

GENDER IN CHILDREN'S FANTASIES

Lucie Jarkovská*

*The paper** is based on an ethnographic research conducted at a Czech grammar school as part of a PhD thesis that was defended in January 2010. The research within a single class of 11-13 year olds was focused on (re)production of gender in the school environment. The research strived to apply a complex perspective on gender reproduction within the classroom. The presented analysis is inspired by Valerie Walkerdine's statement that gender is theorized as a fiction, shot through with fantasy, yet lived as a fact, produced and struggled over within the regulatory daily practices of schooling (Walkerdine, 1990). Using the technique of writing short text the role of gender in children's fantasies was researched.*

Keywords: gender, education, ethnography, children's fantasy, Czech Republic

1. Introduction

If we want to understand why gender still matters in education, we need to understand what gender means for children. Research as well as praxis has shown that the predominant focus on gender roles in so-called non-sexist education is not enough (MacNaughton, 2003). Bronwyn Davies claims that researchers working within the socialization model based on sex-roles are at risk of getting caught up in doing simplistic research to show the ways in which

* Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University (Brno/Czech Republic).

** This study was written with the support by the Czech Science Foundation, under the terms of the research project «Educational strategies of migrants and ethnic minority youth» (P404/12/1487).

adults are at fault in causing narrow stereotypical behaviours in children (2003: 8). I have tried to research the role of gender in children's fantasies and explore how gender structures their thinking about the world and about themselves. I have done this by investigating techniques such as drawing, short stories and fairy-tale interpretation. The source for the analysis was not just the artefacts created on my request during the research. Long-term observation enabled me to gain a better knowledge about all the children in the class and thus give me deeper understanding of the meaning of their input.

The aim of my analysis was not to create a manual of gender-sensitive education. Nevertheless, my findings have potential for application to this end. Educators who strive to employ gender-sensitive methods can use this analysis as an inspiration for their own analysis of gender and power relations in their classrooms or other children's groups. However, although one can see common traits of gender order in most groups, every group has its specifics which the educators should take into consideration. To embrace gender sensitive approaches in education means to learn gender sensitive thinking and the skills of situational and contextual analysis covering both the social structure and the individual being.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical frame for my analysis builds on the literature on gender, children, childhood, and school, namely the work of post-structuralist Bronwyn Davies (2003) and sociologist Barrie Thorne (2004). Post-structuralism shifts the research on gender and school from the focus on gender roles and identity captured in the male/female binary to the question of the connection between structures and individuals that is much more fluid. It works with the image of the individual that is not a definite and unitary social construct, but it is understood as constituted and reconstituted through various discursive practices. Davies suggests that individuals are not unitary beings as the humanist theories and their understanding of the socialization process see them. Regardless of strenuous effort to produce a unitary, coherent and static «self», they are rather complex, changing and contradictory beings. Davies states: «Out of the multitude of conflicting and often contradictory possibilities, each person struggles to achieve themselves as a unitary, rational being whose existence is separate from others, and yet makes sense to those others» (2003: 14). And that is what I try to focus on in my research – contradictions in the discourses children use when they think about themselves and/or about gender and practices of overcoming such contradictions.

As well as Davies, I try to focus on the moments when the normative binary division is crossed and on the ways children defend normative structures and its borders. Davies calls

such practices category-maintenance work (2003, 2006); Thorne uses the term «border work» (2004). Davies argues:

Thus individuals can deviate, but their deviation will give rise to category-maintenance work around gender boundaries. This category-maintenance work is aimed partly at letting the «deviants» know they've got it wrong-teasing is often enough to pull someone back into line but primarily it is aimed at maintaining the category as a meaningful category in the face of the individual deviation that is threatening it. (2003: 31)

This text represents the outcome of a broader project focused on gender reproduction in children's lives. The research had an ethnographic design and was conducted as a case study of one classroom in a Czech school. I had been visiting the classroom 6B (children age 11-13) once or twice a week for one school year. Using research techniques such as class observations, individual interviews, group interviews, and special techniques as drawing and writing short text, I tried to answer the questions «How is gender reproduced within the everyday life of school children?» and «What does gender mean for children?».

In comparison with other methods, the strength of the ethnographic case study lies in the possibility of examining the «case» in the context of «real life» (Yin, 2005: 380). The ethnographic case study enables us to collect data in non-artificial settings, and, even if we supplement the observations with techniques such as questionnaires and interviews and create situations that would not happen without our research, we can obtain rich information about the background of the data. The ethnographic approach matches well with the methodology of case study, because it focuses on an understanding of meanings in everyday life (Spinder & Spinder, 1987: 17).

School classes in the Czech context represent a relatively stable group of girls and boys of similar age who meet every day in a specific place. In grade 1-5, they spend most of the time with their class teacher, whereas from grade 6 onwards there are different teachers for different subjects. Boys and girls and their teachers interact, create hierarchized structures, and (re)produce symbolic meanings. Researching the classroom enables us to observe the mechanisms of cultural (re)constructions and positioning of individuals within the social structure. I tried to focus on the role of gender in these processes.

Culture consists of knowledge that people have to acquire so that they can act in a way acceptable for other members of a certain group (Goodenough as cited in Geertz, 1993). Gender can be perceived as a sign which carries a certain meaning for the members of a culture and is put into the web of relationships. Valerie Walkerdine (1990) states that gender is theorised as a fiction, shot through with fantasy, yet lived as a fact, produced and struggled over within the regulatory daily practices of schooling. This statement inspired me to examine what gender means for children. I considered it inappropriate to ask children this question

directly, because, firstly, by challenging such a «natural» thing as gender order, the researchers may put into question their own legitimacy and social acceptability, and, secondly, there is not even a commonly-used equivalent to the term «gender» in the Czech language. Therefore, I was prompted to use more metaphorical techniques. I asked them to fill in a questionnaire with three open questions: what are the advantages and disadvantages of being a girl? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a boy? What would my life be like if I was a boy/girl? Then they were supposed to imagine they are 30 and meet at a class reunion, and they were asked to draw a photograph they would bring to such an event and write a short text about their imagined life. Thirdly, inspired by Bronwyn Davies' research, I told them the story of the Paperbag Princess (a story about a princess that saves a prince kidnapped by a dragon), let them find the title for the story and draw the picture as an illustration for the Czech translation of the book¹. The outcomes of the abovementioned activities are in the analysis understood in the context of long-term school ethnography. Different methodological procedures allow the capture of different information from children, and an analytical triangulation of this information allows a closer understanding of the inherent complexity of the social construction of gender by children.

3. Analysis

3.1. If I was a boy/if I was a girl

I tried to explore the children's ideas about gender, firstly by asking the children to write the advantages and disadvantages of being a girl and being a boy. In addition, I asked them to add a short text answering the question «What would my life be like if I was a boy/girl». My aim was to learn what being a girl/woman or a boy/man meant for them. I expected a question asking how their life would be if they were the other gender would work better than a question asking what they think makes them a girl or a boy now. For this reason, I decided not to ask the question «What does it mean to be a boy/girl?». I assumed that asking the question in such a way would sound absurd to children, because this knowledge is taken for granted. I attempted to follow up the logic of the fights that from time to time happened in the classroom where boys and girls appeared as two groups struggling for recognition as either «the better ones» or «the ones who are discriminated against».

¹ Due to space restriction, this part of the research will not be described in this paper.

Differences

The core concept/theme of the children's answers was «difference». Although there were many meanings of the difference conveyed, in the first place most of them expressed that their life would be different. Petra and Sonia provided the most comprehensive answers.

If I was born as a boy I would have different name, I would have different toys and from childhood I would behave different. Now I would probably be interested in Hip Hop. I would have more free time than I have now. I would want to be a vet. I would have more serious cock-ups at home. I would have more physical strength then I have now. (Petra)

In the beginning I would get a different name. I would get toy cars instead of dolls. I would have: different hair, eyes, character, voice, politeness, clothes, things, bad manners, organs. I would play tricks. I would be a worse student. I would get worse grades at school. In the future I would have a wife and not a husband. I would have different work. The work for a man is not work for a woman. I would listen to more rough music. (Sonia)

From Sonia's answer, we learn a lot about how much would be different, but we do not know much about the character of these differences. I consider especially significant the statement about work. The difference is based on the fact that the work would be for a man not for a woman. The explanation is tautological women are characterized by femininity, men are characterized by masculinity; women do feminine activities (sports, work) and own feminine items (toys) and men masculine. This refers to the argument of Kessler and McKenna (1985), gender attributions are done on the basis of traits culturally defined as masculine or feminine and attributed characteristics have a meaning only thanks to the socially shared construction of the process of gender attribution.

Although I have found commonalities in most children's answers, there were individuals outside the mainstream. The only student who doubted her life would be different was Emilie:

If I was a boy, my name would be Jakub. I would get different toys, for example cars. I don't know if I would be a good student and I don't know if I would have different hobbies. When I was small I wanted to be a blacksmith. I don't know if my character would be different and what I would like to do. Concerning profession – I don't know what I would want to be. I would be more outside.

As a girl, I am clever and I am a good student. Since the first class (since preschool actually), I am very busy. I am a member of lot of clubs. Though the older I am, the fewer hobbies I have. I have chosen a lot of professions, but I know I want to be an actress. I took extra drama classes, but this year I stopped, because I have to study hard and I have a lot of trainings; however, I also have less and less time for synchronic swimming. And I do not enjoy it very much anymore. The trainings are five times a week. I have a lot of savings, but I do not need to be rich. I love animals, especially dogs. (Emilie)

Emilie knows that there is a common expectation that her life should be different if she was a boy, but at the same time she refuses to confirm this. The doubt is based on her experience of a gender non-stereotypical wish to be a blacksmith. This protects her from a simple reverse answer, as she knows that her wish was actually a «boy's» wish and to think about herself as a boy, in contrast to what she is now, does not make any sense. In her answer, Emilie steps out of gender expectations not only concerning their content, but also denies gender as a dual category with two opposite values.

There was another girl that seemed to subvert gender order – Magda. She was a mighty girl, in many aspects surpassing gender expectations. She was wearing loose clothes, usually jeans and baggy shirt or t-shirt. Her trousers were hung with chains and pendants and on a thick chain she had her keys; I saw this way of wearing keys among many boys at school, but no other girls. She was using rough vocabulary; often got involved in fights, sometimes she herself started them. Her voice was loud and low. She was a tomboy who in her behaviour transgressed gender norms, but at the same time when we got into discussion to the possibility of discursive subversion of gender order, for example, by a fairy-tale about a princess who rescues a prince, she seemed highly upset, and in the end she supported the gender order and refused any disruption of such a system. The reason why she was doing it lies in the fact that her prominent position in the classroom was based on valuable masculine characteristics as physical strength and being loud. She was defending the gender order to defend her status, which was based on her masculine characteristics.

At first sight, it would seem that Magda undermines the gender order more than a nice and hardworking student like Emilie, who seems to be a typical non-conflicting girl. When I got acquainted with Emilie, the more I realised that gender for her is much less rigid than for a tomboy like Magda. For Emilie, gender doesn't mean impenetrable borders between the world of women and the world of men – she can be a nice girl who, at the same time, wants to be a blacksmith. Paradoxically, she represents more subversive elements than Magda, who expresses respect for the gender order, admires masculinity, and tries to get closer to what she perceives as a masculine world.

Corporeality and (hetero)sexuality

In listing advantages and disadvantages of both genders, the most frequent answers were related to the body, primarily to the genitals and their functions. I was surprised how negatively the female body was perceived by both boys and girls. The biggest disadvantage of femininity boys and girls perceived was the menstruation and the «duty» to give birth. Children related to menstruation through a number of other hassles or

duties as the need to buy sanitary pads, ban on swimming, or the belief that menstruation lasts six months after giving birth. Menstruation and childbirth caused literal moral panics in the classroom. In the class of family education, children watched a film about childbirth and reproduction. This was a core theme of their sex education. The teacher tried to introduce child bearing as something beautiful, magical and almost sacred. According to children's discussions in the classroom and to their answers to my research, it seemed that the effect was the direct opposite; they now perceived child bearing as a troublesome duty. When talking about the film, they had watched they described it as a horror – blood, pain, disgust. I asked the teacher what she thought about that paradox, and she told me that it does not necessarily express their feelings, but maybe they just use the topic to express resistance to her activities – the more she says it is beautiful, the more they say it is disgusting.

Whether or not this explanation was valid, I consider it significant that it was the female body that was at stake. The female body was used as a mediating object in the negotiation of the teacher-pupils relationship. The female body in all these talks does not take a role of a subject, that can feel and experience, but as an object used for power games or displays of resistance. The usage of the male body in the same way was never present either in my observations or the children's answers.

Among boys' and girls' answers, some disadvantages of the male body were also listed (they have to urinate standing, the penis hinders, the excitement is visible). But these were not perceived in such a demonic way. I never observed someone speaking about the penis or erection with such disgust or as a burden, whereas menstruation and birth were repeatedly positioned in this way.

Corporeality is closely related to sexuality, which in turn is deeply embedded in the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). Sonia, Marika, Diana, and Alice in their texts explained that they would be attracted to girls and would have women as their partners or wives. It is interesting that no boy has written that they would be attracted to men. I assume these results from the fear of homosexuality – to write *I would be attracted to men* sounds «too gay», and the fact that it is a fantasy about being a girl is not a sufficient protection. Boys' answers were significantly different from girls' answers. They were all noticeably shorter. Answers of Slávek, Vítek, and Jura were, despite their brevity, similar to the answers of girls – they tried to answer my question and list what would be different. Three other boys, Bořek, Erik, and Mirek refused the fantasy and did not try to fantasize about their lives as girls, but they used the answer to perform their own heterosexuality by way of sexual allusions. All three have written they would have another name, but the key to selection of their girls name was different than that used by girls – the name they chose was the name of a girl they fancied the

most in the classroom. Bořek and Erik went further with their heterosexual performance, adding to the name of their favourite girl a sexual provocation. They wrote they would have to use a vibrator. Another evading answer I got from Olda who completely refused the sex change fantasy. His answer was: «I would let myself be killed immediately, exchange my brain into a male body and disinfect all my female thoughts».

At the first reading, I was disappointed by boys' refusal. Nonetheless, after closer inspection, I realised their answer may not include what I have explicitly asked about, but they expressed exactly the fact that I was searching for. I wanted to know what gender means to children and my question was just a means. Bořek, Erik, Mirek, and Olda did not answer the question, but they performed what it meant to be a boy for them. To be a boy means to perform heterosexual masculinity² and not to get contaminated by femininity³. It is significant that the need for this kind of masculinity had to be presented by the class «tough» boys who had disciplinary problems, whose school performance was bad and who came from disadvantaged social backgrounds. They showed that gender for them means heterosexuality in the first place, and in this point their answers were similar to those of girls who considered it important to recognise that as boys they would be attracted to girls or would have a wife instead of a husband. The main gender norm for them is heterosexuality. Their answers support the theory of Judith Butler who argues that gender order is legitimized by a heterosexual matrix, because the only socially accepted individuals are those by whom the triad sex-gender-desire is coherent and stable (*ibidem*).

Appearance

The second most often mentioned topic in the list of advantages and disadvantages of femininity and masculinity was appearance. Both boys and girls assessed girls as the better looking. Whereas boys only stated that girls look better, girls elaborated on that topic in a more sophisticated way. Some girls described particular ways of working on their appearance – improving one's appearance was treated as a space for fun, creativity, and freedom, but at the same time as a duty. Beauty had an ambivalent position in their answers. On the one hand, it was a value that brings fun and freedom that boys lacked, on the other hand, they felt the pressure to take care of their appearance and it was seen

² The centrality of sexuality, especially to definitions of masculinity, is documented also by Pascoe (2007) in her cogent research of the construction of masculinity at an American high school.

³ Processes of repudiation are central to a masculine identity also according to psychoanalytic theorists (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976).

as a burden – being the third most often stated disadvantage of being a girl (after birth giving and menstruation).

The obsession with a good and attractive appearance is by some authors related to power relations. According to Sandra Lee Bartky (1988), the female body is much more disciplined and subjected to stronger control than the male body. Bartky developed Foucault's theory and adapted it to the female body. She sees the body as a product of discourses and social practices. Bartky distinguished three kinds of such practices: 1) practices producing the body of a certain size; 2) gestures and body postures; and 3) decorative practices constituting the female body as a decorative object (*ibidem*: 64-65). These practices make the women's bodies obedient and ascribe a lower social status to them. According to Bartky, women internalize the social pressure on their appearance in the same way as the prisoners in Bentham's panopticon internalize the invisible warden.

Pierre Bourdieu (2001) talks about beauty and disciplining of a female body in a similar way when describing the female existing through being seen, which is a characteristic that constitutes women as subordinated to men. The girls' answers showed girls like improving the way they look and enjoy the outcomes. The beauty requirements are a kind of symbolic violence on girls and women. They feel uncomfortable under close inspection of others, but at the same time they accept the requirement and enjoy its fulfilment.

However, interest in fashion and appearance is ambivalent and can be perceived not only as a conformity to gender norms. Marketa Rybová (2001) from Prague group of school ethnography argues in her study *Girls 2000* that fashion can also be used by girls as a mean of building sisterhood, solidarity among girls, and refusal of heterosexual relationships. One of the participants of her research describes such practice:

Valerie: The other week we agreed with the girls we will wear bell bottoms and the others will wear dress.

Q: And the girls knew you are going to wear bell bottoms? And why do you do that, why do you all dress the same way?

Valerie: And then we have a crazy bell bottoms day and the boys are out, they give us a rest.

Q: That you provoke boys a little with the clothing?

Valerie: And what else? (*ibidem*: 12)

Fashion then can be seen as a source of «girls' power», an expression of girls' strength which can, through the declaration of girls' unity, scare boys and give girls space where they exist just for themselves not for boys, boys *«give them a rest»* then. Fashion means both space for creativity and development and yielding to the beauty myth that disciplines girls and makes their being subordinated to those who are supposed to gaze at them. The crazy bell bottoms day, as Valerie describes it, and the answers given by girls and boys in my research

also signifies that fashion represents more than just the conformity to beauty norms. The joy resulting from the beauty ritual is, in the case of the girls, abused as a form of symbolic violence that forces women to self-discipline, suffer a loss of self-confidence and devalue other personal qualities.

Here we can find potential for gender sensitive education. For girls appearance is a positive value which can be used to express their own strength and freedom. Gender sensitive educators should not be disrespectful towards that value. However, they can perceive it as an expression of women's subordination, if they do so, they devalue girls themselves rather than liberate girls from oppressive structures. Educators can use this interest in the educational process and support the girls not as objects in this field but as subjects, creators who are agentic and confident. This can be developed through/during creative clothing or jewellery workshops where both girls and boys are at the same time the creators and recipients of the created items, and both sexes can experience both subject as well as object position. The significance of appearance that girls expressed as well as the envy of some boys suggests the door may be open and, although social practice rises from existing structure, it is not absolutely determined and offers the possibility for change.

Role/expectation/behaviour

Another dominant issue in the children's answers I identified was the gender expectations and roles. Children described differences in behaviour expected from boys and girls. It was obvious that children understood that women should play the roles related to family and care (*they must take maternity leave, take care of a husband and children*) and men should find their place in the sphere of work (*they must work*). In this respect, the main disadvantage of being a boy and vice versa the advantage of being a girl was for both sexes that girls do not have to and boys have to be rough and aggressive. Children listed that girls do not have to take the part in fights or they do not use foul language. In relation to this, boys mostly mentioned a certain respect and protection that girls get from others (*boys have to pay their costs, boys can't beat girls, everybody protects them*). Girls were perceived as the protected ones, boys as those who were supposed to protect them, who should be the noble knights and defend girls. The pitfall of this constellation lies in the fact that girls are constituted as weaker, and also the protection is a mechanism of their disciplinary subordination. It forms them so that they meet the expectations of middle class femininity. Only then do they deserve the protection. It was interesting that girls were described also as big-headed and as those who make of themselves more than they are – they play «ladies». Here we see a contradiction whereby girls are expected to behave as ladies to get protection from their knights, and, on the other

hand, fulfilling this norm is perceived negatively as arrogance. Ambivalence appeared as one of the major characteristic of feminine gender⁴.

In children's answers the verb «must» often occurs; any advantage or disadvantage of girlhood or boyhood is perceived as something that they *must* do or *need not* do. Although they have described how boys and girls *are* (essentially perceived characteristics), the more frequent answers using the verb *must* refers to recognized social pressure. Characterizing gender differences by usage of the verb *must* was much more evident to children than to the teacher, who more often spoke about how girls and boys *are*⁵. Kateřina Zábrodská identified the discourse of essential gender as one of the practices of constituting gender identity. She described this discourse as a means of gender reproduction and confirming gender inequalities which are legitimized by the reference to naturalness (2009: 100). As I have shown in other text (Jarkovská, 2009), this legitimization of inequality by referring to naturalness is part of the educational process. I assume that children's usage of the verb *must* expresses that the children feel social pressure rather than some inside instinct to behave as boys or girls. They do not question the gender order, because they would risk their own position which needs to be recognizable in terms of gender. They do not want to be «queer» and excluded, but at the same time they feel the injustice of *musts* that apply only to one gender. As other authors (e.g., Pipher, 1996), I assume that this pressure grows stronger as they get into puberty and grow into young women and men and also with the intensification of heterosexual relationships. The verb *must* expressed the disciplining they probably feel more intensely than they did as children, because as teenagers they strive for an adult status which is highly gendered. On the ideological level, during the educational process, children were confronted more intensely with the logics of natural differences than the topics of social roles, norms and social control and social reproduction. It is why I expect that if I had the chance to research them later, in older age the normative verb *must* would be less frequent and would be displaced by the essential verb *be*, as I observed in the teacher's discourse.

⁴ In one Czech fairy-tale, a poor girl gets a task from a king. The task has to prove her intelligence; if she fulfils the task she can become a queen. The task is to come to the castle dressed/undressed, shod/unshoed, combed/dishevelled, come and not come at the same time. During my observations, I saw girls are supposed to fulfil similar dual tasks to be appreciated.

⁵ The teacher said: «Boys are tougher and get involved into fights». Children wrote: «Girls do not need to get involved into fights».

Gender hierarchy

Two of the children's statements reflected the aspect of hierarchy in gender order. The boy called Olda refused the fantasy completely and stated that he «would let himself be killed immediately, exchange his brain into a male body and disinfect all his female thoughts». The idea of being a woman for him was abject. However, other boys also repudiated the fantasy of being a girl; Olda's answer had ascribed femininity an extremely low value and status, as something contagious and disgusting.

Similarly annoyed by the feminine being was the tomboy girl called Magda who wrote:

I would get the name Richard. With other boys, I would slander girls and I would be friend with boys only. I would be a better student. I would have nicer things and I would be five years older and I would have a bigger room for myself. In the future, I would be a vet or medical doctor. Simply everything would be better than now, at least I think so!

Magda's answer reflects the frustration of being a girl. She would like to be a boy and enjoy all the privileges, but at the same time she does not want to fight the existing gender order, she prefers to be as masculine as possible and defend gender order⁶ which enables her to build her good position within the classroom at values perceived as masculine. However, she knows and she regrets that she is not a boy although she fights with boys and seeks boys' company.

3.2. When I am thirty

Another attempt to examine what role does gender play in children's fantasies was a fantasy about their future. I asked children to imagine they are 30 and meet their other schoolmates at a reunion. They were supposed to draw a picture which should represent a photograph they would like to show at the gathering and write a short text summarizing their life.

At first sight, the texts of girls and boys were different again. The boys' texts were significantly shorter. In the text children demarcated significant relationships either by writing a similar story as the best friend, or by placing the best friend into the story or by competing with someone. Girls cribbed from girls, boys cribbed from boys. Girls adapted their fantasy biogra-

⁶ For example, when I told children the Paperbag princess story, she did not like at all. But she was the one who found a solution for the gender discrepancy. When I came to the point where the dragon kidnaps the prince, the whole class started to yell and correct me: The dragon kidnapped the princess, not the prince. Magda found the solution – she suggested the dragon was gay, and after her conclusion the class let me to tell the story to the end.

phies to their best friends: [Alice:] «We went to Hawaii for holidays. My husband paid for everything. Also for dogs. And with my friend Diana»; [Diana:] «Me, my daughter and my friend Alice and her son Rost'a went to Hawaii for holidays which were paid by our husbands». They also fortified the friendship by choosing the same name for their imaginary kids. Boys performed the friendship by choosing the same name for their imaginary firms (*it will be Skoda*) or tried to compete with their rival: [Slávek:] «I have a sea with sharks in my garden»; [Jura:] «I have an ocean with whales».

The fantasies of girls were more factual, they put into their text names of their future children and husbands, they wrote concrete professions. Fantasies of boys were vaguer. Common for boys and girls was the fact that by the age of thirty they will all be rich. The difference was that whereas the girls fantasized as much about their wealth as about their income (from profession or from husband) and rich for them meant to earn thousands a month, boys were dreamy rich (millions and billions), and they do not earn but they simply have it in their bank account. Only two boys mentioned concrete profession (policeman, software engineer). Most of the girls had a profession (bank clerk, writer, director, actress, horsewoman, jewellery shop assistant, architect, secretary, model, photographer) or concrete focus of their firm (fashion design); only two girls did not mention any profession. Boys referred to their profession much more indefinitely: «I have two firms, I am an entrepreneur».

It seems that the financial inequalities between men and women that the statistics demonstrate in the real world exist also in the heads of children and shape their fantasies. Girls here have less not only in comparison with their schoolmates but also in comparison with their imaginary future partners or their partners have a higher occupational status: [Marika:] «I get 40 thousand every week, it is a very good company where I work. My husband gets 100 thousand»; [Hanka:] «I work as shop assistant with gold and silver, simply jewellery (...). My husband works as an architect». In the fantasies of boys, the incomes and professions of their future partners do not appear. The characteristics of the future wife that appeared more times were that the «wife will be nice». In one case, the profession was mentioned: [Jura:] «My wife works where she chooses».

It seems girls are aware of the social structure and their position. They accepted it and incorporated into their dream future. Boys seemingly do not think about their position. They are super rich, the wife is there in their future life, but it is not necessary to describe her status. It is either not important or it is taken for granted it will not be higher than their own status. Girls perceive the profession of their partner as important not only because he should provide the family with financial security, but also because they know that the status of the husband will define, to a certain extent, their own status. Writing about the husband means writing about them, which is not the case for boys. It seems girls are better informed about the social structure and have some strategies at hand of how to reach their status ambitions (either a

profession or a husband). The professions girls introduced also can't be considered as a realistic plan, actress or horsewoman seem more like a romantic dream. However they were based on contemporary girls' hobbies – Emilie who wants to be an actress takes drama classes and Zuzka helps with horses at a ranch; and as such these fantasies are of a different kind than the «I have two firms» of boys. Although boys were more ambitious in terms of wealth, they had no defined plans about how to reach it and their plan was not a consequence of what they were interested in at that time. I assume that the explanation lies in what Connell calls patriarchal dividend (2002: 142), i.e., boys count on the fact they are boys and will benefit from that fact. Nevertheless the patriarchal dividend does not work for all boys the same way. For boys from socially disadvantaged families, it represents rather a deception that brings feelings of privilege (at least over women) and then supplies them with self-confidence and a belief in future successes. The notion of privilege can encourage both middle class as well as the boys from disadvantaged families not to think about the future realistically or not to care at all. However, later the boys from lower social background do not have so much capital of any kind at their disposal as the middle class boys and their relaxed attitude towards school can be damaging for their school performance and future career.

I can't omit the stories that to some extent defy the mainstream. The stories of four girls did not contain a figure of wealthy husband. Marie is single at the age of 30. Sonia is divorced and though she is engaged and prepares a wedding, it seems that she brought up her child for some time on her own. Petra earns more than her husband and Emilie says she is neither poor nor rich and husband and kids are mentioned in the end of the text whereas other girls and boys describe their future family in the beginning or in the middle. Symbolically, she granted the family a less significant place than her schoolmates. Unlike other girls, Emilie did not state her husband's name or profession, and it seems she added the note about husband and kids to her text later after she had seen the text of others. I think so because all Emilie's texts were in comparison with other children elaborated and in writing about her future profession and situation she was significantly more passionate. Much more important than husband and children, for Emilie, were relationships with her cousins, which she places into her future life as part-owners of her business. By doing so, she refuses the gender expectation that in adulthood any relationships will be overshadowed by the relationship with her husband. Blunt sentence: «I have a husband and a daughter Šárka» seems an additional attempt to conform to gender expectations at least a little bit. As I have stated above, at the first sight silent and non-conflicting Emilie seems to be the most subversive child in the class⁷.

⁷ Maybe subversive is a too strong expression and would be better to say the pupil most open for gender transgression and change of gender order.

Marie was, in comparison with Emilie, a girl with poor school performance and a not very respected position within the classroom. She came from a village, it was her first year with this group and during the school year she remained at the margin. She wrote two stories. In the first one she was a successful top model who is rich and travels a lot. The desire to have attractive look and pursue a career in the field of commodified beauty reflects what was said above about women's objectification (Bartky, 1988; Bourdieu, 2001; Wolf, 1992). Wolf and other feminist scholars reveal the association of attractive look with success in heterosexual relationships – girls and women are taught through romance to believe that attractive looks and a good heart will bring them the dream partner and such a partner will bring them higher status and will confirm they are appropriate in their gender role. However, Marie was the only girl who declared the desire to become a model and at the same time her story was the only one which lacked information about a future partner. Writing about her desire to travel around the world she became the only girl who added some other information than about the family and profession. Modelling in Marie's story is not a feminine goal but a feminine means. It is not a means to pursue a husband or become rich (as others longed for) but a means to be free and explore the world. I assume her story was different from others also because she is an outsider in the group, not belonging to any friendship clique and was not copying from «best friends».

After she had written the text, Petra – the classroom star – came to her table, read her story and laughed at her screaming loudly: «Marie wants to be a model». Petra was a smart girl with a respected position among children and perceived as both clever and attractive. Her mockery was a power performance which should remind Marie that she should not be that ambitious. It was easy for Petra to make a mock of Marie because of the ambivalent status of modelling. On one hand, modelling is something the right girls should long for (if not to be a model, then to be beautiful as a model); on the other hand, it is perceived as cheap⁸. Petra's mockery was a power game; when Marie – the girl with lower status in the classroom –, declared the desire for independence and power, Petra used the ambivalent value of modelling and made Marie's story the laughing stock; she positioned Marie as unattractive and poor. She fought at two levels – she laughed at modelling itself (it is a stupid wish to be a model), but, at the same time, she positioned herself as a judge and rated Marie as not beautiful enough to succeed as a model, and by doing so she confirmed beauty was relevant. By challenging modelling as valuable (because the qualities you have to perform there are not the proper skills or intelligence), she related herself to the values perceived as masculine

⁸ It is reflected by saying that the girl can be either beautiful or clever or by the number of jokes about «blondes» who are attractive but incredibly stupid.

(success based on skills and intelligence rather than on attractive looks), it was her way to strengthened her position within the group (she is not a silly girl who wants to be a model). The devaluation of modelling beauty could signal she is resistant to the beauty myth. Nonetheless, by declaring Marie as not pretty enough, she was complicit with the beauty ideology. Not even clever, successful and respected, Petra could escape the requirements forced upon the female body and defining the position of the girl or woman through her appearance.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to analyse what gender means for children aged 11-13. I have shown that they relate gender to corporeality and corporeality as such is tied to female body (menstruation, birth giving) whereas male gender was defined through negation of the female body («they do not menstruate and do not have to give birth») and repudiation of femininity in general.

At first sight, children's fantasies corresponded with what is described by many as a gendered symbolic order (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Connell, 1987; Harding, 1986).

Children used gender stereotypes in their texts such as: girls are more gentle, conscientious at school, committed to family care, whereas boys are rough, sloppy, have behavioural problems, cause troubles, they have to earn money (mainly so that they could pay the girl's bills).

Except for the expected findings, the analysis revealed also surprising outcomes. In the children's statements, the usage of the normative verb *must* was significantly higher than the usage of the essential verb to *be*. Children described gender in terms of norms (what boys/men and girls/women have to do) rather than as an essential being (how girls/women and boys/men are). I argue that this fact expresses the social pressure of gender norms children experience on the verge of puberty maybe more intensively than when they were younger, while they have not yet entirely acquired the ideology of natural differences between sexes, which would lead to the understanding of those differences as essential (to be – not to *must*).

More subtle analysis has shown various aspects of domains stereotypically associated with either boys or girls. For example, girls are expected to look good and take care of their appearance much more than boys. This is referred to, by the children, as a disadvantage and described, by scholars, as the disciplining practice which positions girls and women as objects with lower status. On the other hand, fashion and appearance can be a space for creativity and the means of forming alliances that help girls escape hetero-normativity at least for a while.

Children's statements did not display signs of intentional subversion of gender order but under close inspection we can see that they integrate seemingly contradictory elements. Marie wanted to be a model (a very stereotypical ambition), but her aim was to be independent and explore the world⁹.

I suggest that these findings can be used as impulses for gender sensitive education. Making these contradictions invisible leads to a simplistic interpretation of gender as dualistic and uniform in its feminine or masculine form. I believe the outcomes of my analysis can help teachers to see and support the gender diversity in the classroom and reconcile (or rather overcome) the binaries of masculine-feminine dualism often considered as contradicting and irreconcilable. Non-sexist education that was promoted in late 1970's and 1980's was based on role-modelling and bringing into the classroom non-stereotypical models of girls playing football and caring boys. The teachers experienced this strategy as rather unsuccessful (MacNaughton, 2003). I suggest that educators should search for the potential within the classroom by revealing what is not expected and what easily gets neglected, because at first sight we would rather see the confirmation of stereotypes than subtle potential of gender transgression.

Acknowledgements to Baska Karch, Simon Bailey, Paul Wakeling, and two anonymous reviewers for their help and comments.

Contact: Masaryk University, Faculty of Social Studies, Joštova 10, 602 00 Brno – Czech Republic
Email: jarkovsk@fss.muni.cz

References

Bartky, Sandra Lee (1988). Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power. In Lee Quinby & Irene Diamond (Eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Paths of resistance* (pp. 61-86). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

Chodorow, Nancy (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁹ The same phenomenon was present in Jans' perception of the Paperbag princess. I would like to mention this example of integrating seemingly contradictory elements although further analysis of the Paperbag princess has not been provided in this paper. Drawing the picture for the Paperbag princess, Jan created a strip depicting a dragon ruining the castle – typical boys' obsession with destruction described also by Davies (2003). The surprising thing was that the dragon on his picture was a mother with two small children dragons and the text inserted by Jan into the picture said: «Dragons' education». In this picture, Jan integrated both values perceived as feminine (care, motherhood, relationships) and as well as masculine (aggression, destruction, violence).

Connell, Raewyn (1987). *Gender and power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Connell, Raewyn (2002). *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Davies, Bronwyn (2003). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Davies, Bronwyn (2006). Identity, abjection and otherness: Creating the self, creating difference. In Madeleine Arnot & Mairtin Mac an Ghaill (Eds.), *The RoutledgeFlamer leader in gender and education* (pp. 72-90). London: Routledge.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy (1976). *The mermaid and the minotaur: Sexual arrangements and human malaise*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Geertz, Clifford (1993). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. London: Fontana Press.

Harding, Sandra (1986). *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Jarkovská, Lucie (2009). Školní třída pod genderovou lupou [A classroom under gender focus]. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, 45(4), 243-265.

Kessler, Suzanne J., & McKenna, Wendy (1985). *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

MacNaughton, Glenda (2003). *Shaping early childhood: Learners, curriculum and contexts*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Parsons, Talcott, & Bales, Robert F. (1955). *Family, socialization and interaction process*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press of Glencoe.

Pascoe, Cheri Jo (2007). *Dude, you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pipher, Mary (1996). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Rybová, Markéta (2001). Holky 2000. In *Pražská skupina školní etnografie: Žák v měnících se podmínkách současné školy: 6 tříd* (Příloha závěrečné zprávy o řešení grantového projektu GA ČR 406/00/0470) [Prague group of school ethnography: A pupil in changing conditions of contemporary school: Grade 6 (Supplement of the final research report of the project GA ČR 406/00/0470)]. Prague: Pedagogická Fakulta Univerzity Karlovy.

Spindler, Georgie D., & Spindler, Louise S. (1987). *Interpretive ethnography of education: At home and abroad*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Thorne, Barrie (2004). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Walkerline, Valerie (1990). *Schoolgirl fiction*. London: Verso.

Wolf, Naomi (1992). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. New York: Doubleday.

Yin, Robert K. (2005). *Introducing the world of education: A case study reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Zábrodská, Kateřina (2009). *Variace na gender: Poststrukturalismus, diskurzivní analýza a genderová identita* [Gender variations: Poststructuralism, discourse analysis and gender identity]. Prague: Academia.