

Gender representation in contemporary Grade 10 Business Studies textbooks in South Africa

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There is a distinct attempt on the part of the state to reposition the textbook as a key teaching and learning resource in South African schools. While the textbook industry has responded to the growing demand for better quality textbooks and attempted to embrace the tenets of the country's Constitution, especially as it relates to the issue of gender discrimination, there remains a great deal of uncertainty as to the extent to which attempts at gender equality have moved beyond technical cleansing in South African school textbooks. This article reports on a qualitative study that engaged the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis as the key analytical frame. The Huckin's (1997) framework for Critical Discourse Analysis was used to analyse data from the selected textbooks. A purposive sample of two contemporary South African Business Studies textbooks was selected to investigate the phenomenon of gender representation. The findings of this study revealed that stereotypes of women and men are both implicitly and overtly reinforced in the selected textbooks. Women were shown more frequently in home settings than were men. Men were shown in a wider variety of occupational roles than were women. In both texts, more males were represented in leadership positions in government, economic and corporate institutions. Finally, the portrayal of firstness presented the male pronoun first in sentences and conversation as opposed to the female pronoun. The findings have implications for several stakeholders, as it reveals the subtext of Business Studies textbook content that appears normal and natural.

Keywords: gender, stereotypes, representation, textbooks, CDA

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Introduction and background

In the era of political and social transformation that followed South Africa's first national democratic elections in 1994, the country's education system faced a continuous series of challenges (Christie, 1997). Numerous policy initiatives have been proposed to reform education practices and equip learners to become critical citizens in changing global and national environments in line with international trends (Naicker, 1999). Yet, by 2009, and in subsequent years, a number of problems were documented regarding the failings in South African schools. In response to a barrage of criticism, Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga appointed a task team to advise the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on changes that needed to be made in order to address the education crisis (Kgosana, 2010). A new action plan to improve the country's schools, known as Schooling 2025, that has now been set in place by government, targets a wide range of concerns, including teacher recruitment, learner enrolment, school funding, mass literacy and overall quality of education (Kgosana, 2010).

Schooling 2025, in conjunction with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) documents, attempts to ensure that the performance of South African learners will be improved. One of the ways in which the DBE sees this happening is by reintroducing textbooks in classrooms as a central resource for students and teachers. The Department of Education's (DoE) (2003: 6) *Curriculum News for 2010* notes that "textbooks play a vital part in teaching and learning [and] must be used by teachers and learners to enhance their teaching and learning". While this repositioning of the textbook as a key resource is a positive development, it is based on the assumption that textbooks are inherently useful and will project the values embedded in the country's Constitution. Crawford (2000) reminds us that textbooks play an important role in shaping and socialising students. In countries such as South Africa, the state is a key actor in preparing and controlling school curricula and textbook production. It is no secret that the state views the educational system as a political project through the fusion of linguistic unification and a coherent curriculum within the education system that enables consolidation of a national unity and a new South African identity (Christie, 2000). Yet, despite the ideological changes made to the curriculum since 1994, and despite policy statements aimed at publishing textbooks that are gender-friendly, the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) Report identified a number of obstacles to transformation of the South African education system, one of which was transformation as it relates to gender issues in school textbooks (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez, 1997: 23; Biraimah, 1998: 44). According to Engelbrecht (2006), textbooks, by their nature, tend to both control and transmit knowledge, thus reinforcing selected values and ideologies in the minds of learners. Recognising the key significance of textbooks in the South African classroom and the important way in which they articulate a programmatic curriculum, this study explores the gendered characteristics of Business Studies textbooks.

Literature review

The manner in which gender has been represented in school instructional material, including textbooks, has been a concern for several decades. Documented findings from different studies across various disciplines clearly indicate (as will be shown) that the two genders have been treated quite differently. This brief literature review will focus on three themes, namely the firstness of pronoun; stereotypical occupational roles, and the depiction of leadership roles.

The analysis of gender firstness in textbooks was first undertaken by Hartman and Judd (1978) in an investigation of several textbooks published over a period of twelve years. Hartman and Judd investigated the order of mentioning of two nouns paired for sex, such as Mr and Mrs, brother and sister, and husband and wife, and discovered that, except in the case of 'ladies and gentlemen', the masculine word always came first. They argue that this automatic ordering reinforces the second-place status of women. Adding to the findings of Hartman and Judd (1978), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 34) assert that the traditional order of mention, which is often found in texts, reflects a widespread perception of male supremacy. In some texts, males also initiate more dialogues than females.

Five years later, Porreca (1984) completed a study adopting a similar criterion in an attempt to determine whether change had occurred since the Hartman and Judd analysis. Women were mentioned half as often as men; firstness for men was three times as prevalent as female firstness, and women were less visible in occupational roles (Porreca, 1984). Porreca also noted that, when two gender-specific nouns or pronouns such as mother and father or he/she appear as a pair in a text, the one appearing in the first position can be interpreted as having a higher status. This, she maintained, reinforces the stereotypical notion of who in society is regarded as more worthy and important. More recently, Ansary and Babii (2003) explored firstness in current English First Language and English Second Language textbooks, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. They found that "women suffered most obviously from a second-place status" (Ansary & Babii, 2003: 69). Similarly, Lee and Collins (2008) discovered a strong tendency for men to be mentioned first in single phrases in Hong Kong primary English textbooks, in which two nouns were paired for sex. In the entire series of textbooks, the researchers found 37 instances of male firstness, but only three of female firstness, in a ratio of male to female firstness of 12.3:1.

Occupational roles are very commonly gendered (Bem, 1993), with the traditional division of labour bestowing certain characteristics on women and others on men, based on their roles in society. Yaqin (2002: 14) makes the point that

books reflect the fixed views of a given social culture with respect to gender roles and contain definite gender characteristic patterns, all of which have an important influence on children and cause them to consciously or unconsciously imitate and learn from them.

Brickhill, Hoppers and Pehrsson's (1996) analysis of gender issues in texts from Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe found that gender stereotyping is most pronounced among adults, whereas children were often shown in gender-neutral roles "with not-so-subtle undertones of boys in assertive, action-orientated roles and girls in supporting or domestic roles" (Brickhill *et al.*, 1996: 21). Brickhill *et al.* (1996: 11) question whether one can expect representation of gender equality "in the sense of gender-neutral (or unisex)" approaches to all roles in a context "where custom and culture still respect special and different roles for men and women in community and family".

Mattu and Hussain's study of textbooks from Pakistan revealed a disjuncture between public statements on women's rights and patriarchal reflections of masculinity and femininity, with a "false division of space into the domestic, which is associated with women, and the public which is thought to belong solely to men" (Mattu & Hussain 2004: 92). The authors concluded that the message conveyed by these texts is that women's only legitimate role is in performing household tasks and caring for the family. They also point to how many stories portray males as active and rational, and females as passive and irrational, and emphasise that such stereotypical representation of masculinity and femininity have negative effects for both boys and girls. A United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006) study of research on textbooks from Swaziland, Costa Rica, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Yemen and Zambia, over the period 1990-2006, also highlights consistent gender stereotyping and under-representation of girls in relation to boys.

The representation of gender in Accounting textbooks was the focus of Tietz's (2007) study. She examined the hidden curriculum and analysed the representation of gender in 19 introductory Accounting textbooks. She conducted a content analysis of the pictures, stories and homework items, using a qualitative and quantitative methodology. Her results revealed that the different representations of males and females in these textbooks reinforce "gender bias and gendered role stratification" which is a replication of stereotypes embedded in society (Tietz 2007:91). Men have traditionally been regarded as having more power and status than women, and this dominance has, in turn, influenced the gendered depiction of male and female roles in school textbooks (Kabira & Masinjila, 1997). Similarly, in a study of gender content of career materials provided for high school students, by viewing the illustrations of various people in various jobs and the accompanying job descriptions, Heshusius-Gilsdorf and Gilsdorf (1975) found that men were shown in top management jobs more than four times more often than women. If a man and a woman were in the same picture, the male was typically shown as directing the woman, reinforcing the ideology of "the man being the leader – both at home and work" (Heshusius-Gilsdorf & Gilsdorf, 1975: 12). Pomerence, Varner and Mallar's (1996) analysis of photographs of women and men in Business Communications textbooks, published over a 30-year period, revealed that men were depicted as the superior or dominant person far

more frequently than females. They argued that this contributed to maintaining the glass ceiling faced by women in the workforce. Helfat (2006) argued that the glass ceiling continues to operate in textbooks, as evidenced by the low percentages of women illustrated in top executive positions. By being excluded from the higher echelons in Business textbooks, women are implicitly projected as unworthy or unable to participate equally in the corporate world.

Gender as a social construct gained currency through Simone de Beauvoir's (1952) influential book, *The second sex*. Beauvoir (1952) asserted that the use of the term 'gender' drew attention to the relationship between biological and psychological sex. Her ideas led scholars to become more selective in their use of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' and to avoid framing research in ways that might hint at biological determinism (Poulin, 2007). De Beauvoir (1952:35) claimed that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one". Since Simone de Beauvoir made the assertion that "woman" was not a biological given, but a learnt cultural production, feminism has debated the nature of, and relationship between "gender" and "sex" (Butler, 1993:19). Later, other feminists began to question the sex/gender distinction. West and Zimmerman (1987: 127) define sex as "a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males". In their article "Doing gender", West and Zimmermann (1987) first introduced their notion of gender not as a trait, a social role or a societal representation, but rather as an accomplishment – the product of daily social practices and behaviours which codify and manifest femininity or masculinity. Butler (1990: 33) extends this concept to theorise gender as a constantly negotiated performance. She collapses the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription. However, in her second book, Butler sought to clarify her theorisation of performativity to question those accounts which suggested a free or voluntaristic notion: "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity" (Butler, 1993: 95). In other words, a gender inclination is, in fact, shaped by what Butler (1993: 2) refers to as the "reiterative power of discourse", which schoolchildren encounter on a daily basis in their textbooks.

A brief methodological note

This study drew on the principles of critical research which entails, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004: 28), "... not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflective in research, and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest".

The sampling for this research was purposive, that is, selecting textbooks to be included in the sample on the basis of their “typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought” (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:106). Two Grade 10 Business Studies textbooks were selected from the DoE’s recommended lists. Because Business Studies can be considered a “masculinized subject” (Swainson, 2013:11), it becomes important to examine how this happens in textbooks, with a view to sensitising potential textbook users of the ideological positions being projected.

The methodology employed to address the critical questions in this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA affords the potential for detecting meaning and ideologies and focuses on the role that language plays in the construction of hegemonic ideologies. CDA concerns itself with relations of power and inequality perpetuated through language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). McGregor (2003) asserts that CDA is a powerful approach that enables one to figure out the real meaning behind the written and spoken word (the overt and hidden meaning).

CDA methods used in the data analysis for this study draw on the work of Fairclough (2000) and Huckin (1997). It entailed, first, a reading of the chapters selected in the textbook in an uncritical manner, followed by a re-reading with a view to critique by raising questions about them and establishing how they could be constructed differently. The next step was to seek the perspective being presented; this step is referred to as framing the details into a coherent whole. Finally, a process of closely analysing sentences, phrases and words, looking (among other things) for language that conveys power relations, insinuations, and tone; the three linguistic elements between which CDA particularly seeks to identify connections.

The CDA protocol devised for this study is indicated diagrammatically in Figure 1. The upper boxes name each feature and the lower boxes provide a brief description of the feature.

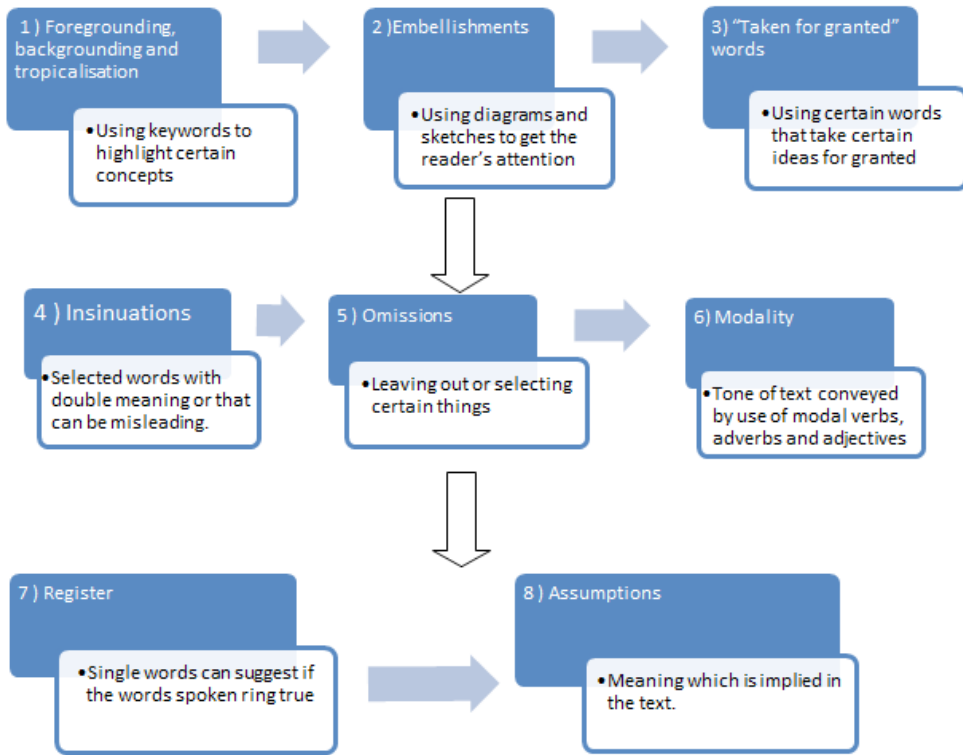


Figure 1: *Critical Discourse Analysis protocol*

Open coding was used to analyse the data from the selected textbooks. This is a “process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 61). Drawing on Henning (2007), the process entailed reading through the selected chapters in order to get an overall impression of the content, followed by re-reads to identify “units of meaning” in the text. Price (2005: 7) calls this first reading “reading with the text” to try and understand the writers’ positioning and why they wrote in the way they did. Codes were selected and allocated different “units of meaning”. The related codes were then put into categories which form the theme.

Findings

The portrayal of leadership roles

In analysing the portrayal of men and women in leadership positions in both texts, some stark differences between men and women began to emerge in terms of management and leadership at the workplace. Men were frequently depicted and described in leadership positions which included top and middle management, and economic leadership. An example of the author’s choice of male as leader and

associated characteristics of such leadership is evident in a section on the topic “Market environment” in Textbook B (p. 39). The foregrounded title, *Nothing fishy about real enthusiasm*, introduces a description and discussion of the leadership of Dave Kershaw, Managing Director of the franchise *Something fishy*. The lengthy and descriptive case study presents Kershaw as

an exceptional leader who saved “Something Fishy” from financial collapse is now an inspiring role model to millions in the business environment ... hands on exceptional management earned the company millions through innovation and improvisation A successful story indeed ... something for others to follow Kershaw is not only admired for the exceptional leadership but also the R80,000 profit.

As portrayed in the case study, Kershaw, a male figure, is described as an exceptional leader who is a role model for others to emulate.

The authors of Textbook B (p. 26) further intensify the depiction of males as successful top-level managers in the use of a case study of a *petrochemical giant*, *Patrick Davis*. This title is foregrounded and further embellished with an account of Davis’s astonishing leadership. Sasol CEO Davis is described as a “global leader ... at Sasol” and Sasol, under the leadership of Davis, is said to be “one of South Africa’s top five performers”. Throughout the case study, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the strategic management of male figurehead Davis and the success he has achieved. Davis is portrayed as a powerful, inspiring individual who is an exceptional leader.

In addition to the case studies in which only males are represented as successful top-level managers, photographs are also used in both textbooks as examples to reiterate and reify the assumed belief that top management is a ‘male occupation’. One specific example, given by the authors of Textbook A, of a male top-level manager is in a description of the hierarchy of a school, where the male school principal in the photograph is identified as a top-level manager. Preceding the illustration of the principal, a photograph of yet another male leader, Kimal Maharajah of Taylor & Co. Ltd, embellishes the account of his success and “stupendous” leadership as CEO (p. 16).

The recurring pattern, in both textbooks, of males only being depicted at top management in photographs and narratives reinforces a stereotypical message to learners. When learners are exposed to content material that consistently projects males as powerful figures, both male and female learners are likely to believe that top-management positions are the preserve of males in the business/economic sector. In the depiction of middle-level management, the authors have unambiguously selected males as examples of male success. Chris Mankayi is described (p. 57) as an “exceptional” manager of a fast food restaurant in a “busy shopping mall”. This case study describes Mankayi as having leadership skills that made him a success. In the case study, Mankayi is quoted as saying

I delegate a task and ensure it is correctly carried out ... time is money and therefore it's important to do a good job once. I am faced with demanding customers and demanding employees; however through the right approach I am able to calm situations.

The case study goes on to explain how Mankanyi's management has earned the business a number of accolades. The case study notes that, under Mankanyi's leadership, the business is now expanding in various provinces throughout South Africa. In a similar case (p. 153), the title *Creative staff management* foregrounds the "brilliant" management of Ravi Singh. The case study notes that "... Ravi was called by his superiors and praised for the good work that he had done". We are told that Ravi first came up with the idea that the initial plastic company should enter the market for manufacturing and selling make-up. Owner Jonas is quoted as saying that "the initial thought was outrageous but he managed to make his idea a success. The company has since opened five stores in the areas due to the demand". Ravi commented as follows: "I cannot be at every store but I can ensure quality and satisfaction through effective leadership. With skill and creativity anything is possible".

This lengthy and detailed case study then goes on to describe how he created profitability and stability within the business. He thus presented not only as a competent manager, but also as a team player within the organisation in working well under pressure to launch this venture.

Men were cited as examples not only of successful and inspiring middle-level leadership, but also as taking a leading role in decision-making in the business environment, where they occupy the vast majority of positions of power and authority. Learners who read these textbooks and encounter the success stories of male leadership figures at middle-level management may internalise the misconception of top management as an occupation exclusively for males.

In the representation of sole proprietorship, men were characterised in both textbooks as successful and powerful owners of businesses. In the opening page of the chapter on entrepreneurial qualities (p. 103), the authors immediately foreground the content in the subtitle they give to the chapter *Big dreams, clear vision, energy and passion*. Closely linked to the title is the additional foregrounding of a "fact focus", within which two iconic South African entrepreneurs, Sol Kerzener and Richard Maponya, are presented as examples of successful, passionate entrepreneurs who lead their new businesses. When students read this fact focus, they are likely to associate success and power with males. The fact focus is further embellished by photographs of these two corporate powerhouses, thus reinforcing the stereotype that males are more often than not successful leaders. The use of the plural term 'businesses' illustrates clearly that these two iconic males are successful in the corporate world and also own many companies.

In the same chapter on entrepreneurial qualities, the depiction of male iconic leadership figures is immediately continued in a lengthy case study in which real-life

business tycoon leaders, Bill Gates, Henry Ford and Walt Disney, are foregrounded in a “fact focus” as three famous successful entrepreneurs “who persevered to overcome obstacles on their path to success” (p. 104). The fact focus describes their business success stories as “outstanding innovation” that is worth more than R90 billion. Bill Gates is quoted as saying that “as a billionaire focus should not be loss, products still need to be modified and re-marketed. Businessmen like myself thrive for success and success comes from passion”. Similarly, Henry Ford and Walt Disney are described as “powerhouse entrepreneurs with big dreams and billions more to be made” (Textbook B, p. 104).

In summary, across the two sample textbooks, males were represented 58 times as sole proprietors, whereas there was only one instance of a woman as a business owner – Fathima who owns a small tuck shop (Textbook A, p. 23). With this single exception, the overall pattern was to depict women in partnerships as opposed to sole proprietorship. In the partnerships, moreover, women provide more of the capital, but receive the same returns as their partner. This portrayal is likely to have a negative impact on learners, as they may be induced to view and understand the world in a distorted way. Female learners are also likely to feel excluded from leadership positions, since very few female characters are presented in the textbooks as role models of successful leadership.

Stereotypical occupational roles

Analysis of both textbooks reveals that occupations for females are represented as low status and low paid. In an example from Textbook A, Tracy Gilmore and Tracy Chambers are described as employees of an NGO called *In aid of women* (p. 67). Similarly, in Textbook B, Susan is described as a member of an NGO in support of undernourished and ill-treated dogs (p. 45). These examples not only depict nurturing and caring occupations as stereotypically “feminine”, but also raise issues of remuneration. An NGO occupation is usually low paid, with low status in a hierarchy of occupations (Kang Sang-wook, 2001). Conversely, in neither textbook are any male characters identified as NGO members. Instead, men are portrayed as dominant CEOs, managers and owners of businesses, in strong leadership positions, who are both authoritarian and assertive (Textbook A, p. 56). The occupations ascribed to male characters in both textbooks represent them as highly paid with high status, as illustrated in the following two examples:

Pat Davis is a global leader who is poised for success. His CEO position earned him not only a top-ranked job but also the attention of global leaders (Textbook B, p. 53).

Richard Branson turned a weak company into a brand name “Virgin Active”, making billions from 88 clubs throughout South Africa. Regarded as a man with companies and partnership throughout South Africa, Branson is destined for success (Textbook A, p. 29).

These instances portray men in high leadership positions which have a bearing on their status and economic power. Both textbooks deliberately omit women in economic and powerful business positions. Therefore, both male and female learners are less likely to be exposed to female role models in high-status or prestigious occupations. In addition to textual accounts of females in domestic occupations, the authors also use photographs to depict low-status, low-paid occupations (Figure 2). These show women in stereotypically traditional female roles, predominately in the domestic sphere – such as cooking, fetching water, child-rearing activities, and doing the washing – in which no remuneration is provided.



Figure 2: Depictions of women in low-status occupations

The photographs confirm the status quo which most children encounter in their families and communities at large. Across the two textbooks, females were represented in domestic occupations 23 times, compared to none for men – reflecting a clear bias on the part of the authors in relation to gender roles. In both textbooks, these stereotypical depictions of women in domestic settings are presented as ‘normal’, and at no time do the authors offer any challenge to the stereotyping. The assumption is that women are solely responsible for private-sphere, nurturing and domestic occupations, whereas men are responsible for high-paying, high-status

occupations. Learners are, therefore, likely to model themselves on these examples and maintain the status quo of unequal division of labour between males and females in both private and public sectors.

Firstness of male pronoun

Firstness refers to the mention in texts of men first before women, as if the masculine gender is more worthy than the feminine. More often than not, in the order of two words paired for sex, such as *Mr* and *Mrs*, *brother* and *sister*, and *husband* and *wife*, the masculine word comes first. This automatic ordering reinforces the second-place status of women and is one of the ways in which the power status of men is reinforced. All the instances in which the two genders were mentioned together in the two textbooks were analysed to inspect which appeared first. A count across the textbooks taken together revealed the following: males were in first position 52 times, whereas females were in first position only twice (see Table 1) – in each of the two instances being mentioned first by name: “*Sarah and Jake*” (Book A), “*Mpumsi and Phelo*” (Textbook B).

Table 1: Firstness of male and female nouns/pronouns

<i>Firstness of male noun</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
He or she	10
His or hers	12
Male name before female (e.g., Patrick and Lisa)	12
Boys and girls	4
Businessmen or businesswomen	2
Men and women	8
Mr and Mrs	4
Total	52
Firstness of female noun	Frequency
Female name before male	2
Total	2

This pattern reinforces the stereotypical notion that womanhood is a second-place status and, therefore, not as important as the male counterpart. In both textbooks, the authors reinforce the notion of masculine firstness in students’ minds, so that they internalise the subordination of females to males.

Discussion and implications of findings

In terms of leadership positions, more males have been represented in leadership positions in government, economic and corporate institutions, corresponding with

prior research (Pomerence *et al.*, 1996; Helfat, 2006; Ferguson, 2008; Thomson & Otsuji, 2008). Many male characters were depicted as successful business leaders, whereas few women were depicted in such roles. In the majority of situations, only males were depicted as top- and middle-level managers, sole proprietors and economic leaders. The data revealed a huge gap in terms of leadership – a 58:1 ratio of men to women. The illustration and texts implicitly show who the desired leader in the business and economic world is. Conversely, women were predominately portrayed as low-skilled workers or in occupations that are regarded as ‘feminine’. Through such representation, girls are likely to be denied models related to leadership. Leadership roles, as represented in the textbooks, are taken for granted to be a monopoly of males. Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998) as well as Timberlake (2005) argue that, although many more men occupy senior leadership positions than women, there are successful business leaders who *are* women. The failure to portray women in leadership positions in textbooks contributes towards maintaining the glass ceiling faced by women in the workforce (Pomerence *et al.*, 1996).

Helfat (2006) argues that the glass ceiling reflected in textbooks continues to operate, as evidenced by the low percentages of women illustrated in top executive positions. By being excluded from the higher echelons of Business Studies textbooks, women are prevented from equally participating in society. To picture predominantly male leaders reinforces the stereotype that successful leaders are male. In fact, at a subconscious level, these texts prepare boys to achieve in the marketplace, while girls are trained to be submissive and to obey at home (Ferguson, 2008). These gender stereotypes may adversely affect even the emotional psyche of children by forcing them to perform a set pattern of behaviour pre-determined on the basis of gender discrimination in which boys are taught to associate with leadership activities and girls are confined to low-skilled activities.

The data from the findings do not, however, depict the reality of leadership in the South African context. There are female cabinet ministers and leaders such as Gill Marcus in the business and economic setting. This is supported by the South African government’s introduction of gender-affirmative action to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions (Dudu, Gonye, Mareva & Sibanda, 2008). This finding indicates that, when given a choice, authors are more likely to gender a character with leadership as male. This tendency helps to reinforce the stereotype that men make better managers and are more successful in business. Tietz (2007) argues that the textbooks present an implied picture of the gendered hierarchy of our society. Textbooks currently reflect and reinforce the stereotypes and expectations of our society. If learners are exposed, for instance, to a large number of leaders who are men, and only to a few women, they might conclude that either there are few women leaders, or they are not worth mentioning. 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 in order to portray women as objects.

Thus the biased portrayal of leadership in textbooks may create a deleterious real world and have damaging pedagogical consequences, especially for women and girls.

‘Firstness’ refers to the positioning of the male noun or pronoun ahead of the female noun or pronoun in sentences and conversation. Males took firstness 52 times in the two textbooks, and females only twice. Females were consistently relegated to second place after males, making men seem superior and more important than women. This reflects another part of the hidden curriculum in learning materials that fosters polarised gender identities and promotes gender inequality. These findings suggest what has been described as discursive marginalisation of discourse partners, especially females, which indicates male dominance and an engendering of female stereotypes as trivial or unimportant (Sano, Iida & Hardy, 2001). Hartman and Judd (1978) maintain that such automatic ordering reinforces the second-place status of women which reflects women as unimportant and minor. Adding to the findings of Hartman and Judd (1978), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 34) assert that the traditional order of mention often found in texts reflects a widespread perception of male supremacy: “let us keep a natural order and set the man before the women”. In some texts, males also initiate more dialogues than females. It is, therefore, important to eliminate sexism in the language use in order to provide an environment where every pupil can learn on equal terms. Mills (1995: 95) states that a gender-free language may contribute to the acceptance of each human being without dominance from one group. Hence, language determines the sociocultural generalisations of a society and forms a part of society’s collective consciousness. The implication is that the process of manufacture of such knowledge is political and mainly reliant on the choice of language.

This discussion indicates that representation in the learning materials are gender biased and gender insensitive and would, therefore, not contribute towards gender equality among learners. Despite the efforts of the third Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Education for All by the Year 2015 (EFA), UNESCO, the Commonwealth Gender Equality Policy objectives and the South African Constitution, discrimination, subordination, invisibility, degradation and exclusiveness still exist in the textbooks under study. Gender discrimination, similar to the discrimination that underpinned apartheid, is still present, as reflected in the textbooks. A great deal of work needs to be done by key role players in the educational sectors to ensure gender-inclusive textbooks which address the aspirations of all children.

In the analysis of the two textbooks, one distinct finding revealed gender biases in occupational roles or career. This corresponds with prior research (Porreca, 1984; Peterson & Kroner, 1992; Reese, 1994; Ansary & Babii, 2003). As far as occupational roles are concerned, the textbook authors’ understanding of gender equity, as presented in the two textbooks analysed, appears to fall short of the principles set out in the South African Constitution and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The aim of the Constitution, as stated in its preamble, is to “heal the divisions of

the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights” (Republic of South Africa, 1996: 1243). The gender-biased representation of occupations portrayed in the textbooks indicates that the textbook producers and other stakeholders have not moved beyond the apartheid and colonial past of South African society with regard to issues of patriarchy. Denis Lawton has argued that, like curriculum, textbooks always present a “selection from culture” (in De Castell, Luke & Luke, 1989). Similarly, the portrayal of women’s limited roles may have a causal association with the writers’ culture. A culture embodies and sustains social values attached to male or female and shapes people’s expectations about what types of jobs men and women should do and how they should behave (Yaqin, 2002). Renner (2009:71-72) believes that “the impact of this reality may affect classroom practices and restrict female learners’ learning opportunities”.

The study revealed that the representation of gender is not neutral, but an act of power in culture. Gender representation of occupational roles in the textbooks might be viewed as either reflecting certain ideological values to which society adheres or a subversion of the cultural norms. Similarly, representing women in stereotypical occupational roles may be a reflection of the textbook authors’ cultural norms and ideological views on gender-appropriate occupations. Yaqin (2002: 14) makes the point that

books reflect the fixed views of a given social culture with respect to gender roles and contain definite gender characteristics patterns, all of which have an important influence on children and cause them to consciously or unconsciously imitate and learn from them.

Therefore, as well as being reflections of sociocultural influences, the textbooks analysed may also tend to expand, reproduce, and strengthen society’s gender biases and perceptions, all of which may affect the way in which children identify with, and subject themselves to the gender role to which they belong. It was also found that men have access to a greater variety of occupational roles than women do. Earlier international research confirmed this finding, namely that men were depicted in textbooks in a greater variety of occupational roles than women were (Cawyer, Bystrom, Miller, Simonds, Obrien & Storey-Martin, 1994; Frasher & Walker, 1972). Women were mainly represented in positions of unpaid and unrecognised labour that sustains household economies such as cooking, washing, housekeeping, looking after children, fetching water, stitching clothes, and so on. Other unpaid occupations and low-paid jobs included NGOs and secretarial occupations. In addition, women were represented in usual stereotypical female occupations such as nurse, hair stylist, florist, and factory worker. The portrayal of women in traditional gender roles is also consistent with Bason’s (1980, cited in Dube, 2006) findings that stereotypes tend to set up a self-fulfilling prophecy and often lead females to behave according to expectation, thus disempowering them and limiting their ability to develop their potential to the full. Tietz (2007) concurs that women are shown in fewer occupational roles and more domestic roles. The implication is that female learners may not be exposed to as many potential role models. Such portrayal in the textbooks, in

which boys are encouraged to view a wide range of occupational possibilities for themselves, while girls are directed towards a narrower range of possibilities, may impede gender equity not only in the schooling system, but also in the community at large. In addition, the implied message is that women are not suitable for a variety of occupational careers.

Conclusion

In an analysis of both the textual and visual language of the selected Business Studies textbooks, this study attempted to arrive at an understanding of the nature of the representation of gender, as well as the reasons for its representation in a particular way. The findings indicate that textbooks continue to reinforce gender bias. It becomes clear that efforts to write gender-inclusive textbooks have failed. The textbooks under investigation reinforced gender disparity in the schooling of male and female learners. The goals of the NCS for providing equitable and fair education for both genders may not be realised and the messages passed on to learners through the hidden curriculum may negatively affect female learners, because textbooks are viewed as powerful objects that deal with powerful concepts and shape what teachers teach and learners learn. Gender is, therefore, a powerful form of social construction. Discourse has always played a major role in determining the nature of gender and in defining and supporting certain ideologies in textbooks. Therefore, curriculum material in schools needs to be selected carefully, in order to ensure the adoption of equitable pedagogy.

Endnote

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