

Gender Perspective in Design and Illustration of Children's Books

(Case Study in Biographical Children's Books of Influential Female Figures in Indonesia)

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ABSTRACT

Children's books industry is vastly developing in recent years. Studies on design and illustration of children's books have to be conducted in regard to varied perspectives that keep up with the times. One of these perspectives is gender. In children's book, gender perspective is essential because books influence greatly on shaping children's view about gender, apart from parents and environment. Gender responsive values, such as free of stereotypes and gender bias, as well as supporting gender equality, will help children to optimize their unlimited potentials. Gender responsive books will deliver inclusive contents that lead to diverse subjects of children's books and wider targeted readers. Design and illustration play a big role to show those gender responsive values. In this research, observation and analysis of design and illustration in children's books are applied using gender perspective. Analysis and observation are conducted to answer whether the design and illustration affected the content to be gender neutral or not. Moreover, this paper would give the suggestion on how to eliminate the gender bias and stereotypes in biographical children's books. Gender concept, neutral-gender design and children's book illustration theory are the basis of this analysis. The books analysed here are those included in biographical genre that presents influential female figures in Indonesia. We chose this genre because it shows the depiction of figures that support gender equality. The result is design and illustration analysis in National Heroes Series R.A. Kartini and Cut Nyak Dien published on 2020 by Bhuana Ilmu Populer publisher. The analysis on those two books will be compared with the one from the series that feature male main figure. We found there are many stereotypes and gender bias. This pattern can be altered in some points, such as figures selecting and content developing. The content of children's biographical books can be changed according to the trend in children's book industry in Indonesia. Therefore we need further studies in design and illustration for child readers and development in interactive digital books format.

Keywords: *children book biography, neutral gender, gender design, children book illustration, children book design*

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, children's book industry in Indonesia is growing rapidly. According to data from IKAPI children's book is the highest sold compared to other book divisions in Indonesia [1]. This excludes people's enthusiasm with children's books on social media and online selling. However, the content in children's books in Indonesia is still limited. This is

strongly affected by the tendency to follow the trend in the societies that currently leans towards religious related matters [2]. In the modern era, the varied content is crucial because it can be their foundation in more challenging future.

One of the important things to be considered in children's books nowadays is gender. Children's books are very influential medium in shaping

children's perspective to gender role, aside from parents and environment. Stereotypes and gender bias often discovered in children's text books. As reported on MDGs in 2008 [3], the depiction of adult male characters are presented to work outside home while the female characters are always at home, taking care of children and household, while girls is responsible for helping household chores like washing and ironing clothes. These stereotypes can shape children's view about gender and restrict their point of view as well as behaviour. They contribute to identity and image building. Gender bias can influence discriminative mindset and behaviour [4]. Children's books content that concern about gender perspective, stereotypes and bias gender, and support gender equality can help children to optimize their potentials free from society restrictions.

Gender responsive content can be found in design and illustration of children's book. Illustration is very important in children's book, even as important as text to narrate the story [5]. Colour selecting, typography, illustration, and image of characters are able to show the masculine and feminine tendency for readers. The emphasize of illustration and design that are gender-stereotyped and repeatedly pictured will affect children's acceptance of that image as fact and is very likely to internalize into their mind [6]. This can occur, for example, in depiction of a character from certain gender that is associated with particular occupation. For instance, pilot is always presented as male, while teacher is always a female.

Gender bias and stereotypes are often found in non-fictional books in Indonesia, both the original or translated books. Female figures are less represented in science children's books [7]. This also happens to biographical books. In the book series *Why? People* that are licensed from South Korea and translated into Indonesian by Elex Media Komputindo, there are thirty three international figures that are presented in the series. However only 9 of them are females. In the book series of Pahlawan Nasional (National Heroes) published by Pro-U Media Yogyakarta, there are five books depicting male national figures. But only one that tells story of female figure, that is Cut Nyak Dien. The biographical books can inspire children about success stories and expand their knowledge about occupations as well as conception of their future. Therefore, the figures depiction in children's biographical books can influence all contents to be more gender responsive.

This study is focused on design and illustration analysis as well as suitability with whole content. The basis of the analysis is gender concept, neutral-

gender design and children's book illustration. We chose biographical children's book series published in 2020 and 2021 that presents influential female figures in Indonesia (Cut Nyak Dien and R.A. Kartini) to portray the most updated situation in children's book community in Indonesia. The analysis on those two books will be compared with the one from the series that feature male main figure.

2. CONTENTS

2.1. Gender Concept

There is a significant distinction of sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male [8]. The sex distinction includes the difference of chemical composition and hormones in human's body, physical anatomy, reproduction and biological character. According to World Health Organization (WHO), gender is female and male character, such as norm, roles, and relationship between female and male groups that are socially constructed. Gender perspective can be differed from one group to others. It can also change over time. Gender is a difference that is not part of God's will but socially produced (both for male and female) through social and cultural long process.

Gender equality is an equal state for men and women to obtain opportunities and rights as human being, in order to be able to participate in political, economical, sociocultural, defense and national security, and parity to benefit the results from those activities. Gender equality accepts and assesses in equal way:

1. The differences between men and women
2. The different roles of men and women in society
3. Understanding the basic life condition on men and women because women give birth to children
4. Accepting the differences between men and women as blessing
5. Equality is not synonymous with sameness
6. Gender equality means same level of existence, empowerment and participation in all parts of life, both public and private [9].

Gender equality in children's books can be applied in contents that support people and free from gender stereotypes, respecting the differences, understanding sameness in human being, knowing and empathy to others and supporting the same opportunity for other [9]. Gender equality can empower all children and awaken the children that they should have same opportunities. The awareness of gender quality also can help children to be more tolerant to differences, hence it lessen violation, abuse, and harrasment. In order to actualize gender equality in children's book, there are two concepts to be understood, those are gender stereotype and gender bias.

Gender stereotype is simple levelling of attributes, differences and gender role from individual or/and groups that could be regarded as positive or negative, but rarely present accurate informations about other things [10]. It occurs when a society gives gender-based assumptions to others without knowing the other facts. The stereotype often unconsciously believed by children because this has been constructed from adults's perception, media, and environment. According to Educate2Empower Publishing, there some attempts to lessen gender stereotype in children's books by considering these:

1. Is the female character depicted as strong figure?
2. Is the male character depicted kind and friendly?
3. Is the female character depicted brave and smart?
4. Is the male character depicted obedient and loving?
5. Is the female character depicted tenacious in solving problems?
6. Is the male character depicted as a figure that respects all gender?
7. Is the female character interested in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, outdoor activities and adventure?
8. Is the male character is able and supported to express his feeling? [11]

Gender bias is a tendency to take side to a gender over other gender. It can occur when one party is prejudiced until he/she feel unfairness, both men and women. In children's books, this is found because the male characters are presented dominant over the female characters. Even in children's books about

animals, males are dominant over females. It can also occur in author's representation and illustrations of children's books that are more in numbers for certain gender.

2.2. Gender-Neutral Design

Gender-neutral design concept appeared due to gender stereotype that limited to masculine and feminine. Post-feminism movement and queer theory is the background that influence gender-neutral as well. This issue can not only be solved by creating feminine design or changing masculine products to be more feminine, but the designers should explore further to apply the design that is neutral and genderless to embody gender equality in design [12]. Gender-neutral design aims to make products with its designs to reach wider customers, not limited to gender binary.

Orana Velarde for Visme.co wrote an elaborative principal of gender-neutral in graphic design that includes colour selecting, typography, layout, pictures and imagery in illustration. For instance, in using blue to boys and pink and pastel colours to girls. It is common to find toys and books in blue, green, and red for boys. Meanwhile pink, purple and pastel colours for girls. Gender-stereotyped colors has started since childhood [13]. For adults, bright colours are favorable to men, while pastels are more favorable to women. Therefore gender-neutral colours are monochrome, grey, black, brown and yellow. In gender-neutral design, typography is quite significant. Fonts with rounded tip and curved lines are associated with feminine side. Meanwhile sharp tip, strong serifs firm and bold lines are associated with masculine side. Gender-neutral fonts are those that are considered classic, that emphasize on legibility instead of details that make them difficult to read both in print or on screen. Gender-neutral layout in print or digital media features clarity with combination of colour, fonts and pictures as well as shape that are neutral. Masculine layout is dominated by dark colour, geometrical shapes, bold block fonts and rigid layout. Feminine layout use color, fonts, and pictures that are attractive to women's readers. Pictures or drawing that are gender neutral can be seen from the equal numbers between female and male characters using neutral colors. It is different from feminine pictures that show a group of women and the activities that associated with them. Masculine pictures are dominated by male characters, masculine colours, and activities that men usually do. This is to avoid gender stereotype.

2.3. Children's Book Illustration

Illustration is a visualization of a text or writing in form of drawing, paintings, pictures or diagram [14]. With illustration in children's book, story, writing and poetry, child readers are easy to understand. Compared to writing, illustration is more helpful for children to remember the story of a book, especially for early readers. A child has an ability to interpret illustration using body language that are depicted to characters, symbols that show visual metaphor and colours in illustration.

In the last decade, more and more illustrations are displayed in non-fictional children's books. In United States and United Kingdom, non-fictional children's books are growing until it reached 8% per year [15]. Currently, english biographical books for children portray female characters because it had been dominated by male characters. These books aim to deliver knowledge to children about female figures who are still living today and those who had lived in the past that have not been depicted by media. For example, a book titled *For The Love of Music: The Remarkable Story of Maria Anna Mozart* from Elizabeth Rusch and Lou Fancher illustrated by Steve Johnson. This book tells the life of Maria Anna Mozart, sister of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, that was actually a music prodigy like her little brother. However she could not continue her talent due to situation in her era that women did not have any choice except following the people's perception saying that marriage is better than playing music. The children's book and illustration can shape people's perception to new things to keep up with times.

3. RESULT

Seri Pahlawan Nasional published by Bhuana Ilmu Populer in 2020 and 2021 consist of three books, two first books portray female figures: R.A. Kartini (2020) and Cut Nyak Dien (2020). It is followed by a new book that portray male figure, Cipto Mangunkusumo (2021). These three books in these series are written by women authors, Watiek Ideo and Nindia Maya. R.A. Kartini book is illustrated by female illustrator, Angelica Naomi. The book of Cut Nyak Dien and Cipto Mangunkusumo are illustrated by male illustrator, Dhidit Prayoga. These books aims for children age 7 and over. The price is Rp 38.000 per book. The books consist of 34 pages of content and 2 pages for cover. They are printed on glossy paper, 20x20 cm in size, stapler binded with soft cover. In this research, initial and main analysis are conducted to two biographical

books about female characters. Further analysis is comparison between book with male characters and female characters.



Figure 1 Book Cover of *Seri Pahlawan Nasional*, published by Penerbit Bhuana Ilmu Populer

3.1. *Seri Pahlawan Nasional R.A. Kartini*

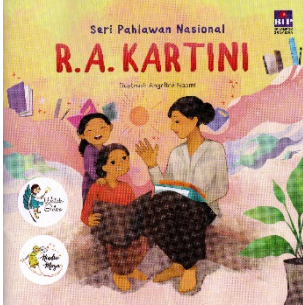

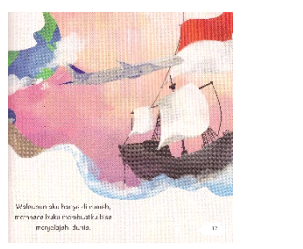
In this book, R.A. Kartini is portrayed from her childhood with information of her birth on April 21st, 1897. The book is ended with the story of Kartini opening a school for girls and her aspiration to help girls to read and write without any specific date and year.


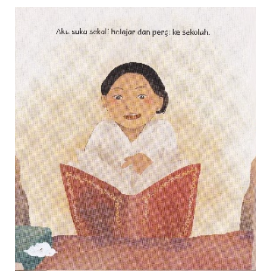



The cover is mix colour of reddish light brown, with a hint of pink, peach and yellow. There are three female characters: Kartini and two girls who are sitting while reading books and discussing together. Book illustration, stationery, books shelf and plant's pot appeared on the cover. In whole the content of this book consist of light brown as background colour, dark brown and white in 27 pages. Green is basic colour on five different pages (page 7, 21, 22, 23, 26) to show the outdoor scene. Pink dominates the background colour of the book on page 17. Dark blue and yellow are the colour on page 29. The font applied on this book is sans serif, both cover and content.

Female characters dominate almost all pages in the book. Only six characters are male: father of Kartini that appear three times, Kartini's brother whose name is Kartono that appear once, and two other male characters whose identity is not mentioned on two different pages. Female characters in this book are portrayed not equal to male characters. For instance in page 3, Kartini's father is standing while Ngasirah, the mother, is sitting with lower position beside him. This could show feudalistic situation in that era, regarding the fact that Kartini's mother is not from noble family like the father. Moreover, she is not the only wife. In some pictures on media, Kartini's mother doesn't appear on family pictures but along with her half mother who was the descendant of Madura Kingdom. Kartini beside her father is also portrayed as an inferior character. On page 9, Kartini is sitting behind and

facing her father. She is looking down and is lowering her body in front of her father on page 23. These two images show Kartini's situation at that time, who is very respectful to her father. She is portrayed as equal and higher than her brother and two characters that are not mentioned (but those are meant to be husband and Kartini's friend in school) on page 10, 15, 22. She is portrayed sitting and standing in lower position compared to her friends who are Dutch descent on page 6 and 7. However apart from the depiction of Dutch having higher position than local people, inequality could be due to Kartini's friend physical appearance that is taller than Kartini.

Table 1. Seri Pahlawan Nasional R.A. Kartini

No	Image	Description
1		Cover
2		Neutral-gender color for background
3		Feminine color for background (Page 17)

4		Unequal position of Kartini beside her father
5		Gender stereotypes depiction from studying activities
6		Equal position portrayal between Kartini and her brother
7		Domination of female characters in the book
8		Domination of female characters in the book

From the explanation above we can see here that this book show not too feminine design and illustration. It attempts to be gender neutral as it is shown in colour selecting. Nevertheless combination of female characters and their inequal portrayal compared to male characters can lead to gender bias. The content of this book also emphasizes Kartini's characters: she loves studying, reading and writing as shown on page 2, 4, 6, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28 and 29. In our contemporary situation, girls in Indonesia have better opportunity to achieve higher education compared to the era when Kartini lived in early twentieth century. Kartini's spirit described in this book is limited to studying, reading, and writing. Those are not relevant to the current situation. This can bring gender stereotype. The depiction of Kartini in media and this book has always been same. When we look at the reference chapter in this book we will find the book *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. This book shows many of Kartini's contribution to local people at that time, i.e. supporting rattan craftsmen in Jepara. This fact should appear in the book as inspiration for children instead of portraying her household activities that tend to display gender stereotype.

3.2. Seri Pahlawan Nasional Cut Nyak Dien

Cut Nyak Dien is national heroine from Aceh. This book opens with introduction of her character, date of birth, and family background. Then, it continues with Cut Nyak Dien's childhood in Aceh on page 3 and 4. Next is the adulthood of Cut Nyak Dien until she put in exile in Sumedang without any detail of time.



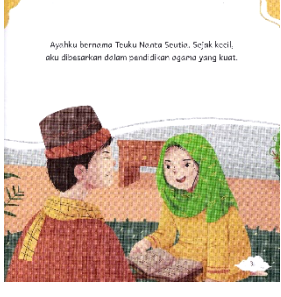


The cover of the books is mostly in green with white and toska background. Cut Nyak Dien is standing in the middle with green long dress, brick red sarong, her hair is messily tied up, holding an Acehnese traditional blade (rencong). In this book, Cut Nyak Dien always wears the same dress. This book shows illustration predominantly varied color and gender-neutral, such as white background and toska for sky, brown and green leaf for grass.

This book is different from Kartini's series. It shows more male characters. There are 37 male characters portrayed as Cut Nyak Dien's father (three times on page 3, 6, and 9), her husband (on page 14, 16, 18), Aceh people in war, and Dutch characters. Female characters in this book are 27, that is Cut Nyak Dien who appears on more than 17 times. The rest is female characters that portray Aceh local people who fight in war. Beside Cut Nyak Dien,

there is no female character with significant role in this story. This book depicts Cut Nyak Dien as very strong character (page 5), brave and never gives up (page 23 and 25), she leads her army (page 11, 17, and 24), independent (page 4), tough (page 22) and she is able to cooperate with her husband (page 14 and 16). It also depicts Cut Nyak Dien feeling sad and cry (page 12 and 28). Female character is presented equal even superior to male characters. While male characters are presented in many states and emotions. For example, Cut Nyak Dien's father raises her daughter alone (page 3) and he leads the army (page 6 and 9). Cut Nyak Dien's husband is presented as a cooperative partner and their position is facing each other (page 14 and 16) and scared (page 18).

Table 2. Seri Pahlawan Nasional Cut Nyak Dien

No	Image	Description
1		Cover
2		Green color domination as the background (Page 2)
3		Depiction of strong character in Cut Nyak Dien (Page 24)

<p>4</p>		<p>Illustration that shows bravery and leadership of Cut Nyak Dien (Page 17)</p>
<p>5</p>		<p>Equal position between Cut Nyak Dien and her husband (Page 16)</p>
<p>6</p>		<p>Equal portrayal between Cut Nyak Dien and her father (Page 3)</p>
<p>7</p>		<p>Household chores depiction that leads to gender stereotypes (Page 4)</p>
<p>8</p>		<p>Illustration that leads to misunderstanding (Page 29)</p>

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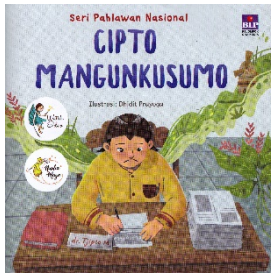
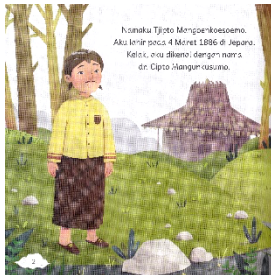


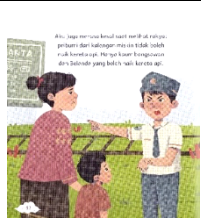
Illustrations that lead to gender stereotype still appear in this book. It is shown for example in the beginning and end of the book. On Page 4, it writes, “*Selain itu, aku juga dididik untuk mandiri. Aku terbiasa memasak dan menyelesaikan tugas rumah sendiri.*” (Also, I was raised to be independent. I cook by myself and I do my household work by myself). The illustration on that page shows she is cooking alone. This description can give a meaning that being independent for girls is cooking and doing household work by herself. In fact, there are plenty portrayals as examples for girls to be independent. The text and illustration are supposed to depict independence related to other activities than cooking. In the end of the book, it is written, “*Akhirnya, Belanda mengasingkan ke Sumedang, Jawa Barat. Di sana aku menghabiskan masa tuaiku dengan mengajarkan agama kepada para pemuda.*” (Finally, the Dutch exiled me to Sumedang, West Java. There I spent the rest of my life by teaching religion to young people here). The illustration shows Cut Nyak Dien is teaching a girl to read religious scripture and the two are smiling. This shows that Cut Nyak Dien is happy although she is exiled by the colonial government. The word “exile” which has a negative meaning is presented with an opposite drawing. The readers can assume that Cut Nyak Dien feels happier to be exiled rather than fighting for her land’s independence.

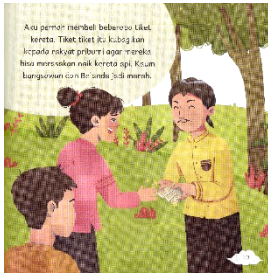


3.3. *Seri Pahlawan Nasional with Female and Male Characters*

The latest book in *Seri Pahlawan* tells a story of a male character, that is Cipto Mangunkusumo. He is an Indonesian doctor that participated in national organisation to fight Dutch colonial government. It is written by the same authors of R.A. Kartini and Cut Nyak Dien and illustrated by the same male illustrator of Cut Nyak Dien book.

The cover is blueish light grey, green, and wooden brown. The content shows variety of colour but white, green and blueish light grey are dominant. The main character in this book always wears Javanese traditional attire, yellow *beskap* (Javanese suit), brown batik, and brown with grey lines *blangkon* (Javanese headgear). Colour selection shows masculine composition yet gender neutral.

Table 3. Seri Pahlawan Nasional Cipto Mangunkusumo

No	Image	Description
1		Cover
2		Neutral gender color background (Page 2)
3		Illustration of Dr Cipto's mother, one of the three female characters in this book (Page 3)
4		Potrayal of female character that shows inferiority (I) (Page 11)
5		Potrayal of female character that shows inferiority (II) (Page 12)

6		Potrayal of female character that shows inferiority (III) (Page 13)
7		Domination of male characters (Page 18)
8		Domination of male characters (page 24)

In the beginning of the story, it is mentioned the year of birth, family background and the original region of the character. It starts with Cipto Mangunkusumo since he is six years old and has to live separately from his parents to pursue his education until his exile in Bandung. The illustrator is the same with Cut Nyak Dien book, and it also shows many male characters. The female characters are only the mother of Cipto Mangunkusumo (page 3 and 4) and three other characters that written in text as *rakyat pribumi yang tidak mampu* (underprivileged local people) on page 11, *rakyat pribumi dari dari kalangan miskin* (poor local people) on page 12, and *rakyat pribumi yang ingin bisa merasakan naik kereta api* (local people who wants to experience trains) on page 13. His school friends and patients, Indonesia youngster who fights

for independence when he is in Indonesia and exiled in Netherland, also Dutch soldiers all depicted in male characters. It is probably to show male domination in the past. But it also shows that female characters are not fully represented in the book.

4. CONCLUSION

From the analysis above we can conclude that design and illustration in children's books are very influential for gender representation in a book. The design for all books can be considered as gender-neutral from colour and fonts selecting. The role for illustrator is very important to create gender responsive book or the other way around. In this research, we found gender bias in female Illustrator who often draws female characters. Meanwhile, male illustrator tends to draw more male characters, both in book for female figure or male figure. Gender stereotype can be found in the books, especially in the depiction of female characters with certain domestic activities and social status.

These books present national heroes whose life have been portrayed several times in media, both in children's book or historical books. The life of R.A. Kartini and Cut Nyak Dien have been adapted in earlier children's biographical books. Nevertheless, these books have not adjusted with the contemporary situation hence they don't offer any novelty, especially related to gender issues. Children need to have knowledge about inspiring Indonesian figures, especially female, that are more relevant to current situation.

For recommendation, further research should be conducted in children's books about Indonesian female figures that are gender responsive and able to keep up with times. The research must include current Indonesian children's perspective and their parents. Additionally, more studies on biographical children's books with female figures can be carried out in interactive digital platform.

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