

TOMBOYS AND GENDERED STORIES: FROM FAIRY-TALES TO CONTEMPORARY TROPES IN MOVIES AND TELEVISION SERIES

Ligia TOMOIAGĂ,

Universitatea Tehnică din Cluj-Napoca,
Centrul Universitar Nord din Baia Mare
Facultatea de Litere

Abstract: The article starts from the history of fairy-tales, especially from the gender roles in fairy-tales and stories for children, taking into consideration a few characteristics of female characters, which have been generalized since and transformed in traits of the female gender. Going further to the concept of the “tomboy”, the study analyzes several facets of this concept, especially in the literature that was transposed on the screen in movies and television series. The tropes of this category are, then, followed in various television series and movies, as we consider these as clear mirrors of how mentalities have changed, especially regarding the traits of the specific behaviour of the two genders. Finally, after the author suggests that there are many other titles that can demonstrated the variety of “tomboys” in the realm of Popular culture today, she comes back to the question whether this category still makes sense in our contemporary world; whether it is not only a concept void of content. The study comes to the conclusion that this term has changed and become a concept that is useful for the genology and typology of today’s Popular Culture; it is not really a concept belonging to the realm of sociology or psychology, or a term used by misogynistic theory.

KEY WORDS: *tomboys, gender roles, television tropes, genres, tomboyism*

Fairy tales were originally not intended to entertain children, but to offer them a ‘survival kit’, a means to understand a world that seemed not complicated, but threatening, especially in the Middle Ages. Sometimes based on mythological schemata, coming from immemorial times, showcasing gods and supernatural beings, or based on the animal world, these folk fairy tales were a means of mediating the world to children, and of teaching them how to behave, what to do, what roads to take in order that their lives be safe. In times when many children would be orphans, as their mothers would very often die in child birth, they were confronted with difficult situations, when they got step-mothers, who were naturally inclined to favour their own children. Some other times, they had to understand how the world functioned on their own, and make the best of a certain dangerous

or bad situation: they were left alone in the world, and had to deal with threatening people, and to win strangers over.

Survival kits? Well, a good idea for girls was to just marry an older, uglier man, for instance, as these older men had no mothers alive to abuse the daughters-in-law; older men were more likely to have a house, some money, they were less likely to go to war and die, and they would be less inclined to find other women and get other children from mistresses that might take the place of the wife one day. Furthermore, they would not be able to have so many children, which for the woman was safer, and they were also likely to die before the woman, leaving her a few years of peace and quiet (see the plot in *The Beauty and the Beast*). On the contrary, not guarding one's virginity, and letting one's instincts get the better of one, would lead to total disaster: a girl who trades her virginity for a short period of pleasure, is not allowed to speak anymore, her every moment will bring pain and hardship, and, eventually, she will be just tossed aside, while the pure, innocent girl will take her place (see *The Little Mermaid*). The way to win a prince over is perfect behaviour, which means that when you are in a house, you just do your duty, do the housework to perfection and in the best of spirits, do not complain, be patient and passive, just do not ever rebel or come against your faith, and one day your prince will just come to the rescue (see *Snow White*, or *Cinderella*).

These folk fairy tales were, then, taken by story-tellers in kings' courts all around Europe, and transformed in behaviour codes for young aristocrats – ironically, the scary folk tales teaching children how to stay alive in a world in which their lives were at the mercy of their 'owners' became the code of honour of aristocracy. The do's and don'ts of good behaviour presented the same gendered recipe: girls have to be 'good', and boys have to be 'brave'.

A short analysis of what 'good' means, with reference to mostly all heroines of 'good behaviour', reveal the following characteristics: innocent, pure, beautiful, non-combat, un-spoken, unconscious of their beauty (not sexy), accepting their role (starting cleaning, if that is the situation, starting knitting, etc.), un-demanding, un-complaining, respectful, modest, having perfect household skills, industrious, silent, patient, religious (a characteristic that appears especially later, with the Grimm brothers). All these characteristics have a common root – passiveness. These beautiful princesses or good girls have to just accept all that faith has to throw their way, and just wait to be rewarded for their patience. The essence of femininity is a kind of un-earthiness. The counter-part of these 'good' heroines are the 'bad women': the 'step' or surrogate mothers, the wicked witches, the women who take action, the ones who are ugly (even if only on the inside), deceitful, with a heart made of ice, the aggressive, powerful, abusive, the intelligent. If positive women characters are seen as sweet,

naïve, dependant, conforming, passive, the characteristics of the princes are the very opposite – princes are active, strong, adventurous, independent, capable, brave, aggressive when needed, etc. The gender roles of the female ‘good’ characters are that of princesses in distress, caretakers, mothers, and they achieve their aims because others help them. On the contrary, the role of male characters is active, they solve problems as they are ingenious, brave, perseverant, their roles being those of fighters, adventurers, and rescuers.

Gender stereotypes have been engraved in the minds of children and young people for a very long time, and, therefore they have been unquestioned for centuries, leading to gender bias. Gender bias, though, did not stop with fairy tales, it was prolonged in society, in what we may call social roles of men and women, in the manner in which men and women saw themselves and their role in their families, in society, in their work places. Consequently, women accepted for a long time an inferior, passive role, the ‘angels of the house’ as they were called in the Victorian Age, waiting for men to come home from ‘work’, from their social activities. The gender bias also considered that men had to be strong, not demonstrate or show any kind of emotion – fear, anxiety, sadness, uncertainty – they could not do ‘women’s jobs’, they were not supposed to play with children, fathers being rather distant figures in the families (see Cinderella’s father, who seems uninterested or incapable of putting a good word for his daughter).

In the 19th century U.S. folk and fairy tales still had dual readers, or audiences: children and adults. The separation of stories for girls and stories for boys, though, appeared towards the 1830s and was still present towards the end of the century (1880s) in such stories like Alcott’s *Little Women*, or Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These stories mark this separation very clearly, with girls that are mostly portrayed in their homely environment, while boys are encouraged to be adventurous and brave. Nevertheless, these books do not only showcase girl heroes and boy heroes, but also the divergent roles that boys and girls had in the American 19th century society. Edward Salman, in his 1886 article “What Girls Read” made the gender role difference clear, as to what is ‘proper’ reading for each:

“Boys’ literature of a sound kind ought to build up men. Girls’ literature ought to help to build up women. If in choosing the books that boys shall read it is necessary to remember that we are choosing mental food for the future chiefs of a great race, it is equally important not to forget in choosing books for girls that we are choosing mental food for the future wives and mothers of that race.”
(quoted in Wadsworth, 2001:17-46)

Literature for boys and girls prepared children for their future roles in society, in which girls were supposed to become mostly house-women, preoccupied with everything concerning domestic life, while boys needed to be more energetic, resourceful, prepared to take action and be the determined men of the future. Boys will do outdoorsy things, they will be adventurous, they will be more interested in sports, in climbing trees, in spying on their neighbours, in disrespecting certain types of authority, in being revolutionaries and rebels, sometimes. Girls are rarely anything else but calm and nice, passive and tender, working industriously around the house. Especially in America, where class differences are not so obvious as in England – where these differences had also to be observed and noted – the main difference between girl-heroines and boy-heroes were contained within their specific gender roles.

What happens if the gender roles are not observed? What happens when girls start behaving like boys? This question got different answers in different epochs, but the word that is generally used in such situations, is that the girl is a ‘tomboy’.

This term appeared in the English vocabulary early, as in the 16th century it was already used, but not referring to girls but to men, to courtiers, who displayed a rather unruly manner. Referring to girls, the term appeared in the 17th century, and meant a girl who had a spirited behaviour, a girl who was rather wild. Charlotte Mary Yonge defined the tomboy as:

What I mean by ‘tomboism’ is a wholesome delight in rushing about at full speed, playing at active games, climbing trees, rowing boats, making dirt-pies, and the like. (quoted in Forman-Brunell, 2001:670)

The first part of the compound word, ‘tom’, also needs to be looked at, as it has had many interpretations. ‘Tom’ means a not so modest woman, sometimes even a prostitute (Abate, 2008); another connotation of the prefix means either a sexual predator (tom cat), a fool (tomfool), or a lesbian girl (Tommy girls) (Abate, 2008). Nevertheless, the concept of tomboy-ism appeared in England rather early, but it was not used in America but later on, even though characters that could be “accused” of being tomboys did exist in American literature, especially as many plots of early American stories are set in villages or farms where women had to work and do many jobs, irrespective of their gender. Then, there was another view on the matter, as being a tomboy was not equated with something defining for some women’s characters, but with a passing phase of growing up, a phase some girls passed through in their search for femininity.

[tomboy-ism is] a very common phase through which little girls would pass on their way to the safe harbor of domestic femininity.

(Sharon O’Brien, quoted in Abate, 2008:IX)

Well, if a girl was a tomboy, and displayed turbulent behaviour, liked to play outside, neglected her appearance, climbed trees and ran too much, she needed to be tamed; tomboys who get closer to adolescence would have to give up to their boyish habits, and take up some more womanly interests. In fact, they were on the verge of becoming wives and mothers, and such behaviour was not overlooked anymore. Meg, the elder sister in L.M. Alcott's *Little Women*, admonishes her younger sister, Jo:

You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady.(Alcott)

Some authors tried to find certain explanations for such un-womanly behaviours, most of the times the little girls 'accused' of tomboyism being raised by men, without a mother who could teach them 'properly'. Scout, Atticus Finch's daughter in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, is such an example. Being raised by a single father, playing with her brother and other boys all the time, little Scout cannot see how she could behave like a girl, how she could wear girl clothes, which seemed to be not only uncomfortable for her, but also prevent her from the activities she wanted to perform. This type of tomboy, her 'father's girl-son' is also present in contemporary literature and film, as many girls are raised by their fathers, either as a consequence of accident, or divorce. Therefore, sometimes tomboy-ism is considered to be a certain lack of feminine empathy, girls who try to fight with their identity because they just do not want to be identified with being a woman (especially if the mother behaved badly, left the house and children, etc.)

Under the influence of Freudian theories, the tomboy started to be seen as a girl whose early sexual inclinations are similar to those of boys, that is, future lesbians. There have been studies dedicated to this issue, as many tomboys even preferred that their names get a more masculine tone (Josephine is Jo, in Alcott's book)

"No", she said. "I'm not Georgina."

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

"I'm George," said the girl. "I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won't be. I don't like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher boy on this coast. You're to call me George. Then I'll speak to you. But I shan't if you don't.(Blyton:7)

Tomboys are associated with some kind of sexual indeterminacy, girls who do not just mimic the behaviour of boys, but also have their inclinations to loving girls. With sensitive boys things seem to be the same: Holden Caulfield, the most iconic sensitive boy of the 50s is under attack as a homosexual, especially as he rejects the trendy boisterous, sporty behaviour of his fellow colleagues. Still, most literary stories with tomboys present tomboyism as a phase in the development of the characters towards becoming a woman; the moment their womanhood is actually reached is the moment when the protagonist becomes a wife and a mother. (Forman-Burnell, 2001:672-674)

The term 'tomboy' is used even today, even though girls nowadays are supposed to be able to do whatever they please, there are so many activities that were considered non-womanly that women and girls engage in today, that a new perspective on the subject of tomboyism should have been felt more vigorously. Nevertheless, Abate shows that:

In spite of both the long history and the strong presence of tomboyism in the United States, comparatively little work has been done on the subject.[...]. In addition, seminal works on the history of women's gender roles and sexual identities omit tomboyism from their discussions. (Abate, 2008:XII)

Still, in library comments, in bookshop ads, in TV guides, the term tomboy is used frequently, and refers to more or less the same reality: girls who like to do what traditionally is considered to be 'boy stuff'. Today, the difference is being made between 'girly girls' and 'tomboys', that is, girls who are rather 'overdoing their girly-ness' and girls who seem to be 'under-doing their girly-ness'. Apparently, feminist theorists prefer to maintain the category, especially in view of the understanding of the word which refers to a 'possible lesbian inclination' that is obvious since childhood.

We would like to give a broader connotation to the term, and consider a tomboy as an independent, daring, free spirited girl, who does not care about conventions and adapting to hypocritical behaviours, but, on the contrary, she wants to just be herself, even if this might be considered shocking, or even outrageous, by some people. They are not against being 'girly girls', they are even friends with such girls, they are not boys, they are girls and like to be girls, they are not lesbians, they like boys as much as any other girl.

The tomboy often serves the purpose of being a character that has not yet hit puberty because it is seen as just a "phase" in a girl's life. And tomboy narratives are used to reinforce innocence with childhood because a tomboy does not like romance, thus the character is not sexualized in any way." (Hatch, quoted in Cook, 2012)

They are just free in manner, they like what they like and do not care if that is in conformity with what is considered to be 'normal' for a girl or not. They are innocent and true, even if their manner suggests something different. They enjoy being with other girls, with boys, they are only a little more inclined towards criticizing the world of the adults, not connected to gender, but to stereotyping, to compromise and hypocrisy, mostly.

The character that seems to best fit this profile is Juno, the main character in Jason Reitman's 2007 movie with the same title. The producers and the writers wanted to re-invent the tomboy character in order to reveal the superficiality of the adults in dealing with teenagers, their readiness to point fingers and label, their habit of judging the youth according to their own stereotypical behaviours. Several times, when asked if she is 'sexually active', Juno has a reaction of total rejection and surprise: she is pregnant, things like that happen, but she is still very young, and her love and lack of inhibition that led her to this situation is not something to be labeled in this manner: on the contrary, even if she had this curiosity, even if her love for her boyfriend made her take this step, she is still a child, she is still young, she is still pure, she is not the stereotypical young girl who just 'accidentally' got pregnant because she was not careful enough. People are different, and they are entitled to their separate truths, to not being judged in 'bulks'.

Juno is a very non-typical girl, she is the one in charge in her relationship with her boyfriend, she is the strong character in the couple, she is not the girly girl. The director of the movie has her always go against the stream wherever she goes – when she enters her school, when she walks on the streets, etc. Is she a tomboy? According to television tropes, where the category of tomboy has several sub-categories, Juno and Bleeker would be the perfect image of the *masculine girl and the feminine boy* couple. Nevertheless, as many other tomboy characters, she fits other sub-categories, too. She is the *outspoken girl*, the *unkempt beauty*, the *spirited young girl*... In a way, Juno demonstrates that the consumerist vision on what is 'girl' and what is 'boy' is limited and does not influence girls and boys that much. Moreover, gender limitations have stopped having real relevance for young people in terms of what is 'proper', or what is 'allowed', or 'becoming'. These limitations are replaced by natural inclinations of young people towards wearing certain clothes, or behaving in a certain manner, without necessarily having to come against any rule, or conform to any rules, either.

If nothing else, Juno is an expression of un-tamed youthful spirit, a free spirit in the proper sense of the world. The fact that she 'fits the profile' of the tomboy is rather accidental, even if from a generic point of view, she might be considered to be the tomboy of our times.

The series *The Game of Thrones* comes with another image of a tomboy, a tomboy that, again, can be illustrative for several categories, or tropes: she is Arya, the young princess. According to the television sub-categorising, Arya is an *action girl*, as she starts learning how to use a sword since she is eleven. She may also be considered a *femininity failure*: in the first episodes she tries to do needlepoint and everything else a princess is supposed to do, but fails lamentably. She is also a *spirited young lady*, a girl who has a mind of her own, is not afraid to come against what adults consider fit and becoming, she wants to experiment, to seek adventure, and not conform to her gender or social role. She is a *tomboy princess*, one that is determined not to have the same tragic destiny of her family. Lack of conformity to her initial path – a princess who will just grow up to marry and form an alliance with another kingly house – will drive this princess further and further in a real world, with real people and real problems, giving her many lessons. She is not the traditional girl.

The series *The Game of Thrones* shows other women who seem to be ‘out of place’ or different than what they should be, so-called tomboys. For instance, there is the woman-knight, Brienne, an *action girl* in her own right, a woman who has to fight not only bias and judgement, but also her own nature: she is a big girl, who, by the standards of historical times, and even today, would be considered non-womanly. She is what the television tropes call a *brawn Hilda*, resembling a character in North European mythology. When she tries to be feminine, and wears a dress, her attempt to be a woman like other women fails, and it is this *femininity failure* that is demonstrative of how women are often mis-represented by such categories of femininity. Being big, or not posing as vulnerable, not looking well in gowns are not signs that a woman is less than a woman, but that she is different.

The Game of Thrones also comes with two very powerful women, who do not refuse a life of danger and continuous battle, in order to have power and be adulated by their people. Cersei, who in the television tomboy tropes could be labeled as a *female misogynist*, is a woman who feels the limitations of her gender to extremes: she can see she is talented to lead a people, she knows she could reign better than any king, but she has to just be subdued to the men in her life – her father, her husband, her brothers. Another woman who seems to be able to do anything for her goal – which is power – is Khalesi, the mother of dragons. She is a *spirited young lady*, she is fearless and passionate, she is on a permanent quest to rebuild an empire. She, herself, is not a warrior, but she is able to inspire her army to follow her lead. There are also *amazon brigades* in the series, with the Searwives and the Windlings of the North as representatives.

Girls who fight, girls who are warriors, or who try to overcome evil are present in many cartoons. From the story of Mulan, the Asian princess,

to the story of Pocahontas, the Native-American princess, many girls in cartoons have populated children's imagination in the past few decades.

One of the most appreciated such cartoons was *The Powerpuff Girls*, a series about three little girls who were made by a scientist from "sugar, spice, and everything nice". Without even watching the cartoon one can infer from just this formula of three elements, which of the three girls is the tomboy: the spice one. Buttercup, with her short black hair, not very nice, always ready for a fight, fearless and full of energy, is the tomboy among the three girls who always save the day in their town, fighting with the evil forces. Interestingly, the name of the plant buttercup, is called in Romanian a rooster's spur; it is a small yellow flower, but which is visible due to its bright colours. It is a 'cocky' plant, as brave and assertive is the character in the cartoon. She is an *action girl*, and she gives little girls much confidence in their power and bravery.

There are many other cartoon tomboys, besides the ones we mentioned: Merida, the Genki girls of Japanese cartoons, etc. In a way, these characters make up for the traditional image of girls and women in cartoons, they offer a more active and independent image, one which is closer to reality. Brave Merida, for instance, is a medieval tomboy, able to fight and resourceful, a perfect archer, a girl who is able to convince her mother of the fact that her choices are the right ones, even if they come against 'good behaviour'. She is the perfect *tomboy princess*, and also an *warrior princess*.

There are many movies and series for children and young adults, or just having children and youth as characters, in which tomboys appear as main characters, or the most memorable ones. One such memorable character is Pippi Longstocking, the character in the Swedish author's Astrid Lindgren stories, who was made famous in the series movie for children. Pippi is an adventurer, a girl who is funny and who knows how to make other children laugh. She picks her nose, does not care about the way she looks, she is dressed with pants and boots, and rides a horse without a saddle, she cleans her house and does housework in the most original manner, she is free and opinionated, the child that every child wants to be. She is the first character in literature that takes action against bullies, that is children who bully other children. She is always on the part of those who need help, and does not care if the social or behavioural rules are disregarded. Pippi is strong and powerful, she is a true *action girl*, who can be a *genki girl* at times, but also a *femininity failure*.

Another memorable tomboy is Beatrice "Triss" Prior, the main character in the trilogy *Divergent*, by Veronica Roth, which was transposed to a movie directed by Neil Burger, in 2014. It is a science-fiction movie, with a warrior who is never afraid, who shows confidence in her powers, who does not stop to think before taking risks. She is a super heroine, as

super heroines are also tomboys most of the cases. Triss is not afraid of being different, she accepts her destiny, and sets an example of courage. She is a *warrior princess*.

Some tomboy characters in movies are nothing but the expression of the preference of the actress that plays the role. This is the case with Keira Knightly, the actress who “confessed to her tomboyism”, and who played the part of Juliette “Jules” Paxton in the movies *Bend It Like Beckham*, and the part of Elisabeth, the equal of the pirates in *The Pirates of the Caribbean*. She would rather wear boy’s clothes, she is a *lad-ette*, she is *one of the boys*, preferring not only to wear men’s clothes, but also behaves in a manly manner, so to say. Keira is a *sports passionate girl* type of tomboy, but also a *cleans up nicely* one. She is a free spirit, beautiful and natural, energetic and intelligent, the kind of woman that fits the profile of a tomboy, traditionally speaking, but also fits the profile of the woman of the 21st century.

We do not have another term, so the tomboy might be considered to embody the free spirit, the independent, smart, determined girl of our times:

It is unfortunate that we have no other word available to describe this strong, independent young woman than to refer to her as a tomboy. This continues to convey to girls that growing up clear-eyed and courageous is being like a boy." (Hluchy, 2008)

There are many tomboys in movies, in fact, a very short list of these will clearly demonstrate and support the idea that what used to be a tomboy in traditional literature and thinking, even if categorized and sub-categorized as such by contemporary television tropes, is nothing but the contemporary girl, the free woman, a non-traditional but not anti-traditional woman – she is not against the girly-girl, who is a modern version of a traditional princess, as well. A short list of such movies, in which Popular Culture promotes the tomboy character will also speak about the variety of such characters, of their implication in different social strata, different walks of life, and various activities.

Addie Pray (Tatum O'Neal) in Peter Bogdanovich's 1973 *Paper Moon*

Becky 'The Icebox' O'Shea in the 1994 comedy *Little Giants*

Billie in Don Wise's 1965 musical *Billie*

Calamity Jane in James Butler's 1953 musical comedy *Calamity Jane*

Carter Mason in the 2009 Allison Liddi-Brown's *Princess Protection*

Program Edith in the 2010 Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud's Disney computer-animated comedy entitled *Despicable Me*

Frankie Addams in Fred Zinneman's 1946 drama (based on a Carson McCullers novel) *The Member of the Wedding*

Idgie Threadgoode in John Avnet's 1991 comedy-drama *Fried Green Tomatoes*

Marjorie Winfield in Roy del Ruth's 1951 musical *On Moonlight*

Bay Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson) in Howard Deutsch's 1987 romantic teen movie *Some Kind of Wonderful*

These movies are not arranged in a chronological order, as they are not intended to show that tomboys evolved, or that they existed practically since the beginning of the 7th art, but mostly to recall a variety of characters that appear under the label 'tomboy'. There are many other such movies, and such characters – policewomen (just remember Ida Flammenbaum – Sandra Bullock's role in *Miss Congeniality*), or extremely strong sportswomen (like Maggie Fitzgerald in *Million Dollar Baby*), warriors of all times (Katniss in *Hunger Games*), Lisbeth Salander, in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, who is a computer wizard and a very strong girl, etc.

The same variety can be noticed in television series, which, in my opinion, mirror best the mentalities of a given decade, and of a given society. Starting with the 50s in America, television series have been an ongoing comment on morals and mores, on customs and habits, on changes on the social, cultural and political scenes, on various idiosyncrasies and on the ethos of various groups, on multicultural changes etc. Consequently, a variety of tomboys that appear in television series, can only highlight the way mentalities as to what is the 'proper stuff of women' changed, and is on a permanent re-evaluation.

Agura, the African hunter and second in command in the 2009-released animated series *Hot Wheels Battle Force 5*

Ashley Funicello Spinelli in Disney animated television series *Recess*, which was premiered in 1997

Darlene Conner in *Roseanne*, the sitcom that ran for a long time, from 1988 to 1997

Eve Baxter in the still running sitcom (released in 2011) *Last Man Standing*

Gosalyn Mallard in the 1991 animated series *Darkwing Duck*

Jen Masterson in the Canadian 2004 animated sitcom *6teen*

Jo in the sitcom *The Facts of Life* (1979-1988)

The Kanker Sisters in the animated series *Ed, Edd n Eddy*

Lindsay Weir in the 1999-2000 comedy-drama *Freaks and Geeks*

Flashman Maddie Rooney in the 2014 teen sitcom *Liv and Maddie*

Mary-Kate Burke in the 1998-1999 sitcom *Two of a Kinds*

Punky Brewster in the sitcom *Punky Brewster* running on and off between 1984-1988

Sam Puckett in the 2007-2012 sitcom *iCarly*

Again, the list is just randomly put together, just to show the diversity of such characters in animated series, in series for children and for teens, in series for adults, and the list can be completed at any time. The television tropes of the tomboy character can find quite a few examples in television series, from the fearless policewoman and *action girl* in *Castle* (Beckett), to the brainy *hot scientist* in *Bones* (Doctor Temperance Brennan), from the brave and skilled Xena, in the series *Xena, the Warrior Princess*, and back to the largely applauded sitcom and the challenging *one of the boys* Monica Geller in *Friends*. The list can continue on and on, with more such characters to complete it, giving the true depth and diverse facets of the tomboy.

Tomboys appear in advertisement, in fashion, as well, some of the well-known figures include actresses, bloggers, sports-women, lawyers and doctors, etc. In an article dedicated to tomboys, Nina Zietman, the editor of Cooler and Outdoor channel, and the editor of MPORA, makes a list of celebrities who have been labeled as tomboys, some of whom seemingly resenting this label, the others considering it not offensive at all. The article entitled *Girls Don't Like Being Called Tomboys Anymore*, Zietman starts from a consideration about tomboys in her childhood:

When I was young, tomboy was a label we relished in. It was a badge of honour in my eyes. It meant I was sporty, fast, brave, independent. I didn't care about getting my clothes dirty, climbing trees or playing football with the boys.

Then, she goes to a few other quotes, which consider that the term is outdated, or describing a reality that does not really exist anymore:

"Tomboy doesn't feel present tense to me at all," Jennifer Baumgardner, publisher of the Feminist Press, told the *New York Times*. "It feels retro, this affirmative way of talking about a girl who likes boy things, as if boy things were better." (quoted in Zietman)

Or

"Maybe tomboy is one of those adaptive terms, something once used to describe any girl who just happened to want to wear dungarees and climb a tree," says book editor Wendy McClure. "Now that those things have been more accepted as part of normal girl behaviour, we don't need it anymore." (quoted in Zietman)

Still, there are other voices that have a more open understanding of the word, considering that it still has a clear meaning, even if adapted to the modern world.

"I am never offended when called a tomboy, I think it is a useful descriptor of a woman who has a slightly more stereotypically male way of things. It is a descriptor against a stereotype, not an insult," says engineer Kate Lindqvist-Jones. (quoted in Zietman)

With other women who think that there is still very much to do in terms of how such labels are 'distributed', and how toys for children are still

gendered – on the belief that girls have pink brains, and boys blue brains, the author concludes that there is no such thing as girly-girls and tomboys, but women. Simply women.

Ultimately, girls and women shouldn't feel they need to categorise themselves as 'girly girls' or 'tomboys'. We are all women – whether we like wearing jeans and playing football or experimenting with make-up and painting our nails. We are just women. (Zietman)

Why, then, should we keep such categories, and even find sub-categories of the term? One of the explanations is that in television and movies genres are still important, as genres are what viewers look for when choosing a movie or a television series to watch. Is it a western? Is it a thriller, or a political sitcom? Is it a tomboy story? If the story is about a tomboy, what kind of tomboy would that be? Many viewers are now interested in movies that have a topic related to gaming – a gaming girl would be one tomboy to attract many viewers; many others are attracted by the 'genius squad' kind of movie, where the tomboy could be a *wrenchy wrench*, like the genius mechanic girl in *Scorpion*, etc. etc.

We may conclude that even if the term tomboy may be regarded as sexist, or outdated in the 'real world', it is still useful for the television and film tropes, as well as for literature tropes, as it may encourage readers and viewers to discover the story behind the title. Diverse and multi-facet as it may be, the category of the tomboy shows not only that the character is in a way a-typical, different, not conforming to certain stereotypes, but, even that it will present a new kind of fathoming reality, of finding out changes in mentalities, of calling to surface new occupations and activities, both for women and for men. It is tomboys that may sometimes attract the interest of the audience, simply by being a reflection of novelty, of change, and of free spirit.

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