

Empowering girls?

The portrayal of Anne and George in Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series

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Abstract

Several of the dominant discourses of the times in which Enid Blyton lived and wrote are often reflected in her writing; and this resulted in much criticism of her work. However, her writing also offers evidence of alternative and emergent discourses, as defined by Raymond Williams. In this article, I consider Blyton's often contradictory representation of gender roles, with particular reference to the portrayal of the characters Anne and George in the *Famous Five* series. I demonstrate 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, while at the same time she reassures young readers that a traditionally feminine role such as that ascribed to Anne is also available to them.

Keywords:

Enid Blyton, Gender, Discourses, Patriarchal, Heteronormative, *Famous Five*, Masculine, Feminine

Enid Blyton's vast *oeuvre* spans a period overshadowed by the First and Second World War and affected by the changes to society that followed them. The first of Blyton's short stories and poems appeared in 1921 and 1922 'in the *Saturday Westminster Review*, the *Bystander*, the *Londoner*, *Passing Show*, and other magazines of the period' (Greenfield 1998, 11). Most of her best-known adventure and school stories appeared during the Second World War and for the next decade and a half. Blyton continued writing until the early 1960s, when she began to show signs of Alzheimer's disease: '[s]he was unable to write anything after 1963 and her last three books were published the following year' (Baverstock 2000, 31). Enid Blyton died on 28 November 1968.

Some of the dominant gender discourses of Enid Blyton's time, as reflected in her writing, appear to promote the middle-class heteronormative views prevalent in Britain at the time, which regulated the behaviour of women in respect of what were then considered appropriate middle-class domestic roles and activities for women, such as raising children and managing the household rather than following a career. Heteronormativity is the term used to describe the presumption that people fulfil predetermined complementary gender roles in a society in which heterosexuality, the experience of attraction primarily to persons of the opposite sex, is the norm. Heteronormativity in the period from 1942 to 1963, when the series of books under discussion were published, can be linked to the concept of the gender binary which delineates gender roles as either distinctly masculine or feminine; women were allocated domestic tasks while men filled leadership positions.

The reading of Enid Blyton in this article focuses on the portrayal of gender roles, in particular the characters of Anne and George in Blyton's *Famous Five* series (1942-1963), in relation to the gender stereotyping prevalent at the time Blyton was writing the books to illustrate Blyton's often contradictory presentation of gender roles. In this discussion, I demonstrate that, even though there is evidence that Blyton accurately portrays the dominant gender discourse that encouraged women to fill a submissive role in relation to

men, she also rejects these stereotypes and presents readers with alternative possibilities for female agency. Blyton did, in fact, subvert dominant heteronormative discourses of the time far more than she is given credit for by those who accuse her of sexism. I show that she not only created opportunities for female characters to succeed in traditionally more masculine tasks and activities, but she also reinforced the notion of freedom of choice, to however limited an extent, in a society in which women were seldom given this option.¹

Every society has institutionalised systems of thought which define socially acceptable behaviour and opinions about issues such as gender and race, among others. These systems of thought construct and define the prevailing body of beliefs of a society and, in turn, reflect the values and norms based on these beliefs and are referred to as discourses. Michel Foucault refers to 'discourses in terms of bodies of knowledge' (McHoul & Grace 1993, 26) or 'areas of social knowledge' (McHoul & Grace 1993, 31). Foucault (2000, 59) discusses the way in which the human and natural sciences, disciplines, institutions and structures of society classify things and people through the use of discourses and regulate the behaviour of individuals by exercising 'supervisory control' of the norm – deciding what is normal according to their dominant discourse and reinforcing this. Dominant discourses are compatible with the contemporary social, political and economic dominant policies of the given society and therefore confirm and entrench currently dominant ideas and approaches. Alternative and oppositional discourses are marginalised systems of thought that, while not necessarily in direct conflict with the dominant discourses, are, to a large extent, contrary to dominant discourses and hence they offer, at least potentially, sites in which dominant ideas and practices can be challenged and resisted. In this regard, Raymond Williams distinguishes between alternative and oppositional practices, 'between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live

and wants to change the society in its light' ([1980] 2005, 41-42). Michel Foucault ([1976] 1978, 101-102) clarifies the complex relationship between contradictory discourses:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.

Raymond Williams also refers to residual discourses – familiar, established systems of thought belonging to the past but that are still active in the cultural process. They are 'experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous cultural formation' (Williams [1980] 2005, 40). A residual discourse may be either embraced by individuals in society because of its familiarity, 'because some part of it...will in many cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense in those areas' (Williams [1980] 2005, 41), or in other cases dismissed as old-fashioned. Residual discourses may also present an alternative to dominant discourse, or oppose it.

In addition, 'new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created' (Williams [1980] 2005, 41). These are referred to as emergent discourses. Emergent discourses act as agents of change because they shape an emerging way of thinking and introduce new ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices. The struggles of the women's movement and the civil right's movement, among others, are examples of emergent discourses that sought to challenge the dominant patriarchal (and most often white) discourse and, at least to some extent, succeeded in doing so.

Systems of thought are 'continually active and adjusting' (Williams [1980] 2005, 39); therefore discourses exist in a constant state of flux. There is no clear-cut differentiation

between the dominant, oppositional or alternative, and emergent discourses operating in society, because the balance between these discourses is constantly fluctuating. Changes in discourse about race and gender roles in society over the years have led to Blyton's being condemned since the mid-twentieth century by many for her purported 'racism, chauvinism, [and] anti-feminism' (Greenfield 1998, 72). In particular, her alleged racist stereotyping in the portrayal of the golliwog character in the *Noddy* series (1949-1963) was singled out for criticism. Blyton was also accused of promoting middle-class values insisting on 'good manners' (Shavit 1985, 319), and 'proper respect for the upper middle classes' (Greenfield 1998, 73). In the 1950s, librarians were vociferous in their criticism of Blyton and were believed to be instrumental in the so-called banning of her books from some of these institutions, or at least their removal from many libraries. However, Druce draws attention to the fact that an official ban was 'non-existent' (Druce 1992, 37); Ray points out that '[n]owhere was there a total "ban" on her books' (Ray 1982, 57); and Rudd remarks that 'very few authorities actually banned Blyton' (Rudd 2000, 34). However, according to documents discovered in the BBC archives in 2009, the work of Enid Blyton was in fact 'banned from the BBC for nearly 30 years' between the 1936 and 1963 because it was considered "second rate" and lacking literary value' (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8361056.stm).²

A number of dominant discourses interact to form a multidimensional matrix of discourses about social and political issues. Hegemony refers to the strategy of combining principles from different systems of thought and social structures into one prevailing coherent ideology that, while possibly different from the many small structures, assimilates them. Hegemony, for Raymond Williams, is

a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.

([1980] 2005, 38)

As a result of socialisation, hegemonic ideas and practices are internalised by the population and become 'common sense', which in turn permeates society and has the effect of maintaining the status quo. The heteronormative views of a given period that encouraged specific gendered behaviour form part of the hegemonic practices of that period.

Blyton's way of thinking about gender roles in society was shaped, not surprisingly, to some extent by the dominant discourses about acceptable gender behaviour of her society and these discourses are reflected in the stories that she wrote. In addition, according to Lurie (2003, 15), many authors 'conventionalise[]' their stories and characters to suit 'contemporary tastes'. Therefore Blyton, who was earning her living by selling books, wrote her characters to appear to conform to the gender expectations of the society in which she sold her books to ensure sales and a steady income. For example, Blyton reinforces the largely unquestioned notion that boys were more valued by her society by having Julian, the oldest male protagonist in the *Famous Five* stories, take on the stereotypical male role of protector and leader.

In the same way that Julian conforms to the expected role of the oldest male, the character of Anne conforms to a number of feminine stereotypes. She is physically small and dainty and requires 'protection' from the male characters, thus further reinforcing their apparent superiority. These physical characteristics allow Blyton to develop Anne's stereotypically gendered role – she is often afraid and not ashamed to say so. In addition to being physically small, Anne also takes on a typically feminine domestic role by 'playing house': in *Five Run Away Together* Anne is presented as enjoying domestic chores and activities.

Anne had a very happy morning. She arranged everything beautifully on the shelf – crockery and knives and forks and spoons in one place – saucepan and kettle in another – tins of meat next, tins of soup together, tins of fruit piled on top of one another. It really was a splendid larder and dresser!

She wrapped all the bread up in an old tablecloth they had brought, and put it at the back of the cave in the coolest place she could find. The containers of water went there too, and so did all the bottles of drinks.

Then the little girl set to work to make the beds. She decided to make two nice big ones, one on each side of the cave.

(Blyton [1944] 1967, 111-112)

Blyton earned her living as a professional writer; she was a career woman. Her own personal resistance to the gender stereotypes of the time is reflected in her *Famous Five* books in the character of Georgina, or George, as she prefers to be called. In the character of George, Enid Blyton challenges the dominant heteronormative discourse of domesticised femininity that encouraged women to stay home and manage the household and raise children, and presents an alternative – the possibility and plausibility of an independent female. During the war years, women were called on to ‘step outside traditional gender roles’ (Rudd 2000, 112) and carry out men’s jobs and work outside the home. Therefore the independence of the character of George could be seen to be a reflection of the emergent discourses during the war years that called on women to show strength of character, and self-sufficiency.

Even though in *George* Blyton presents this alternative to the dominant social and cultural expectations, one has to acknowledge that she also reinforces, simultaneously, a dominant discourse that privileges traditional masculinity. Blyton’s implicit acknowledgement (and thus textual reinforcement) of the fact that boys were more valued by society than girls is evident in George’s residual belief that being (like) a boy is better than being a girl. This point of view is reinforced in comments that appear to laud the masculine by implying that masculine behaviour is inherently ‘decent’ while girls are ‘petty’ and ‘catty’:

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!”

(Blyton [1947] 1967, 23)

Blyton does point out that not all girls should be described thus when she has Anne comment that girls can also behave ‘decently’. Nonetheless, Anne’s comment comes across more as an afterthought and creates the impression that while ‘decent’ behaviour is the norm among boys, it is an exception among girls.

George’s desire to behave like a boy and shun any kind of expectation related to her femaleness is emphasised by Blyton throughout the 21 *Famous Five* books. One of the primary ways that Blyton does this is by having George insist on calling herself George rather than Georgina, as she does in the first book, *Five on a Treasure Island*:

“No,” she said. “I’m not Georgina.”

“Oh!” said Anne, in surprise. “Then who are you?”

“I’m George,” said the girl. “I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won’t be. 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.”

(Blyton [1942] 1967, 18)

This is reiterated almost every book, for example, in *Five Run Away Together*, when Blyton points out that George ‘had always wanted to be a boy, and would never answer if she was called Georgina. So everyone called her George’ (Blyton [1944] 1967, 7-8).

Throughout the *Famous Five* series Blyton makes a number of references that associate George with masculinity. Even in the first reference to George in *Five on a Treasure Island*, Blyton has Julian comment: ‘I wonder what Georgina’s like. Funny name, isn’t it. More like a boy’s than a girl’s’ (Blyton [1942] 1967, 9). Alf, the fisher-boy, uses a masculine form of address and calls George ‘Master George’ (Blyton [1942] 1967, 38), as does Old Mr Sanders at Kirrin Farm: “‘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’ (Blyton [1943] 1967, 35).

Throughout the series, Blyton illustrates the differences between Anne and George. While George behaves like a boy and rejects her femininity, Anne is portrayed as fully enjoying her femininity and being a girl. She happily undertakes domestic activities and is often portrayed as playing with dolls. This difference is highlighted in the first story, *Five on a Treasure Island*:

“Don’t you simply hate being a girl?” asked George.

“No, of course not,” said Anne. “You see – I 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.”

Anne felt offended. “You’re not very polite,” she said.

(Blyton [1942] 1967, 18)

This love of dolls is repeated in *Five Run Away Together* – “George and Anne pulled out the dolls. They were lovely ones. Anne cuddled them up to her. She loved dolls, though George scorned them” (Blyton [1944] 1967, 152). The narrator’s description of the dolls as ‘lovely’ suggests Blyton’s endorsement of Anne’s femininity and thus indicate Blyton’s conforming to the dominant heteronormative discourse.

Blyton appears to endorse, not only the dominant discourse that encouraged women to fill stereotypically feminine roles and behave in an appropriately feminine manner in her portrayal of Anne, but also, in her depiction of George, the emergent and alternative discourse that promoted female independence and which valued the ability of girls and women to participate and succeed at traditionally masculine activities.

Blyton portrays George as capable and successful in various situations and activities in which boys and male characters would traditionally dominate, such as swimming and rowing her boat, and Blyton endorses George’s behaviour by having Anne express admiration for George’s masculine skills: “George can do anything in the water,” said Anne, admiringly. “I wish I could dive and swim like George” (Blyton [1944] 1967, 107). Her skill in such situations empowers her. In the *Famous Five* books readers are regularly reminded of George’s skills: ‘...the boys found that George was a much better swimmer

than they were' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 35); 'the girl cleverly worked her boat in and out of the rocks' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 51); 'the others watched in admiration as the girl guided the boat skilfully in and out of the hidden rocks' (Blyton [1944] 1967, 85). George is better at rowing than either Julian or Dick. She manoeuvres the boat in the more difficult situations, and she even takes the oars from the traditional male leader, usurping his power:

"Isn't George going to take the oars and guide to boat in?"

"Yes," said George. "We've come to the difficult bit now, where we've got to weave our way in and out of the different rocks that keep sticking up. Give me the oars, Ju."
(Blyton [1944] 1967, 84-85)

Blyton also subverts the stereotypical gender roles when she emphasises George's dominant position over Julian in the last book in the series, *Five Are Together Again*, when she pushes the villains' boat into the sea and sets it adrift. Blyton has Julian recognise that 'he would never have thought of doing such daring things himself!' (Blyton [1963] 1971, 174). However, it may be argued that George is empowered because of her intrinsic skills and abilities, and her unconventional daring, not necessarily just because of her looking or behaving like a boy. In this way Blyton presents the possibility that girls can do the same things as boys, and just as well as boys, if not better. In the *Famous Five*, Blyton presents an alternative discourse in which girls participate in many of the same activities as boys do, such as rowing boats and climbing trees. George is a successful, independent girl who can do anything that a boy can do, and do it better.

In addition to using the masculine form of her name and behaving like a boy, George's appearance also reinforces her wish to be seen as a boy: she wears her hair short and she dresses in boy's clothes. We read that '[s]he had very short curly hair, almost as short as a boy's' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 18); and that 'George was dressed, as usual, exactly like a boy' (Blyton [1944] 1967, 7-8). As a result of her masculine appearance, on several occasions, George is mistaken for a boy. Blyton has George express a great deal of pleasure at these cases of mistaken identity, portraying in a positive light her desire to be thought of as masculine rather than feminine: 'George

couldn't help feeling pleased. This boy thought *she* was a boy! George was always gracious to people who made the mistake of thinking she was a boy' (Blyton [1947] 1967, 60). In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top*, George is delighted when Mr Lenoir mistakes her for a boy:

"Three boys for Sooty, and one girl for Marybelle. Ha ha!"
He evidently thought George was a boy, and she did look rather like one – she was wearing shorts and a jersey, as usual, and her curly hair was very short.
Nobody said that George wasn't a boy. Certainly George was not going to!
(Blyton [1945] 1967, 49-50)

George's mother, Aunt Fanny, also compares her to a man: 'You'll be quite safe with George. She can handle a boat like a man' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 49). Blyton also has George undertake traditionally masculine tasks such as driving the horse-drawn caravan in *Five Go off in a Caravan*: "I'm going to drive *our* caravan," said George. "Anne wouldn't be any good at it, though I'll let her have a turn at it sometimes. Driving is a man's job" (Blyton [1946] 1967, 28).

The above examples illustrate how Blyton shows that George and Aunt Fanny have assimilated the dominant discourse which claims that tasks like steering a boat and driving a caravan should be undertaken by males. This appears to endorse and reinforce the then dominant heteronormative discourse that advocated different roles and tasks for men and women and at the same time contradict it: while emphasising the belief that these are purportedly masculine skills, Blyton nonetheless portrays George as capable at these traditionally masculine tasks.

Even though Blyton subverts the socially acceptable gender roles of the time and portrays George as enjoying and succeeding at traditionally masculine tasks, she also reinforces socially acceptable feminine behaviour by portraying stereotypical feminine domestic activities in a positive manner: Anne is presented as enjoying domestic chores and activities. She feels pride when she is praised for success in chores such as

'housekeeping' (Blyton [1946] 1967:39). The highest praise that the other characters can give to Anne is to refer to her as good housewife.³

[Julian] looked round admiringly. "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.

(Blyton [1944] 1967, 112)

In *Five Run Away Together* the children live in a cave on Kirrin Island. Anne undertakes the domestic role of making the cave into a home.

"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. "We'll go and get some heather for beds."

(Blyton [1944] 1967, 109-110)

This domestic role and conformity to the gender role expectations of the time is also evident in *Five Go off in a Caravan* when Anne keeps the caravan neat and clean:

"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."

(Blyton [1946] 1967, 26)

It is significant that Blyton has Anne's mother insist that George 'must' (Blyton [1946] 1967, 26) help Anne with the domestic tasks of keeping the caravans clean and tidy, obviously because George is a girl. Thus, in this example, Blyton is firmly reinforcing a dominant perception of how girls and women should behave. Similarly, in *Five Go off to Camp*, Anne tells George that she 'must help with the preparing of the meals and washing-up' (Blyton [1948] 1967, 27), even though George 'hated doing all the things that girls had to do, such as making beds and washing-up' (Blyton [1948] 1967, 27). Blyton also seems to assume that it is expected of girls to participate in domestic activities by her comment on 'the things

that girls *had* to do' (Blyton [1948] 1967, 27). The expectation that girls fill a domestic role is further emphasised by Blyton when the boys' offer to help with domestic tasks is refused by Anne, who insists that she and George are responsible for these jobs:

"Shall we help you clear up, Anne?" [said Julian.]
"No. That's my job and George's," said Anne firmly.

(Blyton [1948] 1967, 81)

While Anne takes pride in her domestic prowess, Blyton has George feel guilty that she does not play more of a domestic role, even though she does not adjust her behaviour to eliminate this source of guilt, nor does she seek to conform to the gender role expectations. George's feelings of guilt are a result of her internalisation of the social and cultural discourses of the time on what is considered acceptable feminine behaviour, and her realisation that she does not conform to these conventions. In contrast with George's feelings of guilt, Blyton does not allow any such guilt to be felt by the boys; they are not expected to participate in domestic tasks:

"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. She took the pan off the camp-fire and put the contents on to four plates. "Come along!" she called, in a voice just like her mother's. "Have your meal while it's hot."

(Blyton [1946] 1967, 39-40)

Even though Blyton has George break the gender rules and explore alternative discourses to those advocated by society, George remains in a 'false position... like all tomboys, she can be "as good as", but this implies a basic deficiency. She can never be the genuine article' (Rudd 2000, 111). George is only 'as good as a boy' (Blyton [1963] 1971, 66) – because George is still not a boy, she remains inferior, other. Blyton reinforces

this opinion by having Anne accuse George of being a fake: 'You won't find that my brothers take much notice of you if you act as if you knew everything. They're *real* boys, not pretend boys, like you' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 18).

George's desire to be like a boy is evidence of sexism in Blyton, since it reinforces the idea that males are more privileged than inferior females. In the *Famous Five* books, when the children succeed in apprehending the villain and solve the mystery, George's father, Uncle Quentin, often praises her. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, "[Uncle Quentin] ruffled George's short curly hair. "And I'm proud of you, too, George," he said. "You're as good as a boy any day!"(Blyton [1942] 1967, 162). This is also evident in *Five on Kirrin Island again*, "Good girl," said her father, and gave her a big hug. "Honestly, George, you do behave as bravely as any boy. I'm proud of you." George thought that was the nicest thing her father had ever said to her' (Blyton [1947] 1967, 144). The examples suggest that, according to Uncle Quentin, boys are better than girls. Is it any wonder, then, that George tries to fulfil his expectations as she does? ⁴

While George is brave, in line with the expectation that boys not show fear, Blyton often has Anne express her fear: 'Anne slipped her arm through Julian's. She felt rather small and scared' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 62); 'Anne slipped her hand into Dick's. She felt scared' (Blyton [1942] 1967, 117); 'Anne began to cry' (Blyton [1943] 1967, 84). In *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, when Julian tells Anne that she may not accompany the other children to capture the villains, she indicates that she does not want to go with them.

"Anne, you're not to come," said Julian, to his little sister. "You're to go back and tell Aunt Fanny what's happened. Will you do that?"

"Yes. I don't want to come," said Anne.

(Blyton [1947] 1967, 167)

Similarly, in *Five Run Away Together*, Anne decides not to go with the other children to the dungeon: "I think perhaps I'll stay up here with Timothy", said Anne, suddenly. She didn't like the dark look of the dungeon entrance' (Blyton [1944] 1967, 131). However, Anne is

not left passive – she is given the responsibility of communicating the events to her Aunt, effectively ensuring adult back-up for the children.

Blyton also has Anne remark: ‘I don’t think I’m a very adventurous person, really’ (Blyton [1946] 1967, 76), and that she would rather occupy her time with typical feminine tasks than become involved in the adventure: ‘Anne was torn between wanting to go with the others, and longing to play “house” again.... In the end she said she would stay and the others could go’ (Blyton [1944] 1967, 138). It is significant that, even though Anne expresses her fear, she is not ostracised or ridiculed by the other characters. Regardless of her ‘feminine’ behaviour Anne remains one of the ‘Five’. By deciding not to join the other characters Anne portrays freedom of choice. Thus is it possible to argue that, even though she appears to conform to dominant discourses that restrict the role and behaviour of women, Anne is emancipated because she uses her freedom to choose.

As a result of Anne’s showing fear when the children in the *Famous Five* adventures become involved in dangerous activities, the male characters conform to stereotypical masculine roles and offer protection to this weaker female. By displaying a protective attitude, Blyton has the other characters endorse Anne’s femininity as one in need of protection. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, when Dick and Anne attempt to rescue George and Julian, who have been locked in a dungeon by the villains, Anne suggests that they try to get into the dungeon by going down the well. However, Dick will not allow Anne to take the risk: “Well,” said Dick, “I’ll try it – but not you, Anne. I’m not going to have you falling down that well” (Blyton [1942] 1967, 141).

“Do you really think they are dangerous?” asked Anne rather afraid.

“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. “I’m as good as a boy any day!”

“Yes, you are, really,” said Dick. “In fact, you’re fiercer than any boy I know!”

(Blyton [1943] 1967, 147)

It is telling that George also seeks to fill the role of protector, again Blyton reinforces her desire to fill a masculine role.

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. Blyton's *Famous Five* series does show evidence of an awareness of the alternative and emergent ideas operating in society. In this way, Blyton may be presenting different options to female readers – both tomboys and feminine girls.

Blyton depicts George as succeeding and excelling in traditionally masculine tasks and activities. In this way, she provides George with an opportunity to exercise power within a male-dominated world even though this exercise of power does not overtly threaten the status quo or challenge the patriarchy. George behaves like a boy, but she is still a girl, and thus she remains 'other' in relation to boys and men and, by emphasising George's desire to be thought of as a boy, Blyton is supporting the widespread social viewpoint of the time that promotes male dominance and the belief that boys are 'better' than girls. It is possible to argue that George appears to have power and authority only because she behaves like a boy, not because, as a girl, she is equal to the boys. However, and this is central to my argument, we might speculate about whether or not Blyton portrays George as wanting to be a boy and behaving in a masculine manner because the only way she can be successful in a male-dominated world is to be masculine, or whether Blyton may have wanted to emphasise that George is a girl, not a boy, yet she is still able to succeed at traditionally masculine tasks.

Anne's domestic role is portrayed in a positive manner and thus reinforces the discourse that promotes a more strongly domestic role for women. Anne conforms to gender role expectations and, in the characterisation of Anne and her acceptance of her submissive position, Blyton shows evidence of how the gender relations dictated by the

dominant discourse become entrenched and regarded as natural and normal by individuals operating in society. Individuals like Anne consent to a submissive role, and even monitor and regulate their own behaviour⁵ in an effort to conform to these social practices. In this way, Blyton reinforces the prevalent systems of thought about appropriate gender behaviour.

However, and this is the second of the points that is crucial to my argument, Blyton also uses the character of Anne to illustrate the idea that girls and women have power in their freedom to choose – Anne is free to choose whether or not she wants to join George and the boys in the dangerous parts of their adventures – and she is not criticised when she chooses to stay behind even though she is not engaging in the daring activities of the other children.

However stereotypical in some ways, and however true she is to dominant discourses, in the portrayal of Anne and George in the *Famous Five* series, Blyton shows her child readers different possibilities available for girls and women. Blyton emphasises that girls and women have power in their freedom of choice. On the one hand, readers might seek independence and choose to undertake traditionally masculine tasks. In the portrayal of George, Blyton assures them that girls and women can succeed at such tasks. On the other hand, readers might prefer a traditionally feminine role and enjoy playing with dolls and undertaking domestic activities, like Anne does. 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.

Notes

¹ Blyton's own position as a financially independent and highly successful career woman in a time when most middle-class women were only expected to stay at home, manage the household and raise children, thus freeing men to pursue their careers, also subverts some of the gender role expectations of the time to some extent.

² In recent years, further changes in dominant discourses have led to greater tolerance for and acceptance of Blyton. In her favour, now, is that she leaves unexplored formerly taboo topics that feature in contemporary children's literature, such as sex, divorce and abuse and appears to market 'old-fashioned virtues' (Greenfield 1998, 82).

³ Julian's reference to Anne as a 'good little girl' in this example emphasises Julian's superiority because he is the eldest, but is also patronising and highlights Anne's inferiority because she is the youngest.

⁴ It is interesting to consider the portrayal of the relationship between George and Uncle Quentin in relation to Blyton's relationship with her own father. Blyton was very close to her father, who encouraged her love of reading and her interest in the arts and in nature. However, in 1910 Blyton's father left his wife for another woman and Blyton experienced a great sense of rejection; Baverstock claims that she was 'shattered to hear that her father had taken someone else into his life' (2000, 12).

⁵ An individual may exercise self-regulation in order to conform to the social norms of the society in which he or she operates. Foucault calls this self-regulation – the tendency of people to monitor and regulate their own behaviour without the show of force – 'bio-power' (Foucault in Rudd 2000, 14). Bio-power is moulded by disciplinary institutions and structures such as schools, churches and prisons which encourage people to conform to the norm and maintain the status quo.

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