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The Representation of Gender and Gender Roles in English Textbooks

Representation av kön och könsroller i engelska läroböcker

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks. The aim is to see how women and men are described and to what extent the textbooks show equality between the sexes. The study comprises the examination of six textbooks, two of which were published in the 1970s. Previous research concerning gender issues and textbooks is integrated to give a clearer picture of our investigation. The results show that there is an imbalance in the number of female protagonists, an over-representation of male authors and that occupations for female characters are mainly stereotypical or non-existent. This dissertation will show that the textbooks selected do not live up to the requirements in the policy documents. Finally, the dissertation contains some practical ideas on how to work with gender issues in the classroom.

Key words:
English textbooks, gender roles, representation of gender, stereotypes

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Introduction

Do we really need to talk about gender issues and stereotypes in the classroom in the year 2006? After all, are teachers not modern and educated people? Are learners today really exposed to biases and sexual discrimination? In a perfect world, the answer to this question would be no, but unfortunately it is not. Traditional views on for example gender roles do find their way into the classroom. The atmosphere and way of thinking in the classroom is often a reflection of what goes on in the world outside; therefore it is important to bring issues of gender biases to the surface in the classroom. Teachers must be aware of their huge responsibility when it comes to their choice of textbooks and other materials, because the teaching materials used will influence learners.

A textbook, if well-designed, can be the base for learners' exploration, learning and enjoyment. Textbooks and other teaching materials should be learner-centred and nurture the minds of young people, without enhancing or strengthening stereotypes and gender biases. Textbooks are often a major part of the English language classroom and are supposed to aid the learners' learning. Therefore it is particularly interesting to investigate gender representation in textbooks; as they may influence the learners' way of thinking about gender.

Aim

This dissertation aims to look at the representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks used in secondary and upper secondary school. This type of investigation is important because teachers need to consider what the choice of a certain textbook might entail, and the issues this might bring about. Teachers also have to make learners aware of these issues and help them towards becoming critical respondents to texts. Our hypothesis is that the representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks reflect the development of society towards equality between men and women.

Background

During the last 30 years, our society has undergone a huge change in the traditional views on men and women. From the 1970s onwards women's movement organisations have had a big impact on attitudes, behaviours, and traditional perceptions about the capabilities of men and women, and the representation of gender is changing. When we discuss traditional gender roles we refer to for instance, the fact that women have been the homemakers and the ones taking most responsibility for the upbringing of their children. In contrast to this, men have been providing for the family, and in possession of the strongest position in politics and economics.

In order to create a more equal environment between the two sexes, many linguistic scientists and authors believe that it is necessary to implement a gender perspective on language and on the teaching of language as well. In his speech at a TESOL convention in 1997, Christopher E. Renner, strongly advocated a de-gendering of the English language, and particularly when it comes to material used in schools. The English language is very gender-oriented. For instance, many adjectives are used only about men (*handsome*) and others only about women (*pretty*), and never the other way around. Prof. Renner (1997) gives some examples of masculine terms that can be de-gendered, for instance, the noun "*man*" is used to describe the masculine part of the human race as well as the entire human species, and it is also a suffix describing an occupation (*foreman*, *fireman*). Some words of this category seem to have been easily adapted in their gender-neutral form (*spokesperson*). Prof. Renner also mentions in his article that the suffix –ess used to describe female occupations (*waitress*, *actress*) is mentioned in grammar books as a variation, whereas the masculine form is the normative. Prof. Renner is concerned about the message this sends to learners of English, and is therefore advocates the de-gendering of material used in schools.

Skolverket has recently published a report on the use of textbooks in some subjects, among those English. When asking English teachers about their use of textbooks, three out of four teachers say that they use a textbook almost every lesson, but also feel that the textbook controls their teaching. On the other hand, the teachers feel that using a textbook guaranteed adherence to the curriculum. In the report, Skolverket however, recommend a certain restraint in depending too much on textbooks because they believe that there are many shortcomings regarding how textbooks represent fundamental values and policy documents (138).

Previous Research and Relevant Theories

The concept of representation entails how something or someone is expressed or described. Our focus will be on the representation of males and females in English textbooks. In her textbook *Genus - hur påverkar det dig?* Helena Josefson claims that "many teaching materials represent girls and boys in a traditional gender perspective" (42, our translation). She goes on by saying that this representation "strengthens the perception of what girls and boys should and can do" (42, our translation).

In her book *Creating the Nonsexist Classroom,* Theresa Mickey McCormick talks about how parents, family and other people close to the child create and strengthen "the culturally determined feelings, thoughts, and behaviours that are characteristic of "maleness" and "femaleness" in our society" (38). The concept of social construct is a social mechanism, phenomenon or category created and developed by society. McCormick describes the social construct of gender as the way our surrounding environment creates our gender identity, instead of putting it all down to nature. She also claims that "sex or gender stereotypes are structured, mental categories about males and females based on exaggerated, inaccurate, and rigid generalizations (either favourable or unfavourable)" (44). She says that sex and gender stereotypes are also "prejudiced thoughts or beliefs about women and men that have very little correspondence with reality, yet they are used to describe all members of a sex" (44). On the same note, Renner suggests that sexism, which is connected to certain views on gender, "is the stereotyping of males and females, and the oppression of women by society in the belief that gender is an indication of ability" (2). Even in the enlightened world of today, women are struggling with the fact that they are considered the inferior sex, physically, emotionally and intellectually.

It is of utmost importance to bring up the difference between the concepts of gender and sex in this discussion. Some people have a tendency to use these two concepts interchangeably. Therefore, a differentiating explanation seems appropriate. The concept of sex is purely biological, i.e. it states the difference between a man and a woman physically. The concept of gender, on the other hand, is used to understand and distinguish social and cultural expectations on girls and boys. According to Josefson it is those expectations that primarily define the difference between the two sexes (6).

Josefson brings up a number of things that should be fulfilled in order to reach the goal of equity between the sexes in Sweden (59, our translation):

- Women and men should have the same access to education and the same opportunities for development of personal ambitions, interests and talents
- Women and men should have the same opportunities for economic independence and the same prerequisites for enterprising, work and development
- Women and men should have equal opportunities to affect and gain power and influence
- Women and men should be equally responsible for household and family
- No one should be exposed to gender related violence

The national view on issues such as gender equality naturally has an impact on the educational system and how that issue is regarded and dealt with in the teaching situation. The policy document Lpo94 says that:

> The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in learners those fundamental values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school should represent and impart.

The texts in the policy documents aim to address and work against traditional gender roles in order to assure that learners' choice of education and plans for the future are not hindered by gender, social group, ethnicity or any other matter.

On an everyday level, the school must ensure that it lives up to the requirements of equality between women and men. A small but nevertheless important task for teachers is to analyse the material used in the classroom, in this case the English classroom, to investigate the situation.

Luis Ajagán-Lester discusses in his chapter "Text och etnicitet", the prominent position of the educational system when it comes to the creation of texts. It is at school that many children learn what a "good text" is and what such a text is supposed to contain. The school not only conveys but also creates the correct meanings of a text. According to Ajagán-Lester this unfortunately means that the textbook has a selective function in that it may organise knowledge by choosing and combining certain values and certain knowledge. He says that "the text may silence, eliminate some values and

accentuate certain views on the world and cultural traditions" (122, our translation). In this context, it is relevant to talk about the teacher's contribution to the creation of meaning.

In *Discourse Roles, Gender and Language Textbook Dialogues* Martha A. Jones, Catherine Kitetu and Jane Sunderland say that the reader's interpretation of a text cannot be predicted and that readers will respond to texts in many different ways according to current literary theory. They also claim that the teacher's interpretation of a text will affect learners' way of looking at the text and that

> when she (sic) uses the text, the teacher may give it a meaning completely different from that intended by the writer. An apparently sexist text can be addressed critically by the teacher and/or learners; by the same token, a progressive, egalitarian one can be interpreted by a conservative teacher in non-progressive ways (2).

For teachers of English this means that they have to be aware of their own influence on the text when using it in the classroom.

In order to examine a text in depth from a gender-equity perspective one must ask the question: What does an "equal text" imply?

In 1998 Skolverket published a report by Moira von Wright called *Kön och text – när kan man tala om jämställdhet i fysikläroböcker?* The report was part of a project dealing with equality in textbooks. Von Wright uses two different terms; *gender-sensitivity* and *gender-conscious*. Gender-sensitivity means that consideration is taken for gender issues when they are important, and ignored when they are not important. In other words, gender issues are discussed based on the context (18). Gender-conscious means consciously problematising the gender issue. To completely ignore gender and strive for gender-neutral education will merely maintain the current situation. To always enhance gender issues might cause the exclusion of other factors, such as ethnical, social and cultural differences. An equal text should be including, in that it is open towards many perspectives and possible readers, and does not exclude others (29). According to von Wright, a text that corresponds to all these criteria of a gender-sensitive, gender-conscious and gender inclusive text is an "equal text" (29).

There are a number of criteria to be fulfilled by a text in order for the reader to decide if the text is in fact gender-neutral. For instance, the text can be analysed by posing some of von Wright's questions: Who does the text address and in what way? How does the text describe the structure of society, and the relations between men and

women? Does the text encourage actions where men and women are on equal terms? Is the text consciously avoiding stereotyping, trivialisation and sexism, and does the text provide interesting and motivating content (31 ff)?

There is very little literature regarding the analysis of textbooks. The purpose of analysing textbooks has changed over the years, and criteria that were important earlier are not as relevant today. Leslie E. Sheldon claims that many teachers are not even aware that methods of analysing textbooks exist, and therefore base their choice of textbooks on other factors than the actual content of the textbook (240). However, Sheldon believes that it is not possible to set up a universally applicable checklist that would cover all circumstances, rather the teachers themselves should participate in creating such as list based on their local requirements. He suggests that one of the items to investigate when preparing such a list, could be cultural bias and a question could be: "Does the course book enshrine stereotyped, inaccurate, condescending or offensive images of gender, race, social class or nationality?" (244)

Method

This dissertation comprises critical analyses of textbooks used in the secondary and upper secondary school. In order to investigate the development in English textbooks over the last decades two textbooks from the 1970s will also be examined, which are still in use in schools in Malmö.

In our analyses, a number of different aspects will be taken into consideration, such as the gender distribution of narrators and main characters, the description of gender/gender roles and the representation of gender in illustrations. These aspects will be examined quantitatively.

How illustrations are analysed to determine if they are gender inclusive or – exclusive is a matter of subjectivity. It is not possible to set up a scheme that the illustrations must fit. A selection of illustrations from three of the textbooks is investigated with the following parameters in mind:

- Pictures that reflect stereotypical appearances and pictures that exceed stereotypical appearances
- Pictures that reflect stereotypical activities and pictures that exceed stereotypical activities.

The illustrations analysed in depth in this dissertation were selected randomly from three of the textbooks (one secondary school, one upper secondary school and one book from the 1970s). Focus on the in-depth analysis was given to pictures representing males and/or females. However, all illustrations in the applied textbooks were included in the quantitative analysis of how many males and how many females appeared.

Analysis

Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland say that "the textbook carries a unique authority which is created and maintained through its texts […] these are understood as the legitimate version of a society's sound knowledge – the knowledge that every learner has a primary responsibility to master" (8).

Wings is a series of English textbooks for secondary school. It is divided into 4 steps and was published in 2004. According to the publishers, the series is particularly effective in reaching the goals of the curriculum, and it aims to teach learners to reflect and take responsibility for their own learning.

The other secondary school textbook used in this dissertation is *Good Stuff* which according to the publishers facilitates working thematically. It is divided into levels which makes it easy for learners to work independently. A lot of the issues are based on real life situations and are meant to challenge learners into discussions. The language is modern and addresses young people on their own level. The publishers have strived to move away from so-called "school English".

Blueprint B is used at upper secondary school in the B-course of English as a subject. The book has four editors, two men and two women. It is divided into seven chapters, which all follow a certain theme, for example; "Thrill and suspense", "Love is in the air" and "Reality Bites". Each chapter comprises a collection of longer and shorter texts with a number of exercises. There is a mixture of contemporary texts and old classics. There is also one chapter that focuses only on poetry. Each chapter of *Blueprint B* ends with the "blue pages", which contain speaking and writing exercises related to the theme of the chapter. At the end of the book the "blue pages" take over and help guide the learner through different types of speaking situations and text production. In addition, there is a grammar section and an overview of the development of English literature. There is also a CD enclosed.

Toolbox is another textbook used at upper secondary school in the A-course of English, it was published in 1998 and is edited by two women and one man. *Toolbox* contains forty-five texts of different lengths. The level of difficulty increases the further along the learner gets. Every fifth text is called "A good read" and is suggested by the editors as suitable for individual work. In connection to each text there is a variety of

exercises and word work. There is also a floppy disc with extra exercises enclosed in the book.

All in One 2 is aimed at year two in upper secondary school, it was published in 1975 and edited by three men and one woman. The texts are all authentic texts from the 19th and 20th century, and almost all of them are by well-known authors. Some texts are authentic newspaper articles. There are extensive English-Swedish wordlists for all the texts, and an integrated exercise book. The exercises are related to the corresponding texts and consist mainly of vocabulary revisions, grammatical gap exercises and translations. Recordings of some of the texts are available. There are no dialogues in the book. There are a number of contemporary and classic poems.

All in One 3 was published in 1976; it is aimed at year three at upper secondary school and is edited by three men and one woman. The texts represent different times and language areas. There are also approximately twenty-five shorter poems. *All in One 3* contains a large selection of texts, many of them suitable for extensive reading. The workbook is included in the main book and contains wordlists for the different texts and also some "check-your-reading-questions". The given exercises are focused not on isolated form-based language phenomena, but on the reading experience and the function of the language. On the tape included the texts are read by people with a variety of accents to give learners an opportunity to listen to different pronunciations.

Authors

A majority of the contributions in the textbooks are authored by men. There is no evidence, however, that male authors cannot address issues or provide role models for females. The problem is that learners might get the impression that female authors do not produce interesting or useful texts as they are not represented to the same extent. Consequently, the number of male and female authors contributing to the textbooks is studied to see if there is an even distribution in the textbooks.

In *Wings* there is a fairly even distribution of authors (9 female and 11 male authors):

Figure 1 - Authors in *Wings*

The division of male (22) and female (10) contributing authors in *Good Stuff D* is shown in Figure 2:

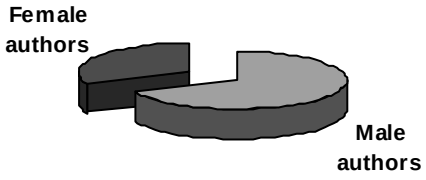


Figure 2 - Authors in *Good Stuff*

The figures are the same for *Toolbox*: 10 women and 22 men have contributed with texts in *Toolbox*.

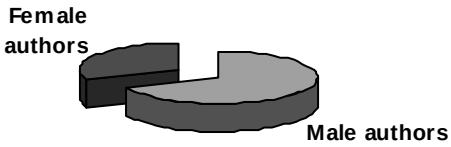


Figure 3 - Authors in Toolbox

A large number of texts in *Blueprint B* are written by male authors (13), they clearly outnumber the female authors (7).

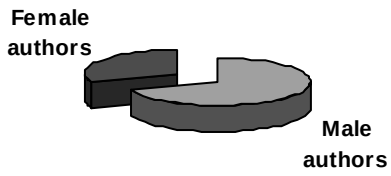


Figure 4 - Authors in *Blueprint*

The gender of the contributing authors in *All in One 2* is distributed as follows: There are 6 female and 30 male authors.

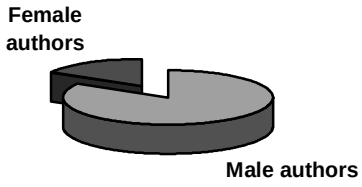


Figure 5 - Authors in *All in One 2*

The results are not better in *All in One 3* where there are 23 male authors and no more than 3 female authors.

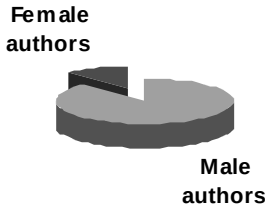


Figure 6 -Authors in *All in One 3*

Occupations

A large number of occupations are mentioned in the textbooks. The distribution between occupations held by men and women, respectively, was investigated. A common feature is that a majority of the occupations mentioned are held by men, whereas the women are described either without an occupation or with a stereotypical one. The problem with representing women in stereotypical occupations, or with no occupations at all, is that learners might get the idea that some occupations are only appropriate for men and some only for women, or that women in English speaking countries do not have a job. After all, women make up a large percentage of the workforce, and this must be supported in the textbooks. All these stereotypical images of women go against the fundamental values that the Swedish school is obliged to instil.

When it comes to the description of occupations held by persons in *Wings*, there is a tendency to describe women with rather stereotypical occupations. An investigation reveals that women are working as for instance florist, teacher, nurse and hairdresser, while men are working as veterinarian, pilot, policeman, PE instructor, inventor, green-grocer, among many others. There are however a number of teachers of both sexes. There are also a number of occupations where the gender is not revealed.

Male (16)	**Female (8)**	**Gender not specified (7)**
Archaeologist	Landlady	Teacher (he/she)
PE instructor	Teacher	Teacher (they)
Vet	Radio host	Shop assistant
Pilot	Nobel Prize winning author	Shop manager
Ice-cream man	Au pair	Principal
Spy	Nurse	Store detective
Policeman	Hairdresser	Inspector
Radio personality	Florist	
Singer		
Lifeguard		
Grocer		

Male (16)	Female (8)	Gender not specified (7)
Greengrocer		
Chemist		
Teacher		
Inventor		
Steward		

Figure 7 – Occupations in *Wings*

When listing the occupations held by men and women in *Good Stuff D* it appears that female occupations are for instance models, actresses, doctors, teachers, artists and athletes, while men work as for instance neurologists, presidents, journalists, singers, have various military occupations, are scientists, and professors, among many others. There are a number of teachers of both sexes. There are also a number of occupations where the gender is not revealed.

Male (28)	Female (7)	Gender not specified (7)
Neurologist	Model	Scientist
Fisherman	Actress	Teacher
Singer	Doctor	Guide
Crocodile hunter	Teacher	Artist
Zoo manager	Coach	Musician
Mime	Athlete	Judge
Street performer	Artist	Lawyer
President		
Journalist		
Teacher		
Crewman		
Minister		
Headmaster		
Vocalist		
Drummer		
Lawyer		
Captain		
Engineer		
Lieutenant		
Skipper		
Radioman		
Torpedo man		
Detective		
Photographer		
Writer		
Author		
Scientist		
Professor		

Figure 8 – Occupations in *Good Stuff*

Some of the occupations held by women in *Blueprint B* are; nurse, florist, hairdresser and teacher. There are several more occupations held by men such as; political editor, director, bag boy and psychiatrist.

Male (16)	**Female (9)**
Bag boy	Florist
Author	Teacher
Carny	Nurse
Psychiatrist	Anthropologist
Psycho biologist	GP (general practitioner)
Sexologist	Shop assistant
Doctor	Hairdresser
Comedian	Receptionist
Film critic	Assistant editor
Teacher	
Steamboat captain	
Social psychologist	
Political editor	
Editor	
Director	
Military occupations:	
Sergeant, captain, colonel & major	

Figure 9 – Occupations in *Blueprint B*

Occupations mentioned in *Toolbox* held by men are for instance; horse-breeder, special constable, scientist and professional boxer. Examples of female occupations in the book are stuntwoman, servant, nurse and sports nutritionist.

Male (24)	**Female (8)**
Horse-breeder	Servant
Farmer	Choir leader
Coalminer	Sports nutritionist
Singer	Landlady
Special constable	Spokeswoman (for London Underground)
Barman	Stuntwoman
Scientist	Au pair
Professional boxer	Nurse
Referee	
Professional football player	
Waiter	
Bus driver	
Expedition guide	
Police officer	
Pilot	
Actor	
Stuntman	
Car mechanic	
Writer	
Gardener	
Veterinarian	
Military occupations:	
(marine corporal, captain, officer)	

Figure 10 – Occupations in *Toolbox*

A list of the mentioned occupations in *All in One 2* shows that there are a considerably larger number of occupations held by men than by women. In fact, not only are there only few women mentioned in the book; for most of them an occupation is either not listed, or they are married women, housewives or mothers. The few occupations that women hold are as factory workers, actresses, waitresses, saleswomen, typists and prostitutes.

Male (32)	**Female (6)**
Druggist	Factory worker
Trash collector	Actress
Construction Engineer	Waitress
Cabinet-maker	Saleswoman
President	Typist
Farmer	Prostitute
Veterinarian	
Driver	
Shop manager	
Pipe-fitter	
Gaffer	
Tooth-drawer, dental surgeon, dentist	
Blacksmith	
Barber	
Salesman	
Policeman	
Doctor	
Clerk	
Correspondent	
Reporter	
Major	
Psychiatrist	
Sailor	
Ganger	
Pilot	
Conductor	
Violinist	
Bricklayer	
Workman	
Historian	

Figure 11 – Occupations in *All in One 2*

The occupations mentioned in *All in One 3* are just as stereotypical as in *All in One 2*. The women mentioned are nurses and servants, whereas the men hold a variety of positions on all levels.

Male (18)	**Female (6)**	**Gender not specified (3)**
Counterman (in diner)	Teacher	Policemen
Doctor	Nurse	Coroner
Consulting surgeon	Governess	Pianist

Male (18)	Female (6)	Gender not specified (3)
Café owner	Waitress	
Masseur	Typist	
Master (at school)	Servant	
Landlord		
Coachman		
Professor		
Police officer		
Solicitor		
Junior clerk		
Teacher		
Butcher		
Fireman		
Wine merchant		
Flower- seller		
Musician		

Figure 12 – Occupations in *All in One 3*

Illustrations

The textbooks contain a large number of photographs, cartoons and other illustrations. The illustrations are useful for introducing the text, and can often be used as a basis for discussion in the classroom. In order to obtain gender equality in the textbooks, not just the texts themselves but also the illustrations must present role models for boys and girls, rather than stereotypical images or activities.

In *Wings*, there is an even distribution between males and females in the illustrations. None of the illustrations showed men or women engaged in stereotypical actions, such as women doing housework, men doing garden work etc.

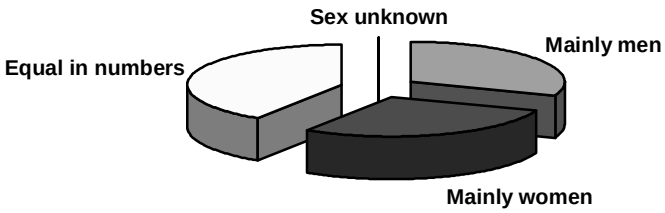


Figure 13 - Illustrations in *Wings*

The illustrations in *Good Stuff D* were analysed in order to see the distribution of males and females, how they are depicted and how that is reflected on a gender-equality basis.

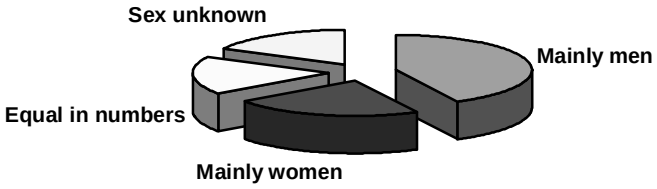


Figure 14 - Illustrations in *Good Stuff D*

The majority of pictures show mainly males (17), and a smaller number of the illustrations had mainly women (9). On the other hand, there are a number of illustrations with males and females in equal numbers (9). None of the illustrations promotes a stereotypical view of men and women.

The illustrations in *Blueprint B* mostly represent men, in 42 of the pictures men outnumber women, while the equivalent for women is only evident in 17 of the pictures.

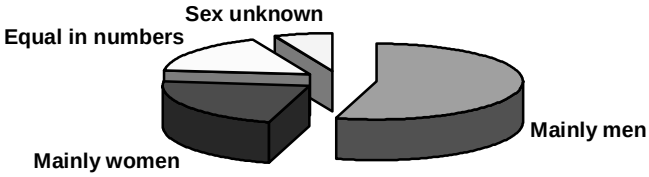


Figure 15 - Illustrations in *Blueprint B*

The illustrations in *Toolbox* represent more men than women; there are mostly men in 24 of the pictures while the women outnumber the men in only 6 of them.

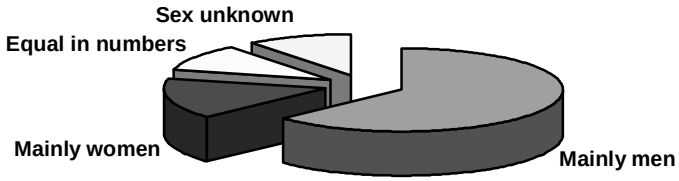


Figure 10 - Illustrations in *Toolbox*

The illustrations in *All in One 2* differ a lot from the illustrations in the contemporary textbooks above. Almost all women are depicted as housewives or as holding other stereotypical positions, or are placed in situations inferior to the men. As the chart shows there is an overrepresentation of men in illustrations, 24 men as compared to 3 women.

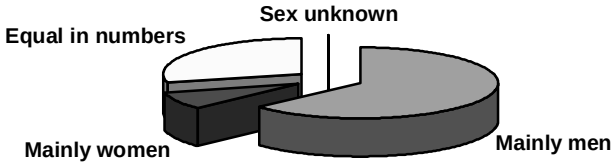


Figure 12 - Illustrations in *All in One 2*

Illustrations in *All in One 3* are fairly evenly distributed between men and women as shown in Figure 14.

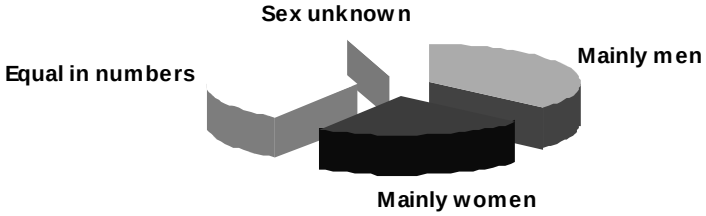


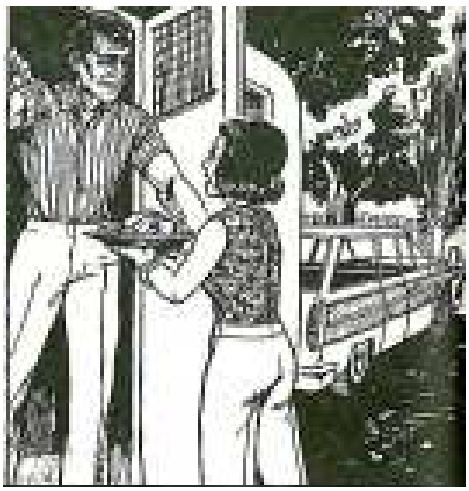
Figure 14 - Illustrations in *All in One 3*

A selection of illustrations from three of the textbooks (*Good Stuff D, Blueprint B* and *All in One 2*) were divided into the below groups with the following parameters in mind:

Pictures that reflect stereotypical appearances
- Suntanned, dirty man, wearing outback clothes
- Muslim women in burqas
- Small boy with a gun
- Woman in long dress & hat and man in uniform
- Men in farming clothes with horses
- Man in military uniform

Pictures that challenge stereotypical appearances
- Girl in leisure-wear on the ground chewing a straw
- Girl with short hair, dyed black, and a dog collar around her neck

Pictures that reflect stereotypical activities
- **Aggressive man – frightened woman (*Good Stuff*)**
- Man wrestling a crocodile
- Man on speaker's stand
- Man and woman standing, woman holding a baby
-
- Man pointing gun at other man
- Man collecting trash – woman looking on
- **Woman offering food to man (*All in One*)**



- Women at sewing machines in a factory
- Men supervising women in factory
- Male doctors and female nurses in operating room
- Woman in pretty dress dancing with sailor
- Native man fishing
- Group of women preparing food
- Native woman dancing
- Man drinking beer beside his hunting rifle

Pictures that challenge stereotypical activities
- Girls playing basketball
- Man feeding cats
- Man picking flowers
- Men hugging and cheering
- Man washing dishes

Discussion

In one of the textbooks (*Wings*) it struck us that the number of famous men mentioned were four times as big as the number of famous women. On this note we would like to mention an article in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* "Skolverket kritiserar", from 2006 about a recent report prepared by a number of researchers for Skolverket. The report analyses twenty-four textbooks and the conclusion was that some textbooks are quite stereotypical and could be perceived as discriminating. For instance, in one textbook which presents the history of music, many famous male musicians are mentioned, but not a single female. Another example is a picture from a biology book illustrating the famous Swedish high jumper Kajsa Bergqvist on her way over the bar. The problem with this picture is the camera angle, which is focused on her tight trousers and her crotch. According to Skolverket's project leader, Charlotte Samuelsson, this is not only degrading for Kajsa Bergqvist, but for all women.

The good thing about this report is that gender issues are brought up and made visible by Skolverket. When looking at these examples in combination with our own analyses, one could claim that the textbooks used in schools today do not live up to the standards and goals of the policy documents. The textbooks do not show equality between men and women; instead they send the message that men are more important than women and that it is okay to portray women as objects.

There are very few women in the stories, and when there are, they are described in rather stereotypical ways, particularly when it comes to their occupations, which seems surprising for textbooks recently published in Sweden. In other words, there is a risk that what learners hear and read in the classroom they will take with them when they use English outside of the classroom. If learners are exposed to, for instance, a large number of names of famous men, and only to a few women they might conclude that either there are few famous women, or that they are not worth mentioning.

In his research, Renner has discovered that in most English textbooks female characters are fewer and have more limited occupations and roles than the male characters (8). When applying Renner's theory, our results vary. In *Blueprint B* there are an equal number of male and female protagonists, but in *Toolbox* the amount of male protagonists is more than double the amount of female protagonists. When looking at

All in One 3 the results are similar to the ones from *Toolbox*: The male protagonists heavily outnumbers the female protagonists. Renner believes that "the impact of this reality may affect classroom practices and restrict female learners' language learning opportunities" (8).

When using a textbook with an overrepresentation of male characters, teachers will need to develop awareness in their learners to discuss and consider gender roles and representations. Any imbalance in texts or dialogues may lead to the assumption that this is how native speakers use the language. There is a risk that gender imbalance in classroom materials will lead to assumptions about how much female/male learners should speak outside the classroom.

Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland have some suggestions on how textbook editors can deal with the problem of unequal relationships between male and female characters in the texts. They suggest that authors either attempt to make the occupational roles of men and women in textbooks mirror those of society, or create positive role models in the textbooks by describing women who are employed in a wider range and at higher level of professions than they really are, and perhaps even assuring that there are the same number of men and women in the professions described, for instance the same number of managers and the same number of lorry drivers (3). Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland believe that it is possible to achieve gender balance in the language practice opportunities but that the risk is that textbooks may lack in credibility when they do not describe society as it really is. A reason for the imbalance between men and women in the textbooks is not only gender-related; it is also a matter of status inequality. Many women hold lower-status occupations, and textbooks need to take this into consideration in order to create a balance between female and male language. They also cite other researchers who have discovered that while men talk more than women, women ask more questions, bringing up the men's topics and providing conversational support. If this is mirrored in the textbook dialogues, female learners will spend more time practising supportive rather than assertive use of language (3). Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland point out that the use of dialogues in the classroom reflects inequality even more because in a classroom with an even number of males and females, males will almost always be asked to read the male dialogue, and females will be asked to read the female dialogue. If dialogue roles are not evenly distributed, it means that all learners may not get equally good learning opportunities (4).

It would have been useful to discuss the choice of texts with the editors. Why did they select this particular text or excerpt, and were there any considerations that texts should be in accordance with the policy documents? This, however, will be a task for another dissertation.

We have looked at a limited number of textbooks, and only a small selection of texts have been analysed in depth. Thus, it is not possible to make any generalisations about the results found. There may very well be other English textbooks that live up to the policy documents in a better way than the books we have investigated.

Conclusion

The contemporary textbooks studied in this dissertation present texts which are modern and which deal with current issues of high relevance to learners. Our hypothesis was that the gender and gender roles in English textbooks would reflect the development of society towards equality between men and women. However, our study of occupations held by women or men in the texts, of the number of male and female authors and of the distribution of males and females in the illustrations, show that there is a tendency in all of the textbooks to promote males and to diminish females. It is not surprising that the textbooks from the 1970s contain very stereotypical views on gender roles; the problem is that these books are still in use in some schools.

Based on the results of our analyses, our hypothesis must unfortunately be rejected. Since the policy documents are very clear on the importance of promoting equality between men and women, the textbooks analysed in this dissertation do not live up to the requirements set by the government. Skolverket reaches the same conclusion in their recent report regarding textbooks.

Because of the results reached in this dissertation and because of the extensive use of textbooks in the English classroom, teachers must bear in mind that they have a huge responsibility for providing a more versatile view on gender representation than is provided in the textbooks. We have included a chapter with some practical ideas and suggestions for films suitable for working with gender issues in the classroom.

There are numerous aspects regarding gender roles in textbooks and in the classroom that could be investigated. In this dissertation we have looked at some of them. Let us therefore conclude by quoting Hatch:

> It is not an exaggeration to say that no qualitative analysis is ever complete. There are always more data than can be adequately processed, more levels of understanding than can be explored, and more stories than can be told. Data analysis is like teaching – there is always more you could do (149).

We hope that this dissertation will inspire others to pursue the questions of representation of gender roles.

Ideas for working with gender representation in the classroom

Renner says that "Working with the fundamental values is a part of the daily work in schools. It is the foundation of values that should be permeating all work in school" (8) and suggests some methods that teachers can use to do so:

- Analyse attitudes about gender and gender roles in the material;
- Examine whether things people do or say are related to their position as a man or a woman;
- Consider role reversals for the characters in the situation presented;
- Explore the learners' reactions to characters that are not "gender correct", for instance a woman pilot and a house-husband; and ways of using language that are not "gender appropriate", for instance women leading decision processes.

Kajsa Svaleryd has developed a unique "equality pedagogy" and her book *Genus Pedagogik* presents some good examples of how to work with gender issues in the classroom, with textbooks and other teaching materials as a base:

- What do you see in the picture?
- What does the person do in the picture?
- Is he/she passive or active?
- Does he/she look determined or undetermined?
- Is the person presented as an object or as a subject, a feeling/thinking/acting person?
- What do the girls/women do? Can the boys/men do the same thing?
- Is there anything boys can do that girls cannot? And vice versa.
- Is there any occupation that only women can have and not men? And vice versa.
- Is housework a job? Who does the housework in your house?

Another way to bring up gender issues in the English classroom is to show a film that deals with the subject. Recent films suitable for secondary and upper secondary schools are:

Billy Elliot (2000). An English film about a boy who is introduced to ballet and finds that he has at last "come home". His father prefers his former interest in boxing. The film deals with issues such as the discrepancy between the choices of an individual and the structures of society. Directed by: Stephen Daldry.

Bend It Like Beckham (2002). A British film about a second generation Indian immigrant girl in her upper teens who loves to play football. Her parents do not think girls should be playing football, and want to find a suitable Indian man for her. Directed by: Gurinder Chadha.

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