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Writing Femininities and Masculinities –
Representation of Gender in Students’ Narratives

Att skriva femininiteter och maskuliniteter –
Representation av genus i elevers berättelser

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Abstract

The study that has been undertaken sets out to explore students’ representation of gender in their narratives. It therefore aims at describing in what way the students represent gender. The method used was a qualitative text analysis from a feminist perspective. The research was carried out in the south of Sweden, with twelve students in year nine. These students’ narratives represented gender in various ways.

The stories included representations of gender with both traditional and unconventional notions. Some of the stories showed a hierarchical relationship between men and women portrayed in the stories, while others, in some cases, depicted gender equality. Male and female characters were more often than not dichotomised and a heteronormative standard seemed to be present. On the other hand, the narratives appeared to contradict the notion of the woman merely belonging to the private sphere since many female characters were ascribed a student’s or a working role. Nevertheless, it seemed as if the narratives were unsuccessful in creating untraditional masculinities, since the male characters were often described as hero, saviour or offender.

Key words: Gender, masculinity, femininity, representation of gender, students’ narratives.
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1 Introduction

During their first year in school, students learn to read and write. These abilities are later used to produce different types of texts, narratives among them. The narratives students write in school are probably not read by many people. However, these texts may show a part of the pupils’ lives and introduce the reader to their innermost thoughts. The teacher reading the students’ texts may receive valuable insights into how pupils view the world and the narratives students produce can form the basis of important discussions for them and the teachers involved. It is therefore crucial that teachers not only correct the texts students produce but also analyse the messages which the students convey through their narratives.

Students’ texts are important for teachers who are interested in learning more about their pupils’ thoughts and feelings. This approach opens up the possibility to analyse whether the students are expressing democratic opinions. Since equality among all students should permeate the Swedish school system, this scrutiny of students’ narratives is vital: “The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school should represent and impart” (Lpo-94, 3). Furthermore the curriculum requires the teachers to actively discourage forms of discrimination that sometimes exist in schools by, for example, “counteracting traditional gender roles” (Lpo-94, 4).

There are a variety of approaches to how one can work against discrimination. By analysing students’ narratives teachers are able to form an opinion of how the students present gender. The information is thus valuable for the teachers’ lesson plans and the incorporation of democratic values. The curriculum further stresses that nobody should experience discrimination based on gender in school and the responsibility to pursue this lies with the staff in every school (Lpo-94). According to Gillis et al. (2007) pedagogues should be open to suggestions on how to work with inequality based on gender: “Certainly any pedagogical environment that does not allow and encourage
students to critically examine their own and other’s assumptions does a disservice to all its members” (Gillis et al. 2007, 12).

**Purpose and research questions**

The aim of this degree project is to analyse how twelve students represent gender in their narratives. Additionally, this study tries to grasp the explicit and implicit messages the narratives seem to convey. Thus, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

- How is gender portrayed in the students’ narratives?
- What messages, concerning gender, do the students seem to convey in their narratives?

**Gender: a definition**

Everyone does not define gender and what it means to represent gender in the same way. In order to maintain the focus of this degree project it is crucial to identify the meaning of the terms in this research. Gender is an example of a hierarchical division between men and women in which we can recognise the social institutions and practices of society. Gender is produced and maintained in the everyday interaction between people and it is in this interaction that women and men form the characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity (Jackson & Scott, 2002).

According to Wharton (2005), there are several sociological understandings of gender and one should not be satisfied with merely stating a single definition of a complex subject which changes through time. However, Wharton continues to explain her view on gender: “a system of social practices: this system creates and maintains gender distinctions and it organizes relations of inequality on the basis of these distinctions” (Wharton, 2005, 7). Wharton continues by stating that gender may include actions of individuals, but gender is also present in peoples’ expectations, interactions and composition of social groups. Furthermore gender is highly present in the structures and practices of the institutions we encounter in our daily lives. Gender is a subtle force which may be unconscious and reproduced without us knowing it: “Their invisibility is one source of their power over us” (Wharton, 2005, 10).
Robert W Connell (1987) states that the term gender embraces the socially constructed characters and identities of every individual. By participating in everyday social life we are not only incorporating mental patterns and fantasies but, we are also forming experiences which are crucial to the shaping of identity and relation to the other sex. However, Connell states that gender usually is organised in manner which signifies male superiority while other relations can be present. According to Connell, gender is as much part of our identities as institutions and historical processes. In accordance to Connell, Judith Butler (1990) also states that gender is part of a construction process. Gender is created by actions, gestures and stages which are constantly re-producing themselves to become what we refer to as our identity. Furthermore, Butler states that our identity is not as deterministic as it might sound as we are sometimes re-producing these patterns in the wrong way and thus we create a different aspect of our identity.

It is noticeable that male and female bodies differ in many cases. The most obvious difference has to do with the biological difference of our sexes in reference to external genitalia. However, feminist critics believe that this difference should not be the reason for the hierarchical division of people present today. Recent feminist critics also argue that gender intersects with other categories of oppression like class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Women and men cannot be understood as single unified categories even if gender representations often try to generalise and unify (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). The next section will explore how gender has been presented in historical and modern texts and can be used as a further development of the definition of gender.

**Background**

Language is not a neutral medium. It is an instrument for users to express an opinion and influence the audience and within early feminist theory language is thoroughly examined. The different branches of feminist theory challenge existing representations of women and men and they furthermore, examine power relations between the two sexes. Gender is of vital importance for historical analysis and the understanding of the world. Thus, the historical analysis of texts, from feminist critics’ perspective, like de Beauvoir and Hirdman, are outlined below. De Beauvoir is a very influential critic who younger, mostly western, feminist critics usually refer to and it is therefore logical to use her findings as a primary source. Hirdman is a renowned, Swedish feminist critic whose work is crucial for the Swedish context. There are many varieties of feminist
literary criticism thus one is restricted to focus on a couple of key figures. Furthermore, a more recent deconstructive theory is shortly outlined at the end of this chapter. This means that many other feminist theories and ideologies will be excluded.

1.1.1 Feminism according to de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1953)

Simone de Beauvoir analysed the myth of the woman in the novels of five historical and influential authors like D.H Lawrence and Stendhal in her book *The Second Sex* (1953). The feminist author identifies several representations of gender and femininity which she describes as myths since they are formed by man’s expectations and feelings towards women and need not be realistic. The myths surrounding women in these novels present the female as very mysterious and different from the man. The myths are difficult to describe as they never take on a fixed form but are rather various and contradictory. Women can, at the same time, be depicted as Eve and the Virgin Mary. Thus, she is an idol, a servant, the source of life and a power of darkness. Nonetheless, she is always represented as the Other. The man, on the other hand, is seen as the norm which the woman should attain (de Beauvoir, 1953).

The five writers analysed in *The Second Sex* reflect these collective myths of women. The woman is represented as nature, thus it is natural for her to serve the man and cater to his needs. Furthermore, the Other is also described as a mediator between this world and the unknown. Femininity, in these western authors’ novels, therefore inspires the man to achieve greatness and somehow be what he expects her to be. The woman appears as the privileged Other as she is the man’s counterbalance, salvation, adventure and his happiness. However, de Beauvoir argues that each author has his own definition of the Other and this depends on how they describe the male characters and ultimately how the writer defines himself. If the author and his male characters: “soar in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth, beneath his feet [...] from time to time he raises her up to him, takes her, and then throws her back; never does he lower himself down to her realm of slimy shadows” (de Beauvoir, 1953, 279).

Stendhal is one of the authors who, according to de Beauvoir, represents another side of femininity. De Beauvoir means that he shows that the immanence of the world lies in the women’s sphere and the source of all evil, such as war and bureaucracy, are exclusively created by masculinity. However, the woman is still the Other; the opposite
of man. De Beauvoir praises Stendhal since he seems to depict women and men as equals in the sense that they depend on each other. In his novels the author depicts women as powerful human beings who are in control of their lives. Nevertheless, the five authors include feminine devotion to the male characters but some choose to portray it as her duty and Stendhal as a generous free choice. In her summary de Beauvoir states that this notion is present in the novels of many other western male writers and she concludes that: “Woman, however, as the Other still plays a role to the extent that, if only to transcend himself each man still needs to learn more fully what he is” (de Beauvoir, 1953, 282).

The women’s movement of the 1960s emphasised the consequences of the images of women portrayed in literature. The representation of women was seen as the most important form of socialisation: “since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the ‘feminine’ and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations” (Barry, 2002, 122). According to Barry, nineteenth century fiction women only worked if necessity forced them, and the focus was instead placed on the heroine’s choice of marriage partner. Barry (2002) further means that this form of patriarchy perpetuated nineteenth century texts’ sexual inequality and explained the long term subjugation of women in history.

1.1.2 Hirdman and three forms of gender representation

Inspired by de Beauvoir, Yvonne Hirdman has analysed influential historical texts, from which she concludes three principles of women representation. These can be presented in a variety of ways in different texts but are nonetheless, not more than the original three when one scrutinizes them. The first “A – not A” is the base form, which represents the woman as the one who is not male and therefore not a part in the discussion of mankind. This form of female representation is present in ancient texts from 500 BC and women are seen as everything the man is not and therefore seem not to exist at all (Hirdman, 2003).

The second form is “A – a” as the woman is made from a part of the man and can never become fully equivalent to him. In Christianity, God created Eve from Adam’s rib and she can therefore never be a complete man or, to take it one step further, a complete person. Hirdman (2003) concludes that the woman is thus an incomplete man and is missing some components to be complete. She was also known to have less reason,
control and soul which made her difficult to control, more ferocious and sexually interested and therefore impossible to satisfy. The woman was always compared to the man and was described as the one who is worth less than the man and not as worth as much as he is. Hirdman also gives the example of Queen Elisabeth I, who compared herself to the bravest of men and urged her subjects not to be fooled by the mere likeness to woman she possessed. The woman is the opposite of man and is always presented in the comparison to him (Hirdman, 2003).

Hirdman (2003) states that the final shape is the “A–B” formula. This representation of women divides men and women by using dichotomy instead of comparison, the two are completely different species rather than each other’s opposites. This kind of thinking is of course recognised in Darwin’s evolutionary theory and tries to be the successor of the biblical “A – a” form. In the theory of sexual evolution the sexes combat each other for complete possession and reproduction (Hirdman, 2003). According to Hirdman, the A-B form is perhaps the one which has had the most influence on western political system. Women were seen as intellectually inferior as they could not, simultaneously, fulfil their duty, as the mother, and pursue intellectual incitements. Hirdman states since woman is the only one who can be the mother to a child she can only be triumphant in this area, without competing with the man. She continues to argue that motherhood assigns the woman other attributes as mysterious, religious and spiritual capacities which were considered seductive. Above all, maternity was considered to be a natural state of being and was the women’s erotical advantage as the intellect was the men’s. “B” is therefore a normative form, she is already an idol formed by “a”, and if one wishes to have a better position, she should aim at becoming B (Hirdman, 2003).

According to Barry (2002), this division of female representation and description is very limited. In reality, in history and today, these forms are interacting and depending on each other’s existence, but are nonetheless important to establishing order to be able to see the underlying structures and patterns of society. If researches were to look closer they would probably be able to find examples of texts where women are not represented in any of the above forms, unfortunately these are not as present and influential as the texts mentioned above (Barry, 2002).

As the man (A), according to Hirdman, has been the main character in many stories it is important to outline the depiction of him in historical texts. We have seen how the women have depended on the men’s character to define her, but how is masculinity formed in history? Hirdman (2003) defines his nature as existent even if not mentioned,
he is somewhere in the background, listening to and forming the stories of women. According to Hirdman, there is no stereotypical man and it is not his duty to follow a label as these are merely created for the subordinates. Men are the superiors who have the power and privilege to be the differentiated and multi faceted, so they cannot be described in the same way as women. However, it is possible to outline the stereotypical notions and thinking about the man in historical textual contexts (Hirdman, 2003).

Hirdman’s analysis concludes that men are broadly defined in texts. When the woman is depicted as nature and a substantial subject, the man is the spirit and soul, thoughts and culture which are complicated to explain and are therefore considered to be of much greater importance. While women’s sexuality is considered weakening and intellectually challenged, the men’s sperm and sexuality is the symbol for prosperity and reason for his high intellect. According to Hirdman, Darwin argued that the man’s sperm is what reproduces the human race and it is his natural capacity that makes him stronger both physically and intellectually. His massive strength comes from his supremacy and ability to be the opposite of the woman. During the 19th century, scientists devoted a great deal of their time proving men’s rational abilities, the women’s brains were simply smaller and therefore unable to produce intellectual reason (Hirdman, 2003).

1.1.3 Considering third wave feminism

Even if Hirdman states that men cannot be described in comparison to women, they still are. How is it even possible to describe anything if we do not relate it to something else? According to the feminist critics above, the terms masculine and feminine do not refer to definite and unchanging qualities which exist independently. Instead they are defined by the cultural context. In western society we have been led to believe that masculine and feminine are natural categories. However, the only certainty we can have is that these categories will change. According to Cameron (1992), the tradition to dichotomise and categorise has been longstanding in western tradition yet, many feminists argue that there is nothing natural about the differentiation between masculine and feminine and that: “the urge to dichotomise is a product of indoctrination and not a native habit” (Cameron, 1992, 88). Nevertheless, Cameron concludes that men and women might be biologically different, but not opposites, and only when admitting to this are we able to find the metaphorical meanings of gender (Cameron, 1992).
One might assume that feminist critique forces the analysis to notice the relationships between men and women. Thus one might be able to further identify which element is privileged, in order to be able to dismantle this oppositional structure which makes oppression and prejudice possible. However, according to Lynn (2005), the division between men and women has proven to be too simple minded and assumptions need to be set aside. The theory about the dichotomy between women and men has started to change as the cultural values are re-thought, what used to be considered as oppression of women, has changed. Pornography is an example of re-defining culture. Feminist have in history considered pornography as exploitation of women without even mentioning the man, it was generally assumed that men in pornography were happy and women therefore, unhappy. This way of thinking goes against the very notion of feminist critique, which aims to diminish the division between men and women in order to defeat the existing subjugation of women and other groups of people (Lynn, 2005).

As feminist literary analysis has changed during the years it is necessary to account for the critical explorations of today. Therefore, I believe it is important to include a feminist exploration of the most powerful medium today; mainstream media such as radio, magazines and television have influenced our everyday life for a long time now. These have a hegemonic power of today’s culture as: “the combination of print technology and capitalism has been a primary function of the creation of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation” (Gillis et al. 2007, 188). Thus, the gender constructions in mass media become relevant for this study.

Critics (Gillis et al. 2007) claim that women’s liberation is marketable. Popular culture is filled with descriptions of women who have a career and are financially and sexually liberated. Even though, women appear in popular culture in a variety of ways, there are hierarchical notions present. In Gillis et al. critics have analysed the show Ally McBeal which portrays a successful woman in her 30’s who seemingly does not need a man to be fully satisfied. However, most of her time is spent dating and obsessing about which man she should choose, just to avoid the emotional turmoil of not having a man by her side (Gillis et al. 2007). Another TV-series called Buffy the Vampire Slayer was analysed by the critics presented in Gillis (2007). The heroin is an icon used by the mass media to produce a new type of heroine. Buffy is portrayed as a strong and fearless woman and she is celebrated as a radical and refreshing example of what a girl can be since she constantly fights the dichotomy between good and evil or, if you think of it, man and woman. These two heroines differ a great deal but they do have some
common ground as well, they are white, young, conventionally beautiful and successful in their areas. Most of the women on TV are portrayed similarly and this sets the norm of how women should act and look like. Someone else is still defining the norms women should live up to (Gillis et al. 2007).

The ideas presented in the background section are not directly connected to the Swedish educational context and students’ texts. However, one might state that they are general for society and have been applied to a variety of research areas. Many researchers in gender and education are influenced by feminist critics like de Beauvoir, Hirdman, Lynn and Cameron. These ideas can be valuable in a researcher’s reading of a plot or understanding a certain character. The following section will focus more on the Swedish educational setting and outline previous research on gender in school and the narratives present in English text books.
2 Previous research on gender in school texts

Educational contexts are important in the analysis of representations of gender. Gender is constructed and maintained by linguistics and our students’ need to be aware of how their use of the language might maintain or take apart the cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity (Öqvist, 2009). Research on gender representation has been conducted in various texts. However, students’ narratives have rarely been the focus of the analysis. Some researchers have investigated how younger children represent gender in their pictures and short stories. These studies, among with studies using text analysis on language textbooks will be presented in this chapter.

2.1 A Swedish context

When writing a text, some young children may be tempted to write about their everyday reality. In her study of eight children’s storybooks Änggård (2005) found that most of the boys wanted their stories to be about knights, dragons or dinosaurs while one boy wrote a story about a troll who rescued an ant. The girls chose their characters to be Barbie’s. According to Änggård the children chose characters which they liked playing with at home. She also identified similarities of popular stories and that the children were in fact simply re-producing a storyline they remembered: “These are activities familiar to the girls themselves. It could be assumed that they used the stories to give shape to some of their own experiences” (Änggård, 2005, 546). However, the study also showed how the girls merely gave male characters subordinated roles and let the Barbie princesses play the active part in the development of the story. The boys also used themes closer to their experiences but they largely avoided describing their everyday life, instead they drew on different secondary genres in their stories. Änggård describes the boys having a dialogue with media products such as TV-programmes, films, computer games and toys. Jordan (1995) discusses the warrior discourse in boys’ accounts, where masculinity is described in terms of the warrior, the knight, and the superhero. This discourse, according to Jordan, has power over boys and is expressed in the stories they tell, pictures they paint and play they engage in. The choice of themes in
hero stories depends, according to Jordan (1995) on what the children have watched on TV recently.

In 2006 the National Agency of Education presented a study which showed how gender is presented in a number of textbooks. This research analysed books use in Biology, History and Social studies classes and conclusively showed an omission of transsexuals, an over representation of men, and the researchers further described the books’ content as consisting of small islands of gender aware text. Berge and Widding (2006) witnessed a male norm which suggested that girls and women are allowed to perform the same actions as boys and men, but the boys and men tend to have more representatives and more options. The researchers do see a positive development in the fact that all authors of the text books had included a chapter which dealt with gender, gender relations, and the power of gender. However, the individual comments about gender throughout the books are rarely followed up and the sex neutral implications are very influenced by a male norm which could, according to the researchers lead to the girls’ not relating to the information in the book.

The researcher further found that many of the degrading comments about women are left unchallenged. This finding can according to Berge and Widding be interpreted as the authors of the textbooks did not feel the need to challenge statements of such a nature since they are true. The researchers further question why the authors of the textbooks let the demeaning comments stand unchallenged? There are also many contradictions about gender present in the researched textbooks. A page about equality among the sexes can be contradicted with a picture of a hetero wedding. Furthermore, when exaggerated violence is portrayed men have the tendency to be over represented just as they have the same tendency when describing historic people and happenings. The researchers mean that these contradictions obstruct the students’ critical analysis of the texts and inhibit them to see the dichotomies.

It is important to acknowledge that students might not at all be influenced by the apparent gender biased textbooks. Sunderland (2000) states that there might be teachers using these books to draw on a more gender oriented discussion in class. This research does not state to what extent these books are actually used in class nor in what way the teachers encourage the students to criticise the content of the texts. However, it is undeniable that this study is important and it is showing similar findings to the feminist critics presented in the background chapter. In line with the research mentioned above Hirdman (2003) argues that historical texts disfavours women, transsexual and
homosexual persons and that these texts further advocates a western, white, middle aged male norm.

Tallberg Broman (2002) points to the fact that even small children are able to characterise femininity and masculinity. Thus, young people associate masculinity and femininity to the exterior of men and women. Symbols for the masculine are strong arms and upper body while round shapes with focus on the breasts and bottom outlines the symbol for the feminine attributes. Tallberg Broman continues to describe the assumptions of gender in accordance to de Beauvoir and says: “With notions of gender that placed the woman as nature and the man as culture schools and universities were developed” (own translation, Tallberg Broman, 2002, 33).

2.2 An international context

International studies of school texts show similar results as the Swedish research mentioned above. In her study of children’s age eight and nine story writing about a castle of fear, Millard (2005) found the children having definite gender preferences. The results of her study showed that all children stories included princesses and queens who needed rescuing by mainly brave knights. The enemies were portrayed as animals, monsters, creatures, vampires, witches and mad professors. The companions of the knights were robots, animals and other brave knights while the only children who chose friends as companions were girls. Millard further experienced boys to have more genre knowledge as they provided the readers with detailed drawings and maps of the castles in which the stories took place.

In their study of construction of gender in early school reader illustrations, Jackson and Gee (2005) show that despite the significant social changes like women working outside home, single parent families, gay/lesbian parenting, step families and so on, the school readers still showed little change across time in representations of men, women, families or parents. Further, their investigation showed how mothers were constructed as child carers and domestic workers while fathers had jobs and involved with the children in outdoor activities. The researchers see the results as the readers portraying women and men in polarised positions within the family, and furthermore reproduce patterns of compulsory heterosexuality. However, Jackson and Gee witnessed a certain change when it comes to the representation of girls. They mean that representations of girls were overall more complex and contradictory: “girl characters took up dress and
activities more typically associated with representations of masculinity” (Jackson and Gee, 2005, 126). Nevertheless, while taking on these roles Jackson and Gee noticed how the female characters portrayed still kept the traditional markers of femininity such as long hair, posture or dresses. As for the boys, the researchers argue that they were positioned largely within a discourse of traditional masculinity where they could be adventurers, sportsmen or game players.

Lee and Collins (2009) researched gender issues in Australian English-language textbooks and found that there is a high level of awareness of the importance of avoiding gender stereotyping in many Australian textbook materials. The researchers continue to explain that textbook writers use different strategies to avoid biased treatment of two sexes by for example applying gender-inclusive terms, generic they and paired pronouns like he or she. However, the results show how the use of masculine nouns and pronouns when referring to people in general is more common than using paired nouns and pronouns. Lee and Collins (2009) further witness that male predominated in the texts analysed: men were represented in a frequency of 58.4% while women had a frequency of 41.6% in total. In accordance to the studies above, the results further showed a stereotypical view on female and male social and domestic roles. Men tended to be presented in the public sphere while women dominated the private sphere and when they joined the public sphere they usually worked as teachers or counsellors. Of 90 identified roles only 10 consisted of gender-shared roles, 59 were male-monopolised or male-dominated while merely 21 were female-monopolised or female-dominated.

Jordan (1995) argues that school pressures boys to gender conformity to greater extent than girls. There is a wider range of options for girls as they are encouraged to participate in activities usually considered as masculine. The boys, on the other hand, are not as persuaded to try something new. Thus, the girls are provided with the opportunity to create and change their own gender roles while the boys are satisfied with their.

Wharton’s (2005) study also showes that males are dominant in terms of overall numeric representation in the children’s reading schemes she analysed. However, the male characters are represented in a fairly negative way and Wharton classifies this category as “The male buffoon” and points to a clumsy behaviour without causing anyone any real harm. As most of the disastrous scenarios take place at the end of a story, they serve to provide the reader with a humorous twist. Wharton means that two
main messages exist in this discourse: “The first is that males are overwhelmingly more likely to make physical and social mistakes. The second is that we should laugh at this” (Wharton, 2005, 248).

Thus, Wharton concludes that even though males are overrepresented, this representation might not be beneficial. Males are depicted as incompetent, dependent, and as the butts of jokes. When females appear they are portrayed as active and capable. Therefore, Wharton poses the important question whether the positive images of male and female only can be achieved at the expense of one another. According to Wharton many critics argue that this is impossible since masculinity and femininity are relational constructs and cannot be constructed from nothing. Consequently, the authors who were partaking in Wharton’s study form male and female as opposites who cannot be positive at the same time.

The next section will introduce the method used in analysing the students’ texts.
3 Method

Every text provides the reader with a meaning and the reader needs to identify this meaning. Furthermore, the reader’s own experiences and knowledge will influence the search for the meaning of the text. In order to pursue the purpose of the project and answer the research questions, twelve students’ texts have been analysed and I will now concretise the procedure.

3.1 Text analysis

Text analysis provides the opportunity to thoroughly describe and interpret the students’ texts. Usually, text analysis is applied on the literary works of published authors, but is nonetheless used to closely read and understand texts and is therefore a valid method for this type of project (Johansson & Svedner, 2006). A text is not merely a formal object represented by the printed and published work; it is also a meaningful form of expression. Therefore, it is relevant to think of the text as a code which the researcher needs to break and understand (Säfström & Östman, 1999).

In this project a few feminist critics were chosen as the basis for finding analysis in the students’ narratives. According to Gustavsson (1999), some researchers argue that the text itself becomes the theory and that the feminist, or any other approach, would be unnecessary and even cause the researcher to neglect some other important aspects. However, Gustavsson states that a feminist critique can be used when it can contribute to a deeper understanding of the text, and in this case it was utterly necessary, otherwise the research would risk being compromised by a great deal of subjectivity and common thinking (Gustavsson, 1999). This project is relatively limited, thus the choice of including feminist critique, and strengthening it with the questions below when analysing the results, helped maintain a clear structure which made the content easier to grasp.
3.2 Selection of participants

The participants in this project consisted of twelve ninth grade students in one class. The choice of participants depended on the students I had access to during my teaching practice and there were twelve volunteers who wanted to partake in my degree project. Hatch (2002) does not advocate more than twelve participants for a qualitative approach otherwise it can become too complicated to systematically analyse and categorise the texts. The participants consisted of seven female and five male students. The students’ knowledge of English varied but all were able to read and write as they have been studying English since year four of secondary school.

The participants were given information before they were asked to take part in the study. They were informed about the fact that their texts would be collected and analysed but I did not notify them about gender being the factor I was mostly interested in. Respecting the individual is very important and there is a thin line between what the subjects need to know and how much information the researcher can give, without compromising the data. If the students were to know that the analysis would focus on their presentations of gender, they might have written stories which they thought the teacher wanted to read which they might have thought would lead them to receive a higher grade.

3.3 The story writing assignment

The participants were asked to write a story of an optional genre consisting of at least two computer written pages (Appendix 1). They were instructed to first create a mind map and then write the story by hand, in class, so I could be certain that the story they wrote was actually written by them. The students were given approximately nine 50 minute lessons to complete the story by hand and two additional lessons were provided to re-write the story on the computer.

During the time when students were writing by hand, I tried to keep a low profile. If they asked me what I thought they should write about, I explained that the research would be compromised if I influenced the plot. I instructed the students in how a story could be built, with an introduction, problem and a problem solution. The participants were then able to form the structure for their narrative.
The students were allowed to choose the genre for their narrative. I gave them examples of what a genre could be. For those who needed help to start their story, I had found some story starters (Appendix 2) which were consistent with the genre examples I had provided the students with. Only one of the students chose to use these story starters. Throughout the story writing process the students were encouraged to write on their own. Some might argue that I, being the teacher and the researcher could have compromised the objectivity and that there is a risk of me influencing the plot in a certain direction. However, I did not read the complete narratives until they were handed in. Also, I could not allow another teacher to instruct the students as I would not be able to control the directions given to the students. I considered the situation to be too fragile to simply observe someone else’s instructions.

3.4 Procedure of analysis

According to Johansson & Svedner (2006), text analysis investigates how the main characters in a narrative are depicted and what issues are discussed or excluded (Johansson & Svedner, 2006). While reading the narratives, I noticed certain recurring patterns. All stories included some form of roles and actions which the characters performed. The students were instructed to present certain problems in their narratives and thus the results of these needed to be analysed. These categories were also influenced by the type of relationship the characters in the stories had towards each other, therefore I also chose to examine the relations depicted. By trying to find the answers to the following questions I might come closer to solving the purpose of the degree project:

- What roles and actions do the characters perform?
- What problems are presented and who solves them?
- How are male and female characters positioned in relation to each other?

These questions were influenced by Sue Wharton’s (2005) study of gender construction in a children’s reading scheme and by Lee and Collins’ (2009) study about gender issues in Australian English-language text books. Presented below is an explanation of what the concepts in the questions mean.
3.4.1 Roles and actions performed

The roles performed by the different characters are very important for the story development. According to Lee and Collins (2009), women’s place usually tends to be private, in the home and men’s place is mostly public, in the work place. They continue to explain that these characters have influenced the social life where men should assume the role of the provider while the women should stay at home and take care of the domestic life. These stereotypes might seem old-fashioned, but the previous research chapter has shown how important the roles ascribed to a character are. Lee and Collins (2009) continue to back up their claims by stating that even though many women have entered the public sphere today, they mostly engage in feminised occupations: “such high-status occupations as scientist, pilot, astronaut, and professor being considered men’s jobs, and others such as teacher, nurse, and secretary as women’s jobs” (Lee and Collins, 2009, 357).

The actions performed by the characters were also important to the study and contribute to clarify whether any of the actions were strictly based on the gender of the characters. Lee and Collins (2009) have for example counted how many men and women are performing activities like studying, playing, relaxing and so on. Wharton also analyses the processes in which the characters engage and states that “this analytical tool provides a detailed picture of the numerical representation of each gender and the capacity in which they are represented” (Wharton, 2005, 240). Thus, this degree project will specify and analyse the implications of the characters’ occupation and activities performed in the students’ narratives.

Certain actions were not as interesting as others since it was impossible to keep track of every activity the characters performed. Activities such as walking, breathing, and seeing were not of interest as all of the characters performed these actions. In another context they would have been of importance; if for example many male characters were blind or many female characters were not able to walk, it would be relevant for the results as this would imply a certain view on masculinity and femininity. All feelings the characters portrayed in the narratives are included as they, unlike to activities, were easier to grasp in number.

All of the results were written down and afterwards placed in four subcategories: roles: domestic and occupation, and activities: feelings and actions. The roles: domestic consist of traditional roles played inside the house and within the family while roles: occupation depicts what the characters work with. Thus, the public and private spheres
of society are included. Activities: feelings portray the actions performed within the character. Activities: actions include the actions performed by the characters as the stories develop. In conclusion, after each named role or activity I have specified which narrative the action is derived from, this way the reader can visualise the numeric facts.

3.4.2 Problems and solutions
Each story presented a problem and most of the authors provided a clear solution. According to Wharton (2005) this will allow the researcher to perceive the interaction of gender construction with narrative construction. She continues to argue that this analysis will reveal “patterns of interaction between gender and narrative development: for example, who typically has problems, and who typically solves them” (Wharton, 2005, 241). This section is interesting for this degree project as gender representation is influenced by the problems and solutions presented in the narratives.

The problems and solutions were divided into two parts: self-initiated solution and other-initiated solution. The self-initiated solution means that the characters who have a problem solves it on their own while the other-initiated solution is solved by a different character and not by the one who has the problem (Wharton, 2005). In this study all problems which the characters in each story faced were included in the results. Each narrative only portrayed maximum two problems and many of the problems were different from each other, therefore it was necessary to form the two subcategories when describing the results. All problems were included as they showed to whom the authors usually described problems and what kind of issues they dealt with. Furthermore, the solutions might be an example of how gender is formed in the narrative. If the problems of male characters were most often solved by someone else, this may perhaps indicate dependence and weakness while solving the problem on his own might be portrayal of independence, power and strength.

3.4.3 Relation between female and male characters
This category could provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the analysis and avoid a merely numerical results section. Depending on the relation between the characters the different roles, activities, problems and solutions were formed. In this study, a relation is characterised by the social connection between two or more
characters. These relations can take place in many different settings like family, friends, marriage, home, work, school or clubs. According to Berscheid and Peplau (1983), the relations might be influenced of some level of interdependence as characters influence each other just like human beings do in their own relationships. Thus, most things that occur to one character can have some level of impact on the other characters in the story.

I looked at the way in which the characters portrayed their relationship to the other characters in the story and divided these relations into four subcategories consisting of female-male, male-female, male-male and female-female. The first two classifications (female-male, male-female) depict how the female characters describe their relationship to male characters and vice versa. As there were several descriptions of relationships between friends or characters of the same sex, I chose to include them in the results. The male-male category describes the relationships by male characters while female-female investigates the relationships between the female characters. These two categories also give information about gender representation as they imply whether there might be a difference between the relations between male characters in comparison to the female relations. If for example only female relations are described as aggressive and male relations mostly influenced by trust then these categories might provide the analysis with greater depth. Only the relationships that were described by the characters were taken into consideration. Relationships to parents were not considered as none of the characters described these in detail and the reader was left to draw own conclusions based on the small amount of descriptions provided. The conclusions risked being too influenced of the readers solely subjective impressions.

3.5 Discussion of method

Text analysis is one of many methods which could be suitable for this type of research. One might feel that interviews could be a valuable complement to the text analysis but interviews are sensitive, in order to get the best result the researcher must be experienced. Furthermore, interviews about gender risk leading the participants in preordained directions and they might be complicated to grasp especially as there might emerge misunderstandings in the search for the underlying meaning. There is also a danger with interviews since the researcher cannot simply ask the participant to explain why he/she has chosen to represent gender in a certain way. These questions could be
considered personal and the participant might even be offended, which could lead to the loss of respect and trust in the researcher. Johansson & Svedner (2006) stress the importance of establishing a secure environment so the participants feel relaxed enough to express their inner most thoughts and feelings. This environment is probably difficult to create as it requires the researcher to develop a solid relation to the participant. Students at this age also have difficulties trusting new people and might be intimidated by interviews. However, focus group interviews would perhaps help the students to feel more secure and if the group composition is good for the students, they might produce valuable discussions. Thus these kinds of interviews could be used as an complementary research method to deepen the understanding of the results.

There is a risk of subjectivity with using text analysis. One can never be sure that the own feelings and thoughts have been completely avoided and since the reader is always influenced by its previous experiences the results risks being read in a certain way. However, a researcher can make the method to attain the results as visible as possible and thus the research could be duplicated to a certain extent. Also, by using previous research and basing the text analysis on experts like Hatch (2002) one might avoid some aspects of subjectivity. As the students wrote the stories in a certain period in their life, there is no guarantee that they would convey the same type of messages in another stage of their lives. But, if using the same stories presented in this degree project, another researcher might be able to come to similar results, but perhaps not to the same conclusions. Conclusions are based on the results but are influenced by the reader’s subjective reading of the results and it is therefore highly unlikely that different researchers would draw the same conclusions of the same results. Also, when analysing someone else’s texts it is important to consider that one person is not able to fully understand the messages conveyed in a narrative without giving the author a chance to explain their line of thought. However, text analysis is based upon the reader’s experience of the meaning in the texts by finding examples to support the assumptions. One can never fully claim that these narratives represent the students’ thoughts about gender completely, but one can still draw some conclusions based on the narratives they have submitted.

I am aware of the risk in asking the students to write in a foreign language. Their proficiency might have influenced their ability to write exactly what was on their mind and consequently they might have used stories which were familiar to them from movies, books and TV-series. Also some of the students might have limited conceptions
of the world and merely see to their own happenings and experiences. Nevertheless, it is these experiences I wish to receive a fragmented insight in as they can provide teachers with the insights they need to form an active discussion in the classroom.

The codes in the different categories are inspired by other published research and their transparency is a help towards too much subjectivity. However, the choice of which research should influence the method and which categories to analyse can be considered as highly subjective. One could have just as easily have chosen different categories to analyse. Other valuable categories could have been to investigate whether male and female students present gender in the same way. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that this degree project will not make such comparisons as it leads to the dividing of men and women. When one divides the sexes it opens up to generalisations based on what one might think and not what has been proven through research. Also it shows that the researcher expects male and female writers to present gender in different manners. However, if one were to see a connection between a certain representation of gender and the sex of the writer, this notion would be of high value for the undertaken research. Another valuable category would have been to try to investigate the relationships between parents and children in order to see whether there is a difference in the depictions of mother- and fatherhood.

Moreover, in accordance to the literature about research ethics, students were given the opportunity to ask questions about their narratives and they were able to choose to not let their text participate in the research. Furthermore, students’ identity is protected and the students’ parents were informed about the ongoing project (Johansson & Svedner, 2006). Consequently, I also informed the students’ parents and asked them to give their permission to their children to participate in my study (Appendix 3).
4 Results and analysis

The following section will present the results obtained from the text analysis of students’ narratives. Before continuing, I will briefly describe the students who participated in this study and what their stories were about. It is important to mention that the students are given pseudonyms. Afterwards, I will continue to categorise and analyse the content and language used. As mentioned above, the students are all in year nine, in a class with mixed abilities and different ethnical and social backgrounds.

4.1 The stories – Short summaries

The stories will be presented in form of short summaries. This may provide the reader with a picture of the data from which the results are taken. After each summary I will present a number to which I most often will refer to in the rest of the degree project.

The Feeling that Changes Everything portrays a girl who is very depressed after her father’s death and no matter how hard she tries to move on, she fails. In addition to the death of her father she needs to cope with consisting rumours about her boyfriend and whenever she wants to talk about the rumours, the couple starts arguing. One day, after a big fight, the main character writes a suicide letter where she explains that she feels sensitive and trapped. Therefore, she thinks that everything would be better if she just disappears. The morning after, her mother finds her, dead in her bed. (1)

The Lost Heir is a detailed science fiction story in which he describes a forgotten island that has lost its queen, and the only present heir is Jowan. The main character however does not feel that he should be the new king as he lacks good leadership qualities. Thus, he wants his sister to take the command. The problem is that his sister has left the island to rule another distant place and Jowan cannot find her. Jowan’s mission in the story is therefore to form a special military unit which will find his sister and ask her to rule their island. Since the story is set in the future, there are many environmental issues that hinder Jowan’s soldiers to get to the place where the sister is. The story ends with the death of Jowan and his troops. Jowan did not find his sister in the end. (2)
The Fire describes a young boy who stays at home from school because he wants to sleep a while longer. When his mother leaves to work, he is bored and wants to try something new. Somehow, he gets hold of some cigarettes and wonders what is so special about some paper and tobacco so he decides to try and feel how they taste. He begins to cough and does not enjoy the taste at all. The main character is very scared that his mother would come home so when he hears a noise, he runs up the stairs to see what it is. When he suddenly smells smoke he realises he had forgotten to put out the cigarette. The house had catches fire and the boy is trapped until a retired fire fighter rescues him and brings him to the hospital where the boy is able to recover. (3)

Every Picture Tells a Story portrays a popular girl who is getting ready for her first day at school after the summer holidays. While she is dressing she questions her lifestyle and why she must give in to the norms set by others. However, she decides to play along because she also has her friends to think about. During a party she is attracted to a boy whom she describes as really good looking and handsome and she felt she could talk to him about everything. When the party ends, they say their goodbyes and go in their separate directions, but on the way home the girl is attacked by a drunken stranger who tries to rape her. Fortunately, the boy from the party comes to her rescue and takes her home. The day after the party, all of the main character’s friends at school reject her because she is now dating someone who is not a football player. Her best friends starts rumours about her and even calls her ‘bitch’. However, the main character now feels secure enough not to take her friends seriously and she can change her path and finally, be confident enough to choose her own boyfriend. (4)

The main character, in a story without a title, is a girl who is cheating with her best friend’s boyfriend. She feels guilty all the time but cannot stop because she really feels that she loves him even though he is with her best friend. The boy feels trapped in his current relationship but cannot break it off since he has made a promise to his girlfriend’s parents. The story ends with a twist as the main character and the boy are kidnapped and tortured by someone unknown. However, the police manage to rescue them and after some time in the hospital they realise they should be together, so the boy ends his relationship to his previous girlfriend. (5)

Suddenly is a tale about a girl who meets a charming and beautiful boy. They fall in love and start dating. Their dates mainly consist of dinner and conversation and they realise that they have very much in common. The only problem is that they live in different cities and cannot see each other too often. They stay in touch and reminisce
about how much they like each other. The main character describes their dates as magical fairytales and concludes that the boy really was good to her. (6)

*The Good Travel* is about Andrew who wants to keep his friend from taking the wrong path in life. Andrew therefore decides to take a break from the auto repair shop and treat his best friend to a trip to Sudan and Saudi Arabia. When the two friends arrive in Sudan, they rent a car and go on sightseeing, as they stop for water they also stumble upon a chest filled with gold. In Saudi Arabia they find oil which they can sell to a rich man and in that way make a lot of money. When Andrew and his friend come home, they are very rich and can live a high class life. (7)

*The Meeting* is a love story where the main character is Bryan, a young man who works at a fashion office and lives alone in an apartment somewhere in England. He is preparing for a date with someone he met in a store. Bryan’s date is called Lucy and she is a fashion designer from USA. They have a great date but as the days go by Bryan has not yet heard anything from Lucy, so he decides to call her and ask her out on a second date. Even though they got a long on the second date, Bryan does not hear from Lucy again and he decides to call this time as well. However, this time he finds out that Lucy travelled back to the US. Since Bryan cannot stop thinking about Lucy, he follows her to the US and they decide to date there instead. Eventually, Lucy falls in love with Bryan and they move in together. The couple also starts a successful fashion company and soon they are married and have a family. (8)

*Samantha and David* is about a girl who is bullied because her father committed suicide. Samantha and her mother decide to move to another city so Samantha can start a new life, in a new school. Sam wishes to be more confident on the first day at her new school and she manages to portray a certain attitude by changing her style. The first day in school, she spots an interesting boy who turns out to attend the same classes as Samantha. They flirt with each other but Samantha is too afraid to get hurt instead, she finds another boyfriend. However, Samantha and David cannot stay away from each other and they end up cheating on their new partners. Eventually, Samantha had to choose between David and the boy she was dating and she finally chose David. (9)

*Love can Hurt* is a story about Gabriella and Troy who meet and fall in love. They are both described as beautiful people who like to sing and play sports and naturally, they should date each other. They do go on a date, but the next day Troy ignores Gabriella. She tries to figure out why he does not want to go out with her again and why he does not even want to talk to her, but she does not find any answers. Therefore, Gabriella
asks her mother if they could move to New York City and start a new life, since she cannot possibly go to the same school as Troy. Gabriella’s mother manages to find a new job in New York and they move away. Eventually, Gabriella finds a new boyfriend that she can trust and marry. (10)

In *The Perfect Crime* the married Joe and Amanda enter a computer playing competition. They play games against people from different places around the world and after they win, they go to celebrate. At the discotheque they hear several gunshots and people screaming. As they start to run they lose each other and Joe cannot find Amanda anywhere. When the police arrive, they find Amanda’s fingerprints on some of the weapons and they also find a wig and a mask which seemed to belong to Amanda. Everyone thinks that Amanda is involved in the shooting except Joe, he continues to search for his wife and eventually he finds out she is kidnapped. He contacts the government and they are able to find Amanda. To compensate the couple for not taking the case seriously, the government gives them one million pounds which Joe and Amanda use to start a new life on Mallorca. (11)

*The Escape* is about a boy who is doomed to prison after killing a lady when illegally driving a car. The boy did not have a driver’s license but had practiced driving with an older friend whom he wanted to impress. The main character stole his parents’ car and somehow lost control as he was not able to stop the car at a crossing and he hit a lady. When he went to prison, his parents did not want anything to do with him since they were shocked by his choices. However, the boy in the story could not reconcile with the fact that his parents were so angry with him so he decided to break out from prison to visit them and beg for their forgiveness. The parents accepted his apology but decided not to visit him until his time in prison was over. The main character accepted this answer and went back to prison to pay off his sentence. At the end, the main character was satisfied with the results from the visit and focused on surviving the life in prison. (12)

I will in the following sections categorise the stories and analyse the results by using the three questions posed in the method section. The results from the text analysis have been placed in three different categories, namely: Role: domestic and roles: actions performed by the characters, problems and solutions, and the relation between female and male characters.
4.2 Roles and activities

The roles and actions performed show whether there is a difference to how male and female characters are portrayed. Butler (1997) states that gender is formed by the identities that the characters partake in their everyday social life. Looking at the body of data analysed the results show upon mostly dichotomised roles between the male and female characters as well as the activities they perform. In the study the roles are categorised in domestic (private) and occupational (public) and the activities consist of the subcategories feelings and actions.

4.2.1 Domestic role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female (Story)</th>
<th>Male (Story)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girlfriend (1,4,5,6,8,9,10)</td>
<td>Boyfriend (1,4,5,6,8,9,10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife (7,8,11,12)</td>
<td>Husband (7,8,11,12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother (1,3,4,7,8,9,10,12)</td>
<td>Father (1,4,7,8,9,10,12) (In 1,9 the father is dead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter (1,4,7,9)</td>
<td>Son (2,7,12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister (2,4,7)</td>
<td>Brother (2,3,4,7,12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both women and men are portrayed as playing traditional roles such as mother and father, husband and wife, daughter and son, and sister and brother. Interesting about these results is the fact that all love relationships are heterosexual and traditional as the students have chosen to portray the characters in love stories as either boyfriends and girlfriends, or husbands and wives. Many feminist critics, including de Beauvoir and Hirdman, would depict this notion as an influence from the hierarchical western society that the students live in. According to Connel (2002) heterosexuality is presented the norm in our society today and this fact has undoubtedly influenced our students and their narratives. In accordance to the findings in Jackson and Gee (2005), the students have chosen to, despite the significant social changes in gay/lesbian relationships and parenting, depict their characters as strictly heterosexual.

However, it is possible to state that three of the stories do not follow the traditional portrayal of family composition. Two of the fathers portrayed are absent as they have both committed suicide. In both stories there is no explanation provided to why these fathers decided to take their own lives but it could be read as a depiction of not present fathers. Another story fitting this pattern is story three where the main character only
mentions that his mother has left for work, the father is not even mentioned as a possible caretaker of the child that felt sick: “His mother was going to leave him alone, she had to go to her job” (Story 3)

4.2.2 Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female (Story)</th>
<th>Male (Story)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queen (2)</td>
<td>Engineer (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student (1,4,5,9,10)</td>
<td>Mailman (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policewoman (5)</td>
<td>Fireman (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion designer (8)</td>
<td>Hero (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse (10)</td>
<td>Policeman (5,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working (no defintion) (1,3,10)</td>
<td>Heir (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working (no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>definition) (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working (no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>definition) (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Roles: occupations

It is difficult to state that the students portrayed female-monopolised or male-monopolised occupations. For example, all characters mentioned in the narratives either work or go to school. Therefore, both the public and private sphere are owned by both genders. This contradicts with the findings in Lee and Collins (2005) where women are seen as care-takers and should occupy jobs which allow them to fulfil their roles. Even though there is only one woman working as a nurse and one male character working as an engineer or fireman, it is impossible to state that these are gendered occupations ruling out the possibility of a male nurse and a female engineer or fire fighter.

Nevertheless, it is noticeable that male characters engage in many more occupations than female characters. Whether this is a sign of men having more access to the public sphere then women in the stories is discussable. As none of the students actually discuss nor state that women and men cannot enter the workforce in the same manner this conclusion is impossible to draw. Furthermore, story two even suggests an opposition:

They wanted a person with royal blood to take the queens place. But Jowan refused. He said instead that he would give the throne to his sister, who was on the island in the Pacific Ocean (Story 2)

In this quote the author suggests that the female character might be better at ruling the country than the male character: The problem is that Jowan’s sister is ruling an island filled with dangerous radiation and cannot come back to claim the throne. However, even if this story seems to suggest an untraditional approach, the overall lack of
occupations for women can be read evidence of the fact that the male characters mentioned in the narratives outnumber the female characters, and thus engage in far more occupations.

One can question why some of the students did not choose to assign female characters the occupations they chose for the male characters in the stories. There is little point in asking these questions without posing them to the writers themselves. However, as mentioned earlier, feminist critique declares that the choice of not including certain members of society speaks just as clearly as presenting them in a negative way. As the students are relatively young and have little life experience, they might have not considered that they are in fact excluding some people in society. Hirdman (2003) states that neglecting women in society or in narratives shows that one does not acknowledge their existence. On the other hand, the students participating in this degree project have chosen to not define female characters’ occupation to greater extent, but they have not left out female characters as they are present in some way in each story. Even in a story with male main characters the author mentions that Andrew: “lives with Sarah (his wife), Lamin and Olivia (his son and daughter)” (Story 7). On the other hand, this wife is the only one which does not have an occupation described in the story but this does not have to mean that she does not work. She is merely mentioned as a background description of the main character.

### 4.2.3 Activities: feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female (Story)</th>
<th>Male (Story)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questioning chosen path (1,4,5,9)</td>
<td>Tired (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling guilty (1,5)</td>
<td>Bored (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy (1,4,5,10)</td>
<td>Scared (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying (1,5,10)</td>
<td>Terrified (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3 Roles: activities - feelings**

The feelings included show that both male and female characters have feelings, but that male characters only portray feelings in a couple of stories:

He took the package and ran down to the basement of the house. He was scared and nervous, he thought someone would see him ... (Story 3)
In story three the character felt tired and bored so he decided to try smoking. Thus, story three portrays four of the six counted feelings while several of the girls portray the same feelings. Another example is:

He ran through the local, terrified, sweaty with blood all over him. He couldn’t find Amanda! Everything was wrong, Joe could not believe this was happening!
(Story 11)

The husband in story eleven is terrified about the shooting in the club he and his wife were in. In these sentences the author also describes how the panic grows when the male character cannot find his wife. However, even though his wife is missing the character does not show signs of feeling unhappy while the female character in story ten is described as feeling unhappy when her boyfriend is ignoring her. Not even in story eight where the female character leaves the male character, without telling him does the male character portray that he feels unhappy. The sentences are also an example of this writer not thinking that certain feelings belong to male and female characters. This could be interpreted as an example of the researchers’ findings from previous chapters where the male and female characters are dichotomised and need therefore to manage similar situations differently (Jackson and Gee, 2005 and Hirdman, 2003).

Female characters do not portray a vast range of feelings but they are described as questioning a chosen path. In story one the main character is questioning if she should trust her choice to believe her boyfriend about the rumours instead of her friends. In story four the main character asks herself why she is compliant with the set norms of dressing:

I take a pair of shorts, a white tight top (with an exclusive braw, who is pushing my boobs up, so boys can notice me) and a pair of gladiator sandals. Why do I even care how I look? This is not me. Well it’s me on the inside but on the outside I don’t even recognise myself (Story 4).

The female character in this story is experiencing a different feeling than the male characters described above. She is questioning something of which she is completely in charge of herself which is different from the male characters in story three and eleven who were terrified and scared of something which someone else is in control of as a missing wife or someone walking in on you while smoking.

Furthermore, one of the female characters felt guilty over something she had done, the other blamed herself for an action performed by someone else. The mother in story
one felt guilty about her daughter committing suicide, an action she could not have prevented while the girl in story five felt guilty about cheating with her best friend’s boyfriend. It is also noticeable that the boyfriend in story five did not portray any guilt and he only states that his current girlfriend: “was the biggest mistake in the world” (Story 5), which seems to be the reason for why he is not feeling guilty about cheating.

### 4.2.4 Activities: action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female (Story)</th>
<th>Male (Story)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug addict (4)</td>
<td>Prisoner (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapped (5,11)</td>
<td>Felon (4,12,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raped (4)</td>
<td>Kidnapper (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured (12)</td>
<td>Kidnapped (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing suicide (1)</td>
<td>Rapeist (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheated (5)</td>
<td>Cheater (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk (4)</td>
<td>Dead (1,2,9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead (1)</td>
<td>Arguing (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fighting, hitting (2,9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving sexist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comments to girls (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popular (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooking food (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaning up (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travelling (7,8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting his girlfriend (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whisteling (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking the first step in a relationship (4,6,8,10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Running (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singing (4,10,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dancing (4,10,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playing computer games (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dancing (4,10,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singing (4,10,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travelling (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cool (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting his girlfriend (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hierarchical and traditional actions combined with some non-conformist notions are portrayed in the students’ narratives. The most evident is that the male characters are allowed to perform similar actions to the girls for example dancing, singing, and being supportive. Cooking and cleaning are, according to the researchers in the background and previous research sections, traditionally actions performed by female characters but are nonetheless chosen to portray actions performed by male characters in the stories presented. Furthermore, in story eleven the male and female characters are both playing the same computer game on the same level. Thus, Jordan’s (1995) argument about boys being pressured to gender conformity is not completely usable in this research. Also, this study shows a different picture than Wharton’s (2005) as none of the male characters are portrayed as buffoons. Instead, the male characters are portrayed as capable of performing various actions.

Even if there are notions of non-conformist suggestions the victimised depictions of women are alarming. These stories present hierarchical and dichotomise actions
between the characters. Several of the studies presented in the background and previous research chapters show victimised women and so do the narratives presented in this degree project. The female characters are in story four both portrayed as drug addicts, sexual objects, and victims of rape, suicide and kidnapping. Thus, the girls/women in the narratives are in accordance to de Beauvoir (1953) and Hirdman (2003) victimised and subordinated. The boys/men in the stories are the ones performing these actions towards the girls/women and the amount of violence from the male characters towards the female is shocking. Short clarifications are presented below:

**Story 1:** The girl commits suicide because she cannot trust her boyfriend any more.

**Story 4:** The female character describes her rape: “He jumped on me and pushed me into the wall and hold my neck in a tight grip and started to threaten me”

**Story 5 and 11:** The female characters are kidnapped. The girl in story 5 describes her experience: “Tony grabbed me in the arm and pushed me out from our house [...] we were in the room for two hours and then came two of the guys and start kick on the chairs and one of them started to pull the hair on my arms [...] I spit him in the face, he became mad and hit me”.

**Story 12:** The young boy decides to drive a car and after practicing a few times, he hits a lady with a child.

Even if the male character in story five was kidnapped as well, his wounds were only described as him having a bloody nose. The kidnappers in this case did not hit him while the boy and girl were in the same room. Thus, the dichotomy between men and women is present in the narratives portrayed in this study; if the female character was the victim, the male character was the perpetrator. This is an example of Connell’s (1987) definition of gender hierarchy as it signifies male superiority. Hirdman (2003) shows how male form A is superior and the opposite of the female form B therefore he is strong when she is weak and is possibly therefore able to sexually abuse and victimise the female characters. In these five stories the same pattern occurs; if the female
commits suicide, the male lives, if the female is kidnapped, the male is the character, and if the female is the victim, the male is the perpetrator.

Nevertheless, it is important to put the data into a wider perspective as five of the twelve stories included showed some sort of clear victimisation of women. However, one could say that these are five stories too many and one could further wonder why the female characters did not do something to defend themselves especially when society today offers several opportunities to for example learn self-defence. Instead the girl in story four merely states: “I didn’t know what to do, so I closed my eyes to get this over” (Story 4). These students are probably, as Änggård (2005) argues, portraying a reality close to them whether they have seen it on TV or experienced it themselves does not make any difference to the importance of discussing the seriousness of the actions portrayed.

4.3 Problems and solutions

The problems and solutions help the researcher to perceive the interaction between gender constructions and narrative constructions. According to Wharton (2005), who typically has problems and who typically solves them shows the hierarchical position between the characters in a narrative. Considering the data below, one might argue that both male and female characters are depicted as having problems. However, male characters usually solve their own problems while female characters tend to let another male character bring a solution to their problems. In the analysis below the problems and solutions are divided in two categories which consist of self-initiated solutions and other initiated-solutions. The female and male characters are also divided in the figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female problem (Self-initiated solution)</th>
<th>Male problem (Self-initiated solution)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Story)</td>
<td>(Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumours about boyfriend – <strong>Commits suicide.</strong> (1)</td>
<td>Does not want the throne, radioactivity – <strong>Starts his own search/help group.</strong> (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy ignores girl – <strong>Moves to another town.</strong> (10)</td>
<td>Friend in trouble – <strong>takes him on a trip.</strong> (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl worried about cheating with her best friend’s boyfriend – <strong>Continues to cheat.</strong> (5)</td>
<td>Girlfriend goes back to US without telling him – <strong>Goes after her and asks her to marry him.</strong> (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents do not want any contact while in prison – <strong>Escapes from prison to talk to them.</strong> (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female problem (Other-initiated solution) (Story)</td>
<td>Male problem (Other-Initiated solution) (Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl bullied – <strong>Mother decides to move</strong> (9)</td>
<td>House catches fire – <strong>Fireman rescues the boy trapped inside.</strong> (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl likes two boys – <strong>A male friend forces her to choose one.</strong> (9)</td>
<td>Wife Kidnapped – <strong>Police (generic term) finds her</strong> (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl being raped – <strong>Boy saves her</strong> (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl thinking too much about what friends think – <strong>Boy helps her to ignore what they say.</strong> (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl troubled by not living in the same city as her new date – <strong>Boy decides to not do anything about it and occasionally stay in touch.</strong> (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 Problems and solutions

This table shows that the problems were evenly divided between male and female characters, with girls having two more problems than the boys. The nature of the problems varies but there are some suggestions of difference between the type of problems which the male and female characters are experiencing:

> Between you and me it is not as before but still I try to be as close to you as possible. But I cannot fight anymore, my body cannot stand longer. It would be better if I disappeared and never came back (Story 1).

This is written in a letter to the heroin’s boyfriend, after finding out that he might be unfaithful. The female characters seem to experience relational problems to higher extent than male characters. Additionally, as it is shown in the example above, most of the female problems are related to their relation to their male peers. Female characters’ problems describe the heroines as passive and introverted thus, calling upon an emotional realisation. On the contrary, males’ problems are designed to actively initiate some form of physical act to solve the problem. Looking at the example above:

> Bryan felt sad and angry, because she did not tell him that she would go back so soon. Well now there was not much to do. But one day he decides to got to USA and meet her (Story 8).

Thus, the male problems seem to emphasise action before emotion even in a problem which on the surface seems relational. Comparing the two examples given, one might conclude that the female character spends more time pondering while the male character acknowledges the problem and rapidly moves on to actively seek a solution. This image
of active men and passive women is also permeating the works of Hirdman and de Beauvoir.

If one is to take a closer look it becomes visible that the solutions the girls in the stories initiated are do not solve their problems. The girls in story one and ten are actually ignoring their problem by committing suicide or moving to another city. Compared to the boys’ solutions the girls’ seem to avoid bringing an end to the problem. Story ten and eight have similar story line except that the characters are of different sex and still when the boy is ignoring the girl in story ten, she moves to another town while when the girl is ignoring the boy in story eight he goes after her and asks her to marry him. The male character in story twelve is quite determined to see his parents even when they refuse to talk to him:

[...] my parents did not want to meet me or even talk to me, I had to meet them. I knew exactly how I would do this. The day they told me about the movement I came up with the plan to escape [...] I left the building and moved along the wall to the fences and I quickly cut the last part of the hole that I had already prepared (Story 2).

In this section the author shows how intelligent and resourceful the male character is. He does not take no for an answer and is able to meet his parents in the end, and even if he must go back to prison he is satisfied with his accomplishment. Thus, the stories in this degree project shows how the male characters are able to solve their own problems while female characters avoid the problems they choose to solve themselves. This notion seems to show upon a traditional view on gender described by Butler (1997).

Furthermore, it is evident that the other-initiated solutions to the problems of the female character are made by male characters. According to Gillis (2007), popular culture is filled with descriptions of women who have a career and are financially and sexually liberated. A couple of TV-series portray their female main characters as highly powerful and able to solve their own problems which most often cannot be seen as a picture present in the stories participating in this study. Instead, the heroines in the stories presented are relatable to the ones portrayed by de Beauvoir (1953) and her analysis of gender in the texts of historical authors where the women are dependent of the male character and his actions. The only case in which there is a female solving the problem of another character is in story nine where the daughter is bullied and her mother decides to move to another city. On the other hand, the male characters who
solve the problems of another character solves them in a manner which tends to prevent the problem from coming back. For example in stories three, four and nine the male characters literary end the problems and prevent them from coming back in the same form again. The boy will not die in the fire described in story three, the girl in story four will probably not be raped by the same rapist again and the girl in story nine will not fall in love with the same two boys again.

4.4 Relation between characters

Relations between characters are defining gender by looking at whether the relations are hierarchical or equal. As Berscheid and Peplau (1983) state, most relations are based on some form of interdependence between individuals. This analysis will focus on trying to define whether this interdependence is based on hierarchy between the characters. To summarise, one might state that the relations depicted are based on a hierarchical order between male and female characters with a few exceptions. The results are categorised in four subcategories consisting of the relations described between female to male, male to female, male to male and female to female relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female – Male</th>
<th>Male – Female</th>
<th>Male – Male</th>
<th>Female - Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love (1,4,5,6,8,9,10,11)</td>
<td>Love (1,4,5,6,8,9,11)</td>
<td>Help (7)</td>
<td>Help (6,10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness (4,6)</td>
<td>Happiness (6,8)</td>
<td>Trust (2)</td>
<td>Trust (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction (5, 4,9)</td>
<td>Attraction (5,9)</td>
<td>Rivalry (9,12)</td>
<td>Worry (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety (4)</td>
<td>Helping (4,2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jealousy (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence (1,4)</td>
<td>Saving (4,11,2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bullying (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspicion (1,5)</td>
<td>Sexist (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Disrespect (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of getting hurt (1,9)</td>
<td>Violent (4,5,11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disrespect (5, 4,10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 Relation between characters
Considering the entire results in figure six, one can conclude that the relationships between the characters are dynamic. The authors describe a range of different feelings towards and between the sexes which in turn makes implications of the representation of gender. If we look at the relationships described between female to male and male to female characters, we see that they are defined by certain adjectives that mostly differ from each other. Three of them are exactly the same, but the rest have either great differences or nuances of disparities. Many stories describe mutual love between male and female characters and the authors do not describe any characters with other sexual preferences than heterosexuality without even contemplating any other possibilities. Many feminist critics, including de Beauvoir and Hirdman, would depict this notion as an influence from the hierarchical western society that the students live in. Heterosexuality is presented as the norm in our society today and this fact might have influenced our students when writing their narratives (Connell, 2002). However, considering the new laws on homosexual marriage, one would have thought the students to portray a couple of more of the sexual preferences present in our society today. The only story in which the reader can detect what might be representations of homosexuality is *The Good Travel* (Story 7) as there are not any women involved in the plot. The main character is said to be married but does not even call his wife during the whole trip.

Happiness and attraction are two other descriptions which the writers use to describe the relationships between the male and female characters. Both male and female characters describe that they feel happy with or attracted to the opposite sex however, they do not formulate themselves in the same manner when describing these feelings. I will now present a few typical cases:

I have never felt so safe and free in my life, thanks to him. He understands me. A part of me was already in love with him, and I could not leave him, because I will never be happy anymore. I was happy with him. He’s my cure (Story 4).

The main character portrays a somewhat dependent attitude towards her relationship. She gives him credit for her entire happiness and safety and she furthermore explains that if she were to leave him, she would never be happy again. Nonetheless, the character portrays a opposite situation as she sees the possibility of leaving her boyfriend even though she would not be happy. Thus, this sentence suggests that she is deciding to stay in the relationship as long as she feels happy. On the other hand, the
same sentence can be read that she would not leave him as his presence is the reason for her happiness and no matter what, she would stay with the boyfriend in order to feel safe and happy. Another interesting fact for the analysis is that the writer does not describe the thoughts about the relationship which the boyfriend might be having. Hirdman’s (2003) statement about men having the luxury to be broadly defined in literature is somewhat disproved. Recent research shows that men have not been broadly defined. Instead, the representation of masculinity has stagnated as it has been the norm, while femininity has been able to change in order to fit the norms (Öhrn, 2002). The boyfriend in story four does not have the luxury to be broadly defined when it comes to his description of feelings towards his girlfriend. Instead, he is traditionally depicted as the saviour and the masculine norm as depicted in de Beauvoir’s (1953) analysis where men are strong and powerful and women are those who describe what they feel.

In story eight the main male character is described to be madly in love with the girl he is currently dating: “Everyone looked at him and they understood that something good had happened” (Story 8). However, the man himself does not portray his feelings in words. The reader is lead to believe that his feelings are enormous as he travels a far way to find the girl when she leaves to work in the US. But this action can also been seen as him exercising his power and not allowing her to keep the decision she has made about leaving him behind without telling him. Thus, the character in story eight becomes the archetypical male from Hirdman’s (2003) A-form who is the opposite of woman. He has power over her and therefore does not have to describe his feelings.

Moving on to the male to male relationships, it is evident that they are not as deeply described as the female. This might be the consequence of the fact that not many stories involve the relationships between male characters. In story seven the main character feels an obligation to help his friend from going the wrong way and chooses to take him on a trip where they go on different adventures and eventually find some treasures. Furthermore, in story two Jowan chooses to form an army of mutated soldiers and the reader is not able to define if these soldiers are male or female as the writer simply refers to them as The Stalkers. However, at the end of the story the main stalker is presented to the reader: “The other stalker said that they should introduce themselves [...] The other Stalker’s name was Paul” (Story 2). This stalker later becomes the most important for Jowan and no one else is mentioned. This might lead the reader to believe that the only stalker who was strong enough to survive the whole journey was Paul.
The relationship between female characters varied in the narratives as they are characterised by negative and positive feelings. Not many female relationships were portrayed in the stories but of those who were presented it could be said that the girls are either friends or foes and nothing in between. Some of the characters had a friend who listened to their worries which could be read as the stereotypical portrayal of the listening and caring woman however, far from a majority of the stories had these tendencies. Instead, the relationships between female characters were permeated by negative feelings towards each other and the stories portraying these relationships showed women who disappoint each other to greater extent than the men in their relationships. In story nine the girls bully their friend about her father’s death to such an extent that her mother decides to move to another city where the girl decides to toughen up and ends up with no female friends. In story ten the heroin expresses worry about her friend:

Clary will not cope when Gabriella moves. But she must understand that Gabriella is not capable of being in the same school as Troy (Story 10).

Thus, even if Gabriella knows that her friend will be very sad, she still decides to leave without notifying her. Furthermore, she never contacts her again which could be interpreted as a sign of disrespect towards the friendship they had formed. Which in turn can be read as the relationship between these girls is based on dependence from Clary’s part and selfishness from on Gabriella’s behalf.

4.5 Concluding remarks

Many of the students chose to write love stories. This might be a reflection of the age and state of mind the students are in at this age. Nonetheless, these twelve stories portray gender in a both traditional and untraditional manner. There are depictions of a hierarchical order between male and female characters which portray the traditional roles of active men and passive women. The untraditional depictions show how the female characters attend the public sphere which feminist critics claim is mostly depicted as men’s sphere.
The purpose of this degree project was to investigate the representation of gender in students’ narratives. Two research questions were posed in order to maintain the focus of the project. One question deals with the depiction of gender through the different characters, and the other asks what messages students could be conveying in their narratives. In this section, I will, with these questions in mind, discuss and summarise the results presented in the previous chapter. It is important to bear in mind that the results obtained in this study cannot be used to generalise the attitudes of the participants. This is a study which presents twelve students’ representation of gender in their narratives, which they wrote during the last term of their ninth school year. It is also important to clarify that, even though this analysis is based on the thoughts of some feminists, it is on some level a subjective interpretation of the students’ narratives. This is almost always the case with this kind of approach to texts.

It was found that the students who participated in this study all represented gender in their narratives. By choosing to depict femininity and masculinity in a certain manner, the students at the same time defined their perception of gender. According to de Beauvoir (1953), gender is formed at the same time we differentiate the sex of the babies when they are born. In a similar way, the students form gender when they decide whether the characters should be male or female. Furthermore, when assigning the characters different social features based on whether they are male or female, the student is forming gender. Each author felt that the gender of the characters was of importance as none of them played with the idea to have an gender neutral main character. In story twelve, the main character does not have a name and it is not clearly stated in the beginning what sex the character has, however, the author refers to the character by using ‘he’ at some points in the end. If the author of this story had played with the notion of not expressing the sex of the character, the story could have been a clearer example of gender neutrality.
The analysis of some of the stories in this study tries to redefine some of the gender norms. Several stories succeed in their effort to present femininity in a somewhat progressive manner, the most evident example being story two in which Jowan’s sister is portrayed as the superior leader. However, as the storyline proceeds, the author seems to neglect the female character as the focus is switched toward Jowan’s fight against the mutants. Thus, one poses the questions if this could be a depiction of the clash between masculinity and femininity described in previous research by Öhrn (2002) and Björnsson (2005). The author of story two depicts the reality around him where women are encouraged to transform and find alternative ways of living, like the sister in the story does. Simultaneously, masculinity is stagnating as the man is expected to lead a country and fight in order to find what he is looking for. By not finding the sister, the story seems to express that women can be leaders in theory, but not in reality. Furthermore, the sister in this story is the ruler of an island which is threatened by radioactivity which helps to prove the point of female characters not being able to be leaders.

The results further indicate that most of the students do not form masculinities in an untraditional manner. While representation of gender norms can vary, the representations of masculinity are constrained to the traditional static view of a strong, active or aggressive male. According to Connell (1995), there is a risk that this static representation of gender will remain static as long as inequalities based on gender exist. To change this view there is a need for a holistic change of gender as third wave feminism advocate. As the study shows, the role of the traditional male is static and in accordance to the heteronormative views. Furthermore, the relations between male and female characters are depicted in a dichotomised manner leaving the women to mostly play the passive and victimised role. In short, looking at the matter holistically, changing one aspect of gender, such as giving entrance to women to the public sphere, is probably insufficient to change the static view of gender. As well as there is a need for simultaneous change of different aspects of gender, the society needs to actively redefine gender roles at grass roots level and use the classroom as a platform for gender dialogue.

The Swedish syllabus for compulsory school states that school should promote “equal value among all people” (Lpo-94, 3). Curriculum for a subject such as social studies explicitly express the need for a gender based discussion in the classroom while the curriculum of other subjects are more lucidly formulated. Furthermore, the English
curriculum states that the subject should aim at developing students’ abilities to reflect on the living standards and cultures of English speaking countries (National Agency for Education, 2000). However, it does not demand inclusion of gender topics. One possible risk is that the individual teacher is left to decide whether to address the subject of gender in class. Consequently, the school might be at risk to not fulfil its goal to promote equal value among all people.

The need for change becomes even more evident when looking at some of the results of this study. Even though some of the students problematise the concept of gender norms in their narratives, they appear to have stagnated when it comes to representation of masculinity. Furthermore, the depicted violence towards the female characters in some stories is alarming. The risk of remaining passive in this matter can risk resulting in a strengthened hierarchical relationship. As Jordan (1995) states, the main reason for adapting feminist theory, and working towards equality among all people, is to discourage all varieties of hierarchic tendencies. If varieties of gender are not represented in school, when the children are young, there is a risk that school will not succeed with its mission. The other potential risk is connected to Connell’s (1995) thoughts, and deals with the possibility of a reversed hierarchy where the men are subjugated. The evidence of this are found in this study as the dichotomised relation between men and women are depicted as a constant factor. If for example, the woman takes part in the public sphere it means that, if looking at it from the dichotomised view, the male might eventually withdraw to the private sphere. The starting point of bringing gender discussion to the English classroom should then work towards unifying the dichotomised relations and by doing so truly recognise the equal value of individuals.

Thus, teachers need to work towards helping students to question and redefine existing norms. Considering this study, one way to practically work with the results from these types of studies and seriously act upon finding a substantial discussion. In the same manner as this study has been undertaken, teachers can present similar activities and use the students’ own work which describes their understanding of gender as a starting point for unifying “gender roles”.
6 Looking forward

It is in light of these findings that I would like to suggest that further research about students’ thoughts on gender is conducted. Mostly because this degree project merely present how twelve students, in one secondary school present, gender. Especially, this research is interesting to convey on younger children as Tallberg Broman (2002) states, children are able to identify femininity and masculinity even when they are very young. This would bring a deeper and more profound insight in the messages students seem to convey in their narratives as well as point to possible differences between the ages. This type of research would also open up a dialogue in which students will be forced to think about what kind of thoughts they wish to express. Also, it would give an insight into the restrictions students feel when constructing their narratives and this would help us understand why certain aspects are highlighted while others are forgotten. I also want to suggest that more research is carried out with students’ writing as the base. These documents outline invaluable resources that can help teachers understand the students to greater extent. It might be valuable to make a complementary study which investigates whether there is an importance of who wrote the story and do a deeper analysis of their experiences to see whether they have influenced their representation of gender. These findings would also broaden the understandings of gender representations among young people today and is therefore worth further investigation.
7 References


8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1

Story writing grade 9

These weeks you will write a short story. You may choose what kind of story you want to write, but I suggest that you choose among the following genres (story types) as we have covered these during the lessons:

• Love story
• Detective story
• Adventure
• Science Fiction
• Horror

Before you start writing you need to figure out what your story is going to be about. Your writing will start with the making of a mind-map. Make sure you can fill in the following facts about your story before you start writing:

• **Protagonist** (hero/main character):
  Sex/Name/Age/Nationality/Occupation/Physical description/Character description.

• **Background and setting**: Time and place for your story.

• **Plot summary**: make a short summary of what will happen in your story.
Also, include a **title** for your story.

Remember some of our writing rules for English:

- you start your sentences with a capital letter,
- you use commas and final stops,
- you use the same tenses throughout the story,
- you write with a formal language,
- you divide your text into paragraphs.

A first version of your story should be completed by Friday, 3 March. This version will be read and commented on by one of your classmates. The final version of your story should be 2-4 pages, written in Times 12, 1.5 lines spacing and handed in Tuesday, 9 March.

I will book the computer room so you can write your story and hand it in to me on the same day. You will receive a grade on this assignment. Carina and I will consider all of the components above.

**Mål: Du ska utveckla din förmåga att uttrycka dig varierat och säkert i skrift för att berätta något.**

**Good Luck!**
8.2 Appendix 2

Story starters

You may use these story starters if you have trouble with the beginning of your story.

- Yesterday I was lying in my bed reading. I don’t know for how long I had been reading when I suddenly heard a voice coming from the book...

- James suddenly woke up. He’d heard some noise coming from the basement. It sounded as if a window broke. He also heard sounds from the stairs. Who could that be? James sneaked out...

- One night when I was just about to fall asleep I suddenly saw a sharp green light outside. I jumped into a pair of jeans and a sweater and sneaked down into the garden to find out what it was. Then I saw that a huge spaceship had landed in the middle of the garden. Suddenly...

- Jenna was walking slowly. She felt sad. Everything had turned out wrong today. After all she wasn’t the one who had beaten Fiona. And it wasn’t she who had fought with Eric. But everybody said it was. She was definitely going to...

- X2 and C14 were sitting absolutely still. They were on their way to Maro. But right now there was a spaceship that was heading towards them. – We’ll have problems, said X2. C14 nodded. Soon they were...

- Miranda’s grandmother is really someone extraordinary. Her grandmother even has a flying rocking chair, a fact Miranda was grateful for the day when...

- I just woke up one morning and realised that I had shrunk. I tried to get out of bed but...

- The first time I met Robert he was...
8.3 Appendix 3

Information to parents

Kära elever och vårdnadshavare i klass 9

Jag heter Saida och läser sista terminen på lärarutbildningen vid Malmö Högskola. Under min utbildning har min verksamhetsförlagda tid varit på x-skolan därför faller det sig naturligt att jag också använder skolans tillgångar för utförandet av mitt kommande examensarbete. Jag är intresserad av elevers synpunkter på skrivande och vill sätta deras åsikter i fokus, mestadels för att forskning visar att deras röster inte hörs trots att de är viktiga för en demokratisk skola.

För att kunna samla information till min forskning behöver jag er tillåtelse att utföra en analys av elevernas texter. Eleverna kommer att skriva under lektionstid. Jag tycker också att det är viktigt att ni vet att jag kommer att hålla mig till forskningsetiska principer som bland annat innebär att eleverna kommer att vara helt anonyma och att de uppgifter jag får kommer att behandlas med vördnad och respekt för varje individs integritet. Dessutom får ni gärna vända er till mig om ni vill ta del av examensarbetet.

Vid eventuella frågor kring examensarbetet får ni gärna skriva till mig på:
LL051038@stud.mah.se

Med vänlig hälsning
Saida Hadzajlic

☐ Ja, vi ger vårt tillstånd till en analys av berättelsen.

☐ Nej, vi ger inte vårt godkännande till en analys av berättelsen.

Elevens underskrift: _________________________
Vårdnadshavares underskrift: __________________________

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