

Making Representational Meanings of Gender Images in Malaysian School English Textbooks: The Corpus Way

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Abstract

Images are in fact representations of reality that are also instrumental in creating imaginary relations between the participants in the image and the viewers. School textbooks are abound with visual images that sometimes can articulate more forcefully social and cultural meanings more so than written texts. This article focusses on a preliminary investigation on the making of representational meanings associated with gender and to critique the patterns of images in relation to gender stereotyping in a selected Malaysian Primary school English textbook with a data of 78 images analysed. Using Kress & van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design (2006) as our method of analysis, we identify and describe gender representations through features of narrative, cultural and biological categorization and circumstance of setting. The analysis focuses on the results of three representational meanings of participant type, relational and institutional categories with the inclusion of ethnicity. Its preliminary findings reveal a predisposition towards gender stereotyping between male and female representation.

Keywords: corpus-based study, gender stereotyping, school textbooks, social semiotics, visual analysis

Introduction

Within the larger spectrum of studies on gender biasness and practices of stereotyping, school textbooks have drawn particular interest among numerous researchers over the past decades (Bahiyah et al. 2008, 2009; Dutro, 2002; Poarch & Monk-Turner, 2001; Turner-Bowker, 1996; Crabb & Bielawski, 1994; Dellmann-Jenkins, Florjancic & Swadener, 1993; Kortenhuis & Demarest, 1993; Mohamad Yassin et al. 2012; Mohd Jasmani et al. 2011; Paterson & Lach, 1990; Collins et al. , 1984; Weitzman et al., 1972). In examining the depiction of participants or characters (van Leeuwen 2006) in the textbook images, we pose this question: *How are participants in the images represented?*

Gender is one of “microcosm of ideologies, values, and beliefs” (Taylor, 2003:301). Therefore, messages about gender roles and gender identity that are transmitted through these texts are thought to affect the future behaviour of the children who consume them as they formulate their own roles in society (Eisenberg, 2002; Drees & Phye, 2001). This is a point which is further stressed by Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996:63) who contend that children have the ability to both “promote certain beliefs and certain forms of behaviour while discouraging others”.

This study aims to firstly examine and describe the making of representational meanings associated with gender in the textbook images. Second, it aims to critique the patterns of images in relation to gender stereotyping in Malaysian English textbooks. Specifically, it investigates how gender stereotyping is visually represented in selected English primary textbooks in Malaysian schools and to explore the patterns of representational meanings that create and perpetuate gender stereotyping in Malaysian school textbook images. This is investigated using a corpus analysis approach.

Literature Review

Research on gender construction in school textbooks can serve children well. A heightened sense of awareness about gender disparities could lead to conscious steps being taken by writers, illustrators and publishers to provide children with access to children’s books that avoid sexist practices. Clark (2002:288), for example, observes that in recent decades, the extensively analysed ‘Caldecott Award’ winning books in the United States “have been much more likely to feature female characters” and in less stereotyped ways compared to children’s books from the 1960s. Therefore, in more recent publications, children, both girls and boys, have the opportunity to see themselves in a greater range of roles, activities and settings. This is a significant step in reducing the social stereotyping of gender identity.

Another reason why gender construction in school textbooks has continued to hold the attention of researchers is the fact that gender awareness and instruction have featured prominently in the school curriculum, and therefore, it is felt that “such literature had to be reviewed for bias” (Rosa, 1999:5). In Malaysia, English language has been revitalized in the classrooms as the language continues to be regarded as crucial for the country’s growth. Among the reasons why mastery of the English language remains prominently on Malaysia’s national agenda is the firm belief that the language is a key ingredient in creating knowledge workers, a necessary prerequisite to compete in a knowledge-based economy (Had Salleh, 2003). The teaching of English has obviously been the focus of attention because the supply of a Malaysian workforce competent in the English language is very much dependent on the emphasis placed on the language within the primary and secondary school curricula.

A major area in the study of gender and gender construction that is still lacking is the visual analysis even though there have been several studies in recent years that focus on images/visuals identity such as the one conducted by Abu Bakar (2012). Othman et al. (2012) analyse the frequency count of visual images in a selection of Malaysian English school textbooks for instance. Although their study is helpful towards the general understanding of the importance of visual analyses when analyzing texts (instead of just focusing on the written representation), there is still much to be done and to be understood

especially as to what roles images or visuals have in shaping gender awareness among Malaysian pupils. This paper highlights the use of corpus tool in analyzing images in school textbooks and discusses the preliminary analysis of the use of corpus tool as its method of analysis. It addresses these research questions:

- 1) What types of visual images are found in the selected English primary textbooks used in Malaysian schools?
- 2) To what extent are gender biasness and stereotyping represented in the visual images of the selected Malaysian primary English school textbook?

Data and Methodology

Sample

As this is a preliminary finding to test the initial analytical framework, one English textbook from the lower primary level (Year 2) was chosen. The lower level of primary education in Malaysia encompasses year 1 to year 3 and we chose lower level primary level as it is the beginning of formal education for all Malaysian school children in general. A year 2 book is chosen as it is the mid-level of lower primary education level. The primary level books are also predominantly books with pictures and thus, we believe that we would have ample amount of data to analyse for the testing of this analytical framework.

Procedure

We had selected 78 images from the textbook for the analysis which should suffice to test the initial analytical framework. Moreover, the selection of one textbook is reliable as Malaysian Education syllabus is centralized throughout all schools in Malaysia. We had chosen Gill M, Kaur M & Kan Y.Y (2003) as it is the general English textbook used in year 2 throughout most schools in Malaysia. The criteria for image selection are as follows:

- (1) The image must contain representation of participants that include people, animals or inanimate objects.
- (2) As gender forms the crux of the analysis, represented participants must show clear culturally defined gender of either male or female. Participants with undetermined gender are excluded from our analysis.
- (3) Due to issues of salience such as sharpness and size, images displaying narrative containing more than 10 participants were excluded from our analysis.
- (4) The images were confined to illustration, which in this study is defined as graphic or commercial art that is created for client to fulfill a task (in this case, the task of educating the readers) (Zeegen 2009). Our selection excluded visuals such as photograph, chart, tables and diagrams.

Data Analysis

This methodology involved annotating images and quantifying representations using explicitly defined categories based on Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design (2006). Guided by the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics grammar of visual design presents an extensive description of visual resources based on examples from contemporary visual design in 'Western' cultures. Their tools provide a significant starting point from which images in other contexts can be explored. As our visual analysis deals with representational meaning, the following paragraphs describe the resources for codifying participants, action and circumstances in images.

Representational function focuses on represented patterns of real world experience in the images. This involves looking at the participants in the images (who), the actions (what is happening) and the circumstances (where) surrounding the participants. Based on the research questions, it is hypothesised that despite the increasing number of women leaders in modern Malaysia and the continuous effort in

advancing the role of women in the public arena, gender stereotyping is still pervasive with regards to positions in the institutional and political domains.

In coding the participants, a system network was created based on several main features found in our preliminary analysis. Firstly, the participants in our data are a representation of either human or non-human entities. So, the first contrasting feature in a participant system network is the choice between human or non-human entities. Secondly, the participant must display clear identifiable gender of either male or female. Gender in this study is defined as a form of cultural categorization and is signified by means of physical attributes such as dress, hairdo, facial features and so on (van Leeuwen 2008). Our data also shows that cultural categorization of participants is a simultaneous representations of gender identity (male or female) and other social identity types marked through 1) attire (e.g. school uniform) construing institutional identity, 2) relationship with others such as a mother or other participants of similar age i.e. friend, representing relational identity and finally, through 3) setting such as a podium and stage construing political identity. Figure 1 summarizes these choices of features for coding the participants.

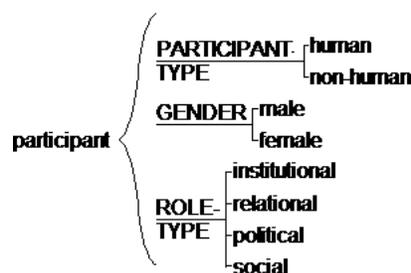


Figure 1. Participant System Network

In coding the actions and circumstances, we adapted the term proposed by Painter & Martin (2010) based on Kress & van Leeuwen's narrative system (2006) by extending the level of delicacy. Narrative is labeled **action** (i.e. realized by vectors originating from one participant and directed at another participant) or **reaction** (whereby a participant is on the receiving end of a vector, e.g. being looked at by another participant). Based on the narrative in our data, we extended the level of delicacy by adding three contrasting types of action based on the type of event, where it is carried out and with whom; these types are 1) **institutional** (e.g. reading or writing in a classroom) 2) **relational** (e.g. playing ball with friends or washing dishes at home) and 3) **political** (e.g. giving a speech on stage).

Participants, actions and circumstances are normally realized in different visual forms within a frame; this program allows for the annotation of parts of different sizes (or as a whole) according to different representational meanings. Frequency occurrences of features can be derived from the completed annotation. Additionally, we can also search for instances of specific features in the annotated corpus (e.g. female and institutional or male and relational).

Discussion of Findings

Our discussion focuses on the results of our three representational meanings analysis. The following sections discuss the quantitative findings and how representational meanings contributed to perpetuating gender stereotyping and constructing gender biasness in the English textbooks. Representational or ideational function of images refers to "a function of representing the world around and inside us" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p 15). Three patterns of representation included; i) participant type ii) action processes and iii) the setting.

Participant type

The first domain of representational analysis is participant type that is discussed under the relational, institutional, relational and ethnicity categories.

Relational

For this category, the general analysis shows that there are more relational characters that relate to males than females for both human (35 male vs. 31 female) and nonhuman. Most of the relational types featured are as a 'friend' whereby there are 75 (96.15%) occurrences altogether. For this, male characters are more dominant than female characters (43 compared to 32 participants, respectively). Female characters are also featured as a 'neighbour' (2.94%) and a 'canteen food seller' (2.94%) whereas a male character (2.27%) is featured as a 'driver'. This is an indication of gender discrimination as a person can become a 'friend' to any gender, whether male or female. Besides human, animals and objects are also depicted in a social circle of friends.

Participants of this category are also shown within family members namely mother, father, son, daughter, sister and brother. Overall, mothers are depicted as more significant than fathers (24 mothers and 17 fathers) and the most significant in the family. An image of a mother playing a substantial role in attending to her children's needs exhibits the traditional role of a mother in this culture to provide the loving care and support needed by growing children.

Institutional

More male characters are depicted as teachers in the institutional setting compared to females (eight males and five females). In this institutional setting, a large proportion of participants are depicted by male characters. This can be seen in an image in a classroom setting where, besides the teacher, who is a male, four out of the total of six students are also males. It is clearly an example of gender stereotyping as for both human and non-human, the institutional setting tends to imply that there is male dominance in education.

Ethnicity

Malaysia with a population of more than 28 million people (Index Mundi 2012) is a country diverse in culture, language and ethnicity. The largest ethnic groups comprise the Malays (50.4%), Chinese (23.7%) and Indians (7.1%) although there are smaller groups of people who are Sikhs, Eurasians (those within the "others" category 7.8%) and members of various indigenous groups. In the analysis of images, ethnicity in the Malaysian context may be revealed through cues that may be in the form of cultural attributes such as objects, dress, hairstyle, headwear (van Leeuwen & Jewitt 2001:95) markings on the face of religious significance, facial and physical features as well as skin colour. Also of great importance in the analysis are naming conventions found in the text that accompany the images which can clearly denote whether the participant/character belongs to a particular ethnic group. In Malaysia, in the absence of images, naming conventions when they are present in the text can be relied upon quite confidently to show ethnicity.

In Figure 2, the image of the participants of different ethnicity can be identified. Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and is practiced by more than 60% of the ethnic Malay population. One of the female participants in the image (on the right) is depicted wearing headwear that measures to the Muslim standards of modesty. She is wearing a *tudung*, which is a head scarf. We can identify the boy as belonging to the Sikh ethnic group also through the headwear. The Sikh boy is depicted as wearing a *patka*, which is a piece of cloth over a knot of hair (equivalent to a turban for adult Sikh males). In Sikhism, the headwear donned by males such as the *patka* and the turban is donned not for cultural significance but for spiritual significance, out of obedience of the wishes of the founders of the faith.

Other images found of a darker skinned girl and a lighter skinned girl and their ethnicity is brought to bear from the identification of their names. 'Sunita', for example, can be easily identified as Indian (darker skinned) and 'Siew Ling' as Chinese (lighter skinned) respectively. These names are common female names related to their ethnic groups. Also reliable in identifying ethnicity in the case of the two images are Oriental facial features such as high cheekbones, slanted eyes and oval face. , Markings on the face such as a black *pottu* on the forehead, i.e., a small round black mark has religious significance., Additionally it also signifies unmarried status for Indian girls.

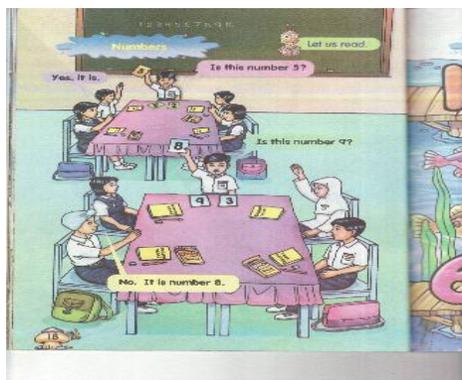


Figure 2 Ethnic Identification

(Source: Gill M, Kaur M and Kan Y.Y (2003). Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah English Year 2. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.)

The analysis of images related to ethnicity yielded two categories: the clearly identifiable participants/characters belonging to ethnic groups and those that are ethnically unidentifiable. In the clearly identifiable category, the analysis revealed the following findings. In general, the images found representations of the three largest ethnic groups namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. Additionally, the Sikh ethnic group is also represented. In this textbook there is a frequent representation of human Malay males and females (41 and 39 respectively). For the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups, there are more human Chinese and Indian females (12 as opposed to 8) than males (15 as opposed to 11) represented in the textbook. Interestingly, no non-humans were found to be representing any of the ethnic groups discussed.

The unidentifiable category yielded (111) unclear ethnicity for human males and 59 unclear ethnicity for human females. It was difficult to code ethnicity in cases such as the following: 1) when proper nouns/names were not mentioned in the accompanying text 2) when there are no obvious reference to names related to ethnicity and 3) when cultural attributes such as objects, dress, hairstyle, headwear as well as markings on the face of religious significance, facial and physical features and skin colour were ambiguous or absent.

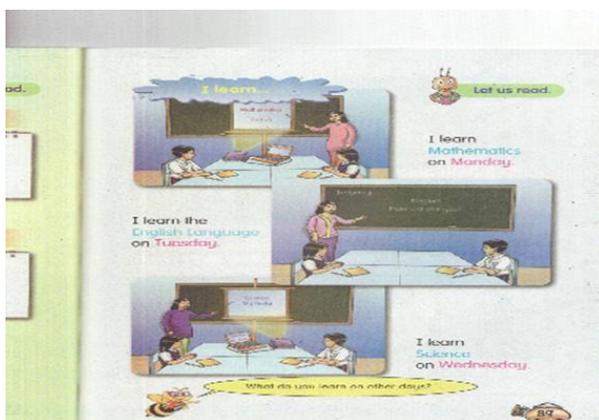


Figure 3 Females in ‘Baju Kebaya’ and ‘Baju Kurung’ – Malay National Costume
 (Source: Gill M, Kaur M and Kan Y.Y (2003). Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah English Year 2. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.)

The females in Figures 3 are seen wearing the traditional Malay dress of *baju kebaya* and *baju kurung* i.e. Malay national costume. The Malay word “*baju*” may mean “dress” or “clothing” depending on the context of use. The *baju kebaya* is a pleated blouse paired with a long skirt or sarong. The *baju kurung* is a long tunic-like dress paired with a sarong. In recent years, the Malaysian government’s policy for ethnic integration has allowed for female non-Malays also to wear the *baju kebaya* and *baju kurung* especially for formal and official functions. This trend is also seen with other ethnic traditional clothings being worn by all ethnic groups. For instance, the *cheongsam*, the traditional wear of Chinese females which is a one-piece dress with a high mandarin collar fastened by small clips or fabric clasps is very often seen worn by women of all ethnicities in Malaysia. The *salwar kameez*, the traditional wear of Sikh females which is a long tunic worn over trousers with a matching shawl is very popular now with Muslim women as it conforms to the ideals of modesty. Women of all ethnicities are also seen to be wearing it for fashion as well as comfort. Very soon we will not be able to confidently identify ethnic identity from the dress they are wearing. Western–style skirts, blouses, dresses, trousers, t-shirts and shoes are also popular as everyday clothings especially for female children of all ethnicities. These western-style clothings are more visible in urban settings.

Action Categories

Actions are classified into 3 types i.e. institutional, relational and political categories. The figure below shows the percentage distribution between 3 categories over the total number of identified actions (220). This section will discuss the institutional and relational categories as they hold the percentage of distribution.

Table 1 Action Type Categories

ACTION-TYPE	Percentage % / No	
Institutional	12.27	127
Relational	87.73	193
Political	0.00	0
Total	100.00	220

Institutional category

From the institutional perspective, images are illustrated most commonly in school classrooms or school playgrounds. Thus, actions represented are mostly learning action. For instance images commonly

depict male and female students sitting down at their desks, answering questions, reading or writing in the classroom (see Figure 2).

Based on the frequency occurrence between boys and girls, the image evidently illustrates more boys than girls. It is evident that there are more boys (six) in the image shown in Figure 2 than girls (four). A ratio of an average of one girl to two boys indicates a certain level of gender biasness in the image as a whole. The prominent learning action shown here are those students depicting the role as the ones who ask questions and those answering the questions. It is worth noting that those depicting the role of asking questions are the boys who are the ones sitting at both heads of tables acting as the leader of each group. The image illustrates three girls putting their hands up to volunteer to answer the questions suggesting girls being the more perhaps, enthusiastic ones in gesture to answer. However, the image also depicts the boys to be the ones to answer questions and to provide the correct answers, i.e. ‘yes it is’ and ‘no, it is number 8’. Though the actions show the boys raising their hands together with the girls, the correct answers are however shown to be articulated by the boys only.

Another gender stereotyped action found is an image of girls in the act of ‘serving’ food to the boys. This act by nature illustrates the gentle action most commonly associated with girls for showing femininity. This example further illustrates the nurturing aspect of female characters often depicted or described.

Relational category

The analysis in general shows that there are more relational actions that relate to males than females for both human (64 male vs. 56 female) and nonhuman participants. From the social perspective, most observable action illustrated is the ‘playing’ action (28.18%) which is the biggest percentage of actions depicted. In such instances, the illustrated images show a more masculine than feminine type of ‘playing’. For instance, for both human and nonhuman, masculine and feminine ‘playing’ is illustrated by boys playing football and girls playing skipping. This is an indication of gender stereotyping where typically football is associated with boys playing football whereas skipping is associated with girls playing skipping. In other words, playing with a ‘ball’ is often associated with boys. However, it is found that there is an occurrence of non-stereotyped image of actions illustrated from the social perspective. For instance, there is an image of a boy playing on a swing and girls and boys together playing with a ball though it is not football or soccer.

It is also found the holding action (11.82%) forms the third most common action after talking (14.55%). This holding action refers to items held by characters which indicate an element of gender stereotyping. For instance, females are illustrated to be holding flowers (15.38%), soft toy (30.77%), fruits (7.7%) and present (15.38%) whereas males (15.38%) human and non-human) are illustrated to be holding a bicycle and (7.69%) holding a ball. This is an apparent evidence of stereotyping of objects that are connoted to boys and girls.

Actions that are categorised as relational are commonly represented by family scenarios. Participants are depicted in a co-meronymic relationship with one another such as mother-daughter, father-sons or parents-children. There is an image of a mother and a daughter in the kitchen doing house chores. The process of ‘cleaning’ is carried out by two female characters (mother & daughter). Interestingly, no male character is present in the kitchen.

It displays an apparent gender stereotyped act of ‘women’ being the ones to accomplish tasks in the kitchen like washing the dishes and drying them. A sense of hierarchical element between mother and daughter is coincidentally depicted between these two female characters with the mum doing the ‘washing’ (as the more challenging task) as compared to the daughter drying the dishes. It is worth to note that the

characters are illustrated with both of them wearing aprons indicating perhaps the stereotyping of women to be suited to wearing aprons than men. This perhaps is the reason why female characters are depicted in such an image. There is another image that illustrates a relational concept of a family cleaning their living room. Both female and male characters are shown cleaning the living room. However, it clearly depicts the father cleaning the ceiling while the mother vacuuming the floor. This suggests the more difficult task to be dealt by the father and the less difficult chore is dealt by the mother. The image also shows the daughter dusting the furniture whilst the son is depicted wiping the table with a cloth. This relates to an earlier discussion regarding the connotation of 'items' or 'objects' to specific gender.

In addition to the two action types, the data also revealed instances in which the participants are not performing any action. This is referred to as analytical process in which participants are represented in terms of a part-whole structure (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). This involves two types of elements: the Carrier (the whole character) and any number of Possessive attributes (such as attire). The participants are clearly displaying the parts of their outfits labeled as *a shirt*, *a pair of shorts*, *a blouse*, *a baju kurung* and so on. The males and females are about equally represented for both human and non-human participants. As for political aspect, no images on political actions are represented in this book.

The Setting

Another feature analysed in the data is the 'setting'. This refers to the setting or context in which participants are most commonly portrayed. The findings highlight two types of setting mainly; the indoor setting and the outdoor setting. Overall, more outdoor activities are featured. As for outdoor setting, 45.99% of participants are depicted outdoors with 38.58% in indoor setting and no setting at 15.43%. This no-setting refers to characters depicted in a setting of no background such as a photo portrait image.

A 38.58% of characters (44) out of the 130 characters found in indoor setting are portrayed for both human and non-human participants. The frequency shows more male than female as a whole for humans (67 / 52). The non-humans are portrayed equally as per gender. The classroom setting makes up the most of the setting for the indoor activities. Home setting in the second most frequently used scene. The park makes the most of the setting for the outdoor activities with the dominance of 34.19% compared to others as shown below. As for human participants, male participants are the most dominant (81 to 53) participants depicted. More male non-humans are also portrayed in the outdoor setting than the female (15 to 6). An image in Figure 4 depicts the balance or imbalance of the number of male and female participants. On the whole, the frequency of male participants dominates female participants in most of the outdoor settings and the specific settings identified were in the park (33 to 20), in schools (12 to 3) and in playground (10 to 5).



Figure 4 Outdoor human

(Source: Gill M, Kaur M and Kan Y.Y (2003). Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah English Year 2. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.)

Implications

The portrayal of males and females in the images may have a strong impact on how Malaysian schoolchildren view male and female roles in society. Our findings largely suggest that adherence to traditional gender roles is perpetuated in the textbook images. Nevertheless, we noted a sharing of chores when it comes to familial activities around the house and while teaching is traditionally considered a female occupation, we also noted a higher number of male teacher depiction in the images.

1. Some areas that still need attention are increased female participation in institutional and political activities. Images of historical and contemporary female figures (e.g., warriors, politicians and athletes) provide one means of increasing female visibility and importance in the textbook. Because school and textbooks are one means of socializing children, it is important that efforts be taken to ensure teaching materials are fair and unbiased toward both sexes.
2. Those involved in the production of school textbooks should review the portrayal of male and female figures depicted in images. This is to provide the real world scenario in educating the younger generation to have a non-stereotyped mind with regard to gender representation in the Malaysian context that should assist in the nation building of the country.
3. It is timely that textbook writers take note of the changing roles of Malaysian females and their realistic contributions to the society so that whenever possible, females can be represented as equally as males in textbooks. There should be equal opportunities given to both genders via texts and images especially in the presentation of the subject matter (be it in social sciences as well as the sciences). This will encourage females to build awareness not only to the fact that they too can contribute significantly to scientific knowledge and innovation but also that they too have as much access and rights to varied careers in the sciences or otherwise, just as much as their male counterparts.

Conclusion

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the emerging literature specifically, those that highlight issues related to gender, inclusiveness and equality in school textbooks. The image analysis conducted on a primary Malaysian English language textbook related to gender is only a small part of a bigger picture. Nevertheless image analysis carried out on the textbook revealed a clear gender imbalance in favour of males.

The analysis revealed that the domain relegated to female participants is still the private sphere while male participants are predominantly represented in the public sphere usually outdoors. In the textbook analysed, stereotypical gender roles of wives, mothers and nurturers are allotted to women and they are largely confined to the private world of the home, represented by equally private spaces such as the garden and the back yard (see amongst others Othman et al. 2011, Abdul Hamid et al. 2008, 2009; Lee & Collins 2009). In the real world, Malaysian women are entering the workforce in increasing numbers, many taking up unconventional professions and to portray them in the private sphere of the home and in nurturing roles is inaccurate. Malaysian women must now be accepted on an equal footing with males in the workplace and images in textbooks must reflect and represent that reality.

Giving equal prominence to males and females in the representation of professional and diverse occupations in images as well as in the text may help encourage females to consider a full range of career options and possibilities in different spheres of society. This may also address the small number of women at the highest level of decision making and in the concentration of women in service- related and clerical occupations.

With regards to activities, females are more often than not relegated to a limited array of indoor activities, they are responsible for domestic chores specifically in the kitchen, around the garden and in

the backyard. Males are depicted in a wide range of activities, some indoors but especially those that involve outdoor settings namely in the playground, in the park, at the beach and at playing fields and they partake in active sports such as cycling, playing football, basketball and so on. The analysis revealed that females are underrepresented in a variety of sports activities even though there have been increased attention paid to physical activity and women's sport during the later part of the twentieth century. The textbook analysed does not aptly communicate a physical active lifestyle for females even though in reality, many of the sports activities do not discriminate along gender lines. Textbooks via gender equitable images can be a potential source of content and a viable tool for introducing and reinforcing a physically active lifestyle for both males and females (Nigles & Spencer 2002). This will spearhead more women to participate in sporting events and make a name for themselves as according to Abdul Hamid et al. (2008: 620), "The stereotypical perception of women in sports is that they are not up to par with their male counterpart".

Many images of girls especially in the school environment specifically those in the classroom depict girls in marginal roles in contrast to boys who are depicted as assertive, intellectual, apt at decision-making and taking leadership roles (see among others Othman et al. 2011, Abdul Hamid et al. 2008, 2009; Lee & Collins 2009). Further, there is an absence of positive female role models for girls to identify with.

A gender perspective must be integrated into teacher education and training programs so that educationists may play a crucial role in addressing the issues of gender, inclusiveness and equality, providing valuable input for the formation of gender equitable curriculum, pedagogy and policies. Material developers, textbook writers, editors, illustrators and those directly involved in producing educational textbook, resources and materials may also benefit greatly from a gender perspective. Input by parents is equally important especially those that bring gender concerns to the fore in the process of nurturing the mindsets of their children. It would be a healthy endeavour if we could study how girls and boys react to visual representations that perpetuate sexism and gender stereotyping and to study how they can challenge prevailing stereotypes that undermine equality. The suggestions highlighted above provide us with impetus to further our investigations.

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