



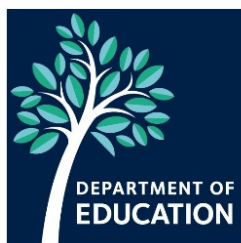
# Representations of gender and sexuality: A Study of Hong Kong secondary English language textbooks and teachers' and students' voices

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MSc in Applied Linguistics for Language Teaching, 2024

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## Abstract

A brief look into research on representations of gender and sexuality thus far has revealed that studies on representations of sexuality in textbooks pale in comparison to studies on representations of gender. Thus, sexuality continues to be significantly under-researched and under-theorized, often accompanied by a lack of discourse regarding broader definitions and representations of gender. (Selvi and Kocaman, 2021). Considering the extensive body of literature examining gender representations in textbooks, the current study does not look at how gender is represented in textbooks but instead focus on the under-researched construct of sexuality in the selected textbooks. Also, recognizing that few studies have been conducted to examine textbook users' (i.e. students and teachers) attitudes towards textbooks or their perceptions of whether those textbooks have a bearing on them, the current study aims to:

- examine representations of sexuality in two English language textbooks used in secondary schools in Hong Kong via Gray's (2013) guiding questions and through the lens of Moore's (2020) taxonomy,
- investigate eight secondary school students' perceptions of English language textbooks, the interplay between gender representations in the textbooks and their interest in learning, the relationship between gender representations in the textbooks and their future visions of themselves,
- look into three secondary school English teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and textbook selection.

The data came the two English textbooks, two focus groups, each with four students in, and three individual interviews with three English language teachers.

The findings suggested that heteronormativity still largely permeates the two selected textbooks, and that through the lens of Moore's (2020) taxonomy, the textbooks appeared to fall into the category of Heteronormative Erasure, category featuring heterosexuality being the normative standard for all romantic relationships and the

exclusion of any divergent forms of sexual relationships. A few instances in the textbooks regarding representations of sexuality were identified to point to the causation displayed by the publishers/textbook creators. However, it was encouraging to see the inclusion of the single-parent family structures in the textbooks, as they could perhaps be interpreted as a soft attempt to challenge the notion of a nuclear family.

A number of key findings from focus groups with the students and interviews with the teachers were identified. First, a potential connection between students' interest in/motivation for learning and gender representation was found. Second, a potential connection between students' future visions of themselves and gender representation was also found. Third, a few reasons why representations of gender in textbooks were considered inconsequential were identified through teachers' narratives.

Pedagogical implications and limitations of the study were also discussed, and suggestions for further research are also made for further research.

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## Lists of Tables/ Illustrations/Figures

Table 1 - Summary of Previous Research Findings.....	23
Table 2 - Summary of Teachers' information.....	33
Table 3 - Summary of Students' information .....	35
Table 4 - Summary of the categories to each RQ .....	40
Table 5 - Summary of the factors the teachers considered important when selecting a language textbook .....	66
Illustration 1 - The excerpt taken from Hong Kong's recent Guiding Principles.....	22
Figure 1 - Moore's taxonomy of five different types of representational heteronormativity (Moore, 2020).....	20
Figure 2 - Crazy Rich Asians (3A, p.2) .....	43
Figure 3 - A Blog Entry about Hossain family (3A, p. 42) .....	45
Figure 4 - The Description of the Vocabulary Practice (3B, p.79).....	47
Figure 5 - Mei-feng Lin (3B, p.79) .....	47
Figure 6 - Pam Yuen (3B, p.79).....	47
Figure 7 - The Excerpt of An Article Mentioning a Single-parent Family (3A, p.72) .....	48
Figure 8 - Wedding Planner (3B, p. 112).....	49
Figure 9 - Personal Trainer (3B, p. 133).....	49
Figure 10 - A Speech About Social Inclusion (3B, p. 76) .....	53
Figure 11 - Basketball Player (3B, p. 10) .....	56
Figure 12 - An E-sports Player (3B, p. 104).....	58
Figure 13 - Elon Musk (3A, p. 74).....	61

## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

- English language teaching – ELT
- Hong Kong – HK
- Focus Group – FG
- Research Question – RQ
- Female – F
- Male – M
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender – LGBT

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>0</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Lists of Tables/ Illustrations/Figures</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>List of Acronyms and Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
1.1 Background to The Study .....	9
1.3 Aim of the Study and Research Questions .....	11
1.4 Overview of Dissertation .....	12
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>2.1 Gender and Stereotypes</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<i>2.1.1 Language and Gender Bias</i> .....	<i>14</i>
<i>2.1.2 Textbooks and Gender</i> .....	<i>15</i>
2.2 Critical Language Education: Connecting Students’ Lives to The School Curriculum: .....	16
2.3 Representation of Sexuality in ELT Textbooks.....	17
<i>2.3.1 Representations of Sexuality: Invisibility and Heteronormativity</i> .....	<i>18</i>
<i>2.3.2 Why Heteronormativity Persists in ELT Materials</i> .....	<i>19</i>
<i>2.3.3 Moore’s Taxonomy: What Should We Do Next?</i> .....	<i>20</i>
2.4 Guidelines: What is Essential is Invisible to the Eyes.....	22
2.5 Studies Focusing on How Gender and/or Sexuality Are Represented in ELT Textbooks.....	23
<i>2.5.1 Studies Showing Gender Discrimination</i> .....	<i>25</i>
<i>2.5.2 Studies Showing Relatively Balanced Representation of Females and Males</i> .....	<i>26</i>
<i>2.5.3 Studies Examining Representation of Sexuality and the Level of</i> <i>Heteronormativity in ELT Textbooks</i> .....	<i>27</i>

2.6 Rationale for the Current Study .....	30
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology .....</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1 Overview of This Chapter.....	32
3.2 Sampling and the Participants.....	32
3.2.1 <i>The Language Textbooks</i> .....	32
3.2.2 <i>Individual Interview with Teacher Participants</i> .....	33
3.2.3 <i>Focus Group with Student Participants</i> .....	34
3.3 Ethical Considerations .....	35
3.4 Data Collection and Procedure .....	36
3.4.1 <i>RQ 1: Representations of Sexuality</i> .....	36
3.4.2 <i>RQ2: Students' Perceptions of Issues Pertaining to Gender</i> .....	38
3.4.3 <i>RQ 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Issues Pertaining to Gender, Sexuality, and Textbook Selection</i> .....	38
3.5 Data Analysis .....	40
<b>Chapter 4 Findings .....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1 New Treasure Plus 3A and 3B: Representations of Sexuality and Sexual Identities.....	42
4.1.1 <i>Romantic relationships: what is the default setting of a romantic relationship?</i> .....	42
4.1.2 <i>Family structure: what accounts as a family unit?</i> .....	43
4.1.3 <i>Clarification: don't get this wrong and they are not what they seem like..</i>	48
4.1.4 <i>Moore's taxonomy: at what levels are the textbooks?</i> .....	49
4.1.5 <i>Social inclusion</i> .....	51
4.2 Students' Perceptions of Issues Pertaining to English Language Textbooks and Gender.....	53
4.2.1 <i>Students' attitudes towards the role of English language textbooks and English teachers</i> .....	54
4.2.2 <i>Students' attitudes towards gender issues on professions in the textbooks</i>	55
4.2.3 <i>Visual Stimuli: Students' divergent viewpoints on gender representations in the textbooks</i> .....	55

4.2.4 <i>Visual Stimuli: Could having balanced gender representations be (de)motivating?</i> .....	60
4.2.5 <i>Visual Stimuli: Why is she always the one to do this?</i> .....	63
4.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Issues of Gender, Sexuality, and Textbook Selections .....	64
4.3.1 <i>Teachers' observation: are gender representations in the textbooks inconsequential?</i> .....	64
4.3.2 <i>Teachers' voices: we can only do what we can do to redress it</i> .....	65
4.3.3 <i>Representations of sexuality and sexual identities</i> .....	66
4.3.4 <i>Setting priorities: What criteria are used for assessing a language textbook's suitability?</i> .....	66
<b>Chapter 5 discussion</b> .....	<b>70</b>
5.1 Representations of Sexuality.....	70
5.2 How can ELT materials be made less heteronormative and how can we move upwards? .....	72
5.3 Promoting Moore's taxonomy .....	73
5.4 Voices of students and teachers': students' future visions of themselves .....	74
5.5 Voices of students and teachers': are gender representations motivating?.....	74
5.6 Teacher's voices: why gender representations take a back seat .....	75
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>79</b>
6.1 Summary of the Major Findings .....	79
6.1.1 <i>RQ1: Representations of sexuality</i> .....	79
6.1.2 <i>RQ2: Students' Voices</i> .....	79
6.1.3 <i>RQ3: Teachers' Voices</i> .....	80
6.2 Recommendations for how New Treasure Plus textbooks can improve in the future .....	80
6.3 Pedagogical implications .....	81
6.4 Limitations of the present study and Calls for Future Research Work.....	82
6.5 Concluding Remarks.....	83
<b>References</b> .....	<b>85</b>

**Appendices.....93**

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to The Study

The school curriculum could be described as “an explicit, conscious, formally planned course with specific objectives” (Kentli, 2009, p. 83), aiming at developing learners’ knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, students often take in more than what is clearly outlined in textbooks through an implicit curriculum shaped by the school’s environment (Lee, 2014). This hidden, or sometimes called “covert” and “latent” curriculum, is recognized as “the socialization process of schooling” (p. 83), whose function is to strengthen predominant “beliefs, values, and norms” among students (Giroux and Penna, 1979, as cited in Lee, 2014, p.40). The key difference is that the formal curriculum explicitly states what students are going to learn, whereas the hidden curriculum involves unintended lessons that students absorb (Lee, 2014).

In the context of formal education, textbooks are often regarded by students as authoritative sources of knowledge (Lee, 2018). Beyond their role in conveying content, textbooks serve as "instructional guide[s]," which have been argued to convey an “appropriate way of behaving, doing, and valuing" through a hidden curriculum (Widodo, 2018, p. 132). Hidden curriculum is defined by Clark as “the vehicle for the unspoken academic, social, and cultural messages communicated to students during their time in school” (2016, p. 1). Indeed, Ndura (2004) highlights that teaching materials function as “the role of cultural mediators as they transmit overt and covert” messages (p. 143). ELT textbooks are no exception, and as a widely used medium that disseminates dominant social values, they are likely to continue to influence students’ perceptions of issues in relation to gender and sexuality. Thus, this dissertation builds on previous research to unearth the hidden curriculum in school textbooks in relation to these two variables.

## 1.2 Rationale of The Study

The materials used for instruction within language classrooms play a significant role in shaping the language learning and teaching processes by serving as the foundation of instruction (Richards, 2001). Language teaching materials encompass a broad

spectrum of items that aid in language acquisition, ranging from “course books” to “graded readers” (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 143). Beyond facilitating learning, textbooks hold significance as they act as "cultural artifacts" (Gray, 2013, p. 3) and offer insights into “how teachers and institutions perceive the world”, “represent this reality to their students”, and convey “values and attitudes” through language use (Kocaman and Selvi, 2021, p. 76). Through materials, teachers can “endorse and reproduce (...) existing power relations, particularly with regard to race, gender and sexual orientation” (Gray, 2013, p. 3). The recognition that language teaching materials play a role in representing and negotiating identities has encouraged numerous researchers to examine how these identities are represented in teaching materials (Kocaman and Selvi, 2021).

Goyal and Rose (2020) point out that future research would benefit from the analysis of how textbooks are used in classrooms. Indeed, many textbook studies (e.g., Lee, 2014; Yang, 2012) appear to focus solely on how genders are represented in textbooks and do not appear to put emphasis on teachers’ attitudes towards those textbooks or students’ perceptions of whether those textbooks have a bearing on them. After all, students are the ones who use textbooks to learn the language, and teachers are the ones who get to decide how to teach what is covered in textbooks and what (not) to teach when preparing a lesson beforehand. Also, a brief look into research on representations of gender in textbooks, it can be found that the body of literature examining gender representations in textbooks is abundant. Therefore, the current study does not look at how gender is represented in textbooks, but rather aims to fill this gap by including English language teachers and students’ voices.

In addition, a more careful look into research on representations of gender and sexuality thus far has revealed that studies on representations of sexuality in textbooks pale in comparison to studies on representations of gender. Thus, sexuality continues to be significantly under-researched and under-theorized, often accompanied by a lack of discourse regarding broader definitions and representations of gender. (Selvi and Kocaman, 2021). Considering the extensive body of literature examining gender

representations in textbooks, the current study, instead of looking at gender representation, focuses on the under-researched construct of sexuality in the selected textbooks. Furthermore, only Gray (2013) and Paiz (2015) look directly at the representation of sexuality and the degree of heteronormality in teaching materials. When it comes to textbook research into both constructs (i.e. gender and sexuality) in textbooks/teaching materials, only two recent studies, to the best of my knowledge, examined the representation of both gender and sexuality. Therefore, the need to examine the representations of gender and sexuality in textbooks is apparent.

It is worth mentioning that the motivation for my deliberate focus on gender and sexuality in textbooks primarily comes from the realization that "representation always involves selection", and what "is not selected becomes invisible" (Azimova and Johnston, 2012, p. 339). Indeed, representations of gender and sexuality in textbooks always involve selection, and naturally, what is not selected may be rendered invisible. Thus, by examining the representation of various identities in language teaching materials, we can get a glimpse into "which identities are prioritized and how institutions and educators choose to present them in the classroom" (Kocaman and Selvi, 2021, p.79).

### **1.3 Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

The present study examines how sexuality is represented in two popular ELT textbooks in secondary schools in Hong Kong: *New Treasure Plus 3A* (Cevik, Cole & Kaeser, 2022) and *New Treasure Plus 3B* (Cevik & Woo, 2022). I also used Moore's Moore's taxonomy (2020) as a more nuanced tool to examine the degree of heteronormativity in the textbooks. It may be worth highlighting that the present study, to the best of my knowledge, bears the potential of being the first one to use Moore's (2020) taxonomy to evaluate the degree of heteronormativity in ELT materials.

The investigation was broken into three parts. In the first part, I examined representations of sexuality in the two textbooks by carefully searching both the text

and illustrations inside the books. Moore's (2020) taxonomy was also used to examine the degree of the textbooks. In the second part, I explored the students' perceptions of gender issues in the two textbooks, and a selection of illustrations and words taken from the two selected textbooks were used as visual stimuli for students to initiate discussions. It is important to note that a decision was made to limit the discussion topic for the student participants to gender representations only, given the current social climate in Hong Kong. In the third part, I looked into teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to representations of gender and sexuality, and textbook selection. The research questions are as follows:

1. How is sexuality represented in the selected textbooks as evaluated via Gray's (2013) guiding questions and through the lens of Moore's (2020) taxonomy?
2. What are students' perceptions of issues pertaining to genders in textbooks?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and textbook selection in relation to language textbooks?

#### **1.4 Overview of Dissertation**

The dissertation comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 articulates the study's background, aims, significance, and rationale, while also outlining the research questions and providing a summary of the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 defines key terms related to the representation of gender and sexuality in textbooks, reviews a selection of empirical studies conducted globally in this area, highlights prevalent themes identified in the literature, and demonstrates how the current study addresses gaps by analyzing two English textbooks utilized in secondary schools in Hong Kong, examining students' perceptions of gender issues in the selected textbooks and teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to representations of gender, sexuality, and textbook selection. Chapter 3 details the sample, the analytical framework developed, and the data analysis procedures, along with justifications for the decisions made. Chapter 4 presents the findings in relation to the research questions. Chapter 5 discusses the most significant results, primarily in connection with the arguments and viewpoints presented in Chapter 2, and explains how these findings contribute to the understanding of gender and sexuality representation in textbooks. Finally, Chapter 6

summarizes the findings, discusses their pedagogical implications for educators, textbook developers, and researchers, suggests avenues for future research, and reviews the study's limitations.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Gender and Stereotypes

Gender can be defined as a societal construct encompassing “qualities, tastes, aptitudes, roles and responsibilities” that are associated with men and women (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009, p. 27). This construct is distinct from sex, which pertains to the biological distinctions between males and females (p. 27). Gender stereotyping involves the perpetuation of fixed notions about masculinity and femininity, resulting in the allocation of a dichotomous set of standards for one’s verbal and social behaviour based on their gender, leaving little room for ambiguity or variation (Christie, 2000). This process of stereotyping entails the “simplification, reduction, and naturalization” of various “physical, mental, cultural”, and other characteristics of individuals (Talbot, 2003, p. 470). Common examples of F stereotyping are simplistic portrayals of F as shallow objects of desire (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009), as aggressive femme fatales (Sully, 2010) or as virtuous angel[s] in the house (Patmore, 1854).

Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) asserted that such stereotypical portrayals are damaging to both males and females because they constrain people's views of their possible future identities and interactions with those of the other gender. For example, one affected negatively by stereotypical portrayals, (Cole, 2000) boys may tend to engage in "social behaviours associated with masculinity" such as "drinking, smoking, speeding," while girls’ academic performance and decisions may suffer (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009, p. 27).

#### *2.1.1 Language and Gender Bias*

The linguistic impact on knowledge acquisition and understanding of the world has been a topic of discussion among psychologists and linguists since the early 20th century (Boroditsky, 2011; Swoyer, 2003; Whorf, 1940). A number of linguists, including Lakoff (2004, 2017), Christie (2000), and Spender (1997), have highlighted specific language patterns that reinforce stereotypical notions about gender and the

dynamics between M and F. Lakoff (2004, 2017) drew our attention to frequently employed lexical, syntactic, and phonological structures used to describe females, which have played a significant role in marginalizing them and rendering them powerless. For instance, the use of the male generic pronoun "he" to refer to both sexes, the derogatory associations attached to terms denoting females "in sex pairs" such as "master/mistress," "sir/madam," (Goyal, 2018, p.14).

### *2.1.2 Textbooks and Gender*

Foucault (1990) supported the proposition that individuals' activities and interpersonal connections are shaped by various ideological discourses, including those of philosophy, medicine, and religion. Wollstonecraft (1792) and Showalter (1985) further provided evidence of how such ideological discourses have contributed to the division of males and females into stereotypical dichotomies, portraying them as active or passive, cerebral or corporeal, and rational or irrational, respectively. Many scholars have emphasized the significant role played by textbooks in shaping students' gender identities (Adel & Enayat, 2016; Ansary & Babai, 2003; Aydınoğlu, 2014; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Blumberg, 2007; Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Fatemi, Pishgadam & Heidarian, 2011; Lee, 2014).

According to Brugeilles and Cromer (2009), printed textbooks hold immense significance as fundamental educational tools. They possess a considerable "power of legitimation" in shaping students' adoption of behavioural patterns, "collective identities", and "gender-sensitive values" present within the textbooks (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009, p. 42). Consequently, this influence can potentially limit the "visions" and aspirations of girls and boys, constraining their perceptions of self-identity and future possibilities (Blumberg, 2007, p. 5). Scholars (Sunderland,1992; Blumberg, 2007; Mukundan and Nimehchisalem, 2008; Mustapha, 2013; Lee, 2014) have further observed that inadequate or skewed portrayal of girls in textbooks girls in textbooks may result in female students internalizing societal expectations for limited roles. Consequently, a correlation between "girls' underachievement and textbooks" has been identified (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009, p.21). The significant impact of textbooks can be attributed to the substantial amount of classroom time allocated to

their use, usually ranging from 70% to 95% of total instructional time (Sadker and Zittleman, 2007), as well as to their repeated use both inside and beyond classroom settings (Barton & Sakwa, 2012).

## **2.2 Critical Language Education: Connecting Students' Lives to The School Curriculum:**

As pointed out by Egbert and Roe (2014), disengagement among students can substantially hinder the effectiveness of their learning. One of the ways to improve students' engagement is to create an authentic connection between what students do in classrooms and their lives (Meltzer and Hamann, 2004, as cited in Egbert and Roe 2014). As suggested by Egbert and Roe (2014), while the idea of being authentic suggests passing on information that aligns with the real world, they also highlight another important facet of being authentic – being “student-centred” (p. 254). Therefore, my current understanding of teaching materials is that they need to be underpinned by the needs of students, and those needs should represent the real world around students where the language is used.

To understand the relationship between representations of gender and sexuality in textbooks and education, we can gain insights from the perspective of Critical language education (CLE). As suggested by Cogo et al. (2021), CLE functions within the framework of Critical Pedagogy, which fundamentally means teaching as a means of facilitating “social change” (p. 192). In the words of Crookes (2013), CLE “emerges from the interaction of theories and practices of language teaching that foster language learning, development, and action on the part of students, directed towards improving problematic aspects of their lives, as seen from a critical perspective on society” (p.8).

Following this train of thought, if we look at education from a critical perspective on society, then it is easy for us to understand that language classrooms are not enclosed spaces, which are kept separate from the real world. Rather, they are “social spaces in themselves, representing microcosms of a broader social world” (Cogo et al., 2021, p.

192). Language classrooms are in fact “sites of constant struggle and intersections of diverse ideologies, cultures, and identities” (p. 192). The same goes for language pedagogy as well. Language pedagogy is not merely an abstract cognitive activity in which fragments of language knowledge are retained in students' minds. (Pennycook, 2001, as cited in Cogo et al., 2021), but refers to “ways that support the development of active, engaged citizens, who will, as circumstances permit, critically inquire why the lives of human beings are materially, socially, and spiritually inadequate, [looking for] solutions to the problems they define and encounter, and take action accordingly” (Crookes, 2013, p. 8). Premised on the idea that "what happens in the classroom ends up making a difference beyond its walls", critical pedagogy positions the classroom within a wider social context. (Cogo et al., 2021, p.193). When it comes to language education, critical practice is ‘about connecting the word with the world’ (see Freire, 1970; Akbari, 2008, as cited in Cogo et al., 2021, p.193), thus acknowledging language as ideology, and “extending the educational space to the social, cultural, and political dynamics of language use” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.70).

### **2.3 Representation of Sexuality in ELT Textbooks**

Given the growing acknowledgment of diversity, social justice, and equality in the field of education during recent decades, it is crucial to acknowledge students with diverse sexual identities present within language classrooms (Selvi and Kocaman, 2021). It is not true that the student body and the teaching staff are composed of heterosexual or cisgender individuals only (Kocaman and Selvi, 2021).

Acknowledging this multiplicity is crucial to shortening the distance between students’ lives and the school curriculum, thereby improving students’ engagement in classrooms.

In the realm of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the broader domain of second-language acquisition, there is an increasing sensitivity to the intersection between matters pertaining to sexuality and aspects such as curriculum, pedagogy, and learning (Nelson 2016). The particular focus on

incorporating queer inquiry<sup>1</sup> (Nelson, 2006) into teaching resources and classroom practices has been gaining favour in the field of English Language Teaching (Gray, 2013; Nelson, 2006; Paiz, 2017).

### *2.3.1 Representations of Sexuality: Invisibility and Heteronormativity*

In response to the need for more extensive studies and investigations in the area of infusing queer inquiry into instructional materials and classroom practices in ELT, researchers have embarked upon investigations into representations of sexuality in the language classroom and ELT materials. The findings of this line of research (e.g. Gray, 2013; Paiz, 2015; Selvi and Kocaman, 2021;) have informed us of two aspects pertaining to sexuality. First, representations of clearly identified LGBTQ+ individuals have been reported to be systematically omitted and made invisible. Second, the notion of heteronormativity has been reported to permeate ELT materials, especially coursebooks.

The notion of heteronormativity, according to Moore (2020), refers to ‘a form of oppressive ideology in which heterosexuality is assumed to be the normal, and often only, pattern of human romantic relationships’ (P. 116). Another definition of heteronormativity is offered by Yep (2002) and refers to an ideology assuming that “heterosexual experience is synonymous with human experience” and “heterosexual experience” is equal to “human experience” (p. 167). Yep’s definition of heteronormativity also highlights that such an equation “renders all other forms of human sexual expression pathological, deviant, invisible, unintelligible, or written out of existence” (p. 167). The definitions Moore (2020) and Yep (2002) offer when it comes to the notion of heteronormativity are similar in that both definitions pinpoint that heterosexuality is presumed to be normal and is equal to human experience. However, the latter sheds light on the existence of heteronormativity being damaging,

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<sup>1</sup> Queer inquiry, according to Nelson (2006), means ‘turning our attention to sexual matters (identities, norms, relationships) within everyday patterns of thinking, speaking, learning, and working’ and ‘highlighting straight, lesbian, bisexual, and gay perspectives, along with the paradoxes of producing such categorisations’ (p.7)

as it has the potential to render other forms of sexual identities pathological, deviant, invisible and so on.

### *2.3.2 Why Heteronormativity Persists in ELT Materials*

The recognition of the pervasive presence of heteronormativity within the majority of ELT materials, as pointed out by Moore (2020), has been known for some time. As to why the persistence of heteronormative in contemporary textbooks still exists, Moore (2020) has suggested two significant factors.

One factor that contributes to the prevalence of heteronormative elements in ELT textbooks can be attributed to their role as commodities within the global marketplace. In this regard, Gray (2013) argues against the assumption that capitalism exclusively values heteronormative human relationships (p. 46). Lots of companies have successfully implemented company policies and marketing tactics that cater to queer individuals (Moore, 2020). However, Gray (2013) notes that heteronormative ideology often results in commercial advantages for specific markets, including the ones in the field of education. Moore (2020) highlights that the commercial success of a textbook often hinges on its appeal to structural-level entities such as educational boards or institutions, as well as the broadest possible global market, rather than individual consumers. Despite the association of globalization with discourses of diversity, publishers succumb to pandering to conservative ideas, often rooted in religious beliefs, in their efforts to cater to a wide range of local markets (Gray, 2010). Gray (2013) offers a particular example illustrating an ELT textbook positively depicting a same-sex relationship between two men. The textbook targeted the southern European market. However, because of the textbook's success, the publisher chose to produce a new edition aimed at a broader range of markets. To attract these expanded markets, the same-sex couple was substituted with a heterosexual couple, and this revised edition became the sole version available for all markets, including the southern European market. In this regard, Gray asserts that "heteronormativity is the default position when profits may be at stake" (2013, p. 52).

Secondly, the task of effectively confronting heteronormativity, as demonstrated by the research conducted by Gray (2013) and Paiz (2015), proves to be more complex than it appears, given its ever-changing and multifaceted nature. Despite intentions that are well meaning, endeavours to incorporate representations of non-heterosexual relationships, including the inclusion of what Gray refers to as "good gays," inadvertently uphold the principles of heteronormative ideology.

Given the commercial nature of heteronormativity and the 'protean nature of its manifestations', confronting heteronormativity is a lot more difficult than it seems (Moore, 2020, p.119). Moore (2020) contends that 'not all forms of heteronormativity are equally damaging' and posits that instead of viewing textbooks as either heteronormative or non-heteronormative, a more intricate comprehension of various manifestations of heteronormativity and their implications concerning oppressive and anti-oppressive approaches could foster a more fruitful dialogue with developers of teaching resources (p.119). It is because of this particular argument and perspective that Moore has created a framework used to look at heteronormativity in its various manifestations.

### *2.3.3 Moore's Taxonomy: What Should We Do Next?*

Moore (2020) has created the taxonomy of five different forms of representational heteronormativity to examine the textbooks regarding the level of heteronormativity. The taxonomy includes five types of heteronormativity (see Figure 1 for the summary), namely Queer inclusion, Heteronormative Mainstreaming, Heteronormative Marginalization, Heteronormative Erasure, and Explicit Heterosexism. The one from the bottom (i.e. Explicit Heterosexism) means the most heteronormative, while the one at the top (i.e. Queer inclusion) means the least heteronormative.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.

The figure was sourced at Moore, A. R. (2020). Understanding heteronormativity in ELT textbooks: A practical taxonomy. *ELT Journal*, 74(2), 116-125.

At this point, it would be useful to touch upon the taxonomy of five different types of representational heteronormativity. To start with the one at the bottom (i.e. Explicit heterosexism), this form of heteronormativity suggests that heterosexuality is explicitly regarded as superior to “other forms of sexuality”, while alternative forms of sexuality are either “devalued” or depicted as “abnormal” (p. 121). Moving up from the bottom is Heteronormative erasure. This form of heteronormativity suggests that heteronormativity is elevated by employing heterosexuality as “the de facto framework for all romantic relationships”, thus disregarding any expressions of sexuality that deviate from this limited “construction of sexuality” (p.121). The one situated in the middle of taxonomy is Heteronormative marginalization, which often arises unintentionally when materials authors include non-heterosexual representations but portray them as “essentialized, potentially controversial”, or uncommon (p. 122). This implicit form of heteronormativity reinforces the dominance of heterosexuality while further marginalizing those who identify outside of it. Including non-heterosexual narratives solely within specific discourse (e.g. HIV/AIDS or social discrimination), inadvertently contributes to this marginalization (Moore, 2020). Moving up from the middle of the taxonomy is Heteronormative mainstreaming. This level of heteronormativity, although diminishing, remains present to some extent. It refers to texts that incorporate positive portrayals of non-heterosexual relationships within the mainstream (Moore, 2020). However, these representations are often highly essentialized and contingent on the characters “being good guys” (p. 122). Finally, at the top of the taxonomy is Queer inclusion. This level of heteronormativity refers to a “well-balanced form of representation” featuring

people in different forms of relationships, some of which deviate from the traditional Western heteronormative norms (p. 122). It avoids relying solely on essentialized terms like 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' when portraying non-heteronormative experiences (p. 122). Also, it highlights the fact that queer people are depicted as the ones who have their own concerns and interests beyond their sexual orientation (Moore, 2020).

The present study, to the best of my knowledge, bears the potential of being the first one which uses Moore's (2020) taxonomy to evaluate the degree of heteronormativity in ELT materials. In this study, the taxonomy was used as a tool to examine the level of heteronormativity in the textbooks. The use of Moore's taxonomy is intentional because such a taxonomy highlights two important aspects of heteronormativity: 1) "not all forms of heteronormativity are equally damaging", and 2) "any effort to move from the bottom (i.e. more heteronormative) to the top of the taxonomy (i.e. less heteronormative) is "to be encouraged" in that doing so helps increase the chances of improving learning outcomes for all students, along with "the affective experiences of learning for queer students"(Moore, 2020, p. 121).

#### **2.4 Guidelines: What is Essential is Invisible to the Eyes**

Given the societal implications associated with textbooks, there is a belief that they should occupy a central position within education policy (Brugeilles and Cromer, 2009), and numerous governmental organizations in Europe, America, and Asia have issued guidelines aimed at promoting gender equality in educational materials (Goyal, 2018). Prominent instances of such guidelines about gender include those established by The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan through the Basic Act on Education (2006). In the context of the present study's focal point, Hong Kong, there exists a statutory organization known as the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). One of its responsibilities was to implement the Sex Discrimination Ordinance to promote "equal opportunities" for all (Equal Opportunities Commission, n.d.).

In contrast, guidelines pertaining to sexuality appear relatively less prominent in comparison to those addressing gender-related concerns. To highlight the fact that sexuality has not received enough attention it deserves, I refer to the description taken from Hong Kong's recent Guiding Principles for Quality Textbooks, as seen in Illustration 1:

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.  
The figure was sourced at Education Bureau - The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. (2023, July 8). *Guiding Principles for Quality Textbooks (Revised June 2016)*. <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculumdevelopment/resource-support/textbook-info/GuidingPrinciples/index.html>

The C-9 statement addresses a wide range of social inclusion factors, including gender, age, race, religion, culture, and disability. However, it notably lacks an explicit reference to sexuality, which is only indirectly suggested by the term "etc."

## **2.5 Studies Focusing on How Gender and/or Sexuality Are Represented in ELT Textbooks**

Even with these guidelines in place, gender bias is widely evident in textbooks, including the underrepresentation of females and the portrayal of both females and males in gender-stereotyped ways (Blumberg, 2007), not to mention representations of sexuality. This is demonstrated in the studies analysed below.

In the following sub-sections, I will review a selection of textbook studies that have been published from 2010 onwards. Given that the current study looks into representations of both gender and sexuality, Table 1 also indicates which of the earlier studies addressed these topics (See Section 2.5.1 – 2.5.3 for a more detailed review of these studies).

Table 1 - Summary of Previous Research Findings

No.	Study	Gender	Sexuality	Categories analysed
1	Bataineh (2017)	✓	✗	Gender visibility, gender firstness, and occupational roles
2	Lee (2014)	✓	✗	The ratio of F-to-M appearances, gender-neutral and gender-marked constructions, adjectives used to describe F and M, the common types of activities associated with F and M, the common address titles of F, the order of appearance of F and M when they are in a single phrase.
3	Yang (2012)	✓	✗	The collocations of gendered term
4	Yang (2016)	✓	✗	How F and M characters are represented visually (e.g. hair length, attire)
5	Zhang et al. (2022)	✓	✗	Feminine-masculine pronouns ratio, occupational/social roles and activities associated with different gender
6	Gray (2013)	✗	✓	Representations of LGBT characters, topics relevant to LGBT, and lexicon associated with sexual diversity
7	Paiz (2015)	✗	✓	The degree of heteronormativity, representations of romantic relationships, family structures
8	Selvi and Kocaman (2021)	✓	✓	(In)visibility of F and/or LGBTQ+ individual, Explicit representations of LGBT characters, topics relevant to LGBT, and lexicon associated with sexual diversity
9.	Ruiz-Cecilia et al. (2020)	✓	✓	The degree of heteronormativity, gender roles

### *2.5.1 Studies Showing Gender Discrimination*

Zhang et al. (2022) conducted a critical examination of how gender is represented in ELT textbooks used in middle schools in China, aiming to explore potential gender bias. The study investigated the ratio of feminine to masculine pronouns, as well as the portrayal of occupational and social roles associated with different genders. The analysis revealed a nearly balanced occurrence of feminine and masculine pronouns in the corpus, indicating an increasing awareness of gender fairness. However, the researchers also delved into the gender roles and activities depicted in the textbooks, coding the occupational and social roles of female and male characters and thematically identifying associated activities. Despite the apparent progress in gender equality, the findings suggested that gender disparities persist. Female characters were often assigned familial roles and involved in less physically demanding tasks, while male characters were shown in broader social roles and almost always depicted engaging in sports-related activities. Moreover, the study highlighted that gendered assumptions were not solely limited to females but also extended to males. An illustrative example from the textbooks featured a male character attempting to climb rocks, facing difficulties, and ultimately being rescued by other climbers. In an effort to conform to societal expectations of being "manly," the male character requested his classmate to keep the incident a secret, revealing how restrictive gender norms influenced males as well. This analysis demonstrates that the dominant gender ideology not only oppresses and limits females but also imposes restrictions on males, reinforcing patriarchal gender norms.

Lee (2014) aimed to explore the hidden curriculum concerning gender representation in contemporary Japanese EFL textbooks, focusing on two popular series. The study evaluated various criteria (e.g. male-to-female ratios, the usage of gender-marked and neutral vocabulary, and typical attributes and activities associated with F and W). Unlike traditional manual analysis methods used in previous research, the investigation employed corpora and modern software tools. The findings indicated a widespread use of gender-neutral vocabulary and the neutral title "Ms" for addressing women. However, the textbooks still exhibit gender disparities, with female

invisibility, male prioritization, and perpetuation of stereotypes (e.g., portraying men as more active and women as weaker, mainly engaged in childcare) remaining prevalent.

### *2.5.2 Studies Showing Relatively Balanced Representation of Females and Males*

Bataineh (2017) investigated how gender is represented in a pre-intermediate level international business English textbook by using mixed-method content analysis. The researcher looked at gender visibility, gender firstness and occupational roles. The findings indicated that females are more visible than males in certain areas regarding occupational roles, are equally represented with males in terms of gender visibility, but less visible than males in other aspects such as gender firstness.

Yang (2012) aimed to examine the representation of gender in a primary English textbook series used in HK schools. The analysis employed the corpus software AntConc to examine the collocations of gender-specific terms such as He/he, She/she, Man/man, Woman/woman, women, Boy/boy, Boys/boys, Girl, and Girls/girls within the textbook series. The primary objective was to investigate whether gender stereotyping still persisted in the materials. The findings of the study indicated that females were no longer portrayed as delicate or weak; instead, they were depicted as stronger than males. Additionally, the portrayal of females in occupational roles had evolved beyond the traditional housewife role to include participation in society. Nonetheless, certain gender stereotypes persisted, such as males wearing shorts, jeans, or shirts, and females donning skirts or dresses. Another discovery was that male terms had a higher frequency of collocates, and both males and females were associated with positive traits. However, negative adjectives were exclusively linked to males, and their physical attractiveness was never discussed. Furthermore, the research revealed that although males were generally depicted as more active, in alignment with societal expectations of male behaviour (Pearce, 2008, p.7), both females and males engaged in sports or outdoor activities within the examined textbook series.

Yang (2016) embarked on a study aimed at investigating the depiction of gender in visual elements (illustrations) within two widely used English Language textbook series in primary schools in Hong Kong. In contrast to prior textbook research that primarily relied on frequency counts of male and female character occurrences and their respective roles, this investigation employed qualitative analyses to examine how male and female characters were visually portrayed in the chosen textbook series, particularly concerning their hair length and attire, with a focus on hairstyles and clothing choices, while considering both line drawings and photographs. The findings revealed that females were more commonly depicted with long hair and dressed in dresses rather than trousers in both illustrations and photographs. Regarding the attire's colour, the findings in Yang's study indicated that a minority of male individuals (less than fifty percent) were wearing blue, a colour conventionally classified as a 'masculine' colour, and a limited proportion of female figures wearing pink, a colour commonly perceived as 'feminine'. Based on these findings, the researcher ultimately concluded that the presence of gender stereotyping was not salient in the chosen textbook series, as there was infrequent portrayal of females adorned in dresses or attired in pink.

### *2.5.3 Studies Examining Representation of Sexuality and the Level of Heteronormativity in ELT Textbooks*

Two significant studies have been conducted in recent years to examine the representation of sexuality and the level of heteronormativity in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials. To start with, Gray's (2013) study focused on ten ELT textbooks produced in the United Kingdom from 2004 to 2012, targeting the global market, as well as three textbooks targeting particular geographic markets such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Gray employed a content analysis approach, seeking explicit representations of LGBT characters, relevant topics, and lexicon associated with sexual diversity. Given the nature of materials designed for the global market, Gray found a complete absence of references to non-heterosexual sexualities in any of the ten UK-produced publications. It is worth mentioning that even when well-known gay figures were mentioned, their sexual identity was conspicuously

omitted. Gray also observed that when there were instances where same-sex desire could be inferred, such as a photograph depicting two men cooking together, textbook publishers would provide clarifications to dispel any notions of homosexuality by emphasizing that the meal was 'for their girlfriends' (p. 50). Further analysis of the three textbooks that incorporate homosexual themes and characters led Gray to argue that by portraying being gay negatively, or by allowing only "good gays" who conform to heterosexual norms, these illustrations eventually perpetuate heteronormative ideology. The findings suggest that good intentions alone are insufficient; an understanding of the various mechanisms through which heteronormativity operates is crucial for material producers and textbook authors to challenge it.

Also, Paiz (2015) examined 45 ELT reading texts and textbooks to evaluate the representation of romantic relationships and family patterns. Paiz looks at how sexuality is represented textually and visually, as well as the vocabulary being taught, rating them on a three-point scale: 1) non-heteronormative, 2) low heteronormative, and 3) heteronormative. Teaching materials are regarded as heteronormative when non-heterosexual possibilities are entirely absent, making heterosexuality the sole option. Teaching materials are classified as low-heteronormative when the authors implicitly acknowledge the existence of non-heterosexual relationships by using gender-neutral terms such as "partner." Paiz categorizes texts as non-heteronormative when they openly engage with or challenge issues related to sexual identity. An example cited by Paiz involved the inclusion of queer voices in a text on the AIDS epidemic, where these individuals were not portrayed as diseased. However, it is noteworthy that even in low-heteronormative texts that included language potentially relevant to non-heterosexual relationships, the instances of relationships presented through the words inside and the visuals were consistently heterosexual. Furthermore, one could argue that by only featuring queer voices within discussions of AIDS and not in other contexts such as education or employment, this would eventually reinforce heteronormativity by confining non-heteronormative representations to topics surrounding sexually transmitted infections (Moore, 2020). Also, in Paiz's

study, a pervasive level of heteronormativity has been found in the teaching materials, a dominance that persists even when considering factors such as proficiency level, year of publication, and publisher.

The studies conducted by Gray (2013) and Paiz (2015) demonstrate the inherent challenges in truly challenging heteronormativity, as its manifestations are highly diverse. Despite the well-meaning intentions behind endeavours to incorporate non-heterosexual depictions of human relationships, such as by including "good gays" (Gray, 2013), these efforts unintentionally perpetuate the norms and beliefs associated with heteronormativity. However, it is important to note that not all forms of heteronormativity, as suggested by Moore (2020), carry the same level of harm or negative consequences. Therefore, part of this study aims to examine the selected textbooks in relation to representations of sexuality by employing Moore's (2020) taxonomy (see a detailed description of the taxonomy in Chapter 2.3.3).

Studies focusing on the representation of sexuality in textbooks appear to be inadequate, and studies focusing on the representation of both gender and sexuality appear even more so. The studies conducted by Selvi and Kocaman (2021) and Ruiz-Cecilia et al. (2020), to the best of my knowledge, seem to be the only two in the past ten years which examined how both constructs (i.e. gender and sexuality) are represented in the ELT materials.

Selvi and Kocaman (2021) conducted a study to investigate the representation of gender and sexuality in locally developed Intensive English Program instructional materials (handouts) at a prominent state university in Turkey. Employing qualitative content analysis, the researchers identified a clear bias in the materials' portrayal of gender, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with a strong emphasis on heterosexuality as the norm. The materials tended to reinforce binary gender and sexuality distinctions, perpetuating essentialized notions of identity. The study revealed a lack of queer perspectives on gender fluidity and LGBTQ+ experiences within the materials, often promoting assumptions about marriage being exclusively

between a man and a woman, thereby disregarding same-sex experiences. The researchers concluded that addressing heteronormativity and sexism within the teaching-learning process should be a “a distributive process” involving key stakeholders (p. 131).

Ruiz-Cecilia et al. (2020) investigated the portrayals of gender roles and heteronormativity in two sets of ELT textbooks designed for teaching English in Spanish high schools. Each set consisted of a student’s book and a workbook. The researchers conducted a qualitative study focusing on how textbooks contribute to the perpetuation of heteronormativity and stereotypical gender roles. They coded the data under two main categories: heteronormativity and gender. The findings indicated that heteronormativity continues to pervade the entire curriculum, and that the textbooks exhibited recurring clichés related to gender stereotypes, such as predominantly associating women with shopping and fashion.

## **2.6 Rationale for the Current Study**

Apart from what has been stated in Section 1.2 (i.e. Rationale of The Study), another gap in the literature is the lack of studies on ELT textbooks used in secondary schools in HK. In addition to the two studies (Yang, 2012; 2016) reviewed above, there are two other textbook studies (Yang, 2011; 2016). All the studies conducted by Yang focused solely on primary English textbooks. So far, very little attention has been paid to textbooks used in secondary school in HK. Accordingly, this study, which focuses on the representation of gender and sexuality, aims to add to the corpus of textbook studies specifically in HK.

In addition, there are several rationales behind my deliberate focus on gender and sexuality in textbooks in HK. Firstly, previous research focusing on the notion of gender, as pointed out by Selvi and Kocaman (2021), is often juxtaposed in categorical binaries of “sex” in heteronormative terms (Gray, 2013; Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004). Thus, sexuality is still predominantly under-researched and under-theorized, and there is often a lack of discussions surrounding definitions and representations of gender (Selvi and Kocaman, 2021). Secondly, the well-deserved

acknowledgment and visibility of LGBTQ+ matters in educational settings and beyond necessitates the acknowledgment of the diverse sexual identities present in classrooms. This recognition signifies the inclusion of individuals who identify as non-heterosexual, both among the student population and the teaching staff. Recognizing this diversity becomes essential in understanding the representation of gender in ELT materials, as “gender cannot properly be explored without looking at sexuality” (Pakuła et al., 2015, p. 95). Thirdly, materials utilized in the English language classroom are cultural artifacts (Gray, 2013), providing an insight into how teachers and institutions see the world. These materials reflect how they choose to represent reality to their students and how values and attitudes are communicated through language. Consequently, these materials create an opportunity for students to enter a space of negotiation of various identities, encompassing linguistic, racial, gender, and sexual aspects, among others (Waller, et al., 2017). By materials, teachers have the capacity to “endorse and reproduce ... existing power relations... similarly with regard to race, gender and sexual orientation” (Gray, 2013, p. 3). Thus, I believe that the present study bears the potential of making a small yet significant contribution in terms of generating more discussions not only on gender, but also on sexuality when talking about textbook research.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Overview of This Chapter

This section provides an overview of how this chapter is organized. I begin by detailing the methodological design of this study and the ways of collecting data. Next, I move on to the section of Sampling, in which I describe the rationale for the selection of the two English Language textbooks *New Treasure Plus 3A* (Cevik, Cole & Kaeser, 2022) and *New Treasure Plus 3B* (Cevik and Woo, 2022), the selection of the participants involved in this study (i.e., teachers and students). In the section of Research Questions and Data Analysis/Coding, I delineate how to analyze the sample and the data collected for each RQ.

It is important to reiterate here that in terms of textbook analysis, only representations of sexuality were examined, that the topics in the FG discussions with the student participants were limited to gender only (See Section 3.3 for more details), whereas the topics in the individual interviews with the teacher participants included both gender and sexuality. The reasons for this adjusted lens of focus for each data source are further explained in Section 3.3.

### 3.2 Sampling and the Participants

#### 3.2.1 The Language Textbooks

Part of this study focused on analysing representations of sexuality in English Language textbooks that are used in most secondary schools in Hong Kong. I first identified all the ‘currently published’ English Language textbook series available by referring to Recommended Textbooks List in English published by the Education Bureau. After a cursory glance at the list, I started to examine the textbooks at my disposal as an English language teacher. The textbooks available to me include the ones published by Pearson Education Asia Limited (i.e. Longman English Edge) and the ones by Oxford University Press (China) Ltd. Finally, the two textbooks, *New Treasure Plus 3A* (Cevik, Cole & Kaeser, 2022) and *New Treasure Plus 3B* (Cevik

and Woo, 2022), were then chosen to be the data of this study mainly because at my school, most of the students usually need to use New Treasure Plus textbook series for three years consecutively, and were therefore fairly familiar with the textbooks published by Oxford University Press (China) Ltd.

### 3.2.2 Individual Interview with Teacher Participants

Purposive sampling (Rose, et al., 2020; Czernek-Marszałek and McCabe, 2024; Acharya, et al., 2013), the mostly frequently used approach when it comes to conducting qualitative interview studies (Czernek-Marszałek and McCabe, 2024), was used for selecting the teacher participants. A set of inclusion criteria were used for the selection of the participants. The first criterion centered on their experience in teaching the English language using language textbooks. This ensured that the participants possessed relevant experience and insights into the topic of interest. The second criterion was based on my perceived judgment of the participants' suitability for engaging in discussions involving topics what may be considered to some people potentially sensitive and disconcerting (i.e. representations of sexuality). This consideration aimed to create a safe and conducive environment for open dialogue. To maintain feasibility and manageability within the scope of this study, a deliberate decision was made to include only three teacher participants.

Three secondary school teachers, including two females and one male with English teaching experiences ranging from three to four years, participated in individual interviews. A summary of their information can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 - Summary of Teachers' information

	Gender	Role(s)	Number of years of teaching experience
Teacher A	F	English language teacher	4 Years
Teacher B	F	English language teacher &	4 Years

		The head of English Department	
Teacher C	M	English language teacher	4 Years

### 3.2.3 Focus Group with Student Participants

Convenience sampling (Rose, et al., 2020; Stratton, 2021; Emerson, 2021; Czernek-Marszałek and McCabe, 2024; Acharya, et al.,2013), coupled with purposive selection of participants on the part of the researcher, was used for selecting the student participants. Student participant sampling was almost entirely based on convenience of access (Rose, et al., 2020; Stratton, 2021; Emerson, 2021; Czernek-Marszałek and McCabe, 2024; Acharya, et al.,2013). After over 13 of my students agreed to take part in the FG discussion, I used a set of criteria to select eight of them and break them into two FGs. There were three specific criteria employed for choosing student participants. The first criterion focused on their prior experience of using secondary school English language textbooks. This criterion ensured that the selected students had at least some familiarity and exposure to the materials. Second, taking “power dynamics” into consideration (Rose, et al., 2020, p.179), I prioritized students who studied in the same class. In other words, the focus groups were made homogeneous in order not to let “power dynamics” affect the ease with which the student participants are able to express their viewpoints (Rose, et al., 2020, p.179). All the students in FG1 studied in the same class, and the same goes for FG2. This minimizes the possibility that the students are likely to feel the need to dis/agree with their senior/junior peers. The third criterion was based on my perceived friendliness of a potential participant’s relation with other potential participants. This is likely to ensure that the participants are in a pleasant environment in which they feel free to share their experiences and opinions with one another. A summary of the students’ information could be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 - Summary of Students' information

<b>Focus Group 1</b>		<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
	Student A	F	16	Grade 10
	Student B	F	18	Grade 10
	Student C	M	15	Grade 10
	Student D	M	15	Grade 10
<b>Focus Group 2</b>				
	Student E	M	18	Grade 11
	Student F	F	17	Grade 11
	Student G	F	17	Grade 11
	Student H	F	19	Grade 11

In addition, it is important to mention that a decision was made to limit the discussion topic to gender representations only, rather than encompassing both representations of gender and sexuality (See Section 3.3 for more details).

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

Participants were under few burdens or risks in joining this study. First, potential student participants were the researcher's students and potential teacher participants were the researcher's friends or colleagues. They might feel compelled to take part in this study. Therefore, a few steps were taken. First, it was made clear on written information sheets that participation was not compulsory and that there was no obligation to join. Second, the participants were made aware that they could ignore or decline to respond to any question that they felt unwilling to answer. Third, the participants were also informed that they could quit the focus group/interview and revoke consent at any time with no consequence to them.

Furthermore, a decision was made intentionally to exclude the topic of sexuality in the FG discussions with the student participants because of two major reasons. The first

one is because of the current social climate in HK. The second reason is that I am aware that engaging students in discussions about sexuality may inadvertently place them in uncomfortable situations, especially if they are not ready to disclose their own feelings or experiences.

In addition, the greatest risk to participants was the risk of their personal information leaking to a third party. To address this issue, all data associated with the participants, including contact information, and the transcripts for the focus groups and individual interviews were kept confidential and made unidentifiable. For example, English letters were used to refer to both the student and teacher participants. Digital data were protected through encryption.

### **3.4 Data Collection and Procedure**

Before going into the description of the method collection methods, it is important to reiterate the RQs of this study.

Research questions:

4. How is sexuality represented in the selected textbooks as evaluated via Gray's (2013) guiding questions and through the lens of Moore's (2020) taxonomy?
5. What are students' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender in textbooks?
6. What are teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and textbook selection in relation to language textbooks?

The data in this study came from three sources: textbooks, interviews with three English language teachers, and focus groups with two groups of students. In the following sub-sections, I describe each of them in more detail.

#### *3.4.1 RQ 1: Representations of Sexuality*

As for representations of sexuality in textbooks in previous studies, a set of questions were first created by Gray (2013, p. 47 - 48) to identify representations of sexuality.

- Are there any representations of clearly identified LGBT characters in these textbooks?

- If so, what forms do they take?
- Is there any treatment of a topic related to sexual diversity (e.g. gay marriage) or the teaching of lexis related to sexual diversity (e.g. lesbian, gay, straight, civil partnership, homophobia, etc.)?
- If so, what form does it take?

This set of questions was then used as a framework by Selvi and Kocaman (2021) to inform their understanding of representations of sexuality in their study. Apart from using the list of questions, Selvi and Kocaman also looked at any mentions of marriage, partnership, romantic involvement, and vocabulary of kinship in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the degree of heteronormativity in the materials they examined. Also, Paiz (2015) analyzed degrees of heteronormativity in a sample of 45 ESL reading texts and textbooks by using a three-point scale: 1) non-heteronormative, 2) low heteronormative, and 3) heteronormative (See Section 2.6 for a more detailed description of the three-point scale).

The present study used Gray's guiding questions as a framework to identify representations of sexuality, and I also paid particular attention to topics in the selected textbooks pertaining to marriage, partnership, romantic involvement, and vocabulary of kinship. In addition, instead of employing Paiz's three-point scale to explore degrees of heteronormativity in the selected textbooks, I employed a more recent taxonomy created by Moore (2020) because the taxonomy, with its five different ways of looking at heteronormativity (i.e. Queer Inclusion, Heteronormative Mainstreaming, Heteronormative Marginalization, Heteronormative Erasure, and Explicit Heterosexism), allows a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how heteronormativity is presented in textbooks (See Section 2.3.3 for a detailed description of the five levels of heteronormativity). To the best of my knowledge, none of the previous textbook studies have so far used Moore's taxonomy to examine heteronormativity in textbooks.

### *3.4.2 RQ2: Students' Perceptions of Issues Pertaining to Gender*

To address RQ 2, two FGs with the student participants were conducted. The format of FG was chosen intentionally as one of the data-collection methods for three reasons. First, FGs can be a valuable means of exploring how consensus is achieved, demonstrating how attitudes may shift during group discussions, allowing participants to reflect on their beliefs in relation to those of others in the group and to “scaffold” one another by incorporating each other’s perspectives (Galloway, 2020, p. 295). The use of FGs often results in “more fully articulated accounts than individual interviews” (p. 295). Secondly, FGs were chosen because they provide an environment that encourages spontaneous responses, allowing participants to steer the discussion and pose intriguing questions to one another that were not on my guiding question list (Galloway, 2020). Thirdly, focus groups can help mitigate power differentials and minimize the potential for the researcher to exert their own ‘agenda’ (Galloway, 2020, p. 296). In the present study, the power coming from my role as the student participants’ teacher could potentially be reduced and my wish to ‘equalise the voice and power balance between the researcher and those being researched’ could also be achieved from focus groups to a certain extent (p. 296).

One distinctive feature of the FG interviews is my attempt to include visual stimuli. A selection of illustrations was chosen beforehand, and they were shown to the participants during the FG discussions. The visual stimuli were intended to function as a springboard for discussion. A list of guiding questions was used by the researcher during the FG discussions (Please refer to Appendix VII for the comprehensive list of guiding questions):

### *3.4.3 RQ 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Issues Pertaining to Gender, Sexuality, and Textbook Selection*

To address RQ 3, individual interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data as they, as pointed out by Braun and Clarke (2013), are especially suitable for research examining people's experiences, beliefs, or understandings of a particular phenomenon. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, the most

common type of interview structure (Braun and Clarke, 2013). During the interviews with the teacher participants, I referred to an interview guide with pre-prepared questions, but left room to explore topics raised by the participant. In terms of the overall structure of an interview, I followed the guide by Rolland et al., (2020). The guide's structure began with an introductory question or an icebreaker to make the participant comfortable. It then followed a topic-based organization of questions, progressing naturally while gradually exploring more personal aspects as rapport develops between the interviewer and interviewee. The interview concluded with a closing question or a chance for the participant to address any additional relevant points.

During the interviews, I used the two interview questions by Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) as the foundation:

1. How do the teachers perceive the gender roles presented in school textbooks?
2. What future changes in EFL textbooks in relation to gender constructions do teachers recommend?

Apart from the two guiding questions, I also used another set of questions to help gather teachers' perspectives on gender and sexuality representations in textbooks and textbook selection. (Please refer to Appendix VIII for the comprehensive list of interview questions):

It is important to note that both the student and teacher participants were encouraged to speak their L1 and to code-switch, because "allowing the participants to draw on their full linguistic and affective repertoire" (Rolland, et al., 2020) is believed to help the participants provide adequate responses when interviewed in their L1 compared with L2 and help them feel less anxious. Each individual interview lasted for approximately 40 minutes. While the interviews with the teacher participants and the FGs with the student participants were conducted almost entirely in Cantonese, the participants naturally code-switched and inserted English lexis into their speeches. The participants' speeches were transcribed and translated into English by the

researcher manually, and the lexis originally spoken by the participants were underlined and bolded.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted with notion of qualitative content analysis (QCA) in mind by quantitative and qualitative approaches. As pointed out by Selvi (2020), QCA is in fact a mixed-method approach and a powerful tool used to subjective interpret both quantitative and qualitative data. Given that addressing RQ 2 and 3 requires the researcher to report the participants' viewpoints with an interpretative orientation, the data analysis for this study leaned more towards the qualitative side.

Selvi (2020) highlights that a coding frame (also known as categories) is vital to conducting QCA and it functions as “a system that will transform the data into meaningful, manageable, specific, and smaller units of information” (p. 444). A set of predetermined categories was therefore created to help guide the researcher, while it is important to note that I also paid particular attention to the findings which do not fall into the predetermined categories when going through the data. A summary of the categories to each RQ can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 - Summary of the categories of each RQ

<b>RQs</b>	<b>Categories</b>
RQ1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Romantic relationships</li> <li>- Family patterns</li> </ul>
RQ2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students' perceptions of English language textbooks</li> <li>- Students' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender, particularly in relation to 1) the interplay between gender representation and students' interest in learning and 2) the interplay between gender representation and students' future visions of themselves.</li> </ul>
RQ3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers' perceptions of English language textbooks</li> <li>- Teachers' criteria for choosing an English language textbook, in relation to representations of gender and sexuality</li> </ul>

	- Teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender and sexuality
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## Chapter 4 Findings

This section contains three parts. In Section 4.1, I look at different individual units of the two language textbooks and examine how sexuality is represented in the selected textbooks. In Section 4.2, I analyse the data in the participants' focus groups, and the data in Section 4.2 are limited to gender issues only. In Section 4.3, I analyse the data from the individual interviews with the three teacher participants, and the data in Section 4.3 revolve around topics pertaining to gender, sexuality, and textbook selections. For ease of interpretation, when presenting and analysing the data from focus groups with students and individual interviews with teachers, the words or expressions originally spoken in English by the participants are underlined.

### 4.1 New Treasure Plus 3A and 3B: Representations of Sexuality and Sexual Identities

Keeping in mind the guiding questions by Gray (2013) and the specific areas (e.g., marriage, partnership, romantic involvement) highlighted by Selvi and Kocaman (2021), I examined the two selected textbooks. As mentioned above, the first part of this study aimed to peruse the degree of heteronormativity and representations of sexuality, particularly in relation to family patterns and romantic relationships (See Appendix IX for a table documenting the cases relevant to the two subthemes.).

#### *4.1.1 Romantic relationships: what is the default setting of a romantic relationship?*

When examining the aspect of romantic relationships, the number of instances was extremely limited and only one instance relevant to romance could be found. In a module titled *Leisure and Entertainment*, there was a warm-up exercise in which students are asked to match the film with the correct genres. As seen in Figure 1, the movie chosen to represent the genre of romance is *Crazy Rich Asians*. Despite now knowing the plot of such a romance movie, we could see the poster (see Figure 2) in which a female and a male holding each other. For such an instance, one may argue that the publisher/textbook creator found it better to choose a heterosexual relationship to represent romance movies. In other words, heteronormativity was

regarded as a priority when it came to romance. Furthermore, it could be argued that the idea of the default setting of a romantic relationship may have been reinforced by the fact that students needed to actively match the notion of “Romance” to the film poster, so as to get the correct answer.

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The figure was sourced at Cevik, A., Cole, M., & Kaeser, S. (2022). *New Treasure Plus 3A*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press (China) Ltd.

As seen in the findings, the notion of a nuclear family – a family that consists of a father, a mother and (a) child(ren) when it is thought of as a unit in society – seemed to predominate in the textbooks. While the subject of family structure was explicitly touched upon eight times in the chosen two textbooks, four mentions of family structures were typical portrayals of a nuclear family, two mentions were portrayals of a single-parent family structure, and two mentions were unclear. As to the depiction of a nuclear family, there were two representative examples – one from an illustration and one from a vocabulary-building exercise. Figure 3 is a blog entry. In it, a volunteer visited the “Hossain family” and looked after their children “when Mr and Mrs Hossain are at work”. The illustration chosen to go with the text is a typical visual representation of a nuclear family.



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Another representative example could be seen in Figures 4 and 5. This example is interesting yet representative because, the textbook creator/publisher chose to depict Mei-feng Lin, the new immigrant, as someone who is happy to reunite with her “husband and son after many years of waiting”, despite a wide range of possibilities of how to illustrate the story of a new immigrant. The textbook creator/publisher could have chosen a different excerpt to illustrate Mei-feng Lin’s story. For example, the textbook creator/publisher could have talked about Mei-feng Lin who 1) may have difficulty learning Cantonese, a form of Chinese spoken in Hong Kong, 2) may struggle to adjust to the fast-paced environment of Hong Kong, 3) may get homesick, 4) may find it difficult to find a job. The list of alternative options to illustrate the story of a new immigrant is by no means exhaustive, but somewhat suffice to reflect the attempt made by the textbook creator/publisher to make the book unnecessarily heteronormative. Also, it could be argued that this unnecessarily heteronormative move could have been easily redressed in two ways. The first way is to change the illustrative sentences into other contexts (e.g. difficulty learning Cantonese) to avoid making the book unnecessarily heteronormative. Alternatively, the textbook creator/publisher could change the word “husband” into “partner” or simply use the noun phrase “her family” to replace the words “my husband and my second”.



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While the family structures were mostly heteronormative, there were two exceptions of a single-parent family structure depicted in the textbooks. One could be seen in Figure 6, and the other one could be seen in a news article about poverty in Hong Kong (see Figure 7, the excerpt of the article). While these single-parent family structures could help reflect the fact that there are various family structures, they could perhaps also be interpreted as a soft attempt to challenge the notion of a nuclear family, suggesting that a household does not necessarily consist of both a father and a mother.

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On the rare instances in which homosexuality can possibly be inferred, the textbook seems to find it necessary to provide supplementary information for fear that readers may get the ‘wrong’ idea. Two examples could be found in a unit titled *The World of Work*. One example (see Figure 8) is from a vocabulary practice section in which students are introduced to the expressions used to describe strengths and skills for different jobs. When Figure 8 shows two females - one addressed in a suit and one in a wedding gown - are communicating with each other, the accompanying text atop and next to the figure helps reduce the number of ways possible for learners to interpret the illustration, helping learners get the “intended” meaning that the one in the suit is just “plan[ning] events and keeping to a tight schedule”. In other words, the one in the suit is simply doing the job of a wedding planner. Another example (see Figure 9) is from a project named *Mapping My Future* in the same unit. Figure 9 shows a male assisting another male in working out. Similar to the first example, the accompanying words below Figure 9 seem to help learners get the intended message that the one in the red shirt is simply doing his job as a personal trainer. As a result, it could be argued that these two particular cases presented in the textbook reflected the

utmost caution displayed by the publisher/textbook creators when it came to presenting two people of the same sex in the same illustration.

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Instead of looking at the textbooks through the lens of black or white (i.e. heteronormative or non-heteronormative), I employed a more intricate comprehension of various manifestations of heteronormativity by Moore (2020) to examine the textbooks, and then decided what type of heteronormativity is a relatively accurate description of the textbooks.

After examining the textbooks and Moore's description of each type of heteronormativity (See Figure 1), it would not be difficult to decide that the textbooks did not fall into the categories of the bottom one (i.e. Explicit Heterosexism) or the top one (Queer Inclusion) could be used to describe the textbooks for this project. To start with Explicit Heterosexism, the examined textbooks did not suggest that heterosexuality is overtly privileged over alternative forms of sexual heterosexuality, or that non-heteronormative sexualities are overtly marginalized or pathologized. Simply put, the textbooks could not be observed to be heterosexist. The textbooks also did not fit the descriptions of Queer Inclusion as they did not feature people in various forms of relationships.

In addition, the textbooks did not fall into the category of Heteronormative Mainstreaming. This is because for a textbook to fall into this category, it should include depictions portraying non-heterosexual relationships in a favourable light despite the fact that such portrayals typically exhibit a high degree of essentialization, with their inclusion contingent upon the characters being good gays (Moore, 2020), and the textbooks did not include any. Similarly, the textbooks did not fall into the category of Heteronormative Marginalization. This is because for a textbook to fall into this category, it should include non-heterosexual representations, but the representations are framed as "essentialized, potentially controversial, and/or rare" (Moore, 2020), and the textbooks did not include any.

Based on the findings, the textbooks appeared to belong to the category of Heteronormative Erasure. For a textbook to be fitting for this category, it upholds the normative standard for all romantic relationships and excludes any divergent forms of sexual relationships. Turning to why the selected textbooks appeared to belong to the category of Heteronormative Erasure, there were three reasons. First, they appeared to prioritize heterosexual relationships by using the movie *Crazy Rich Asians* (see Figure 2) as an example to teach learners the concept of romance genre although there was only one example pertaining to romantic relationships in the two textbooks. Second, the family structures were largely heteronormative in the textbooks, despite the fact that there were two exceptions of a single-parent family structure depicted. It could

therefore be argued that the textbooks seemed to place more emphasis on the notion of a nuclear family. Third, the utmost caution displayed by the publisher/textbook creators when presenting illustrations with two people of the same sex in them (see Figure 8 and 9) could be regarded as evidence of an attempt to erase the existence of non-heterosexual relationships. All in all, it could be argued that the textbooks functioned as instruments of heteronormativity by sending a message to those who are in classrooms and want to discuss other forms of sexuality that topics surrounding sexuality are inappropriate in classrooms.

#### *4.1.5 Social inclusion*

In a module titled *Rights and Responsibilities*, there was a reading passage (See Figure 10) worth examining. The passage was a speech about social inclusion. Some representative sentences/expressions from the speech and within the long box were taken out and put below:

- Social inclusion starts with showing respect for everyone, whoever they are. *(Taken from the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph)*
- Although we differ in nationalities, religions, and social backgrounds, we should treat each other equally. *(Taken from the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph)*
- Increasing social inclusion helps people to build friendship and make stronger communities. *(Taken from the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph)*
- the disabled and the elderly/ ex-criminals, the homeless and ethnic minorities *(Taken from the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph)*
- Racism, gender inequality and other examples of intolerance must be challenged, not challenged. *(Taken from the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph)*
- Diversity is an important part of social inclusion... It also means that everyone's voices are heard ... *(Taken from the rectangular box next to the passage)*

While the speech touched upon a wide range of social inclusion such as “gender inequality” and “racism”, and provided a fairly exhaustive list of groups of people in society such as “the disabled”, “the elderly” “ex-criminals”, “the homeless”, and “ethnic minorities” as well, conspicuous by its absence are sexual minorities/marginalized groups such LGBTQ+ individuals, merely hinted at by the expressions ‘showing respect for everyone, whoever they are’, ‘other examples of intolerance’ and “everyone’s voices are heard”. This particular passage further highlighted the great caution displayed by the publisher/textbook creators despite the fact that this speech about social inclusion is probably an ideal platform to cover the topic of sexual minorities/marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals.

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#### **4.2 Students' Perceptions of Issues Pertaining to English Language Textbooks and Gender**

This section will present results pertaining to RQ2, "What are students' perceptions of issues pertaining to English textbooks and gender?"

#### *4.2.1 Students' attitudes towards the role of English language textbooks and English teachers*

When discussing whether the students would challenge the content of the textbooks, five of them in the focus groups explicitly indicated that they would not question the content of English textbooks or dare to do so due to a number of factors: their perceived lack of ability/language proficiency to judge, textbooks being the authoritative source of information, teachers being the gatekeepers. Examples of participants' reflections on textbooks are shown below.

***Student D (FG 1):*** *I'm not good enough to [question the textbooks].*

***Student G (FG 2):*** *To me, if you [the teacher] think that the textbook is proper and I need to learn from it, then I'll think that the textbook is proper... When my abilities have not yet reached a high level, I dare not comment on them[textbooks].*

***Student F (FG 2):*** *I don't even understand it [the content of textbooks]. How can I tell if it's right or wrong?...And it's called textbook. The word 'textbook' suggests teaching us something. It's used to teach us something. How can I refute them [the ideas in textbooks]?... When it comes to whether it's proper or not, we cannot tell. Only you [the teacher] can tell if it's proper. We don't have the ability to do so. We're still learning.*

The excerpts above showed that the students did not think they had the ability to judge the content of textbooks. Also, the excerpts from Student G and Student F's remarks highlighted that they regarded textbooks as authoritative, meaning that they found textbooks reliable. In addition, the notion of teachers being the gatekeeper for students was accentuated in Student G's excerpt. Her remarks showed a heavy dependence on her teachers, suggesting that when a textbook is chosen and used in class, the textbook and the content in the textbook has already approved by teachers.

#### *4.2.2 Students' attitudes towards gender issues on professions in the textbooks*

When asked to recall how different professions are represented in English language textbooks, students' involvement appeared to be very active. Many of them shared a list of instances. Particular examples touched upon by the students are listed below:

***Student A (FG 1):*** *Nurses are girls, doctors are boys, [and] lawyers are boys.*

***Student C (FG 1):*** *blue-collar workers are boys ... [because] they are more muscular.*

***Student E (FG 2):*** *Athletes are males, especially basketball players.*

***Student G (FG 2):*** *Service-oriented roles tend to be more female-oriented, while jobs that involve greater contribution lean more towards males.*

Following Student G's remarks shown above, Student G soon backed up her standpoint with two examples, saying that "presidents [of some organisations]" are males, while their assistants are female." Student F also added that "this is so stereotypical. This is always the case. How come there is no male secretary."

There were times when one student joined the discussion immediately after one stopped speaking. Examples are put below:

***Student C (FG 1):*** *There are male and female teachers.*

***Student B (FG 1):*** *But usually in textbooks, teachers are girls.*

***Student B (FG 1):*** *Most chefs are males.*

***Student A (FG 1):*** *The same goes for police officers as well.*

#### *4.2.3 Visual Stimuli: Students' divergent viewpoints on gender representations in the textbooks*

During the focus groups, after a number of illustrations from the selected textbooks were shown to the students, their viewpoints varied significantly. As to Focus Group 1, when the researcher drew the students' attention to Figure 11 by pointing at it and

asked them whether it would be normal to use a male to represent a basketball player, all students (N:4) unanimously agreed that it was normal.

As to Focus Group 2, when the researcher drew the students' attention to Figure 11 by pointing at it and asking them the same question, Student F's immediate reaction was to shake her head, and afterwards, she retorted that it could also be a female basketball player.

What was interesting about the discussions generated by the two groups was that some students in FG1 attempted to help the textbooks justify why such an illustration was chosen, whereas some students in FG 2 not only questioned why a male was selected as the representation, but also brought up the issue of stereotypes.

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The findings also appear to suggest the interplay between gender representations and students' interest in learning the language/information. Before Figure 12 was shown to the students in FG2, they were asked to share about what they thought about e-sports players. Almost all students (N:3) agreed that most e-sports players were usually men, while Student F added that e-sports players are stereotypically male and there are really good female e-sports players.



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When Figure 12 was shown to the students in both FG2, it could be observed that Student F kept nodding and Student E said “wah”, which appeared to be an exclamation of surprise. Also, Student G commented:

*It's refreshing to see this [referring to Figure 12]. It's new to me.*

Based on the idea of Figure 12 being refreshing, as seen in Student G's remarks, the students were asked if this illustration would make them more willing to read the reading passage. All students kept nodding and agreed. To illustrate, the excerpts of the discussion between Student F and Student G are put below:

***Student F (FG 2):*** *It's because the way it's represented is different... People think only boys play e-sports, but the textbook says otherwise. So I'm more willing to see what's in the passage and the ideas in it... I'm more willing to read it....I think it's because it's break the...*

***Student F and Student G in unison (FG 2):*** *Stereotype.*

***Student F (FG 2):*** *Breaking everyone's stereotype... So that's why I find it more novel.*

As seen in the discussion among FG2 students, the students recalled from their experience that E-sports players were usually boys. When their attention was drawn to

a reading passage with an illustration (Figure 12) featuring a female teenager being an e-sports player, one of the students appeared to express an element of surprise at the first sight of the illustration, one student found that such an illustration instantly captivated her attention, and all of them indicated that they were more willing to read the article. As a result, the findings here suggest that when textbooks do not follow the usual stereotypical images/representations, they may perhaps have a positive impact on students' interest in learning the content of textbooks.

The findings from the FG1 discussion, however, were distinct from FG2. Before Figure 12 was shown to the students in FG1, they were asked to share about what they thought about e-sports players. Similar to FG2, all students (N:4) unanimously agreed that most e-sports players were usually men. Interestingly, Student B also attempted to justify her standpoint despite Student C being dubious:

***Student B (FG1):** Girls' abilities to react are not very strong.*

***Student C (FG1):** Is this the case?*

***Student B (FG 1):** It surely is. Girls innately react more slowly than boys.*

When Figure 12 was shown to the students in FG1, their immediate reactions varied significantly from that in FG2. Some students found the article featuring an e-sports player (Figure 12) slightly odd. Excerpts were put below for illustrative purposes.

***Student D [FG1]:** It [playing e-sports] seems to be her personal interest. Not playing something serious.*

***Student B [FG1]:** The way she looks is a bit...The way she's dressed is casual. She's more like an amateurish player... not in a way that is competitive.*

As seen in **Student B** and Student D's remarks above, some students did not appear to sit well with Figure 12. Their remarks somewhat suggested their preference, meaning that they found it slightly inappropriate to use a female to represent an e-sports player. The findings were even more interesting because the students made such remarks

despite the caption below Figure 12 clearly stating that “Georgia, 21, is a leading e-sports player...” In particular, the fact that Student B described Georgia as “an amateurish player” and Student D depicted Georgia not “playing something serious” is perhaps an indication of what they thought a professional e-sports player should look like. In this case, probably to Student B and Student D, an e-sports player could appear to be “playing something serious” and to be less amateurish if a male is chosen to represent the player.

Also, when the students in FG1 were asked whether the fact that textbooks choose a male/female to represent a profession has an impact on them, all students (N:4) claimed that it would not have an impact. Excerpts of their discussion are put below:

*Student A (FG1): It's because the picture doesn't matter... What matters is the words.*

*Student B (FG1): It doesn't affect learning.*

*Student D (FG1): Changing he, she, [and] it won't ... change its meaning.*

As suggested by the excerpts above, the students found gender representations unimportant as long as they can still learn the language. *Student A* and *Student B*'s words suggest that the role of a language textbook should primarily be about helping students learn the language, and that other factors such as gender representations are a low priority. In addition, *Student D*'s remarks, in particular, may have shed light on the reason why a certain portion of students does not consider gender issues such as the use of pronouns important.

#### *4.2.4 Visual Stimuli: Could having balanced gender representations be (de)motivating?*

Another part of the discussion among FG2 students also suggests that the selection for gender representations may have a bearing on their interests. Often in language textbooks, there are chapters/units (e.g. technology) introducing the stories of certain celebrities' lives. In Figure 13, it shows a biography of Elon Musk, an influential entrepreneur. When the students' attention was drawn to Figure 13, they were invited

to discuss whether the selection for gender representations when it comes to biographies of celebrities has a bearing on them. Excerpts of the discussion were put below:

***Student F [FG2]:** I prefer reading about women. In my view, there are many male billionaires. When it comes to achievements, it's mostly men. However, I'd rather see a woman achieve great things... Reading about how a woman grows up is much more appealing than reading about a man.*

***Student E (FG2):** I'd [also] like to read more about girls. It's because there are plenty of things about boys... If girls succeed, I'd like to read about their experiences.*

It could be seen from the excerpts above that when discussing whether a reading article featuring a male celebrity or a female celebrity will have an impact on their motivation for reading the article, all agreed that it will make a difference. Not only the female students, but also the male students said that they would want to read an article about a female's achievement, instead of a male's. Also, *Student E's* remarks suggested that reading articles on males are abundant, whereas reading articles on females are not. As a result, the findings here suggest that gender representations could be a motivating factor, and the students' stronger desire to read more about females could perhaps be due to articles about females being rare or novel.

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In addition, on the topic of career, the students in both groups were invited to discuss the idea of balanced gender representations. While the students in FG 1 considered the idea of having a balanced gender representation inconsequential, the students in FG2 thought otherwise. After all students in FG2 indicated that it is necessary to have a balanced gender representation in terms of occupation, they were asked to justify their viewpoint. The excerpts of the discussion are put below:

***Student G (FG2):*** *Being a woman myself, if all I see in textbooks are male professions, I may start to wonder if I can achieve great things in the future...I may start to think that I won't achieve much in the future.*

***With her fingers pointing to the textbook in the researcher's hand, Student F (FG2):*** *There are no such achievements [about females]. It feels like these achievements are all done by boys.*

***Echoing Student F and Student G's s viewpoint, Student E:***

*[Girls will] feel that they can't do it since there are no examples.*

As seen in the discussion above, Student G remarked that if she keeps seeing males occupy all occupations in language textbooks, she may feel that she would not have a bright future ahead. The words of *Student E* and *Student F*'s help elucidate *Student G*'s point of view and point to the notion of the future-self. In other words, the findings suggest that gender representations regarding occupation in language textbooks could be a demotivating factor and may prevent students from anticipating themselves being in certain professions.

#### *4.2.5 Visual Stimuli: Why is she always the one to do this?*

After the illustration with a family in it (see Figure 3) was shown to the students in both groups, almost all the students (N:7) agreed that the act of the mother holding the little girl implied her role as someone who takes care of the family. Interestingly, *Student A* in FG1 used her family as an example to challenge the gender representation in Figure 3, while *Student D* in FG1 and *Student F* in FG2 raised a question as to why the illustration was not presented in the other way around.

***Student A (FG1):*** *My dad hugged me more when I was little...Mums in the books are always depicted as the ones who cook, but my mum doesn't cook and she doesn't know how to cook... My dad does the cooking.*

***Student D (FG1):*** *Their roles can be swapped. Dads can be caretakers as well.*

***Student F (FG2):*** *The dad can be the one who is holding his child.*

As seen in the excerpts above, the students did not view the illustration on the surface. Instead, they were able to interpret the illustration on a deeper level. *Student A* disagrees with the gender representation by citing her own real-life instances, while the words of *Student D* and *Student F* show that the role of a family caretaker should not be limited to mothers only.

### **4.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Issues of Gender, Sexuality, and Textbook Selections**

This section will present results pertaining to RQ3, "What are teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and textbook selection"?

#### *4.3.1 Teachers' observation: are gender representations in the textbooks inconsequential?*

The interview findings cast light on the interplay between gender representations and students' interest in learning the target language. Teacher A shared her observation when teaching the topic related to sports. She observed that boys are especially interested in learning about male athletes. When she was teaching the story of Cheung Ka Long, a Hong Kong foil fencer, she observed that boys looked more interested while girls seemed relatively unresponsive. She also recalled that when she was teaching the topic of sports in a girl's school and the athletes chosen to introduce the topic were Lee Wai Sze, a former Hong Kong professional track cyclist, and Eileen Gu, a freestyle skier, the students seemed more interested in the topic. Teacher A explained that it was probably because girls have little exposure to female athletes and they themselves are not quite into sports, and therefore, seeing female representations in sports brings them a sense of novelty.

Apart from the interplay between gender representations and students' interest in learning the target language, the findings suggest a potential impact gender representations in ELT textbooks have on students' future-selves. Teacher A observed that on the topic of innovation, there were usually male representations and added that "gender representations need to be more balanced" so girls will not "have the stereotype that innovators and scientists are always males." Teacher A's viewpoint about students' future-selves was further supported by Teacher C who remarked that if an article discusses a profession or a task that girls stereotypically couldn't do and a story of a girl who is depicted as someone who went from being unable to being able to do will arouse female students' interest.

As seen in Teacher A and Teacher C's interview, a correlation between gender representations and students' future-selves could be identified. To illustrate, when girls see female "scientists" and "innovators" in the language textbooks, such representations, for those who perceive themselves unable to be one, help stimulate their interest, potentially helping them think about the possibilities of their future-selves.

#### *4.3.2 Teachers' voices: we can only do what we can do to redress it*

When asked to discuss what the teachers would do when they encounter gender representations which they may consider biased or stereotypical, the interview findings suggest that what teachers can do is limited. Teacher A shared that on the topic of what to wear, the default setting of some textbooks is that girls go for the pink clothes, while boys go for blue. When this happens, she will guide her students and let them know that it is perfectly fine for boys to prefer pink and for girls to prefer blue. As for Teacher B, when boys are depicted in the textbooks as being good at mathematics and science and girls as being good at studying arts (e.g. languages, history, and literature), Teacher B would use real-life examples to challenge such depictions. Teacher C's approach differed from the other two teachers. Upon encountering stereotypical gender representations, Teacher C would first clarify that these depictions reflect the publishers' perspectives only, and inform students that they are no longer applicable and can be disregarded.

To summarize, the teachers cast light on the issue of how to redress biased gender representations when using textbooks and provide a number of fairly practical ways for schoolteachers. While both Teacher A and Teacher C let students know that those gender representations are no longer applicable, Teacher C also made it clear to students that those gender representations were artificial (i.e. created from the perspectives of publishers), not based on real-life situations. Teacher C's approach highlights the fact that stereotypical depictions of females and males in textbooks simply reflect how certain people perceive the world. Additionally, Teacher B would use real-life examples to refute biased gender representations.

### 4.3.3 Representations of sexuality and sexual identities

The interviews with the teachers revealed that the teachers did not use any English language textbooks that contained representations of LGBT+ characters, whether they were explicitly identified or not, or any topics, issues (e.g. same-sex marriage) or lexis (e.g. gays, lesbians, bisexuals) related to sexual diversity. Teacher B recalled that one exception was she once came across a reading passage touching upon a LGBT campaign. All in all, the findings therefore suggests that heterosexuality seems to be established as the standard, while the lives and experiences of LGBT+ individuals are predominantly absent from English teaching materials.

### 4.3.4 Setting priorities: What criteria are used for assessing a language textbook's suitability?

The teacher participants stated that they need to discuss textbook selection and exchange feedback with their colleagues every year. During the interviews, they were invited to share what factors they considered important when selecting a language textbook. Their key ideas were summarized in the table below (See Table 5):

Table 5 - Summary of the factors the teachers considered important when selecting a language textbook

	The factors the teacher considered important:
Teacher A (F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b><u>Level of difficulty</u></b></li> <li>- Relevance to students' daily routines</li> <li>- Whether the reading passages are up-to-date</li> </ul>
Teacher B (F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whether it helps bridge students the gap between their junior and senior years</li> <li>- The layout of the textbook; whether the textbook is structured</li> <li>- <b><u>Level of difficulty at textual level</u></b></li> <li>- Whether the content is up-to-date</li> </ul>
Teacher C (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b><u>Whether the textbook is level-appropriate</u></b></li> <li>- Whether the publisher provides enough online</li> </ul>

	<p>resources/support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whether the textbook contains enough colourful illustrations.</li> <li>- Whether the content is relevant to the lives of teenagers.</li> </ul>
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Based on the findings in Table 5, the criteria used for assessing a language textbook's suitability essentially revolved around the learning needs of students, not gender.

When asked directly about gender representations and textbook selections, the three teachers explicitly stated that their current school did not use gender representations as one of the textbook selection criteria. When asked to justify why they thought it was the case, the reasons they provided were broadly similar. Regarding the similarity, the teachers remarked that language textbooks should focus on helping students develop the four skills and acquire vocabulary (Teacher A), and that the level-appropriacy of language textbooks is the most important (Teacher A, B, and C). Teacher B, who was the head of the English Department, stated that the school will still use it [the textbook] as long as it is not seriously biased or stereotypical. Teacher B's stance echoed Teacher A's viewpoint that it is an issue when it [the textbook] involves **gender discrimination**.

Interestingly, Teacher B further added that it does not concern her when fathers are depicted as "breadwinners" and mothers as "housewives". When she went on to explain, saying "this is what is happening in real life". Also, Teacher B believed that gender representations rarely have a bearing on the possibilities of students' future-selves. For such a belief, the explanation offered by Teacher B was that students have a wide range of platforms such as television shows to gain access to different aspects of the world and that students do not really read language textbooks at all times.

What is also worth noting is that Teacher C assumed that his students do not have the ability to reflect on gender issues/representations in textbooks because of the abstract nature of the concept – gender, as reflected in Teacher C's remarks below:

**Teacher C:** *The students do not really have a clue what genders are...I'd like to repeat that my students are Band 3 students. These [gender representations] are high-level thinking processes, involving some abstract concepts. They don't really think about such things...So our first priority is to make sure that the content of the textbooks is level-appropriate.*

Regarding the sub-topic about representations of sexuality and textbook selections, the three teachers also explicitly stated that their current school did not use representations of sexuality as one of the textbook selection criteria. For this, Teacher B explained that sexual identities are not something schools prioritize and what schools usually focus are highly academic, as reflected in her words below.

**Teacher B:** *It's not that schools avoid talking about same-sex marriage; rather, it's that schools avoid talking about love or romance...The mission of schools is to for students to study hard, to get admission to universities. Apart from extracurricular activities, students should not think about other things such as love... not to mention the topic related to LGBT.*

Teacher A believed that language textbooks should cover topic such as LGBT+, but she believed that schools and publishers thought otherwise. Teacher A provided two practical reasons. One reason was language textbooks containing topics about various sexual identities were less likely to be accepted by schools whose school sponsoring bodies are catholic or Christian. The second reason was the fear of getting into trouble. She further explained that parents may complain that the schools are making their children not able to tell if they are boys or girls, and schools would usually try their best to avoid getting themselves into such trouble. Interestingly, Teacher C created a hypothetical situation in his own school context, and the hypothetical situation supports Teacher A's viewpoint about schools' fear of getting into trouble. The excerpts about Teacher C's hypothetical situation are put below.

*Teacher C: If there are two language textbooks in front of us, one with such topics and the other without, we will choose the one that doesn't mention such topics in order to play safe.*

The viewpoint conveyed through the hypothetical situation supported Teacher A's viewpoint that schools will probably tend to avoid getting into trouble.

Teacher C also highlighted that after all, parents are the ones who purchase the language textbooks, and that from the perspective of publishers, they will probably avoid including topics about sexual identities in their language because doing so could help maximize profits and increase the chances of their textbooks being selected by schools.

## **Chapter 5 discussion**

This section explains how the current study enhances the understanding of gender and sexuality representations in English language textbooks by analysing two secondary English language textbooks alongside the voices of students and teachers. It also critically discusses the findings in relation to the RQs and compares them with what has been reviewed from studies highlighted in Chapter 2.

There are two parts in this section. Section 5.1 – 5.3 focus on representations of sexuality in the textbooks, while drawing on the data from the voices of students and teachers' when necessary, while Section 5.4 – 5.6 focus on the voices of students and teachers.

### **5.1 Representations of Sexuality**

The findings indicated that the textbooks contained no LGBTQ+ characters, whether they were explicitly identified or not, nor any topics, issues, or vocabulary relevant to sexual diversity. In line with existing literature (e.g., Gray 2013; Paiz, 2015; Selvi and Kocaman, 2021; Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020), the findings of this study indicate that heterosexuality seems to be treated as the standard, while LGBTQ+ lives and experiences are absent from the selected textbooks, thus presenting in a skewed picture of what it is really happening in the real world.

In terms of family structure, the findings show that half of the mentions (N:4) of a family structure were a portrayal of a nuclear family and two mentions were concerning single-parent family structures. The findings of this study are in some ways contrary to that of Selvi and Kocaman, (2021) who found that part of their findings provided an unrealistic and outdated representations of the world by neglecting to discuss alternative definitions of family and by neglecting to acknowledge single parents. Selvi and Kocaman further argued that the lack of attention given to divorce and single parenting supports the notion of the nuclear family being sacred. In this regard, the findings of this study, in comparison to Selvi and Kocaman's (2021) study, show improvement in terms of representations of family

in textbooks since the textbooks included two depictions of single-parent family structures. The inclusion of the single-parent family structures could perhaps also be interpreted as a soft attempt to challenge the notion of a nuclear family.

In addition, two illustrations in which homosexuality could possibly be inferred were identified in the textbooks. For example, as seen in Figure 8, one may at the first sight interpret such an illustration as two females having their wedding ceremony. Such an interpretation appears to be more sensible, especially in the absence of the accompanying text. Such findings are similar to that of Gray (2013) who found the illustration in a textbook showing two male friends cooking together and the accompanying text makes it clear that “the meal they are preparing is for their girls” (p. 50). While both the illustration (i.e. Figure 8) in this study and the one found in Gray’s study display caution concerning representations of sexuality, there are very slight variations between the two. The accompanying text in Gray’s study directly made it clear that the two males were heterosexuals and prevented students from interpreting the illustration differently in almost every way possible. However, the accompanying text for Figure 8, instead of explicitly saying something which completely prevents students from getting the “wrong” idea, were more implicit and simply provided more concrete contextual information to the illustration on the pretext of being a ‘richly detailed’ language textbook and of helping students learn the language so that the students are more likely to learn the intended meaning of Figure 8. In other words, the number ways to interpret Figure 8 was minimized by providing more concrete contextual information to the illustration.

In addition, it would be encouraging to see the existence of illustrations such as Figure 8 and 9 for three reasons. First, they give textbook users room to interpret them. The incorporation of such illustrations in textbooks, albeit with extra contextual text to minimize the number of ways possible to interpret them, would allow students and schoolteachers to use them as visual stimuli to start “dialogue and critical discussion around all identities, sexual or otherwise” (Paiz, 2019, p.2). For example, through critical discussions among students and teachers, one conclusion they may

arrive at together is that it is normal for two people of the same sex to work out together, even though one of them is not a personal trainer. Second, the findings in FGs show most students (N:5) explicitly reported that they would not question the content of the textbooks and would see textbooks as authoritative sources of information. As a result, such illustrations existing in textbooks become much more meaningful because the textbooks would send out a message to students that it is perfectly fine and safe to depict various sexual identities in classrooms. This may be particularly important for those who “may see themselves on various points along the gender spectrum (e.g., intersex, trans, queer, among others)” (Selvi and Kocaman, 2021, p. 129). Finally, making good use of such illustrations to generate critical discussion is likely to help promote students’ ability to “communicate about sexual diversity matters, and with sexually diverse interlocutors” (Nelson, 2009, p. 206).

## **5.2 How can ELT materials be made less heteronormative and how can we move upwards?**

Examining the chosen textbooks through the lens of Moore’s taxonomy, it would be worth pointing out that representations of sexuality in the textbooks do not explicitly value heterosexuality or devalue other forms of sexuality, and as a result, they do not fall into the category of Explicit Heterosexism. This is consistent with Moore’s (2020) observation that no ELT textbooks fell into the category of Explicit Heterosexism. Second, the findings suggest that the textbooks appeared to belong to the category of Heteronormative Erasure. Now that the textbooks appear to belong to the second category from the last, the question that follows is how the textbooks make progress in terms of the degree of heteronormativity.

Fully acknowledging that any attempt to shift to make teaching materials less heteronormative should be encouraged and that in order for ELT textbooks to move from Heteronormative erasure up to Heteronormative marginalization, they need to include non-heterosexual representations at the cost of framing them as “essentialized, potentially controversial, and/or rare” or putting them in the negative contexts such as HIV, AIDS, or social discrimination (Moore, 2020, p. 121 - 122), I now suggest two

feasible ways to make the chosen textbooks less heteronormative using Moore's taxonomy. One way is for textbook publishers/creators to include non-heterosexual representations through topics such as movie genres. For example, the supernatural comedy *Marry My Dead Body* can be used when teaching about comedy. The movie is about a male police officer who, after discovering an unusual envelope, becomes married to a male ghost, and they start to solve a crime together. While in this movie, non-heterosexual representations are presented in the ghost discourse, the fact that they exist in textbooks can provide an opportunity for students and teachers to critically discuss marriage and sexual relationships in classroom settings.

Another way to make textbooks less heteronormative is to make LGBTQ+ individuals visible when discussing social issues such as social inclusion like the one in Figure 10. The findings of this study point to great caution displayed by the textbook authors and publishers through a reading passage titled "What is social inclusion?". The reading passage presents a long list of groups of people in society such as "the disabled", "the elderly", "ex-criminals", "the homeless", and "ethnic minorities". This finding is particularly interesting because some may argue that sexual minorities/marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals were conspicuous by their absence. This finding was particularly discouraging because the speech about social inclusion is probably the most sensible and risk-free way to include the topic of sexual minorities/marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, based on which students and teachers could critically discuss the topic with one another.

### **5.3 Promoting Moore's taxonomy**

Part of this study aims to encourage the use of Moore's (2020) taxonomy to assess and challenge levels of heteronormativity. However, I believe the terms "Heteronormative Erasure" and "Heteronormative Marginalization" may not be very clear and could lead to misunderstandings. At first glance, "Heteronormative Erasure" seems to imply that heterosexuality is being erased, while "Heteronormative Marginalization" seems to suggest that heterosexuality is being pushed to the margins. In fact, these interpretations do not match their actual definitions (see Section 2.3.3

for a detailed explanation of Moore's taxonomy). To make the taxonomy more accessible, I propose some alternative names. For "Heteronormative Erasure," "Exclusion of Non-Heterosexual Narratives" might be a clearer option, as it emphasizes the omission of non-heterosexual perspectives. For "Heteronormative Marginalization," I suggest "Selective Inclusion of Non-Heterosexual Voices" and "Contextual Marginalization of Non-Heterosexual Representations." The first highlights how non-heterosexual voices are selectively included, while the second emphasizes how queer narratives are marginalized in specific contexts.

#### **5.4 Voices of students and teachers': students' future visions of themselves**

The students' narratives reveal that gender representations in textbooks may have a powerful impact on their future visions of themselves. Student G (FG2) remarked that if *all she "see[s] in textbooks are male professions"*, she may start to doubt her ability to achieve a lot in the future. Student F (FG2) agreed with Student G's viewpoint, adding that she felt "*these achievements are all done by boys*". Interestingly, Student E, the only one male student in FG2, echoed Student G and Student F's viewpoint and pointed out that girls' perceived inability were probably due to underrepresentations of females' achievements. Similarly, the words of two teachers in this study also point to the correlation between students' perceived future possibilities of who they can become and unbalanced/biased representation of females in textbooks. Hence, the voices expressed, notably those of the students, lend qualitative support to the observation made by many scholars (Sunderland, 1992; Blumberg, 2007; Mukundan and Nimehchisalem, 2008; Mustapha, 2013; Lee, 2014) that the inadequate portrayal or prejudiced depiction of girls in textbooks may make female students assimilate societal norms advocating restricted roles. In addition, the qualitative findings in this study were also reported by Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) who found "a link between girls' underachievement and textbooks" (p. 21)

#### **5.5 Voices of students and teachers': are gender representations motivating?**

The findings also point to the possibility that gender representations have a bearing on students' interest in or motivation for learning what is inside the textbooks. All FG 2

students expressed more willingness to learn about the reading passage featuring Georgia (See Figure 12), a leading female e-sports player. Student F and Student G (FG2) explicitly pointed out that such a representation was ‘refreshing’ and broke the stereotype about e-sports players and because of this, both of them expressed more willingness to read about the article. Also, when discussing Elon Musk (See Figure 13), Student F (FG2) pointed out that male representations in terms of achievements were abundant, and Student E(FG2), as a male student, expressed similar ideas.

Furthermore, Teacher A also observed that when she was teaching the story of Cheung Ka Long, a Hong Kong male foil fencer, boys looked more interested while girls seemed relatively unresponsive. She also recalled that when she was teaching the topic of sports in a girl’s school and the athletes chosen to introduce the topic were Lee Wai Sze, a former Hong Kong professional track cyclist, and Eileen Gu, a freestyle skier, the girls seemed more interested in the topic. Putting together, the voices of students and teachers’ point directly to the potential correlation between gender representations and student’s interest in learning.

Several factors could perhaps explain this observation. Firstly, the students’ stronger desire to read more about females could perhaps be due to articles about females being rare or novel. Secondly, it may have something to do with one’s individual identity. Individual identity refers to one’s beliefs and perceptions about oneself as individuals (Master et al., 2016, p. 302). Students are motivated when they perceive a personal connection to the content being studied, particularly when the materials are “personalized” or linked to “valued aspects” of their individual identity (p. 303). In other words, it is reasonable to assume that FG2 students may have identified something which is linked to their “valued aspects” of their individual identity, and as a result, they wanted to learn more about the passage (p. 303).

### **5.6 Teacher’s voices: why gender representations take a back seat**

As seen in Table 5, the teachers selected a number of textbook selection criteria they considered important. It was found that the criteria used for assessing a language

textbook's suitability revolved around the learning needs of students. Turning to exploring why the schools did not use gender representations as one of the textbook selection criteria, the reason provided by the three teachers was fairly similar. The teachers thought that language textbooks should focus on helping students develop the four skills and acquire vocabulary (Teacher A), and that the level-appropriacy of language textbooks is the most important (Teacher A, B, and C).

As to why gender representations are considered inconsequential, three possible reasons could be identified in the teachers' narratives. Firstly, it may have something to do with teachers' perceived power of gender representations in textbooks. This was reflected in Teacher B's voices. She believed that gender representations rarely have a bearing on possibilities of students' future-selves and explained that students have a wide range of platforms such as television shows to gain access to different aspects of the world and that students do not really read language textbooks at all times. However, Teacher B's belief seem to have overlooked the fact that while it is true that with the advent of social networks, students can get exposure to a wide range of roles such as female doctors, male nurses, female pilots, this can vary significantly due to various external factors such as one's family conditions. Yet, this is different for textbooks, as they are universally used. When students learn a language in school setting, they almost have to use language textbooks.

Secondly, it is perhaps due to how teachers perceive education. Teacher B provided a fairly narrow definition of education as she mentioned that "[t]he mission of schools is to for students to study hard, to get admission to universities". The narrow definition mentioned by Teacher B draws my attention to Biesta's (2015) words of caution: that education solely revolves around "making students learn" or "facilitating their learning is potentially misleading", for students and teachers alike (p. 76). In fact, education is much more than just "qualification" (i.e. "transmission and acquisition of knowledge" and "skills") (p. 77) (for a detailed description of three functions of education, please see Biesta, 2015, p.77 - 78). Education also has a positive or negative impact on the student as a person (Biesta, 2015). Therefore, when

teachers perceive education simply as “transmission and acquisition of knowledge” and “skills” (p. 77), they tend to consider gender representations in textbooks inconsequential.

Thirdly, it is related to teachers’ assumption about their students. One unanticipated finding from Teacher C’s narratives was his assumption that his students are unable to understand gender representations in textbooks and they cannot handle “high-level thinking processes, involving some abstract concepts”. The teacher’s assumption is challenged by the student participants of this study who were able to discuss gender-related issues, despite the fact that the students were what Teacher C label as Band 3<sup>2</sup> students. For example, Student A in FG1 disagrees with stereotypical gender representation of mothers as caretakers by using her own real-life instances, while Student F and Student G in FG2 touched upon the notion of stereotype when reading the reading passage about the female e-sports player.

There were two discouraging findings from a critical language education point of view. One is that Teacher B stated that it does not concern her when fathers are depicted as breadwinners and mothers as housewives and explained that “this is what is happening in real life”. I find Teacher B’s viewpoint slightly discouraging, as her perceived “real life” in Hong Kong is a city where male predominance exists, and females are confined to family contexts and are associated with stereotypical jobs such as housewives and caregivers. It is particularly discouraging as I am aware that when teachers perceive the world around them in this way, it is difficult for them to act as “agents of change” to “help learners to think and act according to their own interest and ability” (Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020, p. 1124). Also, Teacher B observed that schools not only avoided discussing same-sex marriage, but also love and romance altogether. This is also disappointing in that the topics about love and romance do exist in textbooks, and love and romance are part of human experiences. This avoidance of the two common topics runs counter to what language classrooms

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<sup>2</sup> Within the context of Hong Kong, the so-called Band 1/2/3 classification is just a general consensus among the public. This classification is used simply to differentiate the educational standards or student quality of different schools.

aim to achieve from CLE's perspective. CLE language classrooms aim to represent "microcosms of a broader social world" (Cogo et al., 2021, p. 192).

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the major findings and implications of the present study, addresses limitations, and offers suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 Summary of the Major Findings

There are three research questions in the present study. The findings for each one are summarized below:

#### *6.1.1 RQ1: Representations of sexuality*

Regarding the first RQ “How is sexuality represented in the selected textbooks as evaluated via Gray’s (2013) guiding questions and through the lens of Moore’s (2020) taxonomy?”, the findings indicate that the textbooks contained no LGBTQ+ characters, whether they were clearly identified or not, or any topics, issues or vocabulary related to sexual diversity, and that heterosexuality seems to be treated as the standard, while LGBTQ+ lives and experiences are absent from the chosen textbooks. In terms of family structure, the inclusion of two single-parent family structures in the textbooks could perhaps also be interpreted as a soft attempt to challenge the notion of a nuclear family, thereby reflecting a certain degree of improvement. Also, great caution could be seen in two special instances: 1) the two illustrations with two people of the same sex in them, and 2) a speech about social inclusion. Using Moore’s taxonomy to examine the degree of heteronormativity, I also found that the textbooks appeared to belong to the category of Heteronormative Erasure (See Section 4.1.4 for why such a conclusion was drawn).

#### *6.1.2 RQ2: Students’ Voices*

Regarding the second RQ “What are students’ perceptions of issues pertaining to gender in textbooks?”, the findings revealed students’ perception of ELT textbooks in general and gender-related issues. The main findings could generally be broken down into five parts. First, the students reported that they would not challenge the textbooks for a number of reasons: their perceived lack of ability/language proficiency to judge, textbooks being the authoritative source of information, teachers being the

gatekeepers. Second, it could be observed that the students were able to discuss gender-related issues in textbooks. Third, conflicting findings could be identified. For example, FG1 students and FG2 students' viewpoints varied significantly in terms of the representation of a basketball player in the textbooks (See Figure 11). Fourth, a potential correlation between gender representations and students' interest in/motivation for learning the content in textbooks could be identified. Fifth, the narratives of the students also reveal their beliefs about some stereotypical associations between certain professions and gender.

### *6.1.3 RQ3: Teachers' Voices*

Regarding the third RQ "What are teachers' perceptions of issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and textbook selection in relation to language textbooks?", the main findings could also be divided into five parts. First, one teacher shared her lesson observation that gender representations appeared to play a role in sparking their interest. Second, a connection between gender representations and students' future selves could be identified in Teacher A and C's narratives. Third, a number of fairly practical ways for schoolteachers to redress biased gender representations in textbooks were suggested. Fourth, based on the teachers' teaching experience, they reported that did not use any English language textbooks that contained representations of LGBT+ characters, whether they were clearly identified or not, or any topics, issues (e.g. same-sex marriage) or lexis (e.g. gays, lesbians, bisexuals) related to sexual diversity. Fifth, the teachers reported to prioritize the learning needs of students over representations of gender and sexuality. Also, there were a few sub-themes from the teachers' narratives, including teachers' assumptions about students' learning ability or malleability and a narrow definition of education.

## **6.2 Recommendations for how New Treasure Plus textbooks can improve in the future**

With regards to how representations of sexuality in future New Treasure Plus+ textbooks can improve, one of the steps textbook authors and publishers could take is to reduce the unnecessary perpetuation of heteronormativity in textbooks, particularly

when it comes to family structures. In the textbooks of this study, the illustrative sentences used to teach learners the meaning of new immigrants are “I moved to Hong Kong ... I am happy to reunite with my husband and son...”, which could be regarded as unnecessarily heteronormative. This could be easily avoided by changing the illustrative sentences into other contexts such as having difficulty adjusting to the fast-paced environment of Hong Kong. Alternatively, if textbook authors and publishers find it necessary to touch upon family structures and romantic relationships, they should simply mention “her/his family”, or use the word “partner”. Doing so is likely to give not only students room for interpretation, but also teachers more teaching moments.

Furthermore, textbook authors and publishers should consider using Moore’s taxonomy to reflect on their current practices regarding the degree of heteronormativity. To illustrate, the textbooks of this study appeared to be in the category of Heteronormative Erasure. What textbook authors and publishers should probably aim to do is to move a layer upwards (i.e. going from Heteronormative Erasure to Heteronormative Marginalization). Though I believe that where change can be made, it should be, I do not suggest that those responsible for creating materials should go directly to Queer Inclusion without carefully thinking it through. As pointed out by Moore (2020), there are circumstances in which taking such actions may lead to social exclusion, censorship, or potential repercussions.

### **6.3 Pedagogical implications**

Two particular pedagogical implications, especially for schoolteachers, stand out from the qualitative data from students’ FG and teachers’ individual interviews. One is that teachers should avoid making any assumptions about students’ ability to understand/discuss gender issues or their malleability. Such assumptions could bring far-reaching impacts. For example, when students feel their teachers have low expectations, they may adopt a passive learning approach, impacting their growth both academically and individually.

In addition, the instance in which a few students found the representation of a female e-sports player odd and “amateurish” points to the necessity for teachers to make good use of the gendered content in textbooks to initiate critical discussions with students. This way, certain students’ deep-seated beliefs, if such beliefs exist, about the linkage between certain professions and genders could perhaps be weakened, or even eliminated. After all, gendered texts, as argued by Sunderland (2000), do not necessarily result in gender-biased interpretations in students, and such texts could be addressed by teachers through critical reading.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the present study and Calls for Future Research Work**

The present study is without its limitations. Firstly, although the manual searching of representations of sexuality in the two textbooks was conducted with meticulous attention and repeated verification, the potential for minor errors remains. Likewise, great care was taken to accurately identify representations of sexuality in articles, illustrations, exercises, and so on, and ambiguous cases (e.g. one unidentifiable family structure) were also identified. Nevertheless, this method of identification is still subject to challenge. Secondly, relying on non-probability convenience sampling methods limited the generalizability of the findings of this study and introduced a confounding variable. As pointed out by Acharya, et al. (2013), there are concerns about “variability and bias” and the findings collected could not be generalized beyond the sample (p. 332). Thirdly, the current study did not include students’ voices about representations of sexuality. As a result, future researchers are encouraged to investigate students’ perceptions of sexuality representations in textbooks, if circumstances allow them to do so.

I agree with Moore (2020) that a “more nuanced understanding” of various forms of heteronormativity needs to be developed (p. 119), if studies on representations of sexuality are to move forward. Thus, a fruitful area of research would be for researchers to use Moore’s more nuanced taxonomy to examine representations of sexuality in teaching materials, instead of looking at representations of sexuality through a binary lens (i.e. non-heteronormative or heteronormative). Researchers are

also encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to investigate whether representations of sexuality in ELT textbooks of different editions have moved forwards/backwards through the lens of Moore's taxonomy.

Future research should also be undertaken to explore students' perceptions of gender issues in textbooks in FG settings, but with changes to the grouping of the FGs. In the present study, both FGs were constituted by a mixture of female students and male students, FG1 with two female students and two male students in it and FG2 with three female students and one male student in it. Thus, exploring students' perceptions of gender issues in textbooks with students of the same gender in FGs may perhaps yield different results.

Teacher A's observation (See Section 4.3.1) and the students in FG2's narratives (See Section 4.2.3) in this study point to the potential interplay between representations of gender in textbooks and students' motivation for/interest in learning what is inside textbooks. Thus, it would perhaps be a fruitful area explore the linkage between the two. If researchers are highly encouraged to consider using Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self system (L2MSS) as a framework, since the notion of "ideal self" (i.e. an ideal self image about one wants to become in the future) was touched upon in the students' narratives.

## **6.5 Concluding Remarks**

As noted by Azimova and Johnston (2012), "representation always involves selection", and what "is not selected becomes invisible" (p. 339). Being aware that what is not selected may be rendered invisible, I find it easier to relate to one of the key messages taken from Kocaman and Selvi's research on gender and sexuality: by examining the representation of various identities in language teaching materials, we can get a glimpse into "which identities are prioritized and how institutions and educators choose to present them in the classroom" (Kocaman and Selvi, 2021, p.79). Now, I end by encouraging institutions, publishers, textbook creators, and schoolteachers to pay more attention to what is not selected in textbooks.



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# Appendices

## Appendix I CUREC Approval Email


 Outlook

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RE: Regarding Amendments [REDACTED]

---

From [REDACTED]  
Date [REDACTED]  
To [REDACTED]  
Cc [REDACTED]

 1 attachments (146 KB)

[REDACTED]

### Research ethics approval

[REDACTED]

The above amendment has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this amendment.

**Please ensure that you state the research ethics reference (including amendment number) on relevant supporting documentation, for example, consent forms and participant information.**

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]



## Appendix II

### An Example Transcript of Focus Group Interview with the Students Participants (FG2)

**Holding up the book, Researcher turned to the page with the article featuring an e-sports player (See Figure 12) and pointed to the Figure 12: How about this one?**

**Student E:** wah.

**Student G:** It's refreshing to me. It's new to me.

**Researcher:** Like you said, it's refreshing. Does it make you more willing to read it?

**Student F:** It does.

**Student G:** It does.

**Student H:** It does.

**Student E:** It does.

**Student F:** It's because the way it's represented is different. People think.

**Student G:** It's because of.

**Student F:** People think only boys play e-sports, but the textbook says otherwise. So I'm more willing to see what's in the passage and the ideas in it. I'm more willing to read it. I think it's because it's break the...

**Student F and Student G in unison:** Stereotype.

**Researcher:** Does it mean that it (i.e. gender representation) has an impact on your interest?

**Student F:** I should probably put it this way. It broke the...

**Student F and Student G in unison:** Stereotype.

**Student F:** It's breaking everyone's stereotype. That's why I find it more novel.



### Appendix III

#### An Example Transcript of Individual Interview with the Students Participants (Teacher C)

**Researcher:** Hypothetically speaking, you encounter a few very stereotypical descriptions in textbooks. It's hypothetical. But you have once encountered similar things, feel free to share it with me. Let's say that there is a part in which there are very stereotypical descriptions about girls and boys. Say – boys like to wear blue shirts, and girls likes wearing pink ones. If you encounter similar situations, would you as a teacher **address** this issue, for example, by saying a few words to your students?

**Teacher C:** I would say something about it.

**Researcher:** What would you say, may I ask?

**Teacher C:** I would say these are created by the publishers. That is to play safe. And then I would say these things are outdated and no longer applicable. Nowadays, girls may like the blue clothes, whereas boys may like pink clothes. I'm quite **easy-going** and quite **free** about these things. I think what matters is that the students are **comfortable**.

**Researcher:** I see. Let's talk about textbook selection criteria. Does your current school use gender representations as one of the textbook selection criteria?

**Teacher C:** I don't think so.

Researcher: May I ask why they don't consider doing so? I mean in your opinion.

**Teacher C:** *The students do not really have a clue what genders are. I'd like to repeat that my students are Band 3 students. These [gender representations] are high-level thinking processes, involving some abstract concepts. They don't really think about such things. So our first priority is to make sure that content of the textbooks is level appropriate.*

**Researcher:** *I see.*




# Appendix IV

## Participant Information Sheet for Teachers



### Genders Representation in Hong Kong Secondary English Textbooks (Teachers)

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: 

#### 1. Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

#### 2. Why is this research being conducted?

I am conducting a study about textbooks used in secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Through this study, I would like to find out more about a few aspects: 1) how gender is represented in the selected textbooks and if there are any differences between male and female representation; 2) as an extension of this, how sexualities are represented in the selected textbooks; 3) what teachers' perceptions of gender (and sexuality) issues in textbooks are.

#### 3. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been identified as a potential participant based on a few criteria. The first criterion used for choosing teacher participants focuses on their prior experience with the New Treasure Plus textbooks, the textbooks used for analysis in this study. This criterion ensures that the selected teachers have familiarity and exposure to the materials.

#### 4. Do I have to take part?


No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the research, without giving a reason, and without negative consequences, by advising me/ us of this decision.

The deadline by which you can withdraw yourself from the participation of the project is 15/03/24.

The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is 1/6/2024. I will not use the data provided by you if you indicate your intention to withdraw yourself from the research.

#### 5. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

This section should explain what will be involved in your research from a participant's point of view, and in the order they will experience it. This should include:

- The research will take place either online (i.e., through Microsoft Teams) or at 





**Participant Information Sheet for Teachers (cont.)**

- After reading through the Participant Information Sheet, you will be given at least three days to decide if you wish to take part in the research. Once you decide to take part in the research and sign the consent form, the researcher will approach you and talk to you about when it is best for you to have focus groups for data collection.
- Each teacher participant will be interviewed for 30 – 60 minutes.
- During the interview, you will be asked to discuss certain issues about textbooks you are familiar with.

#### **6. Are there any benefits in taking part?**

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research.

#### **7. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?**

I am interested in your perceptions of gender issues (and sexuality issues as an extension) in textbooks. The information you provide will help me better understand the interplay between textbook users and representation of gender and sexuality in order to answer one of my research questions.

The words you say during the interviews will be used as data.

The researcher, and the researcher's supervisor for this study will have access to this data.

Identifiable data, including consent forms, will be stored electronically in a password-protected document in the researcher's password protected laptop, and the research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

I may use this data in future studies.

Measure (e.g. the use of fake names to replace their real names) will be taken to ensure that the participants will be unidentifiable from this data.

#### **8. Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?**

The findings from the research may be written up in a dissertation/academic publication, or used for a conference presentation. The participants will be made unidentifiable from the outputs.

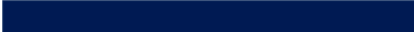
A copy of my dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) where it will be publicly available to facilitate its use in future research/ its access will be restricted.

#### **9. Data Protection**

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance web site at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

## Participant Information Sheet for Teachers (cont.)

### 10. Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. 

### 11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact the following people.



We will do our best to answer your query, and we will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

The Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee;  
Email: [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk); Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

### 12. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:



## **Appendix V**

### **Participant Information Sheet for Students**



## **Genders Representation in Hong Kong Secondary English Textbooks (Students)**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: [REDACTED]

#### **1. Introductory paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

#### **2. Why is this research being conducted?**

I am conducting a study about textbooks used in secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Through this study, I would like to find out more about a few aspects: 1) how gender is represented in the selected textbooks and if there are any differences between male and female representation; 2) as an extension of this, how sexualities are represented in the selected textbooks; 3) what teachers' perceptions of gender issues in textbooks are; 4) and what students' perceptions of gender issues in textbooks are.

#### **3. Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been identified as a potential participant based on a few criteria. The first criterion used for choosing student participants focuses on their prior experience with the New Treasure Plus textbooks, the textbooks used for analysis in this study. This criterion ensures that the selected students have familiarity and exposure to the materials.

The student participants need to be aged between 16 – 20, and around 15 – 20 student participants will be recruited for this study.

#### **4. Do I have to take part?**

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the research, without giving a reason, and without negative consequences, by advising me/ us of this decision.

The deadline by which you can withdraw yourself from the participation of the project is 15/03/24.

The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is 1/6/2024. I will not use the data provided by you if you indicate your intention to withdraw yourself from the research.

#### **5. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?**

This section should explain what will be involved in your research from a participant's point of view, and in the order they will experience it. This should include:

- The research will take place either online (i.e., through Microsoft Teams) or at [REDACTED]
- After reading through the Participant Information Sheet, you will be given at least three days to decide if you wish to take part in the research. Once you decide to take part in the research and sign the consent form, the researcher will approach you and talk to you about when it is best for you to have focus groups for data collection.
- Each student participant, together with other student participants, will engage in a focus group which may last for 30 – 60 minutes.
- During focus group discussions, student participants will be asked to discuss certain issues about textbooks they are familiar with. The researcher will act a moderator throughout the discussions.
- Before each focus group discussion, the researcher will clearly say the following sentences to the student participants: I am about to video record the discussion for this study. Before I start video recording, I would like you to indicate your agreement once again, whether through nodding or saying a few words. And, whenever you feel you would like to me to stop video recording or pause the video recording for whatever reasons you may have, you can and should do so.
- If the researcher finds it necessary to have follow-up sessions, he will approach you in person for clarification. The follow-up sessions are expected to last for no more than 10 minutes. Note that you can decline to have the follow-up sessions without having to give a reason or to face negative consequences.

#### **6. Are there any benefits in taking part?**

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research.

#### **7. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?**

I am interested in your perceptions of gender issues in textbooks. The information you provide will help me better understand the interplay between textbook users and representation of genders in order to answer one of my research questions (i.e. what are students' perceptions of gender issues in textbooks (e.g., the relationship between representations of genders (e.g., female/male invisibility, social roles, etc.) in textbooks and their motivation to learn and/or their interest in learning a particular topic?).

The words you say during the focus group discussions will be used as data. Your body language and/or your interaction with other student participants during the discussions may also be used as data.

The researcher, and the researcher's supervisor for this study will have access to the research data.

Identifiable data, including consent forms, will be stored electronically in a password-protected document in the researcher's password protected laptop, and the research data will be stored for 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

I may use this data in future studies.

Measure (e.g. the use of fake names to replace their real names) will be taken to ensure that the participants will be unidentifiable from this data.

**Participant Information Sheet for Students (cont.)**

**8. Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?**


The findings from the research may be written up in a dissertation/academic publication, or used for a conference presentation. The participants will be made unidentifiable from the outputs.

A copy of my dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the [Oxford University Research Archive](#) where it will be publicly available to facilitate its use in future research/ its access will be restricted.

**9. Data Protection**

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance web site at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

**10. Who has reviewed this research?**

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. 

**11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact the following people.



We will do our best to answer your query, and we will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

The Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee;  
Email: [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk); Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

**12. Further Information and Contact Details**

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:



**Appendix VI**  
**Consent Form**



### Consent to take part in Gender Representation in Hong Kong Secondary English Textbooks

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: 

Purpose of Study: To delve into students' perceptions of gender issues in textbooks (e.g., the relationship between representations of genders and their motivation to learn and/or their interest in learning a particular topic).

**Please initial each box if you agree with the statement**

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that I am free to withdraw myself from the participation of the project at any point until 15/03/24 without giving any reason, and that I am free to withdraw any information I have contributed to the research at any point until 1/6/2024 without giving any reason.

I understand how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project, and I am also aware that the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have the access to the data collected.

I understand that I will not be identifiable from any publications or any other research outputs such as presentations, videos, websites.

I consent to being video recorded.

I understand how audio recordings and videos will be used in research outputs.

I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs if I am not identifiable.

I give permission for you to contact me again to clarify information.

Template written consent form, version 4.2, November 2022

## Consent Form (cont.)


I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

I agree to take part. I hereby assign to the researcher all copyright in my contribution for use in all work stemming from this project and future projects.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

dd / mm / yyyy  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

  
Name of person taking consent

dd / mm / yyyy  
Date<sup>1</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix VII

### Guided questions used in the focus groups with the student participants

Note that the following questions were merely guiding questions for me, and not all of them were used during the focus group discussions.

1. Do you think language textbooks are important? Do you find them helpful? Do you think they can help you learn a language?
2. Can you recall a specific textbook that you found interesting or engaging? What made it stand out for you? Share it with your classmates?
3. What is your overall experience with language textbooks in school?
5. On the topic of jobs/careers, have you noticed any differences in how genders are portrayed in the textbooks you've used? Can you provide any examples?
6. Do you think there is a connection between How representations of gender in textbooks and your interest in learning what is inside textbooks?
7. Are there any specific gender roles or stereotypes that you have come across in textbooks?
8. Do you think there will be benefits to you if there is a balanced gender representation in textbooks? Will it bring you some different learning experiences?

## Appendix VIII

### Guided questions used in the individual interviews with the teacher participants

Note that the following questions were merely guiding questions for me, and not all of them were used during the individual interviews.

1. Do you think language textbooks are important? Why? In what way?
2. Do you find them helpful for students? Do you think they can help you with your English lessons? If yes, in what way?
3. Do you think it is necessary to use language textbooks when teaching English? Without them, do you think it is still possible for you to teach?
4. What are the factors to be considered when choosing a textbook for students in school? What is the factor you consider to be the most important?
5. How do you perceive the gender roles presented in school textbooks?
6. What do you think about the relationship between how genders are represented and students' interest in learning the language/their motivation for learning the language?
7. What future changes in ELT textbooks in relation to gender constructions do you recommend?
8. Have you encountered stereotypical gender representations in the language textbooks you used? If you have, did you do anything to address this?
9. Do you redress gender inequality when stereotypical or unbalanced gender representations appear in the English textbooks you use? If you're going to do so, what challenges, if any, do you face when trying to address gender inequality? If not, why?
10. Has your school listed gender representation as one of the criteria for which textbook to select for students? Why or why not?
11. Do you think your school is willing to consider using gender representation as one of the criteria when it comes to textbook selection?

12. In your teaching experience of using textbooks, have you encountered any representations of sexuality or clearly identified LGBT characters? If so, what forms do they take?
13. In your teaching experience of using textbooks, have you encountered any topics related to sexual diversity (e.g. gay marriage; same-sex marriage) or the teaching of lexis related to sexual diversity (e.g. lesbian, gay, straight, civil partnership, homophobia, etc.)?
14. Do you think your school is willing to consider using representations of sexuality as one of the criteria when it comes to textbook selection?

## Appendix IX

### A table documenting the cases relevant to the two subthemes: family patterns and romantic relationships

Subthemes	Descriptions
Family patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An illustration of a family that consists of father, mother and two children (3A, p.42)</li> <li>- An article about Daisy and her mum.</li> <li>- A chapter of a story about a family that consists of father, mother and two children. (3B, p 4)</li> <li>- An article about a family visiting a new exhibition. The family structure is unclear as the only clues which could hint at the family structure include the use of nouns “I”, “my family”, and “we”. (3B, p. 30)</li> <li>- An illustration of a family that consists of father, mother and two daughters (3B, p. 71)</li> <li>- A news article which mentions a poor single parent with two children. (3B, p. 72)</li> <li>- A mention about a single parent with her ten-year-old son. (3B, p.79)</li> <li>- A mention about a female who is happy to reunite with her husband and son after years of waiting. (3B, p.79)</li> </ul>
Romantic relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A romance movie poster featuring a female and male (3A, p 2)</li> </ul>

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