

## Approaching the Construction of Multimodal Masculinity in a Sample of Picture Books With Two-men Families<sup>2</sup>

### *Aproximación a la construcción multimodal de la masculinidad en una muestra de cuentos infantiles con padres gais*

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to approach the representation of fathers and their construction of masculinity in a sample of picture books with two-father families published in the last decade, paying attention to the relationships between the image and the written text. Using some tools of critical discourse analysis, linguistic and visual patterns of physical contact between the fathers and the child will be analysed in order to deconstruct masculinity and to determine if one of the fathers has a more affectionate relationship with the child. This research will also approach the main textual strategies used to portray and promote gay families. The methodology is qualitative. The discursive analysis shows that, in the sample of picture books analysed, there are aspects related to new masculinities such as representing both fathers doing domestic tasks or taking care of the child, which will have a positive influence on children's education and socialization.

**Keywords:** Masculinities, gay families, children's picture books, critical discourse analysis, multimodality, ideology.

#### RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es aproximarse a la representación de los padres y a su construcción de la masculinidad en una muestra de cuentos infantiles donde el modelo familiar consiste en familias en las que hay dos padres, prestando atención a la relación entre la imagen y el texto escrito. Se emplearán herramientas de análisis crítico del discurso, se analizarán los patrones lingüísticos y visuales de contacto físico entre los padres y el/la niño/a para deconstruir y para determinar si uno de los padres tiene una relación más afectiva con el/la niño/a. Esta investigación también se aproximará a las principales estrategias textuales empleadas para promover y representar las familias gais. La metodología es cualitativa. El análisis discursivo llevado a cabo revela que, en la muestra de cuentos analizados, en general, aparecen aspectos relacionados con las nuevas masculinidades como puede ser la implicación de los dos padres en las tareas domésticas o en las labores de cuidado de las/os niñas/os que aparecen en los cuentos, aspectos que influirán positivamente en la educación y socialización de las hijas/os.

**Palabras clave:** Masculinidades, familias gais, cuentos infantiles, análisis crítico del discurso, multimodalidad, ideología.

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## SUMMARY

1. Introduction; 2. Exploring ways to refer to fathers and connections between the child and the biological father; 3. Deconstructing visual and lexical physical contact; 4. Textual strategies to portray and promote gay families; 5. Discussion; 6. Conclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Children's picture books have an important role in the socialization of children. These books show ideology beliefs and values from the cultural framework and the dominant culture that frames the texts. Picture books transmit their message through the combination of written text and visuals, according to Hoster Cabo, Lobato Suero and Ruis Campos (2018: 91): «The picturebook is a place of communication where readers perceive visual as well as verbal signs. Furthermore, readers are invited to explore them, thus making their own hypothesis regarding the picturebooks' meaning».

Different scholars have paid attention to children's literature in order to understand more fully what children can learn from picture books, how they develop literacy and how ideology is transmitted by the combination of linguistic and visual choices (Hamer, Nodelman and Reimer, 2017; Kümmerling-Meibauer, Meibauer, Nachtigäller and Rohlfing, 2015).

The role of the visual in multimodal texts such as advertisements, textbooks and picture books have also gained attention in the last decades (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2008; Painter, Martin and Unsworth 2013, among others). Various studies have paid attention to the way the image and the written text create meaning in children's picture books because they are multimodal and the visual has a key role in the construction of meaning; Lewis (2001), Moya-Guijarro (2014, 2016, 2017), Painter (2007, 2008), Serafini (2010) and Unsworth and Ortigas (2008). Literacy and literacy pedagogy need to continue exploring the way visuals contribute to extend the meanings expressed by the written text, and that is what justifies studies like this one.

Analysing children's picture books in which there are two fathers contributes to helping children develop their gender schemas by observing the portrayal of gender (Coats, 2018). In this sense, this article intends to contribute to the deconstruction of the gender ideology transmitted by some picture books exploring linguistic and visual patterns of the expression of physical contact by observing how men who have a child in a two-men relationship are represented.

Gender issues are included in literature for children. We have chosen a sample of picture books with two-father families so that when students read they also learn about family models different from the heterosexual one. In this way, learning to read will be associated with the acquisition of values and beliefs connected with the introduction of new family models that challenge the patriarchal model based on a woman and a man. Consequently, reading transmits culture and the ideological values associated with it, including gender ideology (Taylor, 2003).

Five picture books published in the last decades have been chosen to analyse the issues presented in the previous paragraphs and to foreground some aspects of new masculinities: *Daddy's Roommate* (1989), by Michael Willhoite; *One Dad. Two Dads. Brown Dad. Blue Dads* (1994), by Johnny Valentine, with illustrations by Melody Sarecky; *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009), by Lesléa Newman, with illustrations by Carol

Thompson; *Stella Brings the Family* (2015), by Miriam B. Schiffer, with illustrations by Holly Clifton-Brown; and *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017), by Gemma Denham. These picture books are British and North American; they have been chosen because they are useful to approach the representation of gay fathers and their construction of masculinity.

The picture books we have chosen challenge cultural frames because the family pattern they present is a family with two dads. In this sense, they can be considered inside challenging picture books (Evans, 2015). The references to gender in these books concern the construction of masculinity, following Sunderland (2012: 6):

The representation of gender in fiction is not about gender in the sense of what actual men, women, boys and girls tend to be *like*<sup>3</sup> (in terms of their socially-shaped abilities, attitudes, language use, social practices, or whatever). Rather, this is gender, in the sense of the *ideas*<sup>4</sup> about men, women, boys and girls, as well as about gender relations, and masculinity and femininity more widely.

The representation of two men as fathers challenge the myth of romantic love. It started in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century and defines the roles that each person should have at home, implying what true love means. This myth is based on shared beliefs of the true nature of love (Yela, 2003). The main objective of this myth is to foreground one type of relationship, mainly monogamic and heterosexual (Ferrer and Bosch, 2013). The myth of romantic love that frames the mainstream culture affects people's socialization process because it is based on asymmetrical and unequal relationships that guarantee a patriarchal status quo, based on hierarchical and dependent relationships.

This study intends to approach the representation of fathers and their construction of masculinity in a sample of picture books with two-father families, paying attention to the relationships between the image and the written text. The main objectives of this article are: a) to analyse how the fathers are referred to and possible connections between the child and the biological father in a sample of picture books published in the last decades (1989-2017); b) to observe the examples of physical contact between the fathers and the child in order to determine if one of the fathers has a more affectionate relationship with the child; and c) to approach the main textual strategies used to portray and promote gay families and their construction of masculinity.

## 2. Exploring ways to refer to fathers and connections between the child and the biological father

The way both fathers are referred to by the child is very important to deconstruct their importance and their role in the picture book. Moreover, this analysis will be essential to observe if both fathers are given equal importance and if there are references to the masculinity of both fathers. Table 1 offers an analysis of the way the child refers to both fathers, of the father mentioned first and who appears first in the

3 Italics in the original.

4 Italics in the original.

prominent position in the visual. The purpose of this analysis is to see if there are any references to the biological father, according to Rowell (2007: 151): «Having two parents of the same sex raises the question of how these parents are addressed by the child and/or referred to by the narrator to differentiate them (something that may be influenced in the story by the role of and emphasis placed on biological parenthood)».

As we can see in Table 1, the fathers are not referred to by their names but as Dad, Daddy and Papa. In van Leeuwen's classification of social actors (2008: 40), these are examples of 'characterization' meaning "identities and functions they share with others". This contrasts with the reference to Frank in *Daddy's Roommate*, which is an example of 'nomination', in van Leeuwen's categories (2008: 40). He is referred by his name (informal nomination because only the given name is used) and therefore by its 'unique identity'.

Table 1. Ways to refer to the fathers in the picture books.

Picture book	Father mentioned in the first place	Father mentioned in the second place	Reference to the fathers or to gay-parent families in the title of the book	Father who appears first on the right in the visual
<i>Me, Daddy &amp; Dad</i> (2017)	Dad	Daddy	Daddy is mentioned first.	Dad. (Daddy is the first one who appears with the child alone).
<i>Daddy, Papa, and Me</i> (2009)	Daddy	Papa	Daddy is mentioned first.	Papa. (Daddy is the first one that appears with the child alone).
<i>Daddy's Roommate</i> (1989)	Daddy	Neither (There is a clear distinction between the biological father and Frank, his roommate.)	The unique reference to daddy	Frank (He is also the first one who appears with the child alone.)
<i>Stella Brings the Family</i> (2015)	Daddy	Papa	No	Papa
<i>One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads</i> (1994)	Reference to both as blue dads throughout the book.	Reference to both as blue dads throughout the book.	Reference to the two dads in plural.	The blue dad with glasses.

*Daddy's Roommate* (1989) is the only book in which it is clear that Daddy is the biological father, married to the child's mother before he started to have a gay relationship with Frank, his roommate. This is clear from the beginning of the book. The father is seen leaving home, putting his suitcases in the car, while the mother and the child look out the window. This visual image is supported by the written text narrated by the child on the first page: "My Mommy and Daddy got a divorce last year".

In *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017), although there is no reference to the biological father, we can clearly observe that Emily's hair is the same colour as that of her Daddy. The first time they appear in the picture book, it is clear that they are connected with vectors, and it is Daddy who appears behind Emily. Dad appears on the right<sup>5</sup>, and there is a ball and a bone in front of him. On the next page we see the same pattern: Daddy is behind Emily, clearly joined to her by their position and with contact between father and child, whereas Dad appears again on the right, with no contact with the other characters. The first time Emily appears alone with one of the fathers, it is with Daddy, and they are playing with the hose. In contrast, the first time Emily appears with Dad, they are cooking in the kitchen. When the two fathers are running after Emily, it is Daddy again who is behind her, joined by vectors (p. 23). However, that pattern is broken on double spread 24; it is Dad who is behind Emily, almost touching her.

The book shows a parallel structure because it starts with two pages on which the two fathers appear with Emily, and Dad is represented on the right in both cases. Similarly, the book finishes with visuals of Emily again with her fathers on the last two pages of the book, but in this case, it is Daddy who appears on the right. In this way, both fathers are given equal importance and power in the picture book. This contrasts with the fact that this is the only book in which it is the same father (Dad) who is mentioned first and the first who appears on the right. He is given importance and therefore could be the biological father. However, in the other cases the father who appears on the right is different from the one mentioned first in the written text, and therefore both fathers seem to be given equal importance.

In *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009), Daddy is the first one mentioned not only in the title of the book but also the first time both fathers are mentioned. However, he appears on the left on double spread 3, the first page the two characters appear together. Then, on double spread 4, the first time that the child appears with only one of the fathers, the child is with Daddy. He is foregrounded, the child behind him on the right of the page. This contrasts with the next page, where Papa appears on the right, holding the child, who appears on the left side of the page. The fact that Daddy is the first one mentioned in the title of the book, in the book itself and the first one who is foregrounded in the visual could suggest that he is given importance and connects him with the biological father.

5 Since part of the analysis carried out is based on the importance given to the location of the visual character in the illustrations, we will refer briefly to the concepts of left and right locations introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006): the right is the place of new information and the left is the place of given information. Consequently, characters placed on the right are given more importance than characters placed on the left.

Although Daddy is the first element mentioned in discourse, we have also observed that when the two men appear together in the visuals, Papa normally is on the right; this can be seen on the book's cover and on double spreads 3, 6, 15, 17, and 19. Therefore, Papa is presented on the right, the place of new or more important information on the page. Consequently, the written Daddy does not coincide with the visual placing Papa in the prominent position.

Moreover, in this book, the equal role of both fathers is clear from the beginning when both men answer positively to the child's question: "Who wants to play with me today?". In addition, both men appear active on double spread 3. Activities connected traditionally with women such as cooking or sewing are shared by the two men; for example, "Papa helps me bake a pie" (p. 9) and "Daddy shows me how to sew" (p. 12). The division of tasks is also clear in this example: "Daddy brews a pot of tea" (p. 14) and "Papa pours for Bear and me" (p. 15).

In *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads* (1994), it is the blue dad with glasses who is on the right the first time they appear together in a visual. However, that is not really significant because the father with glasses is found on the right 7 times, the same number as the blue dad with Bear does. This suggests that both fathers are given equal importance. Moreover, the fact that they are just referred to as blue dads and there is no specific reference to either of them makes clear that neither is given more importance than the other. Nevertheless, Lou's curly hair is similar to that of the blue father with Bear. When he is shown as a child on double spread 11, he looks like Lou, which suggests he could be the biological father.

*Stella Brings the Family* (2015) is the only book with no reference to either of the fathers in the title. Although Papa is the one who is on the right the first time that Stella appears with them, Daddy is the first one mentioned in the written text when Stella is asked by her classmates who packs her lunch. It is remarkable that Stella appears with her two fathers in all cases with the exception of double spread 24, where she is sitting on Papa's back. It is significant that, out of the 6 cases where Stella appears with her two fathers, each appears on the right 3 times. This gives them equal importance although the fact that Papa has more physical contact with Stella shows that he is closer to her (see section 3).

### 3. Deconstruction of traditional masculinity

The gay relationship of the fathers is foregrounded by the visual physical contact between them throughout the books. In addition, the fact that they are frequently represented in contact with the child highlights the expression of affection between the characters. This also portrays a characteristic of new masculinities, because fathers express affection to the child more openly than heterosexual men have traditionally done.

Physical contact between the characters in *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017) is clear from the beginning of the book. On double spread 7, the first time that Dad and Daddy appear together, Daddy is touching Dad's knee with his foot. On double spread

8, Emily touches Daddy's body with her hair; on double spread 12 Emily touches Dad's arm. On double spread 19, Emily touches Daddy's leg with her leg. On double spread 23, both fathers touch each other with their arms and elbows while they are running. On double spread 27, the two fathers and Emily are in physical contact with each other. Finally, on double spread 28, the bodies of the two fathers are in contact.

In *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009), the physical contact between the characters is clear from the beginning of the book. Both fathers are touching each other the first time they appear together on double spread 3; they also touch each other on double spreads 17 and 19. In some cases, the child touches Daddy (pp. 4, 12, 14) or Papa (p. 7); in other cases, it is Papa who touches the child (p. 5) or Daddy who does (p. 8). There are also cases of both child and Papa touching each other (p. 9) or Daddy and child do (p. 10); both fathers touch the child on double spread 15. The only visual where there is no contact between the characters is on double spread 13, where Papa and the child are looking at each other. There are more examples of physical contact between Daddy and the child; he is also the first one mentioned in the book, which could suggest that he is the biological father.

In *Daddy's Roommate* (1989), there is physical contact between Daddy and Frank: on double spread 3, Frank's foot touches Daddy's shoulder; on double spread 4, Frank's foot touches Daddy's back and bottom; on double spread 5, Frank's arms touch Daddy's back; on double spread 6, both men touch each other with their hands, and it is Frank who is touching Daddy's shoulder.

There is also physical contact between Frank and the child: on double spread 7, Frank's leg is touching the child's arm; there is physical contact between Frank and the child when they are sitting in the same armchair on double spread 8. Frank touches the child with his hand and arm when they go to the zoo on double spread 11. He touches the child's back with his leg while they work in the yard (p. 12). It is also Frank who is next to the child while they are shopping (p. 13).

Daddy hugs the child on double spread 9. Frank and Daddy touch the child with their arms when they go to ball games. Moreover, Frank touches Daddy's back when he puts cream on it while they are on the beach (p. 12). Frank touches Daddy's head with his elbow while they sing at the piano (p. 13). At the end of the book, Frank hugs Daddy and the child hugs and kisses his father (p. 15). Finally, on double spread 16, Frank is holding Daddy. In the last picture, there is physical contact among all the characters represented: the child is holding Frank's arm, Daddy is holding the child's shoulders and the man behind them is holding the woman in front of him.

In *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads* (1994), we find physical contact between both fathers on double spread 3: the father with smart clothes is touching the other one's arm with his elbow (p. 3). The fact that one of the dads brings biscuits to the other one while he is in bed (p. 5) clearly shows affection and caring.

The next picture (p. 6) shows physical contact between Lou and his two dads because they appear next to each other (Lou is between the two dads). It is the father with glasses who is hugging Lou while the other one is just touching his

head with one hand while touching the dog with the other. It is noteworthy that the father who is cooking is also the one who is hugging Lou. Traditionally, cooking and expressing affection are associated with women. This is even more remarkable because it is this father who is represented visually working outside the home. After double spread 6, where characters are next to each other, the next physical contact observed is between the cat and Lou (pp. 9 and 12). On double spread 12, the girl is also patting the cat's head.

There is physical contact between the various characters in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015): on double spread 6, both fathers hug Stella. On double spread 9, Daddy touches Papa's back with his elbow, and the heads and legs of both fathers touch each other. On double spread 16, it is Papa who is shown holding Stella's hand while his head seems to be touching Daddy's arm. On double spread 20, Stella is represented with her whole family, and there is physical contact between different characters.

Stella has a central position in the picture, and she is surrounded by her whole family. Papa appears on her left, holding Stella's hand. Daddy is also holding her hand but on her right. Stella is covering part of Papa's body, which shows that she is closer to him, suggesting a closer connection between both characters. Daddy is touching Nona's shoulder. Aunt Gloria appears between Daddy and Papa, her left arm touching Daddy's. Stella's body is covering part of Aunt Gloria's body; this visual feature and the fact that she is between both fathers and with a central position in the visual reinforce her presence as a woman in the family. Finally, Uncle Bruno and Cousin Lucy appear on the left, clearly connected with vectors with the rest of the characters. Uncle Bruno holds the child's shoulders, and there is physical contact between him and Papa with their arms and their heads.

There is physical contact between Stella and Papa on double spread 24: she is represented sitting on Papa's back while they are playing with other children. Double spread 28 shows physical contact between Stella and her two fathers: Stella is on Daddy's shoulders, and Papa is holding his arm at the same time that his head and Stella's head touch each other. In addition, the two fathers' legs are connected: Daddy's leg is close to Papa's leg while they are walking. The last time Stella appears with her two fathers on double spread 30, it is again Papa who is holding Stella's hand while Daddy is holding a bowl of food. There are more examples of Stella in contact with Papa; i.e., a closer relationship is suggested between the characters.

Analysis of the examples of visual physical contact in Table 2 and Table 3<sup>6</sup> illustrate the way in which physical contact is expressed visually and verbally. There are several examples of visual contact in the picture books analysed. Consequently, authors use mainly visual devices to express affection probably because it is assumed that children will learn better about this topic through visual devices rather than written language.

6 Tables 2 and 3 are based on the ones proposed by Rowell (2007), but we have added two books and the last two columns in Table 2.



Table 2. Visual representation and physical contact in the two-dad texts.

Title	No. of frames	Times dads pictured together	With contact	Times both dads are pictured in family setting	Times contact made in family setting	Times there is physical contact between the child and both fathers at the same time	Times there is physical contact between the child and one of the dads
<i>Daddy, Papa and Me</i>	16	6	4	6	4	2	Daddy and child: 5  (Child touches Daddy: 3; Daddy touches the child: 1; Daddy and child touch each other: 1)  Papa and child: 3 (Child touches Papa: 1;  Papa touches the child: 1; Papa and child touch each other: 1)
<i>Daddy's Roommate</i>	30	21	7	13	2	2	Daddy and child: 2  Frank and child: 5
<i>One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads</i>	26	11	3	5	1	1	0
<i>Me, Daddy &amp; Dad</i>	24	8	3	2	2	1	Daddy: 2  Dad: 1
<i>Stella Brings the Family</i>	23	7	4	3	2	3	Papa: 3  Daddy: 0

Table 2 shows that there is generally more physical contact between one of the fathers and the child, which indicates that one of the fathers is more affectionate than the other or has a closer relationship with the child. Maybe the clear examples of contact suggest who the biological father is although the only book with an open reference to the biological father is *Daddy's Roommate*. The examples of visual physical contact contrasts with the few examples of the expression of physical contact in the written text, as Table 3 makes clear.

Table 3. Lexicalization of physical contact in the two-dad texts.

Title	Characters in contact	Number of times in contact	Type of contact and times made	Examples in context	Number of times contact made
<i>Daddy, Papa and Me</i>	Family	2	Kiss (2)	Now Daddy and Papa are tucked in tight. I kiss them both and say, "Night-night!"	2
<i>Daddy's Roommate</i>	Dad and Frank	1	Sleeping together (1)	Daddy and Frank [...] sleep together	1
<i>One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads</i>	Family	1	Hug (1)	"If they hug you too hard, does the color run off?"	1
<i>Me, Daddy &amp; Dad</i>	Family	0	0	0	0
<i>Stella Brings the Family</i>	Family	2	Hug (1)  Kiss (1)	With a hug goodbye  "I get lots of kisses when I'm hurt either from Papa or Daddy or Nona  or Aunt Gloria or Uncle Bruno or Cousin Lucy [...]."	2

The picture books analysed make explicit the relationship between the two fathers, mainly by physical contact. This portrayal will have an effect on the socialization of children because they will grow up in an environment that promotes the acceptance of two-dad families. However, there are very few written examples indicating the relationship between both fathers, as Table 2 makes clear.

#### 4. Textual strategies to portray and promote gay families

Sunderland and Mclashan (2012: 162–170) refer to textual strategies and the promotion, acceptance, understanding/or celebration of families with same-sex parents as the ‘gay’ strategy’, the ‘different’ strategy and the ‘backgrounding’ strategy.

##### 4.1 The ‘gay’ strategy

*Daddy’s Roommate* (1989) is the only book in which the concept of being gay is clearly indicated, so there is no doubt that this is framed into the ‘gay strategy’ because «[...] gay sexuality is discussed explicitly, in part through the device of explaining the word to the child in the story» (Sunderland and Mclashan, 2012: 163). In *Daddy’s Roommate*, the roommate is mentioned by name on the double spread 3 (“Daddy and his roommate Frank live together”), after being referred to as ‘somebody new’ on double spread 2 (“Now there’s somebody new at Daddy’s house”). This is visually reinforced by the roommate being foregrounded and the child and the father (Daddy) in the middle and the background of the double spread.

On double spread 14 the concept of being gay is introduced by the mother when she is cooking in the kitchen next to the child. Until that point there is no explicit reference to gay men in the written discourse, but the visual suggests it when both men appear in the bed (p. 6) and when Frank is putting cream on Daddy’s back (p. 12). Then, on double spread 15, we read: “Being gay is just one more kind of love”. This sentence is illustrated by a visual of Frank hugging the child’s father; they smile and look at each other, clearly indicating that they are in love. The next double spread contrasts with this one because it represents the mother looking at the child and the father while they are hugging and kissing. As on double spread 10, the dog appears between the mother and the child, establishing a division between the previous family and the change that has taken place after the father left home because he is gay. The book ends normalising the relationship that Dad has with Frank: “Daddy and his roommate are very happy together. And I’m happy too!”

The love between both men and their happiness is highlighted. In this sense, the author tries to normalise a two-dad family and gay sexuality as one of the possible kinds of family and love in society. Consequently, this picture book has a didactic purpose. *Daddy’s Roommate* (1989) clearly shows the expression of affection between the father and Frank, his roommate. There is no doubt that there is a gay relationship between both men because they are also represented sleeping together (p. 5). Their bodies touch each other when they are shaving together. Moreover, Frank is touching Daddy’s shoulder when they make up after fighting. It is also Frank who touches Daddy’s back when he puts cream on it at the beach (p. 12). In addition, on double spread 15, Frank is hugging Daddy while they smile and look at each other. At the end of the book, it is also Frank who touches Daddy’s shoulder when they are sitting on the sofa eating popcorn and watching TV while Daddy is

leaning on Frank. After all the examples of affection mentioned, it is obvious that it is Frank who takes the initiative in the expression of affection in this picture book.

*Daddy's Roommate* (1989) contributes to portraying new masculinities because the two men represented show their feelings: Frank shows his affection for Daddy in several pictures: hugging him, touching him and putting cream on his back. Moreover, Daddy openly shows affection to the child by hugging and kissing him on different pages of the book. The open expressions of affection and tenderness clearly show that the men represented are free from the traditional construction of masculinity legitimized by patriarchal society in which men hardly ever express affection in public. The two men are presented as two human beings who create an egalitarian relationship in which the expression of affection is important.

#### 4.2 The 'different' strategy

Instead of reinforcing the gay strategy, the author of *One Dad. Two Dads. Brown Dad. Blue Dads* chooses the 'different strategy', «where having two Mums or Dads is conceptually recognized as different by the child» (Sunderland and Mclashan, 2012: 165). In this book, the metaphor of the two fathers being represented as blue shows that they are different but can do the same things as straight fathers. In this picture book, the child is questioned about his parents being different by another child, a girl of similar age as Lou, the child who has two blue fathers:

"My dad can stand on his head," I told Lou.  
 "My dad plays me songs on his purple kazoo.  
 He even knows how to make chocolate fondue!  
 Can blue dads do all those things too?"

"What funny ideas you have," replied Lou.  
 "Do you think dads are different,  
 because they are blue?  
 My dads both play piano,  
 and one of them cooks.  
 (He makes wonderful chocolate cream pies).

I have never seen either one stand on his head.  
 But I'm sure they both could  
 ...if the need should arise."

In the previous examples the idea being pointed out is that gay dads are as good as straight dads. Lou makes clear that his fathers can do what other fathers do although they are blue. In this sense, this is the only picture book in the sample texts where having two dads is represented as non-normalised. The word 'gay' is not used in this book; however, Lou's friends ask him all sorts of questions to see if Lou's fathers do the things other fathers do:

Do they work?  
 Do they play?  
 Do they cook?  
 Do they cough?

Lou's answers help to normalise both blue fathers by pointing out that they work, play and laugh as any other father does:

"Of course blue dads work!  
 And they play and they laugh.  
 They do all those things," said Lou.  
 "Did you think that they simply  
 Would stop being dads,  
 just because they are blue?"

Moreover, some of the questions ask how the two fathers ended up being blue, because this is considered strange for the girl with Lou:

Did they go through the wash  
 With a ballpoint pen?  
 Or were they both blue  
 Since the young age of ten?

Did they drink too much  
 Blueberry juice as young boy?  
 Or as kids, did they play  
 with too many blue toys?

In the case of the picture book *Stella Brings the Family*, the 'different' strategy is highlighted because the whole story is about Stella not having a mother to bring to Mother's Day party due to the fact of having two fathers:

But Stella had two dads.  
 Everyone else had a mother. Howie had two!  
 Stella would be the only one without a mother  
 at the Mother's Day party.

The fact of not having a mother, made Stella feel different and be worried:

All week, Stella's  
 appetite was gone.  
 "What's wrong, Stella?"  
 Jonathan asked.  
 "I have no mother to bring for the  
 Mother's Day celebration."

Somebody outside the family asks Stella all sorts of questions to know who does things that for Leon, Howie and Carmen, some of Stella's classmates, are normally done by the mother; this is similar to what happens in *One Dad. Two Dads. Brown Dad. Blue Dads*:

"No mother? Asked Leon. "But who packs your lunch like my mom does for me?"  
 "Daddy knows what I like", said Stella. "The problem isn't lunch. It's that I have no mother to bring for the Mother's Day party."

"No mother? Asked Howie. "But who reads you bedtime stories like my mothers do for me?"  
 "Daddy and Papa read stories to me,"  
 "But who kisses you when you are hurt?" Carmen asked.

"Well, that's a long answer," said Stella.  
 "I get lots of kisses when I'm hurt either from Papa or Daddy or Nona or Aunt Gloria or Uncle Bruno or Cousin Lucy. But I still have no special guest for Mother's Day."

#### 4.3 The 'backgrounding' strategy

In our sample texts there are also examples of picture books that illustrate the 'backgrounding' strategy. As Sunderland and Mclashan (2012: 168) state: "These books do not address the issue of gay sexuality directly or even indirectly, but rather issues surrounding the family or personal life, which are not specific to gay families". *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009) and *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017) give importance to day-to-day activities that can be done by homosexual and heterosexual couples such as cooking, painting, playing instruments, and sewing.

In *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009), the fact that the child has two fathers and that there is a sexual connection between them is clear from the beginning of the story when the two fathers appear so close to each other that their bodies are touching, specifically, part of their backs, hips and bottom. Again, the two characters are connected when, on double spread 6, Daddy's arm is on Papa's shoulder and chest. Almost at the end of the story, the two fathers' bodies are close when they are resting on the tree trunk and their heads, shoulders and arms are next to each other. This visual connection between the fathers suggesting unión and affection between them is reinforced by the written text when, almost at the end of the book, both fathers are on the sofa and the child says: "Now Daddy and Papa are tucked in tight. I kiss them both and say, "Night-night!"".

This book contrasts with *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017) in the sense that there is no affection clearly expressed between both fathers although there is a clear connection

between both characters from double spread 7, the first time that they appear together where Daddy's foot is touching Dad's leg. Similarly, on double spread 23 the two fathers are connected not only because they are both running after Emily but also because their elbows are touching. Finally, when Emily appears with her two fathers in bed, the two fathers are next to each other, Emily between them, but Daddy's arm is around Dad's shoulders. In the next picture we can also see both men watching Emily while she sleeps, and their bodies are clearly connected.

## 5. Discussion

This paper has approached the representation of the fathers in a sample of children's picture books. This study contributes to deconstructing traditional or hegemonic masculinity or "masculine domination" in Bourdieu's terms (1998). This type of masculinity legitimates men's power based on cultural and social acceptance. This contrasts with the type of family presented in the picture books analysed and with the ideology associated with it, in which equal power between both fathers is promoted.

In general, children's picture books influence the construction of ideology and values (Soler Quiler, 2015). The main visual characteristics of the characters contribute to the way masculinity is perceived by the audience, in this case children (Campagnaro, 2015). In this sense, the books analysed are non-sexist (Adler, 1993) because the men represented are doing tasks traditionally associated with women such as cooking, sewing, cleaning, or taking care of the children.

The picture books under analysis not only portray a family pattern different from the mainstream and heterosexual one but also an ideology that supports and normalizes this type of family. Therefore, children will understand as normal and natural the family model presented in these books and will learn to socialize being framed by a same-sex family. The social values presented in these books are associated with respect and acceptance of different types of family, in this case to those with two fathers, which is associated with the social values that the children reading these books will develop, according to Stephens (2018: 137):

Ideologies are necessary for the functioning of social life, since a society cannot exist without structure. If children are to become competent members of society, they need to be able to operate within the various social and linguistic codes used by society to order itself. Embedded in ideology, texts produced for children serve to sustain, and sometimes redefine, social values [...]

The sample texts analysed contribute to foreground a 'gender-progressive' ideology where different types of families are normalised and therefore with equal rights to heterosexual families. The classical institution of the family is deconstructed in order to provide examples of other family models. In this sense, the ideological institution of the family is deconstructed, and in the new family models propose clear expressions of happiness, affection and love are possible, as we can see in some examples of our sample texts:

Table 4. Examples of expressions of happiness, affection and love in the sample texts.

Picture book	Expressions of happiness, affection and love
<i>Daddy, Papa and Me</i>	"Now Daddy and Papa are tucked in tight. I kiss them both and say, "Night-night!""
<i>Daddy and his Roommate</i>	"Being gay is just one more kind of love. And love is the best kind of happiness. Daddy and his roommate are very happy together. And I's happy too!"
<i>One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads</i>	"If they hug you too hard, does the color rub off?"
<i>Me, Daddy &amp; Dad</i>	"I love my Dad and my Daddy. I love them, and they love me. And Max of course, let's not forget, About our very lovely pet."
<i>Stella Brings the Family</i>	"I get lots of kisses when I'm hurt either from Papa or Daddy or Nona or Aunt Gloria or Uncle Bruno or Cousin Lucy."

The age, race and social class of the fathers represented in the sample of books analysed show a general tendency: the age of the men represented in the picture books under analysis cannot be precise but they are supposed to be between 30 and 40. People from other cultures appear only in two picture books of the ones analysed: Lou, the son of the two blue dads, is black in *One Dad. Two Dads. Brown Dad. Blue Dads*. There are also two references to people from other races in *Stella Brings the Family*: Howie's two mothers (one of them is Asian and the other is black) and Leon and his mother (both are black).

All the fathers in the two-father families in the sample are white as are the rest of the characters, with the exceptions mentioned. In addition, the social class of the characters can be considered middle or upper-middle class because representing the child and the fathers doing different activities is not something everyone can afford to do. In this sense, there is a clear relationship between the discursive representation and the social context because adopting a child takes time and costs Money, and not everybody can adopt a child.

## 6. Conclusion

The sample of picture books has been analysed as discourse, i.e., they are texts produced by society that re-create a social reality and that contribute to transform it because the family pattern represented is not mainstream, and therefore it is foregrounded that different models of families are possible.



The sample of picture books analysed not only foregrounds the acceptance of two-dad families but also contributes to the introduction of new masculinities in the educational system. This will have an impact on children's ideology because they will be open to family models different from the traditional heterosexual one. New masculinities are mainly promoted because the fathers represented express their love and affection to their children although it is clear that there is more physical contact between the child and one of the fathers in all the books (see Table 2). Moreover, new masculinities are highlighted because, in general, both fathers share the different tasks at home and they both take care of the child, i.e., gender equality is promoted. Doing housework is represented as normalized, which implies that the child will learn to see housework as normal.

There are no explicit references to masculinity in the written text of the picture books analysed. However, masculinity can be observed visually, mainly through the expression of affection of the two fathers, one of them more obvious or recurrent. The men represented break the model of hegemonic masculinity because they show their affection, they appear doing housework, and they propose egalitarian relationships with equal rights and responsibilities for both men in a same-sex relationship.

In the sample of picture books analysed, traditional models of the construction of masculinity are deconstructed by presenting men sharing housework and taking care of the child. In this way, men are represented as active in their private space, which contrasts with the traditional representation of men as active in their public sphere and passive in their private one. Consequently, these books promote equalitarian values because the child will see as natural that both dads work, cook at home or clean.

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