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“I shall only answer if you call me George.”
Approaching the Tomboy
in Enid Blyton’s The Famous Five

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1. Introduction

For my tenth birthday a friend of my dad's gave me my first *The Famous Five* book. Being introduced to the adventures of these four children and their dog was a revelation for me: Like many readers before and after me, I was immediately enthralled by the fierce, headstrong, rough-and-tumble George, who disliked being a girl, and instead strove to be “like a boy” in all aspects of her life, from her name and her physical appearance to her preferred past-time activities.

I had, of course, already come across other wild-tempered and decidedly active female characters in books and TV-shows, but George was my first encounter with a girl who explicitly expressed her desire to be a boy and tried her best to appear as one. This behavior echoed my own diffuse childhood-desire to “belong to the boys” rather than “the girls”, and I relished in the adventures of this fictional character who felt so much like me. Soon after receiving the first volume I cut my hair short (to the utmost delight of my mother) and secretly burst with pride whenever a stranger mistook me for a boy. I had, until then, always felt rather alone as a girl who preferred plastic swords to dolls, but reading about George had an empowering and liberating effect on me and showed me that there were other girls in the world like me, who did not identify with conventional portrayals of femininity.

Almost two decades later I am now revisiting the friends of my childhood from a different perspective. Coming into contact with gender studies and queer theory has taught me to think critically about issues of gender and identity, and enabled me to position my own, personal experience in the larger grid of diverse gender identities and critical positions towards dominant discourses on gender. Equipped with a deeper awareness and the academic tools to analyze these matters more clearly, I approach *The Famous Five* anew, with the aim to investigate the liberating and rebellious potential it instilled in me as a child.

Starting out from the academic field of gender studies and queer theory, I will first explore the nature of gender and some of its facets before taking a closer look at the phenomenon of the tomboy and the way these gender-bending girls embody the notion of a queer identity, that seeks to disrupt the dominant dichotomy of the masculine and the feminine. This particular interplay between tomboyism, queerness, and gender identity will be the core of this thesis, as well as the pivotal point in my analysis of George and her cousins.
Building on theories of gender as performative and constructed, as has been brought forward in particular by Judith Butler, the question I seek to answer is this: In which way do *The Famous Five* in general and the presence of tomboy George in particular contribute to a deconstruction of gender and reveal its performative nature, both regarding George's own identity as well as that of her friends? My premise is that, although gender is always an act of performance, the presence of a liminal character like George, whose tomboyism positions her outside of the boundaries of both conventional masculinity and femininity, can function as a spotlight, revealing both her own gendered construction as well as her peers', who might otherwise be considered “natural” versions of gender and thus go unchallenged.

When mentioning the *Famous Five* series in terms of its gender-subversive potential, the focus is too often reserved solely for gender-bending, tomboyish George, who explicitly challenges prevailing notions of gender and establishes her own space on the threshold between femininity and masculinity. While this character most certainly offers an exciting point of departure for a critical examination of gender, her cousins Julian, Dick, and Anne should not be ignored in this respect. Each of them offers a window to a critical reading of gender, in particular when they are investigated in contrast to gender-ambiguous George. Unearthing these various layers of the construction and perception of gender will therefore be the aim of my critical examination of Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*.

There is one more point that I would like to raise before delving into the main part of my thesis. When investigating *The Famous Five* from a contemporary gender-critical perspective, one always has to keep in mind the fact that *The Famous Five* themselves are no longer contemporary literature and that the series' attitude towards gender cannot be held to modern standards of gender expression and diversity. However, as I mentioned before, despite perhaps being somewhat outdated, reading *The Famous Five* had a tremendously liberating effect on me and it is precisely this experience that inspired me to write my thesis on this subject. Thus, I will consider both the progressive and liberating, as well as the outdated and conservative aspects of this popular children's classic and evaluate how they relate to modern theories on gender.
2. A Short Introduction to Gender Theory

2.1 Sex, Gender, and Performance

Human beings come (or appear to come) in one of two categories – female and male. However, unlike other physical traits like color of the eyes or hair, the significance of these categories does not stop at the physical, biological level. When a baby is born, the declaration “it's a boy!” or “it's a girl!” is so much more than merely information about this little human's genitalia. It is not restricted to something the child has (certain primary or secondary sexual characteristics, chromosomes, or hormone levels) but instead is already filled with the weight of an identity – something the child is or is expected to become as it grows and matures. Judith Butler, whose work is of fundamental relevance in the field of gender studies, asks: “Is there “a” gender which persons are said to have, or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to be, as implied in the question “What gender are you?”” (1990: 10)

Toys and clothes are bought, names are picked, plans for the child's future are made, and none of these factors can fully escape the significance of the young person's biological category since, like it or not, we all have ideas of what boys and girls, women and men, are like. Surya Monro has commented on this “normalisation of gender binaries” (11), which results in people's belief that gender forms “a crucial aspect of identity” (ibid.) and “that “female” and “male” are the only options available” (ibid.), whereas Susan Stryker has called the moment of naming a baby as a boy or a girl, the moment in which, according to Butler, the “infant becomes humanized” (151) an act of “nonconsensual gendering” (qtd. in Scheman 77).

Separating these two layers of identity and the way they interact with each other has been one of the most fundamental achievements of critical gender theory: the distinction between sex and gender. The former, sex, designates a human being's biological sex, that is whether it has been born as a male or female. Seemingly unproblematic at first glance, this categorization comes with its own share of difficulties:

We all know what sex is, don't we? It's easy to demonstrate. You point to someone's body to prove they're a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. The idea of sex is so naturalised that it is hard to see it at work. […] Yet this idea of sex, of a natural biological coupling and equivalence, is part and parcel of the opposition, which makes this distinction and mutual exclusiveness between men and women appear natural. […] Common knowledge has it that there are two sexes. […] When, in
modern societies, a child is born with ambiguous genitalia, parents are asked to make a difficult decision: which of the two sexes will they choose for the sex of rearing? (Cranny-Francis, et al. 4 - 5)

Unlike the biological sex, that deals with physical characteristics, the word gender is used to designate a person's social identity and the sum of all actions and traits that one uses in embodying this role. In other words, gender includes such things as clothing and style, behavior and mannerisms, preferred interests and activities, body language, and many more factors.

When gender is used in feminist analysis, it is traditionally defined in relation to sex: gender as the cultural or social construction of sex. As a sociological or anthropological category, gender is not simply the gender one is, that is, a man or a woman, but rather a set of meanings that sexes assume in particular societies. The operation of gender in our society takes up these sets of meanings, organises them as masculinity or femininity, and matches or lines them up with male and female bodies. Received opinion about gender would have it that a female body produces feminine behaviours, a feminine identity. (Cranny-Francis, et al. 3)

In other words, gender is concerned with notions of what constitutes a “real man” or phrases such as “boys will be boys”. Gender makes us pick certain toys for our girls and others for our boys, gender is about princesses versus knights, pink versus blue. Gender is about ideals of identities and the failure to meet these expectations. Gender is at work when gentle boys are scolded as “sissies” and rough-and-tumble girls are reprimanded for being “unfeminine”. Notions of gender police the behavior of individual human beings and decide which forms of behavior are considered “normal” and which ones are considered “abnormal” or even pathological. Cross-cultural research has revealed gender to be a social construct, historically and culturally variable:

[…] a particular behaviour which is coded as masculine in one society may be coded feminine in another. A man holding hands with another man in public is interpreted as feminine behaviour in many Western nations. In countries in the Middle East, however, this activity would be coded as acceptable masculine behaviour. Moreover, in the nineteenth century in England, a man would often stroll arm in arm with another male friend without this being coded as effeminate. This allows us to consider the historical and cross-cultural constructedness of femininity and masculinity, of gender itself. (ibid.)

This arbitrary nature of gender is also what constitutes it, in the words of Judith Butler, as the result of “regulatory practices” (1990: 23) or as “performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (ibid. 34). According to Butler, “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the
appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being” (ibid. 45). Identifying these acts of gendering thus takes this seemingly “natural sort of being” apart and “deconstruct[s] the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts” (ibid.).

Thus, gender is the result of using a particular set of traits, attributes, and accessories in order to enact a particular identity. The very fact, that it is possible to “dress up as a man” or “a woman” respectively, already underscores this performative nature. Consider, for instance, the tradition of drag, which has also been discussed by Butler as exemplary of her theory of gender performance: “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (ibid. 187).

Certainly, mustaches may be drawn on and fake bosoms may be worn under dresses, tapping into the area of physical sex characteristics, but, above all, a successful drag show hinges on the attire and the make-up, the mannerisms and the body language, the successful enacting of the opposite sex. The opposite sex is enacted through the dominant notions of gender that this sex has been assigned, it is a matter that has very little to do with nature and biology, and very much to do with conventions of culture and society:

According to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core of substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that is has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (ibid. 185)

However, Butler also stresses that drag ought not to be considered as a mere imitation of some absent original, since all forms of gender are performative in their nature:

The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original; [...] gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without origin. [...] As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. (ibid. 188)
Thus, every person is at all times performing their own gender and there is no such thing as an original, authentic gender. Every act of self-presentation is already a gendered act. From the way we move and speak to the way we dress, every gesture and every item also has agendered connotation and they combine in spelling out a certain gender, albeit some of them wear the cloak of apparent authenticity.

The act of unconsciously presenting oneself while simultaneously reading other people's gender is so deeply ingrained in our socially conditioned selves that one might only stumble upon it when its seemingly natural quality is somehow disturbed, or when we encounter what Annamarie Jagose has called “failures or confusions of gender” (84). Imagine meeting a person and being unable to read them as either male or female. Imagine the insecurity upon perhaps having to address this person and feeling embarrassed about committing a social slight by being unsure whether “Sir” or “Madam” might be the correct form.

This issue of correctly reading and correctly being read by other people may have been honed into unconscious perfection in most people, but it is a very conscious act for those who transgress the boundaries of gender. For transsexual and transgender people, “passing” designates the successful presentation as their chosen gender by means of successful employment of the according gender cues. For instance, a trans-man passes, when other people, in particular cis-men and -women unambiguously read him as being born biologically male.

To clarify the terminology employed here: The difference between transgender and transsexual lies in whether or not a person wishes to surgically alter their body in a way to make it fit their perceived gender of themselves. Whereas some trans-people feel the urge to surgically modify their bodies, others feel like they can live with their chosen gender without having to perform any alterations. The prefix “cis-” refers to gendered men and women who were born as biological males and biological females, respectively. A cis-woman, for instance, is a person who was born biologically female and who identifies as a woman in regards to her gender. In contrast to this, a trans-woman would be a woman-identified biological male. More information on the terminology of gender variance can, for instance, be found on Matt Kailey's website Tranifesto.

Depending on their environment, a trans-person's physical well-being may hinge on their passing successfully, and many social situations (for instance, public restrooms) pose a challenge to their gender performance. In the context of trans-people, “to be read” means to fail to pass as their
chosen gender. Numerous sources of advice for trans-people focus on how to pass successfully and avoid being read. The website *FTM Passing Tips* offers, among other points, the following advice for female-to-male transgender and transsexual people:

**Hair:** Comb the top of your hair back or to the side. As any MTF [male-to-female] can tell you, bangs are feminizing - women and kids tend to have them, but men don't. Use gel or mousse if your hair won't stay in place.

**Voice:** Women tend to use an upward inflection at the end of their sentences, while men tend to speak in more of a monotone.

**Mannerisms:** Women tend to be less obtrusive, while men tend to take up more space. If you watch commuters on a bus, women tend to sit with their legs crossed and their arms drawn in, and men tend to sit with their legs apart and their arms out.

**Handshakes:** Make them firm, not like a dead fish. Lock your thumb into the other persons hand, and look them in the eye. Don't pump excessively.

**Bathrooms:** FTMs are actually fairly fortunate in this area because men are far less observant and social than women - they usually just go in, do their business, and leave. Just march calmly in, use the stall, and march calmly out - if you rush around nervously you'll be far more likely to attract attention. Don't talk to anyone, don't make eye contact, and whatever you do, don't try to look at anyone's dick. Remember, even non-trans men have to sit down sometimes.

Considering gender in this light naturally raises the question, whether such a thing as “masculine” and “feminine” behavior exists at all, or whether the traits, mannerisms, and interests that are associated with a certain sex shouldn't rather be called “behavior generally considered masculine” and “feminine”, respectively. Certainly, it is a bit of a mouthful and rather inconvenient to use routinely, but the realization that no single attribute is inherently masculine or feminine presents a crucial aspect in the perception of gender. Again, I quote Judith Butler:

If it is possible to speak of a “man” with a masculine attribute and to understand that attribute as a happy but accidental feature of that man, then it is also possible to speak of a “man” with a feminine attribute, whatever that is, but still to maintain the integrity of that gender. But once we dispense with the priority of “man” and “woman” as abiding substances, then it is no longer possible to subordinate dissonant gendered features as so many secondary and accidental characteristics of a gender ontology that is fundamentally intact. (1990: 33)

It turns out then, that “masculine” and “feminine” do not designate an existing reality but rather an imagined ideal, thus exerting a regulatory effect on individuals by separating those who live up to this ideal from those who don't and granting legitimacy to the former while excluding the latter.
Lindy West's commentary on the feminist online platform Jezebel appears to me highly relevant in this regard, which is why I chose to quote some of it in this context. Angered by male sports commentators scoffing at the “unfemininity” of female judo competitors at the 2012 Olympic Games, she writes:

To be clear: Anything on earth that a woman is capable of doing *is womanly*. It is impossible for a woman to be unwomanly because a woman is a woman. Therefore, anything a woman does is womanly by default. Fighting is womanly. Winning fights is womanly. Bruises are womanly. Savagery is womanly. Unwholesomeness is womanly. Athleticism is womanly. And not giving a shit what some poor delicate flower of a newspaper columnist thinks about your womanliness is super fucking womanly.

Thus, the way to overcoming the boundaries set by the dominant discourse on gender is to entirely abandon the gender dichotomy of a “biological determinism, or the belief that we act in certain ways because of our physical make-up” (Monro 10). A society in which this would be possible might consider a baby's biological sex as no more relevant than the color of their eyes. Certainly, nobody would suggest assigning certain traits to a particular eye color and derive a form of identity from this, and I am certain nobody considers their eye color as an integral part of their personal identity. We say “I have brown eyes”, and not “I am a brown-eyed person”, indicating that this physical feature has no relevance regarding our sense of self, but one could imagine a society in which the color of somebody's eyes would correspond to certain stereotypes and assumptions about this person's character.

If this idea seems too far-fetched, one need only consider the significance of a person's blood type in Japanese culture. Unlike in Western societies, where one's blood type is only relevant in medical terms, the Japanese associate certain character traits with different blood types. This conviction goes beyond simple superstition, as we might associate with horoscopes for instance, but is rather widespread and most people take it fairly seriously. Coincidentally, I recently had the pleasure to make the acquaintance of a Japanese friend of my girlfriend's and he confirmed my previous information on this matter, namely that it is quite common in Japan to ask another person about their blood type and draw conclusions about their personality from it. An online article on this matter from Scientific American traces this tradition back to the work of Takeji Furukawa, who first suggested that one's personality is determined by one's blood type in his “Study of Temperament and Blood Types” in the 1920s. Since then, this theory has gained great popularity in Japan:
Furukawa’s research claimed that individual blood types—A, B, O, and AB—reflected the personalities of those who carried them. Using questionnaires but providing no controls or statistical tests, Furukawa presented intricate behavioral charts defining the various blood types and concluded that a correlation between blood types and personality exists. As the study lacked empirical evidence, in 1936 G. N. Thomson refuted Furukawa’s arguments but was followed by a wave of pro- and anti-counter arguments throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s numerous books revived public interest in the subject, peaking in 1984-1985 with a total of 204 publications discussing the link between blood type and personality. From this foundation, blood type categorization, or ketsueki-gata, firmly established itself into Japanese culture.

From our perspective, this notion might seem absurd, but the heated debate that this theory sparked, as well as the wide-spread belief in its validity, is reminiscent of the familiar controversy concerning the nature of gender and its relationship to a person's biological sex. Constructivist theories of gender may have established themselves in academia and numerous studies have underscored the vast variability of behavior among women and men respectively, but in popular literature and common sense the notion that “men are from Mars and women from Venus”, to quote the title of one of the most popular works of pseudo-science on this matter, still prevails, as Caryl Rivers and Rosalind C. Barnett lament in their thorough investigation of gender research *The Truth About Girls and Boys*. This is a point that I will explore in more detail in the following chapters, were I will consider alternative concepts of gender, as well as the importance of gender in regard to children, more closely.

In particular, I want to advocate the concept of “queer” as extremely helpful in moving towards a new approach to gender. Jagose has described queer as having “neither a foundational logic nor a consistent set of characteristics” (96) and, indeed, queer is rather defined negatively as an “expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception” (ibid. 97), seeking above all to problematize “normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality” (ibid. 99).

In the following sections, I will explore the concept of queer more closely and investigate alternative models to the dominant discourse of the gender binary. I will then relate these alternative versions of gender to the cultural phenomenon of the tomboy and her particular position of possible gender subversion before turning my focus on one very particular tomboy, George Kirrin from Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*. 
2.2 The Concept of “Queer” - Gender Beyond the Binary

Queer [...] exemplifies a more mediated relation to categories of identification. Access to the post-structuralist theorisation of identity as provisional and contingent, coupled with a growing awareness of the limitations of identity categories in terms of political representation, enabled queer to emerge as a new form of personal identification and political organisation. “Identity” is probably one of the most naturalised cultural categories each of us inhabits [...]. (Jagose 78)

As a term for alternative models of gender and sexuality, “queer” is a fairly recent trend and presents a redefining of a term that in its different meanings both predates as well as succeeds the term “gay”. Whereas in the 1910s and 1920s homosexual men would refer to themselves as “queer”, this habit changed in the 1930s when “gay” started to become the more prevalent term (Jagose 74).

In its new incarnation, the term “queer” resurfaced in the wake of post-structuralist theories towards the end of the twentieth century and represents a decisive break in the conceptualization of identities (ibid. 76). Unlike the term “gay”, queer “exemplifies a more mediated relation to categories of identification” (ibid. 77) and demonstrates how “an ertswhile [sic] politics of identity has largely been superseded by a politics of difference” (Wilson qtd. in Jagose 77). Jagose further points out that by “identifying difference as a crucial term for queer knowledges and modes of organisation” queer theory presents a “change which is not specific to queer but characteristic of post-structuralism in general” (ibid.), in the course of which “identity has been reconceptionalised as a sustaining and persistent cultural fantasy or myth” (ibid. 78).

Thus, queer goes far beyond the homosexual identity of gay and presents an extremely inclusive term that “opts for denaturalisation as its primary strategy” (ibid. 98) and “problematises normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality – and that, consequently, is critical of all those versions of identity, community and politics that are believed to evolve “naturally” from such consolidations” (ibid. 99), challenging “the familiar distinction between normal and pathological, straight and gay, masculine men and feminine women” (98). Queer stands in radical opposition to the dominant discourse of heteronormativity, a “term used to describe the presumption that people fulfil [sic] predetermined complementary gender roles in a society in which heterosexuality is the norm” (Coetzee 85-86).

In her investigation of gender politics, Surya Monro asks: “Is it possible to move beyond the male-
female gender binary system? What happens to gender theory when we consider sex and gender identities as more than just “male” or “female”? (1) and lists “sissy boys and tomboys, […] butch dykes and camp men” (ibid.) as examples for the transgression of gender stereotypes. Among these alternative embodiments of gender, the tomboy is, of course, the one that is of central importance regarding this thesis.

Apart from post-structuralism and related theories on gender, the gender binary has also come under attack from the natural sciences in general and neuroscience in particular. As I have mentioned briefly in the previous section, one very thorough investigation of contemporary research on gender differences comes from Boston University professor of journalism Caryl Rivers and Brandeis University senior scientist at the Women's Studies Research Center Rosalind C. Barnett. In their collaborative book *The Truth About Girls and Boys: Challenging Toxic Stereotypes About Our Children*, biologically deterministic approaches to gender are debunked as popular but nonetheless false myths, sustained partly by an erroneous portrayal of prehistoric societies and their supposed effects on modern humans' brains (59).

Motivated in particular by recent trends in the US-education-system to reintroduce single-sex classrooms as well as sex-specific curricula intended to better meet the supposed sex-specific requirements of girls and boys, Barnett and Rivers point out that whereas “neuroscience tells us more and more about the similarity in our brains, popular culture incessantly beams the opposite message, drowning out the real story” (5) and point to the 1990s as a turning point in a “backlash against women's new roles” (13), giving rise to a “veritable cornucopia of books” (ibid.) trying to explain the supposed fundamental differences between the male and female mind. Commenting on the “granddaddy of them all” (ibid.), John Gray's *Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus*, Barnett and Rivers stress the dubious nature of this “über best seller […] written by a self-styled family therapist whose degree came from a school closed down by the California attorney general as a diploma mill” (ibid.).

Quoting neurologist Lise Eliot, Barnett and Rivers further stress the point that

> Plasticity is the basis of all learning. And in childhood, the brain is far more plastic, or malleable, than it is at any later stage of life – wiring itself in large measure according to the experiences in which it is immersed from prenatal life through adolescence […]. Simply put, the brain is what you do with it. Learning and practice rewire the human brain […] in response to nature or nurture. (39)
Thus, a firm segregation between two decidedly different sex-specific behaviors cannot be upheld, either from the natural sciences or the humanities, and the growing number of individuals who express their discontent about the limiting nature of the “normalisation of gender binaries” (Monro 11) call for new identities that broaden and even transcend the conventional borders of gender. Queer, in its “anti-normative positioning” (Jagose 98) towards sexuality and gender presents itself as fertile ground for the emergence of a new gender diversity, which “provides a challenge to the gender binary system in a number of ways – via intersex, third or other genders, gender fluidity, positions outside of gender, gender fuck and gender queer” (Monro 11).

Among the various strategies that Monro investigates as possible modes of subversion of gender binary categories there are three which I consider particularly relevant in regards to the tomboy identity:

The first, “The Expansion of Male and Female Categories” presents a more “elastic” (35) definition of the gender binary, allowing “gender diversity to be subsumed into “male” and “female” – at least to an extent” (ibid.). Monro mentions professional soccer player David Beckham as an example for this plasticity of gender binaries since he can “wear earrings and effeminate clothing without his masculinity being disputed” (ibid.). Influential in this regard has been the field of masculinity studies and its stance of viewing “masculinities as plural […] moving away from an understanding of masculinity as white, middle class, heterosexual and able-bodied, towards thinking about masculinities as multiple, and the notion that some masculinities are hegemonic, whilst others are subordinated” (35). In regards to tomboy individuals, an elastic definition of femininity would thus allow for very “masculine” behavior to be subsumed under its label as well, broadening the scope of what “feminine” behavior can be, and elevating the tomboy from a status of atypical or even “abnormal” behavior to that of one of many legitimate varieties of femininity.

While this approach is certainly helpful in moving away from one-dimensional notions of masculinity and femininity respectively, and grants alternative versions of gender expression more legitimacy, the concept faces certain limitations and ultimately still depends on an opposition of masculine and feminine. Or, as Monro writes: “if masculinity is de-essentialised and unlinked from male bodies, it becomes slippery and hard to characterise, relying on ideas that reinvoke social inequalities, such as rationality and aggression” (36). Indeed, if the definitions of the terms “masculine” and “feminine” are stretched so far that anything can be subsumed under them, there is no point in keeping them alive at all.
A very different mode of action is proposed by the concept Monro lists as “Moving Beyond Gender”, which calls for a “degendering of society” (36) in an effort to create a “less heavily gendered society” than ours. As an example for the social obsession with gender, Monro mentions “the use of “male” and “female” on forms when sex/gender is irrelevant for the matter at hand” (ibid.) and suggests that “in a society where there was less concern with gender, androgynous and gender ambiguous people would face fewer barriers to social inclusion, and gender norms overall would be less heavily enforced” (ibid.). Instead of “putting people in boxes” (37) a more fluid concept of gender would allow for “saying it's complicated, fuzzy, but also sometimes you don't need to know the category” (ibid.). Applying this approach to tomboy girls, gradually lessening the importance of gender categories would go hand in hand with a reduced urge for “atypical” girls to rebel against social norms of femininity, since these norms would gradually cease to exist.

However, a process of degendering aimed at a genderless society faces its own share of difficulties. For one, Monro points out the dilemma that “once fluidity is named, it becomes a space which people can inhabit, and is therefore arguably no longer a non-category” (37). Furthermore, in contemporary society, activists can also choose certain identities as an act of empowerment and in order to raise awareness about certain social groups: “identity categories seem to be necessary as a basis for cultural and political organisation – for example, it is important for some trans people to be “out” in order to gain civil rights for all trans people” (ibid.). And finally, a prescriptive stance towards degendering “would deny people the choice to identify in a gendered way” (ibid.) and “go against people's rights for self-determination” (ibid.).

Thus, a more practical approach that would still grant individuals the possibility to identify more freely in gendered ways would be the adoption of a gender-pluralistic model, in which gender is conceptualized as “plural, and as a spectrum, a field, or intersecting spectra or continua. Gender is seen as being more finely grained than is the case with the binary system, and as being formed via the interplay of different characteristics associated with gender and sexuality” (ibid.). Such a system would allow for all forms of possible variations of gender expressions, giving individuals the possibility to select or create any number of gender labels that they identify with, but also granting the liberty to refuse to adopt any labels at all. Again, applying this concept to tomboy characters, these girls would be given the freedom to identify any way they like, as “girls” or not, as “tomboys” or not, or even as “boys” or nothing at all, and never having their choice of identity questioned.

Of course, an approach that gives absolute freedom of self-identification again runs the risk of
obliterating the meaning of these labels, if they are available freely and for any form of combination. However, I would argue that labels could still serve their purpose of community-building, if desired by the respective individuals, but that their meanings would be open to negotiation and the construction of new identities since it “involves conceptionalising gender as “fields” or “groupings” of – in some cases overlapping – masculinities, femininities, and gender diverse identities” (38).

In order to visualize such a pluralistic concept of gender, Monro offers the following illustration:

An un-academic yet very rich and helpful source in this regard, that illustrates how individual people translate theories of pluralistic genders into their everyday lives, is the website Genderfork, a “supportive community for the expression of identities across the gender spectrum.” The website presents a rich treasure of individual voices that stake out their individual positions on a colorful spectrum of gender:

As long as you feel free to be yourself, and you are happy with who you are, it doesn’t matter if other people try to put you in a box, because you know it’s their narrow-mindedness that makes them use boxes to define people anyway.
(Posted by Kat on December 11th, 2012 at 10:00 am)

Sometimes I catch my reflection in the mirror – when my guard is down – and find myself genuinely surprised to see a woman. In my soul I am a man. I wonder what
other people see?
(Posted by Freiya on December 11th, 2012 at 08:00 am)

To preface, I’m biologically male. Earlier this year, a friend of mine half-jokingly
called me a tomboy and it was just the best feeling ever. As a guy I’m quiet and
feminine, but really, I’d like nothing more than to just be a pretty, boyish girl and
keep playing in bands, wearing ratty boy jeans, and developing video games; all
things I already do that make me “me”. I just want a different context for those
things!
(Posted by Freiya on December 7th, 2012 at 08:00 am)

I can’t figure out how to exist as myself. I love gender. I hate having one. What does
one do with that?
(Posted by julian on July 11th, 2010 at 08:00 am)

As a mostly-cis woman, I’m supposed to be ashamed of my ability to grow facial
hair, but I secretly like it. One day I’ll quit shaving just to see how people react.
(Posted by julian on July 9th, 2010 at 08:00 am)

I love my girlfriend and my boyfriend. And I really love that they are the same
person.
(Posted by julian on July 4th, 2010 at 08:00 am)

These entries illustrate a deep-seated discontent of many individuals for the dominant notions of
gender and identity, and illustrate their struggles in carving out their own spaces on the grid of
representation that our society deems acceptable. It is this discontent that lies at the heart of the
concept of “queer”.

In the following chapters of my thesis, I will illustrate how a queer concept of gender is particularly
relevant in regard to tomboys and their gender-bending ways, that challenge dominant notions of
femininity and constitute a form of border-crossing of genders. The tomboy, I will argue, is much
more than the common definition of the word, a girl who behaves like a boy, suggests. Indeed, the
point that I will try to make is that the whole notion of “like a boy” is faulty to begin with, since it
assumes for one that there exists such a thing as “inherent boyness” and that, secondly, such
behavior is somehow at odds with the natural disposition of girls.

To conclude this section on queerness and the demand for greater freedom beyond the conventional
borders of gender, I would like to quote parts of the track "Kategorie Ich" by German hip-hop artist
Lena Stöhrfaktor, who aptly addresses her discomfort at repeatedly being reduced to feminine
stereotypes by other people and the anger this perpetual conflict incites within her:
Du sagst ich pass nicht in deine Kategorie,
und das will ich auch nicht, ehrlich gesagt wollte ich das nie.

Ich will mich nicht verbiegen, für dein Bild von Geschlecht,
und deshalb bin ich einfach die, die dein Frauenbild zerfetz.

Denn die Mehrheit unterstützt diese Rollen die dich einzwängen,
und die sich seit der Kindheit schon in uns're Köpfe einbrennen.

Du sagst "Frauen benehmen sich anders, deine Neigungen sind krankhaft",
doch ich bin nicht geboren, damit mein Anblick dich anmacht.

Diese Kategorien sollten überflüssig werden,
und es wäre mein Traum wenn es irgendwann auch alle merken.

Ich will so sein, wie ich will und ich wünsch das jedem,
und ich kämpfe gegen Anpassung und Rollen die uns nicht stehen.
2.3 Gender and Children

Despite the fact that a queer and more pluralistic concept of gender has gained great popularity in the academic and activist circles concerning themselves with such issues, and despite comparatively permissive attitudes towards child-rearing emerging in recent decades, the category of gender still holds a firm grasp on children in their freedom of expression and their life-choices.

Judith Halberstam has noted that although girls nowadays are often encouraged by their parents to engage in active play and frisky behavior, “forms of pronounced masculinity” (160) among girls are still considered within a “fully pathologizing discourse” (ibid.) and are “still very much outside the parameters of acceptable girl behavior” (ibid.). Similarly, “young boys who exhibit feminine behavior are punished, not to protect femininity from male incursions but to encourage masculinity in male bodies” (ibid.). And again, I want to stress Caryl Rivers and Rosalind C. Barnett's observation that although “neuroscience tells us more and more about the similarity of our brains […] in many ways the world for preschoolers is more gender divided than ever” (5).

Indeed, considering the story of a Canadian family who chose a radically different approach to their youngest child's gender illustrates that a completely indifferent approach to sex is still unacceptable for many. In the case of baby Storm, a child from Toronto, the parents decided to keep their baby's sex a secret outside of their closest circle of family. The child's name seems to be aptly chosen in this regard, since news of the “genderless” baby took the media by storm and created an uproar among more gender-conservative people. The child's parents, Kathy Witterick and David Stocker, according to ABC News, explain their motivation to keep their child's sex a secret for the time being as follows: “We decided not to share Storm's sex for now - a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a standup to what the world could become in Storm's lifetime.”

A cursory glance at the respective article in the Austrian newspaper Der Standard and its accompanying discussion forum demonstrates that such an extreme position of gender-nonconformity hits a nerve with many people. Accusations aimed at the supposed irresponsibility of the parents abound, their decision to use their child for what many consider a dangerous experiment is both attacked and ridiculed, and concerns are raised about the child's mental health and future development.

Before I reflect further on the idea of a “genderless upbringing”, I think there is one decisive point
that many commentators seem to have overlooked: the main motivation behind this decision seems to be the interaction between the child and people outside of the family, who are not to be let in on the baby's sex in order to keep them from interacting with the child in gender-stereotypical ways. This is not the same as ignoring any questions about his or her sex once the child starts asking about these things, which seems to be what those who are upset about this form of parenting worry about. However, this conflation of different forms of identity is exactly what lies at the heart of the sex-gender distinction and illustrates how deeply these two are intertwined in our society.

Again, I recall Susan Stryker's words about what she considers an act of “nonconsensual gendering” of newborn humans and the rage she experiences in this regard: “A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is a tribal tattoo [sic] that makes one's personhood cognizable. I stood for a moment between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence” (qtd. in Scheman 78) and Naomi Scheman elaborates that “the complexity of her [Stryker's] rage is in that dilemma: it is not as though, in the world we know, one would treat a child better by withholding gender, since, in the world we know, one would be withholding personhood” (ibid.).

What the critics of baby Storm's upbringing worry about seems to be the loss of some integral element of the child's self, but what this element might be remains unclear, since Barnett and Rivers point out that “stereotypical beliefs have no basis in fact” (5), that “there is no evidence to support the claims of massive innate gender differences in such critical areas as math, verbal ability, nurturance, aggression, leadership, and self-esteem” (ibid.) and that “most differences are tiny, a far cry from what the media and some very vocal pundits present” (ibid.).

Additionally, I would answer the concerns of these critics by quoting Judith Butler, who asks: “After all, is there a gender that preexists its regulation, or is it the case that, in being subject to regulation, the gendered subject emerges, produced in and through that particular form of subjection? Is subjection not the process by which regulations produce gender?” (2004: 41) Is there a preexisting identity, that might be impeded by sparing it “that particular form of subjection”? I would argue no, considering the findings on diverse childhood behaviors in scientific studies (Hemmer & Kleiber 1981, Langer & Martin 2004, Morgan 1998) as well as the plethora of individual voices relating their struggles against gender norms.

Rather, I would point out how normalizing operations within societies work in a kind of stealth
mode as has been noted by Butler: “Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as
the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read,
discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce” (2004: 41).

Furthermore, what is rather curious is that the very people who are most fierce in their
condemnation of Storm's unconventional upbringing also seem to be the ones who insist most
fervently that gender is essential rather than culturally learned and constructed, but I consider these
stances to be extremely contradicting. Even if we were to assume that gender-stereotypical behavior
is indeed rooted in nature and not in culture, these critics would have nothing to worry about. Most
boys will still develop the way that “boys do”, they will pick “boy toys” and do “boy things”
because it is in their nature (while gender-nonconforming children will continue to not conform to
gender stereotypes). If you let the child choose freely, it will follow it's own inclinations, which will
be dictated by its naturally inherent gender.

If, however, gender is something that is culturally constructed and imposed from the outside, the
child will again simply develop in the ways he or she feels is right for them. Indeed, it appears to
me that what these critics worry about is not so much the loss of some integral aspect of one's
identity, but rather the possible development of gender identities that may be too unconventional
and hence deemed “abnormal” in a pathological sense. Girls might have earned the freedom to wear
pants and t-shirts, but a boy wearing pink dresses still seems a bit too much for some.

The case of Storm is reminiscent of the 1975 book X: A Fabulous Child's Story by Lois Gould, and
indeed, the fictional X might very well have been another inspiration behind Kathy Witterick and
David Stocker's choice on how to raise their baby. The story might exaggerate somewhat in the
extremely positive depiction of the development of young X, who ends up excelling in any field,
both academic and athletic, but the core idea of the story is still quite intriguing. Part of “Secret
Scientific Xperiment”, known officially as “Project Baby X”, X's parents are instructed by a group
of scientists to raise X freed from the burden of gender with the aim of letting the child develop
their full potential, unhampered by any outside influence that might steer him or her in the direction
doing gender-stereotypical behavior. When in doubt about something, they consult the “Official
Instruction Manual” that came with little baby X, which is full of reassuring advice for the new
parents: “Buy plenty of everything”, for instance, is the instruction when the parents return
frustrated from a trip to the toystore and its strict blue-and-pink territorial boundaries of gender-
themed toys. And, perhaps even more importantly: “Never make Baby X feel embarrassed or
ashamed about what it wants to play with.”

Of course, the story is not entirely naive about the possible struggles of a “genderless” child. Upon starting school, X is confronted with the reactions of its fellow pupils and their parents, who consider X a freak and demand to know its sex in order to be able to categorize this young human, who so blatantly insists on refusing their system of categorization. Not surprisingly for a children's story, even these difficulties are overcome and the fellow children start to realize the liberating potential of X's upbringing and start behaving rather non-conformist themselves, to the great concern of their parents.

Certainly, as the outcry following the news about young Storm has shown, such an upbringing would not always be easy. Considering the central position of sex and gender in our society, Scheman may be correct in her assessment that “by withholding gender […] one would be withholding personhood.” The possible obstacles of a “genderless” child like Storm should not be downplayed, but I would argue that they should not be considered insurmountable either. After all, possible ostracism is also one of the arguments that are frequently used against gay parenting and yet “rainbow families” (families with gay parents) are becoming ever more common and socially accepted. Furthermore, I find the term “genderless” misleading, since it denotes a lack of something, and would rather suggest the term “genderfree” since in reality this baby would not be lacking a gender, but would instead simply be free to assemble their identity freely, selecting whatever elements they resonate with, regardless of whether they are considered “boyish” or “girly”.

Furthermore, the child would do so out of his or her own impetus, at least ideally. In reality, of course, the role of the media is not to be underestimated in influencing and shaping a child's reception and understanding of gender roles. But, at least for a certain amount of time, the child might be spared the categorizing handling of other people, who project their own notions of gender onto the child, and the effect of which ought not to be underestimated, as psychologists Carol A. Seavey, Phyllis A. Katz, and Sue Rosenberg Zalk from the City University of New York stress in their study “Baby X: The Effect of Gender Labels on Adult Responses to Infants”:

A child's gender significantly affects interacting adults along many dimensions. Substantial evidence exists in both the psychological and popular literature that boys and girls are responded to in different ways, ranging from the particular types of personality traits and skills which are encouraged or discouraged, to the kinds of play
and reading materials that are provided by parents and teachers. The most common interpretation of such differences is that they reflect differential societal expectations as to what constitutes appropriate masculine and feminine behavior. (103)

The team behind this study point out that while most of the data on differential treatment is obtained through research conducted in nursery schools and among school children, “evidence suggests […] that differential handling may occur in early infancy, as well, but at a more subtle level, and typically without parental awareness” (104). As an example, they mention the finding that “mothers initially touch male infants more, but verbalize more frequently to female infants” and that “this behavior pattern reverses itself by six months of age, when female infants are handled with greater frequency” (ibid.). In this regard, Barnett and Rivers point out that children quickly internalize the expectations their environment has of them and tend to act accordingly:

Some studies show that when preschoolers (average age 4 years) are closely supervised by adults, their behavior tends to adhere to the stereotype for their sex. Boys exhibit more playful physical assault, wrestling, and rough-and-tumble play, whereas girls exhibit more cooperative play – for example, waiting their turn in line and taking part in verbal games. (108)

It is quite clear then that although child rearing practices may have become somewhat more permissive in recent decades, children are still exposed to “a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field” (Butler 2004: 43) and that this discourse “performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (ibid.).

What would be needed in order to gradually disrupt the gender binary system, as Surya Monro has proposed, and to lessen in particular the regulatory effect it forces onto children? Considering the stories of individuals who have found themselves on the fringes of or beyond gender altogether, it seems that alternative narratives are required that bring more subversive forms of gender into the light and cement their legitimate place in an individual's healthy development instead of pathologizing them or trying to write them off as a phase, as has happened many times in the context of tomboyism.

Recalling Judith Halberstam's statement that “forms of pronounced masculinity that many girls cultivate […] remain beyond the pale” (Halberstam 160) I would argue that necessary role models for girls should not only disrupt gender myths about the nature of girls but about their physical appearance as well, thus advocating a greater freedom in all aspects of self-expression. Fictional
characters such as George Kirrin, who is the central figure of this thesis, presents one example for such a radical redefinition of femininity since she not only challenges contemporary beliefs on what girls can and can't do but also, in the way she styles herself aesthetically, claims the freedom to reject the dictatorship of conventional femininity and instead wholeheartedly and unapologetically embraces the “masculine” aspects of herself. The relevance of this freedom of self-expression is stressed by Lee Zevy's account of her tomboy childhood and the feeling of transgression she frequently experienced:

Tomboys have always had to be *allowed* [emphasis added] to be in their space. [...] In particular, they are allowed by the boys they wish to join and by the other parents and community. The degree to which a tomboy will be tolerated and liked or disliked depends on whether she attends to and keeps a distance from the boundary of all male behavior which is always bound up in sexuality and the male ownership of sexual difference. (Zevy 188)

And concerning the future possibility of sustaining healthy relationships, Zevy adds that “tomboys must find a role model or models whose own desire has been realized, so that they can observe the possibility of fulfilled desire. Children will imitate adults when they need to gain pleasure, power, property, or any one of a number of desired goals” (ibid. 191).

In the third part of my thesis I will explore in detail the portrayal of tomboyism in Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* and assess how George Kirrin serves as a possible role model for alternative versions of gender. Before that, however, the following chapter is dedicated to the literary and cultural phenomenon of the tomboy as such, as well as the medical significance of female masculinity.
3. Approaching the Tomboy

3.1 What Is this Creature Called “Tomboy”? 

Trying to define what a tomboy is might seem easy at first glance. After all, I am fairly certain that most people will immediately come up with mental images and associations upon hearing this term. A tomboy is a girl who distinguishes herself from other, “regular” girls by behaving in ways and preferring activities that are usually associated with boys. Or, to use the definition that the Merriam-Webster dictionary offers: a tomboy is “a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish”, a meaning that has its origins in the late 16th century, when the term underwent a change from signifying a “rude, boisterous or forward boy” (OED) to “a bold and immodest woman” (ibid.), before eventually settling on the contemporary meaning of “a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl; a hoyden” (ibid.).

According to these dictionary entries, the matter seems to be simple and straightforward enough, but in the course of this chapter, I will illustrate, that the reality of tomboyism is really far from being simple. In fact, I would consider the tomboy a highly contested identity, on which ideologies of gender clash with the individual, imposing their regulatory power.

The scientific research on tomboy-identified children is rather scarce, but there are a handful of studies and books that have tried to investigate the phenomenon of tomboyism more closely. One of them is a study conducted by psychologists J. Michael Bailey, Kathleen T. Bechtold, and Sheri A. Berenbaum, who have sought to shed some light on the question “Who Are Tomboys and Why Should We Study Them?” In particular, they investigated whether tomboys necessarily behave like boys in all aspects of their personality or only in some. Considering sex-typed behavior as a multidimensional space, they decided on five crucial aspects for conducting their survey:

- playmate preference: the assumption, that tomboys prefer boys to girls as playmates
- sex-typed activities and interests: a preference for “boyish” activities
- gender identity: a higher likeliness to question their female gender identity
- appearance: a higher preference for a masculine appearance
- aggressiveness: a more aggressive disposition than non-tomboy girls
Apart from trying to define the nature of tomboy girls, the authors of this study also tried to investigate the cause of a tomboyish disposition in the girls. According to the research team “because they behave like boys in some respects, tomboys provide an opportunity to explore why the sexes differ in those ways” (334).

In terms of the possible origins of tomboy behavior in girls, both biological causes as well as social explanations are mentioned in the study. “The most influential biological hypothesis is that prenatal androgens cause sex differences in the brain that subsequently cause behavioral sex differences” (334). Thus, one assumption about the roots of tomboyism is that these girls were exposed to “atypically high early androgen action” (ibid.) or “exposed to higher levels of sex hormone binding globulin (a molecule necessary for testosterone action) during the second trimester of fetal life” (ibid.). However, the study also points out that it is currently not possible to determine in retrospect which females have been exposed to the highest level of prenatal androgen, which makes it impossible to assess girls who turned out to be tomboys retrospectively without any data collected during pregnancy in order to test and verify these hypotheses.

In terms of social explanations for tomboyism, the study lists differential treatment by the family, their teachers or peers, as well as observational learning as possible causes. According to these theories, tomboy girls would have experienced atypical socialization leading to sex-atypical behaviors (334) by parents who might have “atypical attitudes about sex role socialization” (ibid.) or mothers who are “themselves somewhat masculine.” By selecting tomboys who have siblings and comparing the girls with their brothers and sisters, the research team tried to investigate the relevance of socialization in tomboy behavior more closely.

In the final discussion of its findings, the study confirms some of the initial assumptions made about tomboys, which were that these girls would tend to be closer to their brothers than to their sisters according to the behavioral criteria listed as characteristic for tomboy behavior. However, the study also concedes that there was considerable variability among the tomboys, a circumstance that is attributed to the study's recruitment strategy, which relied solely on the parents' classifications of their daughters as tomboys. The variability within tomboy behavior would thus be attributed to the differing stringency of parents' criteria (339).

Finally, the study explicitly stresses the complex origins of sex-typed behavior. Neither did the sample of tomboys have “very unusual rearing environments” (340) nor was there “evidence that
tomboys were exposed to sex-atypical hormone levels early in development” (ibid.). However, other possible biological causes, such as “extremely sensitive androgen receptors” (ibid.) are also mentioned, but those are only assumptions and could not be verified in retrospect.

There are a few points about this study that I would like to dwell on more closely. In particular, I would argue that the selection of tomboy characteristics ought to be examined and questioned critically.

For one, I have some doubts about the significance of girls' appearances in this regard and consider this issue to be not so simple and straightforward, considering that dress codes for girls have become much more liberal in recent decades. Girls may wear pants, t-shirts or sweatshirts without raising any skepticism and without necessarily identifying as tomboys at all. Similarly, assuming a higher likeliness for aggressive behavior echoes essentialist views on the fundamental difference between boys and girls and the inherently more docile nature of the latter. Although these claims have enjoyed increased popularity and dissemination in the mainstream media in recent years, their basis is shaky at best when examined through rigorous scientific investigation, as Barnett and Rivers have shown.

Another reason for remaining critical about this study is the fact that its authors also included “physical attractiveness” in their assessment of girls' gender appearance, an aspect which I find highly problematic for several reasons: for one, it is based upon the notion that physical attractiveness is both more important and more desirable for girls than for boys, a conviction that I consider extremely harmful for the development of girls and young women. Secondly, it echoes negative stereotypes of “mannish” or “unfeminine” women as being in some way deficient and hence undesirable and adopts a very uncritical stance towards issues of attractiveness and diversity among individuals.

In spite of these shortcomings, however, I still consider this study useful in one particular aspect, namely its assessment of the complex nature of sex-typed behavior. The fact that the results of the study show a great variability among the tomboys, stresses a point that I think deserves a lot more attention in the discourse on gender behavior and ought to raise awareness for the immense diversity among individuals within a certain group.

Another attempt to investigate the phenomenon of the tomboy was undertaken by Michelle Ann
Abate from Hollins University in her book *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*. In this quite engaging work on gender-nonconforming girls, Abate considers changing attitudes towards child-rearing practices in the 19th century United States as one crucial element in the emergence of tomboyism as a particular code of conduct.

Curiously enough, whereas tomboyism today tends to be associated with rebellious attitudes towards traditional views on gender, it may come as a surprise to realize that the origins of this code of conduct as a wider cultural phenomenon were closely linked to rather conservative racial politics in the United States of the mid-1800s (1-5). During this time a significant change occurred in the prevailing views of the upbringing of young girls, giving rise to a new ideal image of womanhood and, subsequently, spawning a wildly successful literary tradition of tomboy characters.

According to Abate, three social factors contributed in bringing about this radical shift:

- increasing economic instability, making it necessary for women to become more self-reliant and able to fend for themselves
- massive waves of immigration, raising fears among Anglo-Americans about the future of “white racial supremacy”
- the emergence of the Feminist movement

Up until then, the “Cult of True Womanhood” had largely dictated the upbringing and education of young middle- and upper-class girls. According to this belief, femininity was to be equated with fragility and passivity:

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (Welter 3)

According to their supposedly inherently weak nature, women were to refrain from physical exercise of any form in order to remain as fragile, and thus as womanly, as possible. In addition, uncomfortable and restricting clothing such as tight dresses or corsages further inhibited the
physical condition of young women.

Now, however, these views were beginning to come under closer scrutiny as their harmful side-effects became ever more alarming: Infertility and miscarriages were frequent results of this unhealthy lifestyle and raised fears of a possible “race suicide” among elitist Anglo-Americans, who witnessed the biggest immigration wave in the history of the United States (Abate 6). Alongside these tremendous demographic changes, the Abolitionist movement had culminated in the American Civil War, changing the social status of African Americans and gradually opening up new opportunities for non-white citizens (ibid.)

The health of Anglo-American women suddenly became a crucial social and political issue and new beliefs about the upbringing of young girls emerged: In order to become healthy and fertile women, and thus good future mothers and wives, young girls were to engage frequently in outdoor exercise, adhere to a healthy, well-balanced diet, and wear sensible clothing that did not restrict their movement and circulation.

It is worth noting that whereas tomboyism today tends to be associated with a challenging stance towards conventional gender roles as well as the ideology of heteronormativity, according to Abate, it had none of these connotations in its earliest incarnation. Quite on the contrary, this ideology was seen as a preparatory stage for young women in order to mature into healthy, productive, and above all reproductive mothers and wives, thus fulfilling their familial duties and ensuring the future of white Anglo-Americans. Young girls raised as tomboys “would surely develop the resourcefulness, self-confidence, and, most importantly, the constitutional vibrancy required for motherhood” (O'Brien qtd. in Abate 6). Furthermore, this form of tomboyism was seen as a specific child-rearing practice and a means to an end, and did in no way address questions of personal gender identity.

While these social changes prepared the ground for a new ideology of womanhood, the outbreak of the American Civil War propelled these changes into full motion and brought about some decisive alterations in the perception of the tomboy.

The sudden absence of the male population from the everyday workforce made it necessary for women to assume many roles and responsibilities that were formerly exclusively reserved for men, thus spurring on the quest for women's rights and gender equality. During this era, tomboyism grew into a widespread cultural phenomenon that in turn gave rise to an extremely popular literary
tradition of tomboy characters (Abate 24).

However, along with a heightened popularity these tomboys were also confronted with a heightened sense of controversy. Unlike their antebellum counterparts, who were primarily trained for the duties and challenges of the domestic sphere, these Civil War tomboys sought more access to the public sphere and started to question the expected social role of women as mothers and wives. This changing attitude is very accurately embodied by one of the most famous tomboys in literary history, Louisa May Alcott's Jo March, who voices her disdain for the limiting future prospects that her era held for women: “I don't believe I shall ever marry. I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in any hurry to give it up for any mortal man” (Alcott 394).

Jo March, whose dream it is to become a professional writer, exemplifies the way in which Civil War tomboys were starting to loosen their ties to marriage and motherhood and imagined future scenarios outside of the domestic sphere as attractive alternatives. Furthermore, unlike antebellum tomboys, Jo experiences and openly expresses unhappiness about being born as a girl. These sentiments move tomboyism into a new direction, extending this code of conduct from a mere child-rearing practice to an issue of personal gender identity.

Like so many tomboys after her, Josephine expresses her desire to be a boy by preferring a male version of her name and even uses masculine pronouns for herself on some occasions. Furthermore, she occasionally refers to herself as “the man in the house” in their father's absence and generally seems more at ease with masculine behaviors and attitudes, much to the unhappiness of her more conservative sisters, who urge her to abandon these boyish antics in order to become a proper young lady.

Thus, in the case of Jo March, the tomboy's performance of gender takes on a new dimension as it is a direct result of her personal identity and individual disposition. Jo does not only crave the freedom and independence that women are denied in her society, but she also struggles with the rules that dictate women's physical appearance and behavior, their language and manners, and frequently experiences disapproval from her environment in the way she speaks and behaves. Her desire is to push the boundaries of a woman's professional freedom as much as the boundaries of self-expression:

“You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave
better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little
girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should
remember that you are a young lady.” – “I'm not! And if turning
up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm twenty,”
cried Jo, pulling off her net, and shaking down a chestnut mane.
“I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear
long gowns, and look as prim as a China Aster! It's bad enough to
be a girl, anyway, when I like boy's games and work and
manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy.
And it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with
Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old
woman!” (Alcott 5)

Since this newer incarnation of the tomboy called into question the dominant ideology of limiting
women to the domestic sphere, preferring instead the pursuit of a professional career while also
adopting a more masculine gender identity, concerns were raised about the potentially harmful
effects of this code of conduct. Whereas antebellum tomboyism had been seen as extremely
beneficial for American families, this new version was considered anti-social by many, leading to a
new characteristic of the tomboy narrative: the “tomboy taming” (Abate 31).

As the name suggests, its aim was to lessen a gender-bending girl's wild and rebellious attitude in
order to ensure her qualifications as a future mother and wife, thus fulfilling her duty as a female
citizen. This also presents a break in the reception of tomboyism insofar, as it changed from a
desirable life-long practice to a particular stage in a girl's development, that was acceptable during
her childhood years but ought to be abandoned during her adolescence in favor of a more traditional
form of womanhood.

Again, Alcott's Little Women presents a very good example for the practice of tomboy taming,
which in literary works was often accomplished through some tragic event that has a profound
impact on the young tomboy and eventually causes her to re-evaluate her rebellious lifestyle. In the
case of Jo March, this personal alteration is brought on by the death of her sister Beth. Ultimately,
Jo abandons her aspirations of becoming an independent woman and a professional writer and
settles instead for marriage and a more gender-adequate career as a teacher.

As I will illustrate in the third part of my thesis, where I turn my attention to the depiction of the
tomboy in Enid Blyton's The Famous Five, the notion of tomboy taming lives on in this classic
series of the mid-20th century. Even though they are separated by almost a century, Enid Blyton's
George Kirrin is confronted with similar attitudes towards her gender rebellion as Alcott's Jo March and frequently finds herself struggling for the right to express her sense of self against dominant notions of femininity.

At the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, Abate considers the emerging medical field of sexology as highly relevant regarding the tomboy and the social interpretation of this form of behavior. The increasing scientific interest in human sexual behavior created a new system of categorization: The notion of the “homosexual” as a particular type of person was born, changing homoerotic behavior from something “people did” to something “people were” and creating the medical subject of the “sexual deviant” that could be studied and medicated. In the wake of this shift in the medical discourse, efforts were made to identify early “symptoms” of adult gender-deviance.

Quite obviously, tomboy girls with their nonconforming attitude towards gender became a likely target and the rather tenacious notion that is still around to some degree, namely that tomboys grow up to become lesbians, was born. In his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing describes “a bold and tomboyish style” as one early marker of sexual deviance in girls (420).

These changes in the medical sciences caused a massive shift in the perception and portrayal of tomboy girls. Its positive aspects as a beneficial form of upbringing for young women were now entirely abandoned, giving way to a negative attitude that linked tomboyism with latent homosexuality and gender dysphoria. In line with the biological determinism of this age, tomboyish behavior was considered to be genetically inherited rather than consciously chosen and, as a result, could not be abandoned with age, but only medicated and contained, thus also putting an end to the practice of tomboy taming (Abate 56).

In her subsequent investigation of forms of tomboyism in the 20th century, Abate adopts a rather wide definition of the term, as she includes such differing cultural phenomena as the “flapper” from the 1920s as well as punk and grunge and the girl-power movement during the 1980s and 90s. It is this diverse selection of various kinds of more or less rebellious forms of femininity that underscores the crux of any analysis of tomboyism, namely the question, which girls and women respectively ought to be considered under this label. Is any woman who pushes the boundaries of fashion that are acceptable in her time already a tomboy? Do tomboys necessarily need to enjoy outdoor activities or is an explicit desire to either be a boy or like a boy a prerequisite in order to qualify for tomboyism? Is tomboy a label solely reserved for girls, or does it also apply to adult
women?

There are no definite answers to these questions but it is still worthwhile to consider them, since, while they may not get us any closer to the essence of the tomboy, pondering these questions tells us more about the underlying ideologies of gender that make the tomboy such a phenomenon in the first place.

The diffuse nature of the term “tomboy” becomes also strikingly apparent in a recent unacademic publication called *Tomboy Style: Beyond the Boundaries of Fashion*, which seeks to present the diversity of various fashion styles its author considers tomboyish. In its flap text, author Lizzie Garret Mettler defines tomboys as

> [...] confident, rebellious, and adventurous. They are bold, brazen, fierce – and sexy. They aren't known for following the rules; they are known for doing – and wearing – whatever they want. [...] To define tomboy style requires searching far beyond the simple notion of a woman wearing men's clothing. Although the tomboy is often identified by her outward appearance, what makes her wholly so is her inherent sense of confidence. Throughout the twentieth century, the mass marketing of gender stereotypes meant that tomboys cropped up against the odds, trends, and ads.

Does this characterization of tomboys bring us any closer to pinning down the essence of tomboyism? I would argue no, and consider it rather problematic that adjectives such as bold, brazen, fierce, and sexy are presented as somehow unusual attributes of women, that deserve a special marking under the label of tomboy, and the same goes for the quality of confidence. Certainly, a definition of tomboyism along these lines only works at the cost of considering “regular” femininity as the absence of those attributes – a very limiting and rather conservative view of women, indeed.

I shall conclude this section with a few images from Mettler's book and invite my readers to form their own opinion on the tomboyish qualities of these women. As I have mentioned before, I believe that the crucial question is not what defines a tomboy, but rather what the attempts to try to define her in the first place tell us about the discourse on gender. I will explore this aspect further in the following section before turning my attention to Enid Blyton's series *The Famous Five* and its gender-bending protagonist George.
3.2 Tomboys and Female Masculinity

Perhaps more relevant than trying to define tomboys and identify possible causes for this type of behavior is the question why there exists a need to do so in the first place. The very fact that “tomboyish” girls need to be marked and are subject to investigation already tells so much about dominant notions of gender in general, and notions about the nature of young girls in particular. To the questions “who are tomboys?” or “what causes girls to become tomboys?” I would simply answer “why should we care?” Judith Halberstam has written about attitudes towards tomboyism and female masculinity:

Clearly, the emphasis upon explaining tomboyism, and doing so in highly detailed ways, makes tomboyism into an abnormal model of child development because of the scrutiny it endures. Imagine, for example, a “macho index” that might be developed and applied to young boys who show early signs of antisocial behavior (fighting, dominating conversations, rudeness, bullying). If scientific researchers spent time and money trying to evaluate whether there were a “macho boy syndrome” that may serve as a predictor for adult sexually abusive behavior or violent personalities, boys who fight a lot or act out aggressively would grow up to thinking there was something very wrong with them (and there may well be). In other words, scientific attention can produce self-censoring among kids and adult scrutiny of otherwise normal childhood behavior. (Halberstam 167)

The very existence of tomboyism as a specially marked kind of behavior reflects the deep-seated beliefs about the natures of boys and girls respectively, and basically boils down to the fact that whereas certain forms of behavior are considered normal for girls, others are not, regardless of how prevalent they might actually be among young girls. In fact, the study “Tomboys and Sissies: Androgynous Children?” by psychologists Joan D. Hemmer and Douglas A. Kleiber suggests in its findings that the very notion of tomboyism as some unusual form of behavior is inherently flawed, since “[...] tomboyism is statistically quite common, and […] there is little indication that it is abnormal. The normal childhood experience for females and males may be the activity many in this culture believe to be characteristic only of males; hence, the label, tomboy” (1206) and the authors stress that “the acquisition of typical cross-sex behaviors (preference for active outdoor play and boy's games in girls, and nurturing plays for boys) should be viewed as neither appropriate nor inappropriate for either sex” (ibid.).

In a similar vein, returning to Bailey, Bechtold, and Berenbaum's study “Who Are Tomboys and Why Should We Study Them?”, the authors point out that “self-reports usually reveal that more
than half of girls and women tend to consider themselves tomboys” (336), a finding that has also been confirmed in study by researchers from Bowling Green State University, in which 63 percent of their sample of junior high-school girls and 51 percent of adult women reported having been tomboys in childhood (Halberstam 161).

In spite of the prevalence of young girls who identify as tomboys, the notion that this form of behavior is in some way unusual is rather persistent, since the dominant discourse on the matter continues to propagate a dualistic concept of gender, in which masculine and feminine behavior are portrayed as inherently oppositional. Hence, the tomboy, despite far from being a rare phenomenon, is still treated as an oddity that needs to be examined and explained as well as a transitory phase that girls are frequently expected to outgrow.

Indeed, in her study “Where Have All the Tomboys Gone? Women's Accounts of Gender in Adolescence”, sociologist C. Lynn Carr from Seton Hall University names social pressures from parents and peers to conform to stereotypical femininity along with a budding interest in boys and a perceived incompatibility of tomboyism with heterosexual success as decisive factors for many adolescent girls to either suspend their tomboyish natures or abandon them entirely: “A third reason participants gave for having ceased tomboyism was pressures from parents and peers. Several participants described gender role alternations that were instigated by maternal warnings in adolescence” (443). One of the participants of the study recalls the sudden shift in her female peers' attitude towards boys and her ensuing cessation of tomboyism as follows:

[…] heterosexually identified Susan recounted riding bikes with her best boyfriend, exploring in the mud at a nearby river, and playing sports with boys. In her account heterosexual and “un-tomboylike” expectations were linked and foisted upon her unexpectedly: “When I came back to sixth grade it was like – wait a second, what happened?...All the sudden, girls weren't really buddies with boys anymore. They were talking about, you know, going out with them...and everybody was all worried about how they were dressed...and what their hair looked liked. And you know, how much they weighed. And I sort of felt like I had been in a time warp. (443)

In this light, I consider Dianna Elise's concerns quite apt, who wonders: “Perhaps the dive that girls are seen to take in adolescence with regard to many measures of self-esteem and self-respect reflects the possibility that heterosexuality as it is constituted under patriarchy isn't always good for girls” (Elise 150).

The attitude of tomboyism as a somewhat abnormal form of behavior is expressed in its most
extreme form in the diagnostic definition of Gender Identity Disorder in Children (GID) as listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), where it made its debut in the third edition in 1980. According to the current *DSM-IV-TR*, GID is defined through “strong and persistent cross-gender identification” (576) as well as “persistent discomfort with one's assigned sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex” (576). Additionally, “there must also be evidence of clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (576).

The first part of this diagnosis (sufficient evidence of cross-gender identification) is met if the child displays at least four of the following criteria (*DSM-IV-TR* qtd. in Langer and Martin 6):

1. repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex;
2. in boys, preference for crossdressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing;
3. strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex;
4. intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex;
5. strong preference for playmates of the other sex

Children qualify for the second criterion, sufficient evidence of discomfort or sense of inappropriateness, in any of the following cases (ibid. 7):

1. in boys, assertion that his penis or testes are disgusting or will disappear, or assertion that it would be better not to have a penis, or aversion toward rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games and activities;
2. in girls, rejection of urinating in a sitting position, assertion that she has or will grow a penis, or assertion that she does not want to grow breasts or menstruate, or marked aversion toward normative feminine clothing

While the *DSM* also adds, that GID is “not merely a child's nonconformity to stereotypic sex-role behavior, as, for example, “tomboyishness” in girls”, Abate notes in her survey of tomboys that this “cautionary assertion […] was moved to a parenthetical [sic] aside” (231) and stresses that GID presents a “scientific blurring between childhood tomboyism, Gender Identity Disorder, and adult lesbianism” (ibid.). Indeed, in considering the origins and the purpose of GID one must not ignore the ways in which the diagnosis was aimed at preventing homosexuality in adults by treating its considered precursor in children, as Abate has pointed out: “Akin to previous historical eras, when more masculine forms of female gender expression were pathologized, concern about GID in girls
was rooted in fears that childhood gender nonconformity would lead to adult sexual nonconformity” (202).

In this light, the DSM covertly continues to regard homosexuality as an undesirable abnormality in the form of GID and links it to children who strongly exhibit gender-nonconforming behavior: “Here, homosexuality-as-pathology is simply reconfigured as a childhood disorder.” (Rottnek 1)

Considering the diagnosis of GID, it is quite shocking how easily a child might be diagnosed with it, despite the DSM's assurance that GID is not intended to cover tomboyish behavior in girls. If a preference for “crossdressing”, a stronger identification with “cross-sex roles in make-believe play”, a desire to “participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex” as well as a “strong preference for playmates of the other sex”, combined with a “marked aversion” towards gender-normative clothing constitutes the definition of GID, we can conclude for instance that both fictional characters Jo March as well as George Kirrin would be diagnosed with this “mental disorder”, a circumstance that I find extremely alarming.

As far as the very first possible criterion of GID, “repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex” is concerned, the DSM stresses that this desire must not be inspired by “a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex” (576). This point deserves closer scrutiny, for what exactly is meant by “perceived cultural advantages”? Is this point intended to address the fact that discrimination against women is still common in our society and that men often enjoy more freedom and greater privileges? But if this were the case, does this criterion solely apply to girls who wish to be boys?

I would argue that this disclaimer is very ambiguous and does not specify what these “cultural advantages” would be comprised of. In particular, I want to point out the question of legitimate gendered behavior in this regard, which might be the central motive behind children's desire to be the other sex. As I have mentioned repeatedly, the issue with tomboyism (as well as the notion of “sissyness” in boys) is that these labels assume that there is such a thing as inherent gender-typical behavior, thus granting those who exhibit these behaviors legitimacy while pathologizing those, who do not conform to them. Thus, I would consider a child's desire to be the opposite sex a quite logical consequence upon realizing that their presentation as well as sense of self is considered “wrong” by its environment. A society that shows greater acceptance of all kinds of gender expressions might make any desire to be the opposite sex redundant.
Returning again to an observation made by Dianne Elise:

Certain ways of being are considered unusual for a female, even though in reality they may be quite common. The actual process of labeling sets these traits and behaviors apart and denies permanent ownership to the girl; the traditional gender balance is maintained in the face of many girls acting out of role. The culture waits and bides its time, knowing that in adolescence it will reclaim the female and that these other expressions will be “just a phase” […]. Being a “tomboy” becomes a short-lived, insignificant phase that we ignore or humor out of existence as merely a lapse in the ongoing stream of feminine development. (Elise 150)

As I will illustrate in the third part of my thesis, it is precisely this attitude towards tomboyism that is the source of discomfort and struggle for the character George in Enid Blyton’s The Famous Five. The conflict between her own inner experience of herself and the expectations projected onto her by her environment result in George occupying a kind of liminal space between the genders, belonging neither here nor there, where her identity and sense of self is continually challenged and even ridiculed. A society that prohibits certain forms of gender expression by deeming them unnatural and undesirable thus casts a large share of its young women into a position of gender deviance and, through the regulating power of this discourse, aims at molding them into more acceptable forms of femininity.
4. The Tomboy in Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*

4.1 George and the Dilemma of the Tomboy

**The Presentation of George**

Tomboy George, perhaps the most popular and well-known character of the series, serves a dual purpose in the course of my thesis. For one, her tomboyism is the central aspect of my paper and the main subject of investigation. Since my research has been motivated by the wish to explore the liberating effect that reading about George had on me as a child, it is her expression of herself, as well as her environment's reaction to her, that is the central issue of my thesis. Furthermore, I will employ the character of George as a sort of focal point through which I will also examine her peers Julian, Dick, and Anne in a gender-critical light by juxtaposing their performance and role of gender with George's, thus shedding some light on the discrepancies between conventional and unconventional expressions of gender.

Any analysis of George's tomboyism, I believe, ought to start with the girl's presentation of and ideas about herself, in order to identify the elements that combine in forming her identity. The first of these that the reader is introduced to is related in George's absence and regards her choice of name. When George is first introduced through her mother talking to George's cousin Anne, who inquires about "Georgina's" whereabouts, the reader learns the following about the girl:

> “Where's Georgina?” asked Anne, looking around for her unknown cousin.
> “Oh, the naughty girl! I told her to wait in the garden for you,” said her aunt. “Now she's gone off somewhere. I must tell you, children, you may find George a bit difficult at first – she's always been one on her own, you know, and at first may not like you being here. But you mustn't take any notice of that – she'll be all right in a short time. I was very glad for George's sake that you were able to come. She badly needs other children to play with.”
> “Do you call her 'George'?" asked Anne, in surprise. “I thought her name was Georgina.”
> “So it is,” said her aunt. “But George hates being a girl, and we have to call her George, as if she were a boy. The naughty girl won't answer if we call her Georgina.”

(*Treasure Island* 9)

Three things are established about this character before she even appears on stage, so to speak: For one, the reader learns that Georgina is called George by her family and that she only responds to the male version of her name. Secondly, that this circumstance is owed to the fact that George dislikes
being a girl and instead wishes to be treated as a boy. Thirdly, that George is a “naughty girl” and that her cousins might find her “difficult at first”.

I will focus in more detail on George's “difficult” character in my discussion of the psychological and emotional aspects of her identity, but the information concerning her name deserves more attention. By introducing the character of George by way of her name, the reader is also presented right away with the girl's self-determination and agency. Through this passage, it becomes obvious that George is an individual who has very clear ideas about herself and is determined to enforce and defend these ideas. The information that she “won't answer if we call her Georgina” already suggests a strong-willed individual who claims her right for self-expression and agency regardless of whether or not her environment complies with these. After all, the act of naming oneself might perhaps be considered the ultimate form of self-expression, since to name something is to create something. Naming it is the first act through which parents introduce their child to the world, and by renaming herself, George can be said to reintroduce herself to the world as she sees herself and not how her parents see her.

In *The Power of Naming* Thomas J. Gasque explores the cultural significance of the act of naming and has pointed out that “the idea that a name is an essential part of one's being plays an important role in our literary tradition” (5). He names the Old Testament, in which naming presents “the very first human action” (7), as well as Homer's *Odyssey* and the folk tale of Rumpelstiltskin, both of which suggest that “to reveal one's name to a stranger is to risk having that stranger use magic against one through the name” (5) and points out that “the relationship among name, namer, and named is a complicated one involving privilege, ownership, and freedom” (6). Thus, George's act of renaming herself is also an act of declaring her freedom and privilege to assert herself in her own terms, as well as her sole ownership of her identity.

When George eventually appears in the flesh, more elements of her self-expression are added:

The child in the opposite bed sat up and looked across at Anne. She had very short curly hair, almost as short as a boy's.

[...] 

“Oh!” said Anne, thinking her new cousin was most extraordinary. “All right! I don't care what I call you. George is a nice name, I think. I don't much like Georgina. Anyway, you look like a boy.”

“Do I really?” said George, the frown leaving her face for a moment.

(ibid. 13)
In addition to choosing a male name for herself, George's presentation of herself is also founded on certain exterior features. Sporting short hair and “boy's clothes” such as shorts and jerseys, it becomes obvious that George not only wishes to be a boy but also prefers the clothes that are typically worn by boys and, in fact, strives to appear as one to other people. The information about her choice of name as well as her choice of clothes and hairstyle are reiterated at the beginning of almost every volume in the series, introducing George's gender-bending style anew: “George was dressed, as usual, exactly like a boy, in jeans and jersey. She had always wanted to be a boy, and would never answer if she was called Georgina.” (Five Run Away Together 2) “She looked more like a boy than a girl, for she wore her hair very short and it curled close about her head.” (Smuggler's Top 1) “George had always longed to be a boy, but as she wasn't, she made up for it by trying to speak and act like one.” (Five Are Together Again 2)

I would argue that it is this part of herself that highlights the performative aspect of gender in The Famous Five, since there are several occasions throughout the novels in which George is, in fact, mistaken for a boy by other people, a circumstance that delights the girl to no end every single time. She quite literally performs gender in this regard, her clothes and particular hairdo presenting, in Butler's words, the “constitutive acts” of the “substantive appearance” of her gender (1990: 45).

The clothes she wears carry a deeper significance beyond aspects of comfort or usability. She does not only wear shorts because she likes them, she also wears them because they spell out “boy” to others, although I would stress that these two aspects are perhaps not easily separated but rather interdependent. The gendered element of certain items is probably as much a cause for her preference as it is a means to an end. One could argue that a skirt might, in fact, be just as comfortable and practical as a pair of shorts, on hot days perhaps even more so, and yet a girl like George would still shun them because of their gendered significance. George's choice of clothes is, I would argue, a very conscious one since she selects them as much for herself as for her environment, to whom she wishes to communicate herself as “boy”.

The instances in which George is mistaken as a boy by other people thus further stress this performative element, since it is in these situations that George quite literally performs a role to an audience that she manages to fool into mistaking her biological sex. In the words of transgendered individuals, George passes successfully as male on several occasions, thus illustrating quite vividly the way people's gender perceptions are based on certain cues ranging from hairdo to clothing and general demeanor.
Another layer of George's gender identity is rooted in physical prowess and certain skills that are considered manly. In George's case, swimming, diving, and rowing are amongst these, and her outstanding abilities in these fields are mentioned frequently along with their gendered implications:

“I don't like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher-boy on this coast. You're to call me George. Then I'll speak to you. But I shan't if you don't.”

*(Treasure Island 13)*

They all had a bathe that morning, and the boys found that George was a much better swimmer than they were. She was very strong and very fast, and she could swim under water, too, holding her breath for ages.”

*(ibid. 30)*

So down Julian went – but he was not so good at swimming deep under water as George was, and he couldn't go down so far.

*(ibid. 38)*

George made her way through the reefs of rocks with a sure hand. It was marvelous to the others how she could slide the boat in between dangerous rocks and never get a scratch.

*(ibid. 110)*

“Anyway, I couldn't come,” went on Aunt Fanny. “I've some gardening to do. You'll be quite safe with George. She can handle the boat like a man.”

*(ibid. 45)*

A fourth layer of George's identity is linked to the way she expresses herself emotionally and extends her desire to display a high level of strength from the physical to the psychological level. In line with the girl's pride in her physical constitution she also makes a point of not showing any emotional weakness. Crying is considered particularly shameful by George, which she only allows herself to do when the other children can't see her, and when her emotions do overpower her in front of the others she feels angry with herself for letting down her guard.

Sightseers from the places all around came to see it [George's island], and the fishermen managed to find the little inlet and land people there. George sobbed with rage, and Julian tried to comfort her.

“Listen, George! No one knows our secret yet. We'll wait till this excitement has died down, and then we'll go to Kirrin Castle and find the ingots.”

“If someone doesn't find them first,” said George, drying her eyes. She was furious with herself for crying, but she really couldn't help it.

*(Treasure Island 98)*
He went to find George. She was in the tool-shed, looking quite green. She said she felt sick.
“It's only because you're so upset,” said Julian. He slipped his arm round her. For once George didn't push it away. She felt comforted. Tears came into her eyes, and she angrily tried to blink them away.
(ibid. 104)

To sum up, George's identity and the way it is linked to gender is based on four crucial aspects which combine in forming George's particular version of tomboyism. It is presented as an amalgamation of outer and inner factors, her choice of name and her very literal performance of employing masculine signifiers in her clothes and hairstyle, as well as an emphasis on strength on the physical as well as the emotional level. Physical prowess and endurance, outstanding skills in areas that are considered masculine, as well as a stubborn refusal to display any forms of emotional weakness make up the key components of George's concept of herself and the way she presents herself to her environment. The way in which these elements are not entirely unproblematic will be among the issues that I'm going to address in the course of this chapter.

**Encountering Other Tomboys**

In the course of the twenty-one volumes of *The Famous Five* series, George happens to encounter other tomboys besides herself. In *Five Fall Into Adventure* the children meet “Ragamuffin Jo”, a young vagabond, who is being neglected by her father and returns in some of the later books, as well as in *Five Go To Mystery Moor*, where the children spend their vacations at a stable and meet Henry, a girl who is actually called Henrietta but, like George, wishes to be a boy and insists on people using a male version of her name.

Curiously, although one might assume that George would recognize these girls as kindred spirits and immediately bond with them over their shared aversion towards conventional femininity, the very opposite is the case. With both Jo and Henry, George at first takes an extreme disliking to the other girls and only gradually, through the course of their shared adventures, comes to like them. However, this aversion goes both ways. Both Henry and Jo are equally hostile towards George and tend to scowl at or insult her whenever an occasion arises.

“Bad luck, Georgina!” said Henry, who was listening to all this. “Very bad luck! I know you're terribly bored here. It's a pity you don't really like horses. It's a pity that you – ”

“Shut up,” said George, rudely and went out of the room. Captain Johnson glared at
Henrietta, who stood whistling at the window, hands in pockets.
(Mystery Moor 7)

I find this circumstance rather surprising and regard it as bearing an important significance for the depiction of gender in the series. After all, since both George and Henry, who is more outspoken in her gender-bending efforts than Jo, are frequently ridiculed or rebuked by their environment for their behavior, a friendship between the girls might suggest itself as a source of mutual support and reassurance. Instead, the girls treat each other as enemies and rivals and only become friendly towards each other at the end of the respective books through the bonding effect of their shared adventures.

What I find equally surprising is the fact that George not only dislikes both Jo and Henry from the start, she even scoffs at her cousins' remarks regarding the striking similarities between her and the other tomboys. The following passages illustrate her hostility towards Henry and Jo as well as her indignation at their suggested similarities:

George and the ragamuffin stood scowling at one another, each with fists clenched. They looked so astonishingly alike, with their short, curly hair, brown freckled faces and fierce expressions, that Julian suddenly roared with laughter. He pushed them firmly apart.
(Five Fall Into Adventure 15)

“I'm going to eat it here,” said the girl, she suddenly looked exactly as mulish and obstinate as George did when she wanted something and she didn't think she would get it.
“You look like George now!” said Dick, and immediately wished he hadn't. George glared at him, furious.
“What! That nasty, rude, tangly-haired girl like me!” stormed George. “Pooh! I can't bear to go near her.”
(ibid. 33)

In five minutes' time Jo was proudly wearing a pair of perfectly clean, much-mended shorts of George's, and a shirt like the one Anne had on. Anne looked at her and laughed.
“Now she's more like George than ever! They might be sisters.”
“Brothers, you mean,” said Dick. “George and Jo - what a pair!”
Jo scowled. She didn't like George, and she didn't want to look like her.
(ibid. 102 - 103)

Anne had been very much amused to see how Henrietta and George hated one another at sight - and yet both had so very much the same ideas. George's real name was Georgina, but she would only answer to George. Henry's real name was Henrietta, but she would only answer to Henry, or Harry to her very best friends!
“I think you're rather unkind to Henry,” said Mrs Johnson. “After all, you and she are very much alike, George. You both think you ought to have been boys, and...”
“I'm not a bit like Henrietta!” said George, indignantly.

(ibid. 11)

Curiously, George even mocks Henry's efforts to look like a boy and gets furious when her cousins mistake her for one:

“That beast! She goes and meets you and never says a word to us, and makes you think she's a boy - and - and - spoils everything!”
“Hold your horses, George, old thing,” said Julian, surprised. “After all, you've often been pleased when people take you for a boy, though goodness knows why. I thought you'd grown out of it a bit. Don't blame us for thinking Henry was a boy, and liking him - her, I mean.”

(ibid. 20)

It is worth pointing out that Julian's comment on hoping for George to grow out of her tomboyism echoes the 19th-century concept of tomboy taming and expresses his opinion on her chosen gender expression as something temporary that eventually ought to be abandoned in favor of a more conventional version of femininity. I will return to this issue in more detail in the second part of this chapter, where I focus on the relationship between George's masculinity and that of her male cousins and investigate questions of authenticity, something that George's tomboyism is repeatedly refused, more closely.

For now, however, I would like to dwell further on the mutual aversion between George and fellow tomboys Jo and Henry, a circumstance that I find equally surprising and troubling. The fact that George's quick-tempered nature, for all its beneficial qualities, also goes hand in hand with an instant disliking for these other girls, who are so much like her, is rather sad and characterizes her as excluding and difficult to approach. The same is, of course, also true for Henry and Jo, who mirror George's rejecting behavior and are unwilling to display any form of camaraderie or mutual respect.

How is the tomboys' conduct towards each other relevant for the depiction of gender in *The Famous Five*? Above all, since all three of them exhibit this kind of conduct, it equates tomboyism with a kind of emotional unavailability and suggests that distancing oneself from the respective other tomboy is somehow an integral part of the image that the girls wish to display of themselves. What could be the reason behind this stubborn refusal to express any form of friendliness or support,
opting instead for immediate mutual hostility, that is only gradually overcome?

I consider two issues relevant in this regard. For one, this instant disliking of a person who is strikingly similar to oneself echoes gender stereotypes of women as “catty” and prone to perceiving other women as potential rivals and enemies rather than allies. Considered in this light, it makes sense that this kind of enmity occurs among the tomboys and not, for instance, between George and Anne or Henry and Anne. Since the tomboys distance themselves from conventional femininity, a girl like Anne represents an entirely different group of belonging and thus is not perceived as any competition. Amongst themselves, however, the tomboys apparently perceive each other as a potential threat and choose mutual ridicule as their coping strategy.

A pivotal issue in the conflict between George and Henry, in particular, could also be the circumstance that Henry is described as being more convincingly “boyish” than George. Comments are made on Henry's haircut as well as her hair being straight, which seems to contribute to an overall more “authentic” masculine look, and which in turn appears to instill a feeling of insecurity in George.

Henry grinned. “Oh, so they've told you, have they? I was tickled pink when you took me for a boy.”
“You've even got your riding jacket buttons buttoning up the wrong way,” said Anne, noticing for the first time.
“You really are an idiot, Henry. You and George are a pair!”
“Well, I look more like a real boy than George does, anyway,” said Henry.
“Only because of your hair,” said Dick. “It's straight.”
“Don't say that in front of George,” said Anne. “She'll immediately have hers cut like a convict or something, all shaven and shorn.”
(Mystery Moor 21)

Considering the contested nature of George's social position, an issue that I will examine more closely in the second part of this chapter, having her masculinity lessened by another tomboy obviously poses a serious threat to George. Given the circumstance that George already often struggles to have her identity validated by her environment, being outdone in her masculine performance by, of all things, another tomboy, seems to constitute a painful experience. However, since George has a habit of keeping feelings of insecurity strictly to herself, she seems to have no other way of dealing with these feelings than acting hostile towards Henry and ridiculing the other girl's boyishness.
Portraying the tomboys' relationship towards each other as being dictated by feelings of insecurity transformed into hostility and ridicule is, I would argue, one of the decidedly negative aspects of Enid Blyton's portrayal of gender in *The Famous Five*. In the reception of her books, Blyton has both been commended for her portrayal of unconventional femininity in the form of George and other tomboys as well as criticized for covert sexism, for instance in Anne's exaggerated femininity or the higher level of agency allowed to her male characters, as both David Rudd (193) and Liesel Coetzee (87) have pointed out. The question whether Blyton's depiction of femininity in *The Famous Five* ought to be considered as progressive or conservative is one that I will return to repeatedly and the peculiar behavior of the tomboys towards each other is one of the instances that warrants further investigation in this regard.

By introducing other tomboy girls as rival characters to George and positioning them in competitive hostility towards each other, I would argue that Blyton sends a decidedly negative message about the nature of tomboys and weakens their respective positions. By discrediting each other, the tomboys engage in the very same behavior that they are confronted with through gender conservative individuals and thus reproduce the kind of oppression that seeks to suppress tomboyism and other forms of gender rebellion. A much more desirable plot for the cause of tomboyism could see the girls recognize each other as allies in their shared experience of non-conforming gender-expression and support each other through mutual respect and encouragement.

Apart from aligning the rivaling tomboys with stereotypes of female “cattyness”, it also reflects relevant issues in regard to the tomboy's handling of her emotions, in particular emotions such as insecurity or jealousy, that cannot be openly communicated but are only expressed by transforming them into enmity and ridicule. In George's display of emotions there exists a curious division: Whereas the girl is depicted as hot-tempered and prone to sudden outbursts of anger, being, in the words of her own mother, a “difficult” and “naughty girls”, she makes a point of keeping a firm lid on certain other feelings, in particular sadness and fear, and the same is true for Henry, who toward the end of the novel admits to only acting brave but really being scared of facing the crooks and coming to help the other children. It is this emotional dilemma that I consider a pivotal issue in Enid Blyton's depiction of gender and tomboyism respectively and that I will now investigate more closely.
Tears of a Tomboy

The central problem of George's character in *The Famous Five* can be summed up as follows: By distancing herself from conventional ideas of femininity, which she does not identify with, and preferring instead traditionally masculine activities as well as clothes and mannerisms, a person like George inhabits a position that is both outside the socially agreed norms of femininity and masculinity. I will reflect more closely on this peculiar position, its opportunities as well as limitations, in the second part of this chapter, but for now I would like to focus more on George's emotional strategies and the way they are dictated by her own notions of gender.

As I have mentioned before, George displays an interesting contrast in the way she expresses her emotions. Whereas she quickly articulates feelings of anger or frustration, she does the exact opposite when she feels sad or insecure. These feelings are suppressed or ignored for as long as possible, and only when she is by herself does George allow herself to drop her guard and weep, as the following passages illustrate:

Anne began to cry. She didn't like hearing that the tutor she liked so much had been knocked down by Tim, and she hated hearing that Tim was to be punished. “Don't be a baby,” said George. “I'm not crying, and it's my dog!”

But when everyone had settled down again in bed, and slept peacefully, George's pillow was very wet indeed. (*Five Go Adventuring Again* 82)

They all sat down in a heap together when they got there, and George got as close to Timmy as she could. She was glad when the boys switched off their torches. She badly wanted to cry, and as she never did cry it was most embarrassing if anyone saw her. (*Five Fall Into Adventure* 160-161)

The reason for this refusal to show sadness or tears is given by George herself in the first volume of the series: “boys don't [cry] and I like to be like a boy” (*Treasure Island* 26). Contained in this short remark is George's clear ideas on the nature of girls and boys. Girls may cry but boys don't and since she finds herself identifying more with other boys than with other girls, this code of conduct must apply to herself as well.

Furthermore, her utterance hints at the central dilemma of the tomboy. George's situation is as follows: Existing in a society that still adheres to a very clear separation of boys and girls in the way they dress and conduct themselves, George is an individual who faces the situation of being
biologically female but not identifying with dominant notions of femininity at all. Distancing herself strongly from these conventional notions of girlhood, the only available alternative that she perceives is to affiliate herself with the other gender group, namely boys. After all, many things that she enjoys doing, such as physical outdoor activities, have traditionally been labeled masculine activities and she craves the freedom to follow her interests and inclinations in these fields as unquestioned as any boy. The impression of boyhood as the only alternative to conventional femininity has been expressed quite aptly by Julia Penelope in her accounts of her tomboy childhood: “I was uncomfortable with my femaleness (at least what I was told I was supposed to be as a “female”) because I couldn't accept the weakness, passivity, and powerlessness that such “femaleness” required. Since I refused to be “female”, as I understood it, I concluded I had to be “male” (Penelope qtd. in Rottneck 187).

The part about being told what “female” was supposed to be is a relevant detail that I will return to in the second part of this chapter where I consider alternative versions of femininity, but related to George's tomboyism this statement captures her predicament quite well. Like Penelope, George is only familiar with one official version of femininity and this concept is something that she utterly despises. Her reaction to this feeling of estrangement is to seek a feeling of belonging elsewhere, but in a binary world of gender, this elsewhere can only be the category of boys.

However, this desired affiliation with masculinity is not unproblematic, especially in a society such as George's, that still propagates very stereotypical ideals of gender. In order to convincingly distance herself from conventional femininity and gain recognition of her more masculine disposition, George inevitably falls into the snares of dominant masculinity and can be said to simply trade one limiting set of gender characteristics for another. In order to be recognized as “one of the boys”, instead of being lumped together with other girls, George must strictly follow the rules of what it means to be a boy in this society.

In other words, while George tries to cross the boundaries of gender, abandoning femininity in favor of masculinity, her particular act of crossing not only keeps the boundaries themselves intact but also fortifies them. Instead of questioning the socially acceptable limits of gender and offering new and more diverse versions of femininity and masculinity respectively, George perceives her only alternative to succumbing to the rules of feminine behavior is to switch sides and adopt the masculine code of conduct for herself.
George's behavior recalls Naomi Scheman's comments on the dictates of heteronormativity: “[…] identity boundaries are policed by experts committed to keeping their works under wraps. Even when the experts are facilitating the crossing of sex and gender boundaries, they do so in ways that attempt to do as little damage as possible to the clarity of the lines: they may be crossed, but they are not to be blurred” (Scheman 76). The “experts” that Scheman refers to are medical doctors who enable transsexual individuals sex-reassignment surgery, and while her comment focuses on the physical aspects of biological sex, it is equally valid for George's assessment of gender. While she may be radical in her rejection of conventional femininity she is rather conservative in her views on the gender binary as such.

In adopting a masculine code of conduct, George claims not only positive attributes, such as physical prowess and self-determination, but also the negative and limiting elements that are part and parcel of dominant masculinity. The most striking of these negative elements is the emotional restraint that is put on boys and, by extension, on tomboys such as George, who feel particularly driven to live up to the boys' standards since their whole concept of self is based on maintaining a strictly guarded distance to stereotypically feminine behavior. One might even argue that tomboys like George are under even more pressure than biological boys to conform to the rules of masculinity since they already inhabit an uncertain position, constantly examined and suspected of fraudulence by their environment, and are particularly vulnerable towards attacks on their gender behavior.

In George's case, this restraint results in her suppression of feelings of sadness and despair and thus in limiting a healthy expression of her emotions. Internalizing the masculine code of conduct and, in particular, the rule that “boys don't [cry]” George's tomboyism can be seen to inflict emotional damage on her and must be considered critically in this regard. Instead of propagating possible alternative versions of gender that allow for a more diverse self-expression and permit a wide range of emotions, George's tomboyism keeps the strict duality of gender intact and unquestioningly adopts the rules of masculinity, regardless of her actual experience and the very real sadness that she experiences.

The Tomboy's Performance and her Dilemma

To sum up, George's tomboyism is a form of expression that is an amalgamation of several factors: one level consists of the very literal performance of gender through external cues, such as the
gendered significance of items of clothing, while another is based on the girl's preference for and abilities in activities and sports that are traditionally labeled as masculine. Further elements are George's self-determined act of choosing a name for herself, intended to signal her desired affiliation with the masculine to other people, as well as her insistence on suppressing sadness and tears in public, a circumstance that is owed to her desire to appear convincingly in her role as a boy, thus adhering strictly to the male code of conduct that forbids the shedding of tears and any displays of emotional weakness.

Returning to my initial motivation to investigate George in terms of the character's potential for liberation, I find that I must raise points both in favor and against a positive reading of the girl's tomboyism. On the one hand, throughout the series the girl expresses admirable determination in the expression of her gender-bending identity and remains undaunted even in the face of her environment's disapproval. Any criticism directed at her boyish disposition merely results in fueling her determination even further and does nothing to deter George from pursuing her identification with notions of masculinity. One profound act that illustrates her determinism and wholehearted embrace of personal agency is George's act of naming herself anew with a male name and refusing to answer to her female birth name. Thus, the character of George communicates positive attributes of self-confidence and perseverance in the face of adversity, conveys the important message of staying true to one's own sense of self, and asserts a person's liberty in choosing their own identity.

However, underneath this positive aspect of George's character lies another layer that has rather negative implications. George's dilemma is the result of her social circumstances that don't allow for any diversity outside of the traditional masculine-feminine dichotomy and its specific rules for each gender. Feeling no real affiliation with girls and conventional femininity, the only possible escape from her undesirable situation is to wholly reject anything feminine and instead seek allegiance with masculinity, which presents the only alternative to femininity in George's gender-binary world.

Hand in hand with this pursuit of a masculine identity, however, goes its own set of limitations. Aspiring to be “like a boy” in all aspects of her life, George becomes subjected to the code that governs acceptable masculine behavior and in particular its strict emotional dictatorship. Thus, George's struggle against the boundaries of gender does not result in a creative act of imagining new and more diverse versions of gender but rather strengthens the existing duality. The boundaries are crossed but they are not blurred. Or, in the words of queer activist and musician Kathleen Hanna: “We have to find other ways that meets [sic] people's needs that is [sic] fair instead of just throwing
your hands up in the air and being like, I’m going to spend the rest of my life trying to drop out and be the opposite. When you’re the opposite of something you just totally reinforce it.”

Thus, the question of whether George's character has the potential for liberation, my answer would be a tentative “yes, but”. Clearly, the very presence of a girl such as George already has the beneficial effect of providing young gender-ambiguous readers with an encouraging source of identification, and the girl's agency and determination might serve to boost readers' confidence about themselves.

But the possibly damaging and limiting effect that George's behavior, through her unquestioned adoption of conventional masculinity, contains ought not to be ignored. In a contemporary reading of the series, it lacks the possibility for real gender diversity and instead reiterates a potentially harmful concept of masculinity that has become rather outdated.

In the following chapters, I will now explore George's social position between femininity and masculinity more closely and, in particular, investigate her environment's reception of her gender expression as well as issues of authenticity, that play a relevant role in this regard.
4.2 Julian, Dick, and the Issue of Authentic Gender

The Status of George's Masculinity

At the very beginning of the Five's adventures, when George meets her cousin Anne for the first time and readers are introduced to her gender-bending identity, a highly relevant remark is uttered, that encapsulates the difficult situation of the tomboy and sets down the status she holds in regard to her male cousins Julian and Dick. In the words of Anne, who retorts after being offended by George, Julian and Dick are “real boys, not pretend boys, like you” (Treasure Island 14).

The accusation that George's behavior and self-styling presents an act of pretending, thus implying that it is inherently fake, is one that runs throughout the entire series. Repeatedly, the young tomboy is reminded of the fact that she is a girl and of the significance this biological circumstance carries with it. Her environment's reactions range from having her forms of self-expression criticized as improper behavior to denying her participation in certain activities on grounds of her biological sex. One striking example in this regard is the character of Captain Johnson, the owner of the riding stables in Five Go to Mystery Moor, who chides George and fellow tomboy Henry: “You two girls!” he said. “Why don't you behave yourselves? Always aping the boys, pretending you're so mannish! Give me Anne here, any day! What you want is your ears boxing” (Mystery Moor 7). And when George voices her wish to sleep in the stables like the boys do, we are told that girls are unable to do so:

“I wish Anne and I could sleep in a stable too,” said George, longingly. “We never have. Can't we, Captain Johnson?”
“No. You've got beds that you're paying for,” said the captain. “Anyway, girls can't do that sort of thing, not even girls who try to be boys, George.” (ibid. 31)

Captain Johnson's assessment of George's behavior as “aping” as well as his remark about “girls who try to be boys” reflect a strong aversion towards her masculine conduct. The choice of words is particularly telling, since “aping” describes not only an act of copying, but implies that this act is done in a rather clumsy and unskilled way. Thus, the Captain not only accuses George of imitating the boys, but does so with an additional sentiment of derision, which further underscores both his lack of understanding as well as respect for George's behavior.
Another example is the tutor Mr Roland, who appears in the second book of the series, and is positioned in conflict with George right from the beginning by pointedly addressing her as a little girl:

“Oh, George is a girl,” said Dick, with a laugh. “Her real name is Georgina.”
“And a very nice name, too,” said Mr Roland.
“George doesn't think so,” said Julian. “She won't answer if she's called Georgina. You'd better call her George, Sir!”
“Really?” said Mr Roland, in rather a chilly tone. Julian took a glance at him.

[...]

“Don't you like dogs?” asked Julian, in surprise.
“No,” said Mr Roland, shortly. “But I dare say your dog won't worry me much. Hallo, hallo – so here are the two little girls! How do you do?”

(Adventuring 23)

Needless to say, both Mr Roland's disliking of dogs, as well as his continuous insistence on calling George Georgina, mark him as an antagonistic character right from the start and, not surprisingly, the tutor eventually turns out to be part of a gang of thieves trying to steal important documents from George's father.

However, in the course of the series, there are also occasions in which George's wish to be treated like a boy is actually granted by other people and her exemplary skills in certain masculine activities are also noted repeatedly. Among the supportive people in George's environment, apart from her mother, are the fisher-boy Alf as well as the old couple Sanders, who inhabit a farm house close to Kirrin Cottage. All three of them have a habit of referring to George as “Master George”, which naturally pleases her to no end.

“Morning, Master George,” he said. It seemed so funny to the other children to hear Georgina called 'Master George'!

(Treasure Island 46)

“Why if it isn't Master George!” said the old fellow with a grin. George grinned too. She loved being called Master instead of Miss.

(Adventuring 27)

“Anyway, I couldn't come,” went on Aunt Fanny. “I've some gardening to do. You'll be quite safe with George. She can handle the boat like a man.”

(Treasure Island 45)

The title of “Master George” warrants attention in more than one regard: apart from having a gendered connotation, there is, of course, also a class element inherent in this form of address.
Throughout the series, repeated instances in which the four children's middle-class status is portrayed as being particularly worthy of respect and admiration occur, which, as Liesel Coetzee has pointed out, caused Blyton to be “accused of promoting middle-class values by insisting on good manners and proper respect for the upper middle classes” (87).

As far as George's closest social circle, her three cousins Julian, Dick, and Anne are concerned, it is quite interesting that despite being her closest friends, the other children turn out to be rather inconsistent in their respect for George's tomboyism. While there are some occasions in which they make a point of acknowledging her desire to be a boy, they also criticize and even purposefully exclude her on others. In the first book, for instance, Dick tries to console George after she learns the news that her parents are planning to sell her beloved island:

Anne took George's hands.
“I'm awfully sorry about your island, George,” she said.
“So am I,” said Dick. “Bad luck, old girl – I mean, old boy.” (105)

However, in *Five Fall Into Adventure*, Dick is not quite so supportive when George insists on fighting fellow tomboy “Ragamuffin Jo”:

“You can't go about fighting,” said Dick. “Don't be an ass, George. I know you make out you're as tough as a boy, and you dress like a boy and climb trees – but it's really time you gave up thinking you're a boy.” (16)

And in *Five Go Off to Camp*, Julian makes a point of assigning himself and the other boys as more relevant in regard to their adventure than the girls: “This is my adventure and Dick's – and perhaps Jock's. Not yours or Anne's.” (118)

The inconsistency of their attitude towards tomboyism becomes even more striking when we consider their interaction with Henry in *Five Go to Mystery Moor*. Upon meeting the girl for the first time they mistake her for a boy. Henry, rather pleased about this, does not contradict them and it is not until they catch up with Anne and George that the two boys realize that Henry is a tomboy like their cousin.

“Yes. An awfully nice boy,” said Dick. “Gave us quite a welcome and dragged our packs into the wagon, and was very friendly. You never told us about him.”
“Oh, was that William?” said Anne. “Well, he's only little. We didn't bother about telling you of the juniors here.”
“No, he wasn't little,” said Dick. “He was quite big, very strong too. You didn't mention him at all.”
“Well, we told you about the other girl here,” said George. “Henrietta, awful creature! Thinks she's like a boy and goes whistling about everywhere. She makes us laugh! You'll laugh too.”
A sudden thought struck Anne. “Did the – er – boy who met you, tell you his name?” she asked.
“Yes, what was it now, Henry,” said Dick. “Nice chap. I'm going to like him.”
George stared as if she couldn't believe her ears. “Henry! Did she meet you?”
“But that's Henrietta!” cried George, her face flaming red with anger.
[…] “Gosh, she sounds very like you, George,” said Dick.
“Well, I never! It never occurred to me that he was a girl. Jolly good show she put up. I must say I liked him – her, I mean.”
(Mystery Moor 18 – 19)

What is noteworthy here is that not only do the boys fail to see that Henry is really a girl (in other words, Henry passes successfully as a male), Dick is also slow in adapting to this new reality and keeps thinking of Henry as a boy, not just in this passage but also a little further on:

“Right,” said George. She began to heave some straw around. “But not with That Girl,” she announced, from behind the straw she was carrying.
“What girl?” asked Dick, innocently. “Oh, Henry, you mean? I keep thinking of her as a boy.”
(ibid. 24)

It appears as if George's cousins are more inclined towards viewing Henry as a boy than they are with George herself. This tendency also becomes apparent in a later passage, when both George and Henry are required to wear dresses to dinner and Anne comments on Henry's appearance:

George looked nice, because her curly hair went with a skirt and blouse quite well, but Henry looked quite wrong, somehow, in her frilly dress.
“You look like a boy dressed up!” said Anne, and this pleased Henry, but not George.
(ibid. 34)

While both girls wish to be boys and to be treated as such, Henry seems to appear more masculine to George's cousins in a way that actually makes it somewhat difficult for them to consider her as a girl. They clearly are capable of perceiving her masculinity as an inherent feature of her person, a quality that visibly clashes with notions of femininity, as Anne comments on Henry looking rather odd in her dress. Thus, I find it rather curious that they sometimes fail to realize the inherent nature of George's masculinity and even suggest that she give up this perception of herself.
One can say therefore that George's position throughout the series is characterized above all by its uncertain and contested nature. While George herself has very clear ideas of who she is and what she can do, expressing a high level of self-confidence, she repeatedly clashes with her environment's more conservative attitudes towards gender norms and finds herself criticized, ridiculed, and excluded on grounds of her gender-bending behavior.

**The Tomboy's Plight: Sexist or Realistic?**

David Rudd has pointed out how George's repeated experience of social exclusion has contributed in giving Blyton a reputation of being sexist in her writings (186) and refers to Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, who consider George to inhabit a “false position”, since “like all tomboys, she can be “as good as”, but this implies a basic deficiency. She never can be the genuine article” and they further stress that “there is no suggestion that […] [George's] fantasy of being a boy is just as “normal” as Anne's acceptance of a “housewifely” role.” Instead, they claim that “the author's view of girls who “pretend to be boys” [is] that they are pretentious and silly. They will “grow out” of it; the growing out is a process of adjustment” (338-343).

However, Rudd himself does not share this thoroughly negative judgement of Blyton's portrayal of tomboy George. Rather than reading George's struggle as sexist, his assessment is that “Blyton […] put the whole debate about “sexism” on the agenda in this series” and addresses the fact that “the problem of what is appropriate behavior for the sexes is something that concerns children a great deal” (192). A similar reading is proposed by Liesel Coetzee, who suggests that

> Although there is evidence that Blyton does support a dominant heteronormative discourse that encouraged girls and women to take a submissive role in relation to boys and men, she also undermines such stereotypes and shows her readers different possibilities for girls and women. In her portrayal of the tomboy George, Blyton illustrates that girls and women can succeed at traditionally masculine tasks […]. (85)

In addition to pointing out Blyton's realistic depiction of gender-related power struggles, Rudd raises another relevant point and stresses the importance that *The Famous Five* as a popular series appealing to both girls and boys had for lessening the rigid boundaries in gender-specific literature: “At a time when boys' and girls' books were more clearly demarcated, it was to Blyton's credit that she produced “adventures for boys and girls” - and created a character that many boys found acceptable [George] (generally boys avoid girl protagonists in stories)” (194).
My own assessment of Blyton's portrayal of tomboy George is in line with Rudd's and Coetzee's views on the matter. Rather than consider the recurring derision that George experiences as Blyton's own opinion, I would argue for a more critical reading that sees them as a realistic engagement with the various difficulties that a young tomboy encounters in her life. Again, I quote Rudd, who considers excessively idealistic depictions of life that don't respond to the readers' real-life experiences as unhelpful in children's literature:

Rather than ignoring it, Blyton's books seem to engage in a dialogue about it – addressing it as an issue. By pretending that the world is suddenly free of these power struggles, that all the Five habitually engage in washing up, is to miss the tensions that Blyton explored. The latter might be a desirable state, but as most ethnography shows, it is not yet a reality. To pretend it is so “for the sake of children” is [...] to demean them. In the Five books, this sort of equality is not a given: It is fought for. (193)

The tomboy's fight for equality can be seen as being fought on two distinct levels. One level, George fights to have her skills acknowledged in areas that are traditionally considered masculine. As I mentioned previously, swimming, climbing, and rowing are paramount in this regard, and her outstanding skills are not only repeatedly mentioned by Blyton but also recognized by the others:

They all had a bathe that morning, and the boys found that George was a much better swimmer than they were. She was very strong and very fast, and she could swim under water, too, holding her breath for ages.

(*Treasure Island* 30)

George took a beautiful header off the end of the boat, deep down into the water. The others watched her swimming strongly downwards, holding her breath.

[...]

So down Julian went – but he was not so good at swimming deep under water as George was, and he couldn't go down so far.

(ibid. 38)

George made her way through the reefs of rocks with a sure hand. It was marvelous to the others how she could slide the boat in between dangerous rocks and never get a scratch.

(ibid. 110)

Then George clambered up the side of the wreck like a monkey. She was a marvel at climbing.

(ibid. 76)

However, in addition to her performance at traditionally masculine tasks, George also fights for recognition of her very own masculine form of self expression. Her staunch insistence on being
treated like a boy has been the cause for some criticism. Bob Dixon, for instance, refers to George's wish to be a boy as “a very bad case of that castration complex, or penis-envy, first described by Freud, and her success with readers rests almost entirely upon the fact that, in our society, and for what seem very obvious reasons, small girls frequently wish they were boys” (53).

While Dixon is certainly correct in his assessment that the greater freedom granted to boys in George's society would constitute a very obvious reason for her desire to be treated as one, I consider his outright disregard of it as too simplistic and limiting in regard to freedom of gender expression. According to him, George's desire to be a boy is solely rooted in her desire for more freedom, to which boyhood seems a means to an end, but it could equally be considered a legitimate form of self-expression in and of itself.

Dixon's dismissal of George's masculinity as a form of “castration complex, or penis-envy” is reminiscent of Judith Halberstam's assessment that there are two distinct forms of tomboyism, which differ both in their form of self-expression as well as their level of social acceptance: “both have been labeled “tomboy” but one is linked securely to femininity and heterosexuality while the other is tied precariously to masculinity and queerness” and Halberstam adds that “despite the rise of feminism and the recognition of the dangers posed by conventional femininity […] we still hesitate to cultivate female masculinity in young girls” (144-145).

George's tomboyism appears to be too extreme for the likes of Dixon, who cannot fathom why a girl would choose such an extremely masculine form of self-expression apart from strategical considerations aimed at gaining a greater level of freedom traditionally reserved for boys. Halberstam warns against a stance that accepts tomboyism only in terms of its active, frisky disposition and instead propagates an overall approval of tomboyism in its various forms, including a decidedly masculine identification and presentation:

While a permissive attitude towards active little girls is a positive change in the parenting of girls in general, the reduction of the meaning of tomboyism to active play among girls suggests something more sinister. If tomboy simply means “active”, then those forms of pronounced masculinity that many girls cultivate – complete male identification, lack of interest in girls and girls' activities, desire to dress in boys' clothes and play exclusively with boys as a boy – remain beyond the pale. This preadult female masculinity, in other words, is still very much outside the parameters of acceptable girl behavior. Tomboyism is tamed and domesticated when linked to non-masculine girls, and allows for a more harmful, fully pathologizing discourse to explain strong masculine identifications among preteen girls. (159-160)
Recalling Surya Monro's enumeration of possible alternatives to the dominant binary concept of gender, George's form of tomboyism reflects this need for greater gender diversity. Considering the fact that she not only equals the boys but actually outdoes them in many traditionally masculine tasks and activities makes their repeated exclusion of her even more incomprehensible. This is particularly striking as the boys occasionally admit to her remarkable qualities regarding conventional notions of masculinity:

“Yes, I should think so,” said Julian. “But you needn't worry, Anne, you've got me and Dick and Tim to protect you.”
“I can protect her too,” said George, indignantly.
“You're fiercer than any boy I know!” said Dick.

(Five Go Adventuring Again 155)

This passage illustrates very well the difficult and contradictory nature of George's position. Although she repeatedly proves to be outstanding in qualities that are considered masculine, her status is still an unstable one, constantly threatened by exclusion, depending on the whims of her environment. If we consider it more closely, Julian names himself, along with Dick and Tim the dog, as part of a group constituted by their shared quality of protectiveness. However, if strength and bravery as necessary elements of protectiveness are the unifying factor here, it makes no sense to exclude George and not mention her as well, considering that her nerve, courage, and physical strength are pointed out repeatedly throughout the series. Instead, it reveals that the unifying factor is above all the masculine incarnation of these qualities, hence granting them a status of higher legitimacy when occurring in a biologically male body. Thus, George is not automatically included in this circle but needs to protest and demand her place, before Dick acknowledges that she might in fact also qualify for it.

In addition to George's having to demand inclusion, this passage is also relevant in regard to Dick's choice of words: referring to George as “fiercer than any boy” he knows is not necessarily a compliment, considering that one definition of “fierce” is “violently hostile or aggressive in temperament”, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. While a certain level of aggression can of course be helpful in protecting another person, it is worth noting that, overall, the description of George as extremely fierce is not particularly positive. Instead, this characterization further contributes to the habit of marking George's masculinity as “other” - “as good as, but not the real
thing.”

Considering George's position in this light, I would argue that the potential for alternative positions of genders is broached but not fulfilled. Coetzee is certainly correct in her assessment that *The Famous Five* books illustrate that girls can succeed in traditionally masculine domains, thus contributing to the corrosion of strict gender boundaries and proposing new versions of femininity that define themselves through their independence, their straight-forwardness, absolute determination, and physical prowess. However, these new forms of identity are still limited in two regards.

For one, despite George's success in these aforementioned masculine domains, she is nevertheless repeatedly rejected from participating in “masculine” activities simply on grounds of being a girl. As in the case of Captain Johnson, no further reasons are given for why she cannot be included in these activities. Similarly, Dick's statement that George cannot fight Jo because she is a girl does not give any explanation in this regard but simply clings to outdated ideals of femininity. Thus, although George has fought and won her inclusion and respect in some aspects, other traditionally masculine areas are still closed for her.

While these circumstances contribute in suppressing the tomboy's freedom and undermine her determined assertion of her skills, I nevertheless consider Rudd's position important, who argues in favor of viewing these forms of rejection as realistic depictions of the tomboy's struggle. After all, reading about the difficulties that George encounters can serve an equally empowering purpose for young gender-ambivalent readers, whereas an excessively positive depiction of George's situation would be unrealistic and thus perhaps unhelpful for their own experience.

The other way in which George's freedom of identity is limited concerns her masculine presentation. After all, her external features are not directly connected to her skills in traditionally masculine domains but rather serve as an additional enhancement of her tomboyism. George is not only an outstanding athlete and rower, she also prefers to style herself in a way that is decidedly masculine. Here too does she encounter resistance from her environment in the form of comments on her “aping the boys” or urges to give up this form of behavior. Again, it is quite realistic that she would find herself in these situations, but what I find rather disappointing is that her cousins are also a source of these forms of discouragement.
The inconsistent support from her closest friends is a point that I find most problematic in the
depiction of George's position. While I consider incidences of conflict with the rest of her
environment to be expected, I find it rather disappointing that even the members of her closest
social circle repeatedly discredit her form of self-expression and try to persuade her to adopt a more
conventional form of femininity. It is this aspect of George's portrayal that stresses the need for a
greater diversity of genders the most.

However, considering possible concepts for achieving this diversity, I disagree with Judith
Halberstam, who proposes “the extension of masculinity to nonmale bodies”. Instead, I would be
more in favor of strategies aimed at producing a pluralistic concept of gender, since I consider the
labels “masculine” and “feminine” respectively as inherently problematic elements in the issue of
gender-appropriate behavior. Since both words derive their meanings from the Latin words for male
and female (see the Online Etymological Dictionary: *masculinus* and *femininus*), using these labels
to describe certain forms of behavior can never fully transcend their link to particular biological
bodies and only reinforces the sex-gender interdependency.

Instead, I would opt for the concept of gender pluralism as described by Monro, in particular due to
it “being formed via the interplay of different characteristics associated with gender and sexuality”
(37). Unlike an expansion of masculine and feminine behavior to non-male and non-female bodies,
which ultimately still relies on and enforces a dualistic view of gender, a pluralistic concept would
provide a wider range of possible genders and would grant the individual greater freedom in
selecting their particular position on a the gender spectrum.

Reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's concept of a “third space”, such a new dimension of gender could
serve as a site of hybridity beyond the limits of masculinity and femininity where new forms of
identity can be formed in order to transcend the limits of the gender binary. Bhabha writes about his
perception of a third space: “But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those
feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the
traces of certain other meanings or discourses” (211). Such a definition of a new site of hybrid
identities recalls Monro's suggestion of considering gender as “more finely grained than is the case
with the binary system” and “formed via the interplay of different characteristics” (37).

Such a position would be desirable and helpful for a character like George, but *The Famous Five*
fall short in achieving such a more nuanced reading of gender. Instead of fully acknowledging
George's skills as equal to the boys' and accepting her masculine appearance as a legitimate part of herself, even her cousins repeatedly express their disapproval of George's tomboyism and either ridicule or directly criticize her for it. Recalling George's unquestioning adoption of conventional masculinity for herself, this aspect further stresses the circumstance that gender is not negotiated in *The Famous Five* but remains cast in the duality of conventional masculinity and femininity.
4.3 Anne and the Depiction of Femininity

Anne versus George

Occupying a liminal space between the genders, tomboy George is positioned not only in contrast to Julian and Dick, but also to her third cousin Anne, the youngest of the gang. While George's conflicted relationship to the boys is rooted in her unfulfilled desire to be considered as one of them, the opposition between her and Anne is the result of George's aversion towards anything conventionally associated with femininity. Again, this opposition is established in the opening pages of the Five's first adventure at George's first meeting with her cousin:

“Don't you simply hate being a girl?” asked George.
“No, of course not,” said Anne. “You see – I do like pretty frocks – and I love my dolls – and you can't do that if you're a boy.”
“Pooh! Fancy bothering about pretty frocks,” said George, in a scornful voice. “And dolls! Well you are a baby, that's all I can say.”
*(Treasure Island 14)*

This passage not only lays out the rules of what girls can do that boys can't, namely enjoying pretty frocks and playing with dolls, but also George's attitude towards this notion of femininity, which is one of utter disdain. She calls Anne “a baby” for enjoying these things, and this is not the only time that Anne is considered by the others in such diminutive and rather pejorative terms:

Anne went up to her. “I'm sorry I nearly made a mistake, George,” she said. “Here's your bread and cheese. I've brought it for you. I promise I'll never forget not to mention Tim again.”
George sat up. “I've a good mind not to take you to see the wreck,” she said. “Stupid baby!”
Anne's heart sank. This was what she had feared.
*(Treasure Island 32)*

Anne burst into tears. “Don't blame me for telling him we got it from the wreck,” she sobbed. “Please don't. He glaring at me so. I just had to tell him.”
All right, Baby,” said Julian, putting his arm round Anne.
*(ibid. 87)*

“It's a –,” began Anne, and at once all the others began to talk, afraid that Anne was going to give the secret away.
“It's a wonderful afternoon for a walk.”
“Come on, let's get our things on!”
[…]}
Anne went red as she guessed why all the others had interrupted her so quickly.
“Idiot,” said Julian, under his breath. “Baby.”
(Adventuring 43)

Not only is Anne the opposite of George in her attitude towards “girl things”, but also in almost every other aspect of their behavior, as well as their role within the group. Whereas George is headstrong and brave, Anne is insecure and timid. And whereas George can always be trusted to keep a secret, Anne is repeatedly scolded for her “careless tongue”:

The children went to wash. “Idiot!” said Julian to Anne. “Nearly gave us away twice!”
“I didn't mean what you thought I meant the first time!” began Anne indignantly.
George interrupted her.
“I'd rather you gave the secret of the wreck away than my secret about Tim,” she said. “I do think you've got a careless tongue.”
“Yes, I have,” said Anne sorrowfully.
(Treasure Island 69)

“You want to know a secret formula, and we want to know a secret way,” said Anne, quite forgetting that she was not supposed to talk about this.
Julian was standing by the door. He frowned at Anne. Luckily Uncle Quentin was not paying any more attention to the little girl's chatter. Julian pulled her out of the room.
“Anne, the only way to stop you giving away secrets is to sew up your mouth, like Brer Rabbit wanted to do to Mister Dog!” he said.
(Adventuring 63)

Anne's characterization thus confirms a number of stereotypes of women and girls respectively, namely that they are easily scared as well as exceedingly chatty and thus potentially unreliable. In casting Anne as the weakest link of the group, she could be considered as a negative figure besides George, who is intended to be the preferable figure for identification for female readers, in order to enhance her positive traits, such as dependency, bravery, and determination.

This crucial aspect of Anne's portrayal is one that deserves closer attention. I admit that my own childhood reading-experience was very much along those lines. I adored George and saw her as an inspiring role-model, but I was almost constantly annoyed by Anne, who represented everything about being a girl that I sought to distance myself from. Now, however, I consider these two characters in a different, more nuanced light, and would argue that an entirely negative assessment of Anne's character is also problematic.

Similarly to the depiction of conventional masculinity in the series, Anne's character is created
through an amalgamation of female stereotypes. Not only does she enjoy typical girl things, such as
dolls and pretty frocks, she is also the one who routinely chooses matters related to the domestic
sphere throughout the series of adventures. While the others are mainly focused on the excitement
that these adventures bring them, Anne is most content when she can manage the Five's household affairs:

“Let's arrange everything very nicely in the cave,” said Anne, who was the tidiest of
the four, and always liked to play at “houses” if she could. “This shall be our house,
our home. We'll make four proper beds. And we'll each have our own place to sit in.
And we'll arrange everything tidily on that big stone shelf there. It might have been
made for us!”
“We'll leave Anne to play “houses” by herself,” said George, who was longing to
stretch her legs again.
(Five Run Away Together 112)

“Let's have a look around now,” said George, who always liked doing things at once.
“Anne, you do the washing-up and tidy our cave-house for us, will you?”
Anne was torn between wanting to go with the others, and longing to play “house”
again. She did so love arranging everything and making the beds and tidying up the
cave. In the end she said she would stay and the others could go.
(ibid. 146)

“I shall keep everything very clean,” said Anne. “You know how I like playing at
keeping house, don't you, Mother – well, it will be real this time. I shall have two
caravans to keep clean, all by myself.”
“All by yourself!” said her mother. “Well, surely the boys will help you – and
certainly George must.”
“Pooh, the boys!” said Anne. “They won't know how to wash and dry a cup properly
– and George never bothers about things like that. If I don't make the bunks and wash
the crockery, they would never be made or washed, I know that!”
(Five Go Off in a Caravan 23)

Besides her preference for domestic activities, Anne is also portrayed as physically weak as well as
rather timid, frequently getting nervous or scared in the course of their adventurous encounters:

Everyone took turns at rowing except Anne, who was not strong enough with the
oars to row against the tide.
(Treasure Island 67)

Then George clambered up the side of the wreck like a monkey. She was a marvel at
climbing. Julian and Dick followed her, but Anne had to be helped up.
(ibid. 76)

Anne slipped her hand into Dick's. She felt scared. She didn't like the echoes at all.
She knew they were only echoes – but they did sound exactly like the voices of
scores of people hidden in the caves!
(ibid. 125)

The children all took turns at going into the space behind the back of the cupboard and being shut up. Anne didn't like it very much.
(Five Go Adventuring Again 33)

However, despite much preferring George over Anne myself when I read the series for the first time, I would strongly argue against a simplistic reading of this character that considers her solely in a negative light. As David Rudd suggests:

[…] Anne, who is a favorite target of those adopting a crude approach to sexism. With comments like, “You'd never get your bunks made, or your meals cooked, or the caravans kept clean if it wasn't for me!... I love having two houses on wheels to look after,” it is easy to see why. But this is a very narrow view, neglecting the fact that many girls do enjoy this behavior and are empowered by it, given the confines of a patriarchal society. In other words, they use their control of the domestic sphere to enable them in others. (193)

**The Freedom of Choice**

Like Rudd, Liesel Coetzee also argues against viewing the portrayal of Anne as sexist and in favor of a more nuanced reading of her depiction of femininity. According to her, “Anne portrays freedom of choice” (94), both in her preferred activities and chores within the group, as well as the freedom to avoid dangerous situations instead of being pressured into them by the rest of the group: “It is significant that, even though Anne expresses her fear, she is not ostracised or ridiculed by the other characters. Regardless of her “feminine” behavior Anne remains one of the “Five”. (ibid.)

Similarly, her preference for domestic chores and enthusiasm for playing “house”, in contrast to George's tomboyism, presents female readers with different versions of femininity and offers a more diverse choice for identification:

By highlighting the distinction between Anne and George, Blyton presents contrasting gender stereotypes. In this way, she appears to endorse the different aspects of these female characters: she promotes emergent discourses about female independence in George, while simultaneously portraying Anne's conforming to the dominant discourse that promotes domestic and stereotypically feminine activities for girls and women (ibid. 95).
I certainly find it admirable that George is so determined in claiming her chosen space of identity and rebels against other people's notions of how girls ought to be, but I must also stress that Anne's pursuit of the things that give her joy is no less admirable, and that she should not be considered as inferior to George. This, I would argue, is not only true of her preferred activities but also of her emotional qualities. There is no reason to consider a reluctance to expose oneself to possibly dangerous situations as a weakness and a personal flaw, just as I would not consider a preference for, say, climbing trees as better than one for playing “house”.

Apart from Anne's legitimate choice to take charge of the domestic sphere, the empowering effect that she derives from it ought not to be ignored. Realizing the vital role that managing their home and their provisions play in their adventures, Anne draws great satisfaction from being in charge of these matters:

“My word, Anne – the cave does look fine! Everything in order and looking so tidy. You are a good little girl.”
Anne was pleased to hear Julian's praise, though she didn't like him calling her a little girl.
(*Five Run Away Together* 116)

“I like this holiday better than any we've ever had,” said Anne, busily cooking something in a pan. “It's exciting without being adventurous. And although Julian thinks he's in charge of us, I am really! You'd never get your bunks made, or your meals cooked, or the caravans kept clean if it wasn't for me!”
“Don't boast!” said George, feeling rather guilty because she let Anne do so much.
“I'm not boasting!” said Anne, indignantly. “I'm just telling the truth. Why, you've never even made your own bunk once, George. Not that I mind doing it. I love having two houses on wheels to look after.”
“You're a very good little housekeeper,” said Julian. “We couldn't possibly do without you!”
Anne blushed with pride.
(*Five Go Off in a Caravan* 38-39)

“I'll just see what we've got in the larder, Julian,” said Anne, getting up. She knew perfectly well what there was in the larder – but it made her feel grown up and important to go and look. It was nice to feel like that when she so often felt small and young, and the others were big and knew so much.
(ibid. 61)

“I'll get you some supper,” said Anne to everyone. “We're all famished. We can talk while we eat. George, come and help. Julian, can you get some ginger-beer? And, Dick, do fill up the water-bowl for me.”
The boys winked at one another. They always thought that Anne was very funny when she took command like this, and gave her orders. But everyone went obediently to work.
What these passages illustrate is that Anne perceives her own contribution to the gang as equally important as the others' knack for exploring and, I would argue, rightfully so. After all, an organized home and especially regular, well-prepared meals are a vital factor in the children's adventures. Furthermore, I want to underscore the feeling of empowerment that Anne derives from looking after her peers, and I do not consider her assessment, that she is the one who is actually in charge, an exaggeration. I want to stress that I do not wish to romanticize the domestic sphere, but that I simply want to argue against an ideology of hierarchy, in which the domestic is generally perceived as inferior to the public sphere.

In addition to that, I also think that the boys' reaction towards Anne taking command deserves further attention. The fact that they find her “very funny” is extremely informative, and can be read as a strategy to mask their own insecurity about possibly losing their perceived superiority. By considering Anne “funny” in this regard, they deny her true authority within the group and refuse to acknowledge her claim that she is the one in charge. When they comply to her orders, it is because they kindly agree to do so, not because they feel they ought to, as the “but” at the beginning of the last sentence suggests. Despite finding her funny, the group decides to follow her orders, but they are reluctant to relinquish control to the young girl.

Again, I agree with Coetzee's view that Anne and George serve as differing options for identification and present readers with alternative, but equally legitimate versions of femininity from which they may choose:

In her positive portrayal of Anne, Blyton assures readers that this too, is a possibility available to them. Readers may even be able to transcend both roles and find a new emergent position that incorporates both Anne's nurturing domestic role as well as George's independence. Most importantly, readers are assured that in Blyton's world they have the freedom to choose their own role, and that they will not be isolated by their choice because there is a place in Blyton's adventures for tomboys and for feminine girls. (96)

**Anne's Awareness of Gender Stereotypes**

Another aspect of Anne that I consider extremely interesting and highly relevant in regard to the reception of gender is her critical stance on certain gender stereotypes. In the first book of the
series, this is reflected in a comment she makes on George's ideas of masculinity:

“[…]. I couldn't keep Timothy any more, and Mother backed Father up and said Tim must go. I cried for days – and I never do cry, you know, because boys don't and I like to be like a boy.”

“Boys do cry sometimes,” began Anne, looking at Dick, who had been a bit of a cry-baby three or four years back.

Dick gave her a sharp nudge, and she said no more.

(Treasure Island 26)

This is one of the rare occasions in which the strictly dualistic view on the inherent natures of boys and girls, that is so prevalent in this series, is explicitly questioned, and it comes as no surprise to me that Anne is the one who voices this critique. After all, in terms of the children's self-perception, I would consider Anne the one with the least necessity to prove anything to her environment. Quite content with her status as a girl and the things that are associated with being one, her position, unlike George's, is not a contested one and she feels no need to live up to any expectations or notions of gender. I would argue that it is precisely this position that grants Anne the liberty to examine stereotypes on gender more critically and expose them as mere myths.

Dick, on the other hand, is not so keen on having his former tendency to cry made public. His reaction recalls Judith Halberstam's words on the heavily guarded nature of masculinity, which “is a sign of privilege in our society […]. Young boys who exhibit feminine behavior are punished, not to protect femininity from male incursions but to encourage masculinity in male bodies” (164). Thus, what we witness in this passage is Dick's effort to protect his own masculinity against the accusation of feminine behavior. To keep up his credibility as a proper boy, the information regarding his more emotional former self ought not to be made known to the others.

A similar moment occurs right at the beginning of the first book, when the three siblings are packing their belongings for their trip to Kirrin Cottage, and Dick mocks Anne for wanting to bring several dolls along:

“Anne wanted to take all her fifteen dolls with her last year,” said Dick. “Do you remember, Anne? Weren't you funny?”

“No, I wasn't,” said Anne, going red. “I love my dolls, and I just couldn't choose which to take – so I thought I'd take them all. There's nothing funny about that.”

“And do you remember the year before, Anne wanted to take the rocking horse?” said Dick, with a giggle.

Mother chimed in. “You know, I remember a little boy called Dick who put aside one
teddy bear, three toy dogs, two toy cats and his old monkey to take down to Polseath one year,” she said.
Then it was Dick's turn to go red. He changed the subject at one.
(Treasure Island 5)

Again, Anne does not feel that she ought to justify herself for loving her dolls so much, and is quite irritated by Dick's attempt to ridicule her. And, again, I would argue that Dick's behavior is primarily motivated by his desire to distance himself from any forms of “girlish” behavior by making fun of it, thus strengthening his own masculinity and trying to mask the insecurity he might feel about himself.

Another instance in which Anne questions common assumptions about gender occurs in Five on Kirrin Island Again, when Julian commends George on her decent behavior in a rather odd way:

Julian gave George a gentle clap on the back. “Good old George! She's actually learned, not only to give in, but to give in gracefully! George, you're more like a boy than ever when you act like that.”
George glowed. She liked Julian to say she was like a boy. She didn't want to be petty and catty and bear malice as so many girls did. But Anne looked a little indignant.
“It isn't only boys that can learn to give in decently, and things like that,” she said.
“Heaps of girls do. Well, I jolly well hope I do myself!”
(17)

Again, it is George who goes along with Julian's one-dimensional opinion on gender and does not question his statement that giving in gracefully makes her more of a boy. She is too busy feeling proud about being considered a boy, and the praise she receives, to consider the underlying message, and her general disregard for all things considered feminine makes her blind to the discriminatory nature of Julian's generalization. Anne, on the other hand, is not in need of any praise validating her identity and immediately detects the false assumption behind Julian's statement. Offended by his “praise” of George, she speaks up and points out that girls exhibit decent behavior just as much as boys do.

Thus, I would argue that a thorough consideration of Anne's character resists a simplistic reading that casts her in an exclusively negative light. Of course, it is quite obvious which aspects of her portrayal lend themselves to an accusation of The Famous Five as sexist, seeing as Anne wholeheartedly embraces every aspect of conventional femininity and shows little interest in leaving the domestic sphere traditionally reserved for women in favor of more adventurous
activities or greater independence.

However, her joy in these domestic tasks ought not to be belittled and written off as sexist without further reflection of the matter. After all, it is also pointed out in the course of the novels that taking care of the domestic affairs is vital for the Five's adventures and that Anne derives a sense of empowerment from being in charge in this regard. I do not propose to idealize Anne's preference for household chores too much – after all, it is also made clear that they come second to the gang's actual adventures. As the titles of the individual novels suggest, the important parts of these stories are the adventures, and not Anne's playing “houses”, thus there is of course a hierarchy in the children's activities that ranks the public sphere of the adventures above Anne's preferred domestic sphere, but I wish to stress that Anne should not be written off as an entirely sexist opposition to George's more progressive character.

Indeed, I wish to underscore again the aspect in which Anne is actually more progressive than George, namely her keener awareness of discriminatory generalizations about the natures of boys and girls. In this regard I believe that Anne deserves to be credited for speaking out against both George and her brothers and correcting them in their assumptions that boys don't cry or that giving in gracefully makes one more of a boy. Despite representing conventional notions of femininity in most of her aspects, this is one crucial point in which Anne presents a surprising voice of gender criticism and contributes in deconstructing the dominant gender myths that even George succumbs to.
5. Conclusion

In the course of this paper I have investigated the concept of tomboyism both in general as a cultural and literary concept of unconventional femininity as well as in particular in the depiction of the character of George Kirrin in Enid Blyton's children's book series *The Famous Five*.

Starting out with contemporary theories on sex and gender, I have illustrated how the concept of a gender binary is instrumental in perpetuating dominant notions of masculinity and femininity, respectively, and how these notions in turn wield a regulatory effect on individual human beings. By propagating certain forms of behavior as acceptable and others as deviant, the gender binary limits the awareness for the diversity of authentic forms of expression that occur among individuals, regardless of their biological sex, and instead insists on ideas of “real” or “authentic” masculinity and femininity.

In spite of a large body of scientific literature denying that fundamental behavioral differences between men and women exist, I have illustrated how faulty assumptions of “inherently natural” masculinity and femininity continue to have a firm grasp on the collective mind, producing images and expectations of how little girls and boys ought to be raised. In this context, I have mentioned the case of baby Storm as one possible strategy against these dominant notions and have furthermore proposed a queer attitude towards gender as helpful in gradually eradicating the gender binary.

Following this exploration into the nature of sex and gender, I have shifted my focus on one particular example of gender-nonconformity: the tomboy. Outlining some efforts to define the nature of, as well as identify possible causes for, this form of behavior I have subsequently argued that the core issue is not the nature of the tomboy itself but rather the circumstance that a need to investigate the tomboy exists in the first place. Again, notions about the nature of boys and girls are instrumental in this and mark the tomboy as some kind of oddity, despite the fact that tomboy behavior is, in fact, very common among young girls. Thus, what really needs to be investigated is not the tomboy but rather the dominant discourse on gender, that considers the tomboy a kind of abnormal, even pathological variety, as the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder in Children reveals.
Locating the difficult nature of tomboyism precisely in this discourse and its delegitimizing effect, I have finally focused on the depiction of tomboy George in the *Famous Five* series and outlined the portrayal of this tomboy figure as well as her relationship to both her male cousins and her female one. Upon closer consideration, it turns out that George is a rather contradictory character, who claims greater freedom for herself by decisively rejecting contemporary notions of femininity, while at the same time reinforcing them through her stubborn refusal. Similarly, her efforts to meet dominant expectations of masculinity is also problematic, since it strengthens precisely these stereotypes that form the dichotomy of the gender binary and construct these one-dimensional concepts of gender. Thus, while I give George credit in terms of having a liberating potential for readers of this series, I consider her unquestioning adoption of conventional notions of masculinity as problematic, since an uncritical exchange of one stereotype for another cannot be considered a real solution to possible gender dilemmas experienced by young readers.

Putting George in opposition with her male cousins Julian and Dick further illustrates the matter of authentic expressions of gender, since the tomboy frequently finds herself confronted with the accusation of being a mere imitation of masculinity and is urged to abandon her gender-nonconformity, which is considered a phase that the girl is expected to outgrow. Linking *The Famous Five* with the concept of tomboy taming, which emerged in late-19th-century narratives of tomboyism, I have stressed the issue that, regardless of her skills, the tomboy is always considered a fake in relation to biological males, even when she excels at the very things that are seen to constitute the nature of masculinity. The fact that even her cousins contribute in this devaluation of George's masculine character traits presents a disappointing fact that limits the potential for a truly radical redefinition of gender in this series.

Finally, by contrasting George with her female cousin Anne, I have outlined the depiction of conventional femininity in the series, in both its negative and positive aspects. While, on the one hand, Anne's character consists of many rather negative feminine stereotypes and is less instrumental in the adventurous parts of the stories, the fact that her contributions are also relevant for the group ought not to be overlooked. Without wishing to romanticize the domestic sphere, Anne illustrates the way in which it is also possible to derive a feeling of empowerment and accomplishment from being in charge of these chores. However, I consider the most important aspect of Anne's character her critical awareness for gender stereotypes and generalizations and the fact that she is the one who criticizes these most vehemently. In this regard she presents a more progressive attitude towards gender than George does, since the latter is too preoccupied with
asserting her own masculinity in order to question the underlying dynamics that are at work.

Reevaluating the liberating effect that *The Famous Five* had on me as a child, I now consider the series in a more critical light. While I still view George's struggle to be recognized as an authentic and legitimate expression of identity relevant for young girls who are faced with similar repressions, I have become more aware of the stereotypical, one-dimensional models of gender that are also at work throughout this series. Rather than crossing the boundaries of gender, as George attempts to do, I would prefer a blurring of these boundaries and would consider such an approach more helpful, since in George's case the boundaries still remain intact. Thus, I cannot stress enough the relevance of adopting and promoting a queer attitude towards gender in children's literature, that acknowledges the very real diversity along the gender spectrum and no longer requires these boundaries and the categories they are founded on.
6. Bibliography

Primary texts:


Secondary texts:


Zusammenfassung (Abstract)


Die Position eines sozial konstruierten Geschlechts wird weiters in der jüngeren Strömung der Queer Studies aufgegriffen, welche sich gezielt gegen eine binäre Konzeption von Geschlecht stellen und, dabei teilweise von Butlers Theorie beeinflusst, für eine pluralistische Wahrnehmung von Geschlecht eintritt, welche dem Individuum größtmögliche Selbstbestimmung in der Wahl der eigenen Identität zusichern soll.

Dieser theoretische Hintergrund bietet also den Rahmen meiner Analyse der Kinderbuchfigur George Kirrin, welche ich als queere Figur lese, die sich in einer umstrittenen Position zwischen den Geschlechterrollen wiederfindet und versucht, möglichst selbstbestimmt ihre eigene Wahrnehmung ihrer Identität durchzusetzen. Ich untersuche sowohl die potentiell befreienden als auch die einengenden Aspekte ihrer eigenen Positionierung in einer von Geschlechterstereotypen noch tief geprägten Gesellschaft, und stelle diesem Tomboy außerdem ihre mehr geschlechterkonformen Cousins entgegen, welche innerhalb der Geschichten als Kontrastfiguren fungieren.
Curriculum Vitae

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