

The Representation of Liberal Feminism in the Picture Book *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Keith Negley

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This research aims to show that women can dominate the story as seen in Negley's picture book (2019) *Mary Wears What She Wants*. The theory used in this research is the theory of representation by Stuart Hall (1997). Besides, Barthes' semiotic theory (1957, 1968) is utilized to reveal the meaning of verbal and visual data in Negley's picture book. This research is qualitative in its nature in which the data are the verbal as well as the visual texts of the picture book under study. The finding of this research shows that the picture book under scrutiny represents inequality of gender rather than equality which highlight the inequality of women and men in the Victorian society. Another finding reveals that liberal feminism is represented through the main character, Mary. Mary dares to take risks to choose and decide the best for women, as she thinks that women have the rights to do anything they want without hesitation and with no limitation. This research also reveals that Mary uses her power to voice and to make changes impacting to women in her time. Because of her strive and determination, to date women have the bravery and power to do anything they want.

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Introduction

For years, women and men have had their gender construction in society. They are expected, by the society, to behave and do things in accordance with their gender norms. In society, women experience many difficulties because of stereotypes and ideal beauty standards set for them. Women do not have freedom to putting forward their opinions, they are considered weak, and easily outsmarted. In contrast to these facts, instead of being smart, women are expected to be beautiful and able to serve their husbands' and household needs. To date, some people keep portraying men and women unequally. McDonald (2016:390), argued that "... sex role stereotype still present and still produce negative consequences, especially for women". He argued that women are still underrated by some people because of the gender stereotyping set by the patriarchal society. This social rules, norms, and values create a gender gap in society. Women cannot

go to school because women have to stay at home to take care of their children and husbands. This fact highlights the pivotal roles of women in their home.

The children's picture book *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Negley (2019) is used as the object material in this research. The life of Mary Edwards Walker, a pioneering 19th-century doctor inspires this Children's Picture Book. She rebelled and refused to wear the dress that was usually worn at that time and chose to wear pants that were deemed not in accordance with the gender norms of that era. According to Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross (1972), the image of the female character in the picture book, especially in children's books, is simply invisible in title; they are underrepresented in every aspect of the picture book, such as roles, pictures and so many more because most children's books are talking about men. When children's books show women and men as role models, a woman is portrayed as a mother taking care of her children or as a wife. They stated, "[...] children's books are bound to receive the impression that girls are not very important because no one has bothered to write books about them." (Weitzman et al., 2019:1129). However, the contents of the picture book under examination describe how a little girl named Mary tries to wear comfortable pants and clothes. She feels frustrated because she has to wear uncomfortable dresses which limit her moves, whereas boys are allowed to wear comfortable clothes which make them move freely. When she first puts on her pants and goes to town, everyone is shocked and objects her decision. However, she does not give up and continues to wear pants. Because of this, clothes are not valued by the gender of the one who wears it. Everyone is free to wear whatever h/she wants.

This article focuses on how liberal feminism, gender equality and/or inequality, which are represented through Mary, embracing a spectrum of her entity, starting from her personality at one end and conduct, behavior, decision, as well as her actions in public sphere at the other end. During the Victorian era, women did not have the rights to wear pants, to vote, to have equal wages from the factories as that of men. Women in this era were easily abused and oppressed as the result of policies in which discriminatory laws existed. The clothes women had to wear were very uncomfortable. They wore tight, bulky, shaped, and heavy petticoat (Dorré, 2002), so they often had difficulty breathing and moving. Besides, women were not given proper education in contrast to men. The society's focus of attention was on men that time. The public domain was preoccupied with how men were given the chance to pursue higher education, given their political rights, and the right to make decision. In contrast, women were not given the right to choose and decide even for their lives and themselves. Gökçek (2020:145) stated that "In early 19th century in England, women were not allowed to improve their conditions through education, occupation, and emotional experience. They had to deny emotional fulfillment and desire to have roles in relation to men in society". Women could not become a person who owned property, and also, women could not work in specialist-level fields; they could not hold it, and they were only allowed to work as factory workers, a teacher, or domestic servants (Mitchel, 2009). To date, women are still discriminated by limiting their rights to express themselves and do what they like. Women still face many struggles because society forces and tells women how they are supposed to behave and show good conduct as the society expected. The ideal woman, according to society itself, is a woman who is obedient, beautiful, and neatly dressed.

For long time, women have already encounter problems in many aspects of social life, such as discrimination, sexual abuse, gender inequality, and violence. These issues took place because of many stereotypes on women. People describe women as weak creatures, easily outsmarted, sloppy, and cranky that they need protection from men.

Priyadharshini, Mohan, Hariharasudan, and Sangeetha (2021) stated that liberal feminism is a powerful tool for women to go against the inequality on gender. Women are not instruments to fulfill the thirst of men's pleasure. It means that women have the freedom to do anything, such as the freedom not to get married, to live, women have the power of voice, freedom of speech, and so many more. Because of this problem, some authors use the issue of women and their struggle as the central theme of their literary work, showing that women are not weak.

Methods

Negley's picture book titled *Mary Wears What She Wants* (2019) is selected as the object of the research, given that children's picture books can be used to instill and transmit different values and ideologies to the children. We assume that the picture book in hands conceals liberal feminism in its verbal and non-verbal language (the visual language of the text). The theories used in this study are Hall's representation theory and Barthes' semiotic theory. Representation is an essential part of the process by which meanings are produced and exchanged between group members in a culture. So, with the representation, the concept in literary work can be deciphered from people's minds by the use of language, either verbal or non-verbal. Semiotics by Barthes is about the production of meaning depending on the language which use a system of signs, besides knowing how the content of the message is conveyed, the message that is produced should be known.

This research is qualitative research in its nature. Close reading of the book and categorizing the data by referring them to the traits of liberal feminist movement are conducted first. This current research deals with collecting and analyzing the verbal and non-verbal data (the illustrations) with no numerical data, thus it is qualitative. The verbal data used here are in the forms of narrations or dialogues and the non-verbal data mean the illustrations in the picture book. They have been profoundly selected following the traits in liberal feminism. The verbal data are tabulated, whilst the visual data are screen shot and tabulated as well. Hall's theory of representation will be used as a tool to analyze the liberal feminism represented by both types of data. Apart from that, this study wants to find out whether or not the female and male characters are represented equally in the book.

The next step is processing the data after collecting them. Then verifying the data should be done more than twice by doing a deep understanding by breaking down the essential visual and verbal data that will be analyzed. The focus of the analysis on the verbal and visual data portrays whether or not the females and males are represented equally in the picture book. The liberal feminist ideology is revealed through the main character's strive to face the societal stereotyping.

Results and Discussion

How Male and Female are Represented Unequally in *Mary Wears What She Wants*

This picture book represents the inequality of gender by looking at the action and also the expression of the characters. Mary explains to us the situation in her society. When we looked at the picture on pages 6 and 7 closely, we will find the inequality of gender based on the characters' expressions.

Picture 1

Mary is Looking at The People Around Her (Source: Negley, 2019, pp. 6-7)



Table 1
The Analysis Result of Picture 1

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Some people are walking, interacting, and playing around, but there is a little girl who stands and looks at the people who are walking.	Some people are walking and doing some activities with different facial expressions. The women and the girls seem unhappy; meanwhile, the men and the boys are happy and enjoy their activities.
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Some people are walking and doing some activities with different facial expressions.	Some people walking and doing some activities, the men feel happy because he can do anything he want, meanwhile the women cannot do anything because there is a limitation.

This visual data shows discrimination towards one gender which is a woman. The visual data on pages 6 and 7 show that women have a limitation while doing something. According to the data, the denotative stage in this picture there is a family in which the man communicated with his woman and daughter, but the expressions of the woman and the daughter are not happy; meanwhile, the man communicates with his woman while using his hands to support what he is saying. Then the signifier and the signified in the picture generate value indicating the difference between woman and man in public activity by looking at their expressions. The women and also girls seem to have limitation to do anything in public, meanwhile men can do anything, can talk anything they want.

Besides from the visual data, the context of the data is supported by Mary's narration using the theory of representation by Hall (1997) that representation is a part of process to get a meaning and exchanged between members of a culture, it involves the use of language, of signs and images.

"Once upon a time (but not too long ago), girls weren't allowed to wear pants. Can you imagine?" (Negley, 2019, p. 7)

Mary's statement in the quotation above tells that in her society there is a rule that girls are not allowed to wear pants, so, there is a limitation in dressing, they could not wear what they want. Mary thinks that this rule does not make sense for her. It represents that there is no freedom for women to wear anything because in Victorian era, any changes that break the social rules and conventions are considered as taboo.

The visual data shows gender inequality by looking at the difference between men and women with expressions and activities that are inversely proportional to their clothes. The girls feel uncomfortable while doing their activities because of their clothes. Yen (2014:43) states, "... wearing too tight a corset or too large a crinoline would harm a woman's health and impair their own and others' movement". The girl feels uncomfortable because when they wear a dress, they cannot breathe, and also, they cannot do anything freely, such as sitting or standing, as Mary experiences,

"The only things girls could wear were uncomfortable dresses... heavy-and-hot-and-hard-to-breathe-in dresses. Tied-too-tight-and-can't-bend-over dresses!" (Negley, 2019, p. 6)

"It's the way things have always been and the way things will always be," they said.

"And no one thought it should be any different" (Negley, 2019, p. 9)

The visual data shows the dominance of men in doing things. We know that in that era, women are portrayed as weak, passive, and oppressed. In picture 1, men are regarded as dominant and active people with the power to control women. This part shows the inequality of gender between girls and boys. Having observed the characters' actions in the same picture, it can be concluded that women have no freedom to do anything; they are subject to the prevailing culture. Mary feels sad and worried because the traditional rules in her society make her hard to make a move. She could not do anything that she wants in dressing because, in her society, a sudden change on women's outfit affects the perspective of the society. Tong (2009) reports that there is a law or taboo that forbids women from doing something that average men can do. Mary's decision is limited by the people in her society who are strict with the rules.

Liberal Feminism in *Mary Wears What She Wants*

After analyzing the inequality of gender in *Mary Wears What She Wants*, we can conclude that gender inequality in this picture is more portrayed than gender equality, and women are portrayed as people who have no freedom to do anything. In this subsection, this research focuses on how liberal feminism is represented in the picture book *Mary Wears What She Wants* by looking at the character's facial expressions, actions, and physical appearance.

1. Having Rights to Do Anything

In the picture book, it is portrayed that Mary does what she wants, and she is confident with it because she thinks that pants will make her move easier. From the picture, the signifier – Mary - is walking with a happy face, and then we connect it to the context that she is walking and shows her happiness because she can do anything she wants and anything she wears, it means there is a freedom in her life. According to Tong (2009), liberal feminism is a movement for women to do anything they want, so it talks

about women who can do anything that men can do. By looking at her expressions, it shows that she feels happy after she can do anything she wants because she can feel freedom even though she knows that her society has a traditional rule that women should wear a dress; she does not care about it because she thinks that her idea is not that bad.

Picture 2

Mary is walking with happy face (Negley, 2019, pp. 27)

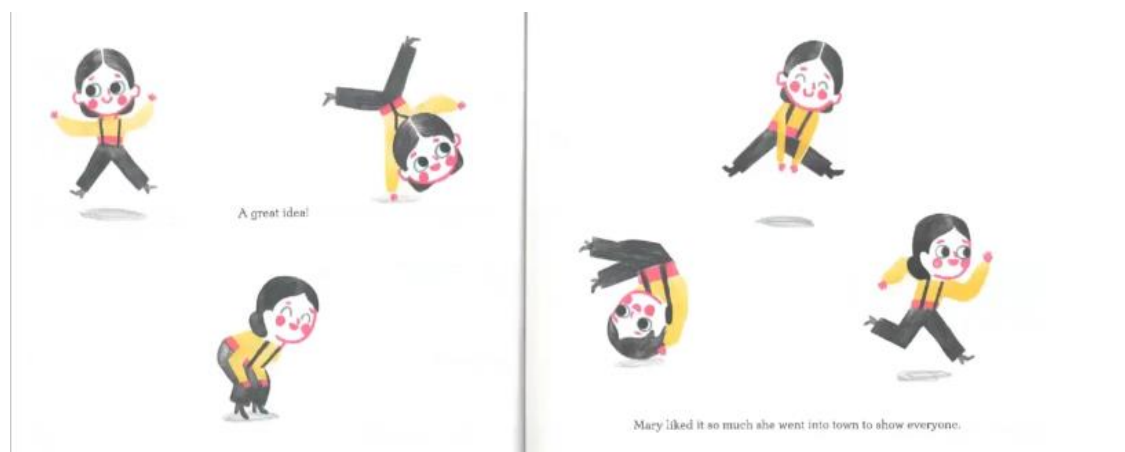


Table 2

The Analysis Result of Picture 2

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Mary is walking.	Mary is walking with a happy face
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Mary is walking with a happy face	The way she moves freely and feels happy showing how confident she is, and she feels that she can do anything she wants because there is no limitation by looking at how freely she walks

“The next morning Mary decides that she didn’t like being told what to wear. Pants were just plain better in all sorts of ways. As she left for school, she discovered she could even walk faster in pants...” (Negley, 2019 p. 27).

The verbal data shows that she does not want to be managed by her society about what she wears because it is her life. By looking at her action, it portrays that women have the right to do anything they want because, according to Panambunan, Badaruddin, and Kuswarini (2022), women can strive and fight for their freedom. Also, women can determine their own lives because women have power, and the power itself can be used to be equal to men.

2. Dare to take risks

Picture 3

Mary is walking with happy face while people are pointing at her (Negley, 2019, pp. 16 – 17)



Table 3

The Analysis Result of Picture 3

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Mary is walking while people are pointing at her.	Mary is walking with a happy face while people are pointing at her with shocked and angry expressions.
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Mary walks with a happy face while everyone around her seems shocked and unhappy.	Mary walks with a happy face represent how confident she is. She walks steadily to show that she will take any risk even though she knows that people around her look at her with an unhappy face because of what she did. Meanwhile, people around her seems unhappy and shocked because Mary break the rules that girl cannot wear boys' clothes.

The signifier of this picture is Mary is walking in front of the people who are mocking and pointing at her. When we connect it to the context which is the signified, we assume that Mary walks with a happy face and steadily without any fear because of her appearance. By looking at Mary's action, it shows that she takes a position to move, and it is supported by her dialogue, "A very daring idea" (Negley, 2019 p. 12); she will wear pants when she goes anywhere. She knows that in her society, women should wear a dress and that rules must be obeyed, but by looking at her expressions, it can be concluded that she will go against that rule. She will do whatever makes her happy. She

decides to wear pants and goes to town to show her look in front of many people. She thinks people will excite but the fact is people look so mad and shout at Mary to not wear pants because pants are for the boys and girls cannot wear pants.

People keep telling her that she will regret wearing pants, but she ignores because she knows that she will get that reaction from all people. Beyond her expectation, it is getting worse, people keep mocking her and the worst part is she is pelted with eggs by her friends. Because of that, she is worried about her decision, even though she knows the rule that women should wear dress but she does not understand why people care so much about what she does and what she wears. Her worries last only a moment, because after she shares her thoughts to her father, he offers an insight for Mary, "Sometimes people get scared of what they don't understand." (Negley, 2019, p. 28). Her father's insight consolidates Mary's decision to wear pants against the society's rules. She resolves to remain in her stance that she will wear pants no matter what. Mary still wants to take any risk, even though she knows that she will get mocked or maybe she will be pelted with eggs by her friend. However, her friends' treatment to her fails to change her and it is caused by her father's support. Even though her father and Mary are from different generations, her father still supports his daughter in making a change.

3. Determination

This picture book shows how determinate she is by looking at her action on pages 32 and 33, when she is going to show that she wears pants to their friends, the signifier of this picture she gets pelted with some eggs by her friends, and Mary looks angry about what her friends do to her.

Picture 4

Mary looks angry (Negley, 2019, pp. 32 -33)



Table 4

The Analysis Result of Picture 4

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
A girl looks angry with her friends	A girl looks angry with her friends because she get pelted by her friends
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
A girl looks angry with her friends because she get pelted by her friends	Mary's friends look angry because they are not accepting what Mary do so they pelt Mary with some eggs. Meanwhile Mary seems angry with

her friend because her friend do not support what she did, they do not support Mary's changes.

And not everyone liked it.

"You're gonna regret wearing pants, Mary Walker!" they all said.

"No, I won't!" Mary said back. (Negley, 2019 p. 32)

This picture book shows her determination when she shows the public that she wears pants. She feels angry and confused about why people care so much about her appearance, but in the end, she shouts that pant is not clothes for boys only, but girls can wear it too. She often said that to everyone because people kept mocking her anywhere and anytime. She shows that she determines anything that she wants to do.

4. Getting Recognition

Picture 5

Mary's friend is going to hug Mary. (Negley, 2019, pp. 38-39)



Table 5

The Analysis Result of Picture 5

Denotative Signifier	Denotative Signified
Mary's friend is going to hug Mary	Mary is going to hug her friends with a happy smile.
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Mary is going to hug her friends with a happy smile.	Mary is so happy and she is going to hug her friend because she get accepted by her friends and also she get recognition from people around her that she can wear boys' clothes.

When Mary goes to school with her new looks, people are angry with her, people tell Mary that she is wearing boys' clothes, but she determines and stands on her perspective that all gender can wear pants. She shouted to the people that she is wearing her clothes, not boys', and people feel shocked by Mary's response. After Mary argues with everyone, she goes to school confidently and prepares herself because she thinks her friends would do the same. Out of her expectation, she sees her friends, especially

girlfriends, wearing pants, even though in the picture they still wear dress, but her teacher does not feel bothered by the students' changes. By looking at their expressions, the girls feel happy when they wear pants, and Mary also feels happy because she gets the recognition that all gender can wear pants. The narration supports this recognition, "And it was never the same again" (Negley, 2019, p. 38). Because of Mary's movement, people gradually accept the new perspective that pants can be worn by all gender. This convinces that Mary eventually obtains her rights and freedom to dress up.

Discussion

Based on the above results, it shows that in the Victorian era, married men's role was significant, and men dominated every aspect because, in this era, it had some stereotypes that women were weak and passive meanwhile men were active, strong, and superior and also, they had good education. According to Parker (2020), men had the authority to plan and make a decision about everything. Meanwhile, women did not have that authority, and Gökçek (2020:146) stated that "A husband was responsible for the wife's actions; he controlled her property." In the Victorian era, women and men had separate spheres. Women were supposed to be in the private sphere, and men were in the public sphere. Even though women and men got married, inequality still existed because, according to McDonnell (2018), women were considered subordinate, and men did not want to expand woman's roles in their marriage life. There was limitation to do something because women were prohibited from doing what the men and the boys did. After all, as the abovementioned, women were supposed to be in the private sphere.

In this picture book, some data show the discrimination between woman and men. This picture book is set in the Victorian era. The Victorian era was classified into three social classes: the working class, the middle class, and the upper class. By looking at the clothes that people wear in the picture book, *Mary Wears What She Wants*, they are the middle class because, according to Everett (2021), in the Victorian era, the middle-class woman wore a wide skirt with a crinoline that would encircle the entire body. It became standard for middle-class women in the 19th century. The middle class is a part of the bourgeoisie. Yen (2014:43) stated, "... in order to be respectable mid-Victorian middle-class women had to dress in accordance with social morality and etiquette, given that outward appearance was considered as representative of the inward character and decorum of the wearer." In the Victorian era, women were expected to dress daily because it reflected morality and gender identity. This was caused by the image of the ideal middle-class woman the 'Angel in the House'. It can be concluded that dress and accessories represent the morality of the wearer, and that image been affected all middle-class women.

Mary is portrayed as a girl who has a strong character when she faces her problem. She is trying not to feel sad because of what her friends do to her. She chooses to stay strong and face it because Panambunan, Badaruddin, and Kuswarini (2022) stated, "Women have a strong character to face problems in life. Strength is the condition of a person being able to deal with problem strongly". Because of Mary's movement, people gradually accept the new perspective that pants can be worn by all girls not only for boys. Mary shows that she could get her rights to get women freedom in dressing. This picture book portrays Mary Walker's real life. Mary Walker was a 19th-century pioneering doctor who wore pants that shocked everyone with what she did. Mary Walker, graduated from medical school in 1855; we know that in that era, women should not get higher education. When she volunteered with the Union Army even though people thought that women could not do that because that was men's job, and at that time, women were considered

weak people. When she worked, many people tried to attack her because she wore pants and she was arrested repeatedly because of it. However, it did not make Mary wear dress when she was working. She determined what she did for herself and she was consistent to wear pants. In her old age she still wore pants. In 1865, Mary Walker was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration (Negley, 2019, back cover page).

Conclusion

In the Victorian era, women were identified as weak creatures and belonged to the private sphere. Meanwhile, men were identified as solid or dominant creatures and classified into the public sphere. In the 19th century, women were powerless and had no freedom; they were staying at home, doing the household, taking care of their children, because when they wanted to do something, they were limited by Victorian era traditional rules. On the contrary, men could do anything, such as get an education, earn money, and work. Because of that condition, some women started to do a movement to fight for their freedom and their right to do anything they wanted without any limitation. That movement was called liberal feminism, and that focused on women's freedom in public sphere.

The picture book *Mary Wears What She Wants* represents the inequality of gender and also gender equality but in a different situation, and it is represented through the characters in this picture book. The actions and expressions between men and women characters in this picture book show that men and women are not equal because men have the privilege to do anything. Besides the characters' actions, gender inequality is represented through the placement of characters between men and women in picture books. Liberal feminism discourses were found in this picture book. Liberal feminism is represented through the main character, Mary, who struggles to wear what she wants to wear. She thinks that wearing dresses cannot make her do her activities freely because the dress is too tight for her. Because of that, she wants to wear pants which are considered boys' clothes. When she goes to the town with pants, she is poorly treated by her society, including her friends. Besides the treatment she gets from the people in her town, she dares to take risks with what she chooses, and she still wants to wear pants because she thinks that pants are not only for boys; girls can wear pants too. Because of that, she determines to do what she wants without limitation and does not let anyone get in the way of her decisions. This research finds that Mary uses her power to voice and to make changes for all women, which is supported by her braveness and determination. Because of Mary, women have the power to do anything.

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