A Socio-political and Cultural Driven Analysis of the Representations of Protected Characteristics in UK-produced ELT Textbooks, Through the Lens of the Equality Act (2010)

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 16,360 words in length, has been composed by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, it conforms to the University's GAP Policy, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. This project was conducted by me at the University of St Andrews from 06/22 to 08/22 towards fulfilment of the requirements of the University of St Andrews for the degree of MSc TESOL under the supervision of Amritesh Singh.

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"Normality is a construct imposed on a reality where there is only difference."

Michael Oliver, 1996[1]

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[1] Michael Oliver (1996) in 'Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice,' p. 88.

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ABSTRACT

Representations of groups with protected characteristics in dissimilar media forms have proven to shape public attitudes and everyday interactions, with the upholding of normative ideologies often contributing to high levels of discrimination. English language teaching (ELT) textbooks possess ideological underpinnings, they act as fuelled cultural products with the capacity to influence the belief system of their consumers. This dissertation explores the cultural representations of three protected characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, disability) in UK-produced textbooks through the prism of the Equality Act (2010). Findings from a multi-modal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) illuminate some progression in the diversity of representation, yet problematic constructions prevail through under-representation, misrepresentation and complete erasure. As a consequence, the ELT teaching materials fail to reflect a full picture of the socio-political and cultural backdrop which could be to the detriment of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) students in a UK context.

Keywords: Protected characteristics, Hidden curriculum, MCDA, Ideology, Interpellation

APPENDAGE

Renowned UK publishers are making a concerted effort in recent publications and impressions to reflect technological advances in ELT materials through modifications to include audio-visual resources and keys to digital realms. Is the same effort being expended to accurately reflect changes within the socio-political and cultural climate? If not, is this an oversight of an industry set in its ways or rather a deliberate violation of a moral responsibility to reflect positive representations of protected characteristics in light of the Equality Act (2010)?

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INTRODUCTION

Discrimination: A Theoretical Perspective

Amnesty International (n.d.) defines discrimination as an individuals' inability to "enjoy [their] human rights or other legal rights on an equal basis with others because of an unjustified distinction made in policy, law or treatment." Grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), discrimination can manifest as the by-product of the human desire to navigate self-identity through the experience of group membership. Through the mental process deemed self-categorisation (Turner et al., 1987), in-groups and out-groups emerge engendering an 'us' vs 'them' mentality. As individuals endeavour to ameliorate their self-image, "intergroup comparison represents a functional tool for receiving information about the relative value of one's social identity" (Lüders et al., 2016, p. 34). The self-image of the in-group can be enhanced at the expense of the out-group, with selected traits determined inferior.

Continually reinforced, these comparisons contribute to the shaping of power relations and normative ideologies, igniting "division, hatred and even the dehumanization of other people [with] a different identity" (Amnesty International, n.d.). Discrimination can contribute to social exclusion by negatively impacting an individual's social and professional opportunities, mental and physical well-being and overall sense of agency (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018).

Discriminatory practices are rife in all aspects of society, the extent to which English language teaching (ELT) materials contribute to or detract from this is of great importance. Examining gender, sexual orientation and disability as protected characteristics for the purpose of this research is particularly pertinent. The cultural representations in media

constructions, such as teaching resources, can perpetuate the binary gender division[2] through

constant reiteration of normative behaviour. Under-representation and blatant erasure quell

LGBTQ +[3] voices, with ELT materials typically promoting an exclusively heterosexual

perspective. Furthermore, poor quality disability textbook constructions can influence social

relations, shaping attitudes towards disability and conditioning interaction between disabled

and abled individuals.

The effect of inflexible normative ideologies, perpetuated in media cultural

representations, is apparent through regular portrayal of discriminatory conduct, oppressive

policies and hate crime in real-life contexts which impact individuals with protected

characteristics' lived experiences within the UK.[4]

UK Legislative Change: The Equality Act (2010)

For the purpose of this dissertation, it was important to embed this research within the

context of the Equality Act (2010). With social minority groups often the victims of

discrimination, a greater need for their protection prevails. Within the UK, enactment of the

Equality Act served to simplify and elucidate existing anti-discrimination law. This

legislation unified previous measures: Sex Discrimination Act (1975), Race Relations Act

(1976) and Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (UK Government, 2015).

The Equality Act, currently in effect in Great Britain, recognises nine protected

characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership,

pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (Equality and

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[2] The researcher acknowledges the problematic definition of binary genders, but for the purpose of this research applies this binary distinction for clarity and to ensure reader comprehension.

[3] The researcher will interchange between the terms 'LGBTQ +' and 'queer' with the intention to be inclusive to all present and future identities on the sexuality spectrum. For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher subscribes to the reclamation of the word 'queer' in social use, as a signifier of "protest and pride" (Rand, 2014).

[4] See Appendix 3 for further reading of recent discriminatory conduct against individuals with protected characteristics in the UK.

Human Rights Commission (EHRC), 2020). It strives to protect those from potential discrimination "because they are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has, a protected characteristic" (UK Government, 2015). Specifically, it safeguards against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation (EHRC, 2020). The Act has better informed the public about discrimination, changing people's perception of their societal role.

Introducing Equality Legislation into Education

Section 149 (1)(b) of the Equality Act stipulates public authorities, including schools, should have due regard to "eliminate discrimination," "advance equality of opportunity" and "foster good relations…between people who share protected characteristic[s] and people who do not" (Department for Education, 2014, p. 30). This legislation has sparked greater awareness of protected characteristics in the educational domain. Educational institutions must be considerate of practices and ensure that they refrain from discriminatory conduct. They are also subject to regular inspections by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to confirm compliance (Ofsted, 2021). This involves ensuring parity in terms of educational opportunity and quality of experience.

Introducing equality legislation into classroom activity and discussion has allowed a wider range of individuals to interact with it, helping students recognise their own rights and develop their understanding of unlawful behaviour and treatment of others. This exposure may engender them with a more profound respect and tolerance to diversity to apply to social situations within and out with the classroom. A prime example is the creation of the 'No Outsiders in Our School' project, by Andrew Moffat (2016). Established within the context of British law, a series of picture books aimed at young children deal with equality issues through topics relating to different protected characteristics tackling "big themes in subtle ways" (Sacred Heart, 2019, p. 15) with a steady incline in complexity and maturity. This

project demonstrates adapting presentation to suit the needs of specific learners. Moffat (2016) also provides lesson plans and interactive ideas to facilitate their classroom integration.

Effect of Equality Legislation on TESOL Education

The statutory obligation for public services to confront inequality heightened the need for teacher training programmes and material development to facilitate the equality agenda within teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) administrative and classroom practices. Nexus' teacher training programme 'Embedding Equality and Diversity' (British Council, 2015) was inspired by the Act, to help teachers weave equality and diversity into the entire curriculum. Interactive exercises encourage reflection on teaching practice with topics pertaining to learner accommodations, increasing diversity and challenging stereotypes. Whilst tailored to a prison setting, its broad nature renders the training applicable to all TESOL teachers.

Any student cohort is likely composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds, with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners "cut across all the protected characteristics" (Stella & MacDougall, 2021, p. 373). A substantial percentage of students are usually "economically disadvantaged and therefore unable to access [or unaware of] their full set of rights" (Cooke & Peutrell, 2019, p. 4). Consequently, equality legislation becomes an important tool for students to recognise personal rights and develop tolerance and respect towards others to navigate the social reality of their immediate context. For ESOL teachers, a sense of duty arises to address prejudiced perspectives which could prove problematic in the UK by helping students to diplomatically "express opinions, listen to those of others, possibly modify their views and live with disagreement and compromise" (Mallows, 2014, p. 39). To foster tolerance and acceptance within wider society, the classroom should model this

behaviour by promoting a safe space where students feel visible and valued. This necessitates ESOL institutions and staff promote diversity and social inclusion through their choice of pertinent materials and effective classroom use.

Changes to the equality framework have sparked discussion about inclusivity. For years, TESOL in the UK has operated under the troublesome supposition that its clientele is indefinitely heterosexual and cisgender (Stella & MacDougall, 2021) despite sexual orientation forming a component of 3-7% of all asylum cases from 2017-20 in the UK essentially negating this claim (Home Office, 2021). As a result, the invisibility of LGBTQ + individuals is preserved through teaching materials "implicitly passing judgement about which identities are legitimised and valued in the target language community" (Stella & MacDougall, 2021, p. 380). Avoidance of material which could create friction risks suppressing parts of individuals' identities and diminishing their sense of self during their learning experience.

In 2012, a conference 'Breaking the Ice: Issues in the ESOL classroom' was held by NATECLA in response to Ofsted's declaration of diversity and equality inspections (Gray & Cooke, 2019). A progressive move for the sector, the conference which explored sexual diversity issues generated mass interest. However, post conference, a survey revealed that teachers were still hostile towards introducing LGBTQ + themes into the classroom (Gray & Cooke, 2019). The Queering TESOL seminars (2013-15) sought to counteract this mentality stressing the connection between TESOL and wider society, by exploring the cultural politics of representation and themes such as "erasure, representation and intersectionality" (Gray & Cooke, 2019, p. 304). The seminar aimed to establish a like-minded community inspired to introduce more inclusive themes into the classroom.

The Scottish context provides an example of inclusive material design through 'Engaging with LGBT and Migrant Equalities: Activities for the ESOL classroom' (Stella et

al., 2018). Aimed at adult ESOL intermediate learners to confront the dearth of LGBTQ +

representations in commercial material, this learning resource recounts real-life migrant

stories and presents themes of "families and relationships, gender identities, and homophobic,

transphobic, racial prejudice and discrimination" (Stella et al., 2018, p. 1). It is hoped to

promote dialogic discourse conditioned by respectful and open-minded communication

(Stella et al., 2018).

Similar efforts to integrate gender and disability are not explicit, however perhaps this

reflects a changing climate in which these protected characteristics are already receiving

greater pedagogic attention.

Dissertation Overview

Through a multi-modal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), this research aims to explore the

possible subliminal messages of existing cultural representations in textbooks by renowned

UK publishers, Pearson and Oxford University Press (OUP). Undertaken through the lens of

the Equality Act, the representation of three specific protected characteristics (gender, sexual

orientation, disability) will be examined in UK-produced textbooks published since its

passing to assess the extent to which these materials explicitly promote diverse

representations of groups with protected characteristics. Despite acknowledging the

terminology 'sex' as stipulated in the Equality Act (EHRC, 2020), for the purpose of this

dissertation the researcher is more interested in the social construction of 'sex,' i.e., 'gender.'

Thus, the terminology 'gender' has been adopted throughout this dissertation in lieu of 'sex'

to discuss this protected characteristic.

Whilst analysing all nine protected characteristics dictated in the Equality Act is out

with the scope of this research, this trio was chosen due to their place on the global stage with

acts of discrimination against them prevalent within modern society. Gender is a topic well

explored in textbook analysis (Carroll and Kowitz, 1994; Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland, 1997; McGrath, 2004; Ndura, 2004; Sherman, 2010; Sunderland, 2000a), however sexual orientation and disability are more uncharted territory only recently gaining traction (Gray, 2013; Paiz: 2015; Nelson, 2019; Ellis, 2018; Brown & Nanguy, 2021). This research hopes to contribute to the field of growing literature through a fresh approach which recognises the effect of multi-modal presentation, considering the interrelationship of image, text and audio-visuals to decipher the ideologies conveyed.

This research project uses multi-modal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) as the methodology of choice to enable a focus on how meaning is constructed through the use of multiple modes of communication. Beyond the written form, the selected student books also incorporate audio-visual elements and online resources. The rationale for material choice is based on the popularity of the series and reputability of publishers which likely provide a snapshot of cultural representations common in the ELT industry and illuminate the politics of representation in material publishing. Student books were specifically chosen as they are the component of textbooks to which students are most exposed. Whilst mindful of the distinction between textbooks and student books, to aid this research the terms will be employed interchangeably. Embedding the research in the context of the Equality Act allows the researcher to measure the extent to which, if at all, the legal duty to reflect the protected characteristics enshrined in the Equality Act has permeated into current UK ELT material publication.

Research Relevance and Rationale

Research of this nature is highly relevant to the ELT field, with identity construction and negotiation a major aspect of second language acquisition. One's self-construction is somewhat established through identification with representations in mediums, including but

not limited to media, literature, textbooks and art (Hall, 1996). These outlets are far from neutral, conditioned by political, ideological and commercial motivations. In TESOL, the materials and corresponding classroom activity may influence "students' attitudes and dispositions towards themselves, other people and society" (Ndura, 2004, p. 143) and act as valuable cultural knowledge for socialisation.

An ever-evolving concept, culture can be defined as "a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviours that we share with others in a particular society, giving us a sense of belongingness and identity" (Lebrón, 2013, p. 126). Language and culture are intertwined, thus any language textbook is rendered "a de facto cultural artefact" (Mishan, 2021, p. 4). Recently, there has been a focus on developing students' intercultural competence to deconstruct barriers and facilitate successful communication across cultures. This dissertation ascribes to Spitzberg & Chagnon's (2009, p. 7) definition of intercultural competence as "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world." Material choice is a pedagogical factor which can profoundly affect students' uptake of cultural knowledge. This is of particular importance in a UK setting, whereby a legal obligation for public services to foster equality and diversity is enshrined in law.

This duty does not automatically extend to external influences such as material writers and publishing houses. However, if students are to become familiarised with equality and diversity, sourcing appropriate materials becomes a major consideration. It could be argued that there exists a moral responsibility upon ELT designers and publishers to be actively aware of the quantity and, more importantly, the quality of cultural representations. As education is an ideological tool, it is important to consider cultural aspects not only from the standpoint of formal curricula, but also the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). An

important motif which informs this research, the hidden curriculum accounts for "underlying messages that go beyond factual information, e.g., sexism, ageism, social orientation and values" (Kazemi et al., 2013, p. 1234). In this case, the series of influences on students' perceptions of protected characteristics which "function at the level of organizational structure and culture affecting the nature of learning, professional interactions and clinical practices" (Andarvazh et al., 2017, p. 200).

Renowned UK ELT publishers, whose materials are in frequent use across the UK, are adapting to technological advances with latest editions and impressions including links to audio-visual and online resources. However, there appears reluctance to modernise cultural representations. This phenomenon is partly due to the portability of textbooks with publishers catering to a wide, often global, audience to ensure any endeavour is a lucrative undertaking. There seems little desire to modify content according to consumer preference, which would allow for a greater variety of diverse representations to be incorporated for a UK audience and other markets with similar cultural values.

Research Questions

In effect, this dissertation intends to research the following questions:

- Is there observable change in the representation of protected characteristics in UK produced ELT textbooks post passing of the Equality Act 2010?

- Which discourses are encoded in recent UK-produced textbooks and what ideological values do they reflect in light of the current socio-political and cultural climate?

The results will aspire to determine whether the Equality Act has inspired any change in the cultural information of esteemed UK-produced ELT textbooks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Althusser's theory of ideology (1971) is adopted as a starting point for this research. Literature surrounding the ideological nature of textbooks as a pedagogical tool is then analysed, focussing on its value in ELT and the link between language and culture. Subsequently, available literature is explored to unearth common constructions of representations of the protected characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, disability) in UK-produced ELT materials, prior to implementation of the Equality Act.

<u>Education and Ideology</u>

Furthering the research of other influential Marxist philosophers, Althusser was a major contributor to the development of 'ideology,' situating its role within an educational context. Althusser (1971, p. 162) asserts that ideology represents "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." His work (1971) distinguished between 'Repressive State Apparatuses' (RSA) and 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISA) to depict the way in which institutions aid in the dominant ideological group's maintenance of power.

The RSA constitutes institutions such as the government, police and army and it "consists essentially in guaranteeing *by force* (physical or not) the political conditions for the reproduction of the relations of production" (Althusser, 2014, p. 141). In contrast, ISA operates more heavily on ideology rather than repression. Social structures such as education, family, media, politics and language act as powerful tools for the dissemination of ideology and condition socially acceptable behaviour in accordance with social norms (Althusser, 1971). As such, ideology is transmitted to minds in a more abstruse fashion as "a structure that imposes itself on us, without necessarily having to pass through consciousness" (Teixeira, 2005, p. 75). This can manifest in individuals recognising an element of choice in

their ideological beliefs but subconsciously being directed towards certain ways of thinking to discern a sense of self-identity, social relations and the wider world. However, the social norms exhibited by these apparatuses are not neutral, rather "developed in the interests of those with social power" who sustain this power by "naturalizing them into the common-sense- the only- social positions for power" (Fiske, 1998, p. 1270).

Althusser (1971) refers to this process as 'interpellation,' a concept which this dissertation will frequently invoke, where constant offering of a specific identity or 'hailing' helps steer individuals towards adopting a particular form of being. Whilst interpellated individuals have the agency to negate specific ways of thinking, they do so at the risk of differentiation and potential ostracism, therefore rendering cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 2004). In effect, "a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination" (Fiske, 1998, p. 1273). The Marxist philosophy was concerned with capitalist values, however, interpellation is applicable to different aspects of identity and thus can be considered useful to explore ideologies pertaining to gender, sexual orientation and disability. It must be noted that ideology is not a static concept, the dominant group face resistance and experience a constant power struggle to maintain normative values. Therefore, it is possible for these values to change and become more accepting or inclusive of alternative identities as the dominating power needs to be continually "won and rewon" (Fiske, 1998, p. 1273).

Althusser (1971, p. 167) negates ideology as purely theoretical, asserting that "this imaginary relation is itself endowed with a material existence." As representations which comprise ideologies manifest in material realities, it is important to consider latent messages embedded in media outlets.

The value of employing Althusser's notion of interpellation has been recognised by other researchers. Savova (2019) recently explored the compelling nature of adverts, and the

role of interpellation in perpetuating ideologically fuelled consumerism. Whilst Stocchetti (2019) studied the phenomenon of selfies as an act which presents a means for the interpellated subject to mediate their self-image according to digital and promotional culture. This dissertation seeks to adopt Althusser's theory as a conceptual tool to explore whether, as impressionable individuals, the ideologies emitted in textbooks could influence ESOL students' understanding of and reception to socio-political and cultural norms in their immediate surroundings.

Textbook as a Pedagogical Tool

Despite a growing array of resources at a teacher's disposal, the textbook remains a powerful pedagogical tool in the language classroom. It continues to be viewed as a dependable means to navigate the learning process, with teachers and students alike confiding in its content and delivery, attributing it to a "map" or even a "bible" for language learning (McGrath, 2006, p. 176). Providing a strong foundation for curriculum structure and lesson continuity, teachers often adopt a creative and critically selective style (McGrath, 2016) whereby textbook content can be supplemented and tailored to student needs but remains a pivotal learning device. Contemporary ELT materials manifest in attractive packages encompassing not only textbooks, but also supplementary guides and digital resources. It is this presentation adopted by major UK ELT publishing houses which ensures a sort of credibility; teachers and students feel safe and supported by the presence of textbooks in classroom operation.

However, as noted by Timmis, Mukundan and Alkhaldi (2009, p. 11), "for such commonplace objects, [textbooks] have aroused a surprising degree of controversy." The recent Dogme ELT movement has witnessed some educators transitioning towards "materials-light" teaching, centred on conversational learning inspired by "emergent language" (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p. 8). This approach is partly founded on a lack of

observable progression in ELT publishing and depleting faith in the value of textbooks. Renowned UK publishers (OUP, Cambridge University Press, Pearson and MacMillan English etc.) have adopted a similar ELT textbook blueprint for the last 25 years with new editions founded on prior triumphant models and reproduced in a "self-perpetuating 'washback effect'" (Mishan, 2021, p. 4). With a life cycle of around five to six years, textbooks can become an artefact of a specific point in time reflective in the content's explicit and implicit values. Despite the inclusion of online resources to reflect digital advances, changes to contemporary textbooks have remained mainly cosmetic with format and content mostly consistent with previous publications. Materials produced by these publishers remain popular and continue to be distributed across "private language schools, colleges of further education, and university language centres in Britain" (Gray, 2010b, p. 10).

Textbooks have long been established as the provider of linguistic input, with the language utilised in a range of activities and exercises designed to develop proficiency and expose learners to the target community. A scholarly consensus exists regarding the problematic construction of the target community in language textbooks (Gray, 2010b, 2013; Canale, 2016; Vinall & Shin, 2018), with some textbooks proving to be "ahistorical, apolitical, and uncritical representation[s] of target cultures" (Keles & Yazan, 2020). One tenet of argument is that ELT textbooks portray an overly Anglo-American outlook (Xiong, Feng & Hu, 2022). However, it could be argued that even this perspective is an inadequate reflection of the diverse and multi-cultural nature of British and American present-day societies. Traditionally, the target community of ELT teaching materials was the Caucasian, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied male population (Paiz, 2019). Nowadays, some UK publishers continue to cater to the dominant groups, rendering the identities of social minorities illegitimate in the realm of ELT.

Due to the inextricable link between language and culture, textbooks are not solely carriers of linguistic information, but also cultural. Teaching materials fail to achieve neutrality, as they mirror a particular set of values and social order (Cunningsworth, 1995). It is important to consider the potential interpretations of cultural representations in ELT textbooks, as socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) stresses the salient interplay between thought, language and identity construction in second language acquisition. In line with interpellation, the cultural information imparted to students is likely to shape their attitudes and beliefs towards different social groups. Much of the aforementioned scholarship in the field (Althusser, 1971; Mishan, 2021; Gray 2010b, 2013; Paiz, 2019), centred on language and culture representation, validates the importance of carrying out research of this nature particularly in terms of protected characteristics.

Despite the tendency for replication in contemporary textbook production, there are some common trends witnessed in recent publications which stress their evolution. Since the 1990s, textbooks have become more learner-centred with a focus on learners' personal lives integrated into the narrative (Gray, 2010b). The feminist movement also sparked greater and more diverse female representation. Nowadays, UK-produced ELT material content is further regulated by systematic "regimes of inclusivity" where protected characteristics such as race, gender, age and disability are distinguished as "requiring non-stereotypical representation" (Gray, 2013, p. 6).

However, with the globalising effect of English rendering ELT materials a portable commodity, publishers began expanding their reach to the international sphere in the 1990s. Commercial pressure has contributed to the "one size fits all" (Mishan, 2021, p. 4) approach of the present day, with publishers aiming to appease a wide audience by evading topics which could attract controversy. Gómez Rodríguez (2015, p. 168) differentiates between "surface" and "deep" culture in ELT materials. The former refrains from meaningful

provocative content, instead often opting for a 'touristic' viewpoint through superficial topics akin to tourism, celebrity culture and cuisine (Rybkovà, 2018).

Prohibition of so-called PARSNIP[5] subject matter safeguards against affronting conservative cultures (Mishan, 2021) however it can also impede learner engagement, with topics of national interest off limits in material design. For example, whilst representation of different sexual orientations is gaining prominence in media such as TV and film, in ELT textbook publishing "gayness is just one of a whole host of taboo topics that cannot be mentioned" (Goldstein, 2021, p. 340). Especially regarding UK-based ESOL learners, the sanitisation of topics such as politics, religion and sex directly conflicts with the established equalities legislation. Stereotypical portrayals, tokenistic appearances or blatant erasure of groups with protected characteristics contributes to a warped view of reality, perpetuating the outgroup homogeneity effect whereby all individuals within a community are portrayed as following "the exact same established sociocultural norms with homogeneous compliance" (Gómez Rodríguez, 2015, p. 169).

It is possible to segment markets and deliver coursebooks in tune with local attitudes and beliefs, as has been witnessed through variations including a Polish *Face2face* (Tims, Redston & Cunningham, 2005) and a Middle Eastern *Challenges* (Williams, Mugglestone, & Fricker, 2007). However, adaptation is a costly undertaking and for publishing houses, already thriving on the global growth of English as an international language, perhaps placed on the backburner to monetary concerns.

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[5] PARSNIP: Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Sex, Narcotics, Isms, Pork

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<u>Pre-2010 Representations</u>

Current literature on the topic of cultural representation illuminates some commonalities in the representations witnessed in UK-produced textbooks prior to amendments to equalities legislation. The portrayals of social groups with protected characteristics can be categorised, to varying degrees, into three common areas: under-representation, misrepresentation and erasure. Such portrayals can engender a somewhat distorted view of the UK's socio-political and cultural realities.

Gender

Whilst often misused in place of *sex*, the physiological differences between individuals assigned at birth*, gender* relates to the social construction of ideals and norms attributed to typical male and female roles, acts, and behaviour (Shastri, 2014). Despite possessing different meanings, these two concepts are routinely confused in documentation, literature and even conversation. de Beauvoir's (1949) theory of 'the Other' elucidates the secondary status of women, often shadowed by man's existence. She proffers that women have traditionally been disadvantaged in their access to equal opportunity, yet their complicity only hardens this inequality by helping to define and reproduce female-typical normative behaviour and roles. In this vein, women continue to a certain degree to be treated as "man's passive and dependent counterpart" (Knowles, 2019, p. 244). Whilst more than ever women are receiving an education, gaining traction in the workforce, embarking on traditionally male-driven career paths and demanding due recognition on the world stage, a recent report (World Economic Forum, 2021, p. 5) predicts that at the present trajectory it will take some 135.6 years to completely close the gender gap worldwide.

Literature around this topic suggests that the representation of gender in UK-produced textbooks has changed considerably, with women assuming greater equality in design and

narrative. Traditionally, women were relegated to second-class citizenship with men claiming a dominating presence in text and audio-visuals. Sunderland (2000b, p. 151) categorised the gender bias witnessed during the 1970s and 1980s into "exclusion, subordination and distortion, and degradation." Exclusion related to the tendency for a skewed sex ratio, in which the over-representation of males led to disproportionate female representation in relation to socio-economic activity. When women did appear, each sex was consigned to constrictive gender roles eliminating the opportunity for diverse depictions. Common tropes identified in Tyrer's (2012, p. 102) analysis of a range of ELT textbooks by prominent UK publishers included men as breadwinners and the sole occupiers of managerial positions in the public sphere, whilst women governed household and child rearing responsibilities within the private domain, "happily cleaning [and] shopping." Tyrer (2012) recognised employment to be something that women do often only prior to the main event, that being marriage and procreation. Personality traits also perpetuated female degradation, men were consistently pictured as emotionally detached whilst women, overly sensitive and melodramatic (Sunderland, 2000b). These sorts of portrayals continued for decades with a recognisable delay between the enactment of social change in published ELT materials' cultural representations (Motschenbacher, 2010).

Available literature suggests representation of the sexes has undergone major reformation, with publishers actively striving for constructions which blur conventional gender roles. This has been witnessed both in UK-publishers' efforts to include explicit exploration of gender roles and stereotypes in exercises, and implicit positive representations in textbook images and textual content. Tyrer (2012) confirms this transformation recognising the evolution of female representation in the newer *Headways* with women demonstrated in a wider array of roles in both the public and private sphere, including a particular development in which women effectively balance family and work life without

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having to sacrifice personal freedom. More diverse constructions noted in the *Open Road* series have also helped deconstruct stereotypes, through characters such as non-maternal women and single fathers (Leshchinskaia, 2017). Whilst Gray (2013) claims that the overt sexism identified in early material analysed no longer exists, at least in UK-produced materials, some problematic gender representations persist in textbooks from the early 2000s.

An overreliance on gender differentiation remains prevalent, with a focus on distinguished male and female habits regarding shopping, eating and interaction (Redston & Cunningham, 2012; Clandfield, 2010; Kay & Jones, 2009). Whilst publishers perhaps fear deviating from these constructions due to cultural differences, it is surprising that Tajeddin and Enayat (2010) recognised less female representation in American and UK-produced ELT textbooks than a locally developed Iranian textbook. However, their analysis was congruent that collectively the textbooks "revealed more power and better social status for men" (2010, p. 52). The gender roles in editions of *New Headway* and *Top Notch* depicted men as "more active, competent, socially important, breadwinners, and powerful" (Tajeddin & Enayat, 2010, p. 52). Another Iranian study of UK-produced ELT textbooks corroborated this occurrence, with visible male monopolisation discerned (Majid & Fateme, 2014).

With the women of textbooks often "universally slim and well-dressed" (Tyrer, 2012, p. 164), success becomes associated with physical attractiveness and imagery tied to the female experience continues to illuminate women through the male gaze. For example, Tyrer (2012) epitomises this through textbook examples of female catwalk models, actors and athletes in provocative clothing. Images of women are manufactured to increase their attractiveness to viewers through what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p. 164) refer to as "sensory coding orientation." The manipulation of the dimensions, colour and depth of field of images can contribute to veiled sexual objectification of women. Whilst overt sexist language is uncommon in recent ELT publications, there remains a tendency for male-

firstness, with textbooks often failing to produce gender-neutral nouns and pronouns (Majid & Fateme, 2014) to describe human experiences.

The aforementioned researchers provide credible examples of the nature of gender representation in UK-published textbooks, invaluable information for this dissertation that allow comparisons to be made with post-2010 publications.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation can be defined as "an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people" (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). A natural component of human behaviour, sexual orientation is usually established prior to or during puberty, and fully formed by adulthood. A profoundly intimate identity marker, members of a sexual minority may ignore or supress sexual desires from fear of deviating from the majority population of heterosexual individuals (Moser, 2016). As a result, exploration or declaration may occur later in life. However, recent studies proffer that denying one's sexual orientation is likely to engender severe effects on mental health and well-being (Jacobson, 2018). Whilst there have been strides towards better representation, discrimination towards non-heterosexual groups remains a ubiquitous problem.

Heteronormativity or "culturally hegemonic heterosexuality" (Jones, 2006, p. 451), as a type of repressive ideology, pervades ELT classroom activity. Textbook depictions act as a "physical and symbolic manifestation of this ideology" (Moore, 2020, p. 116). A major way in which the voices of non-heterosexual individuals are stifled is through erasure. Sexual minorities are denied recognition in textbook design, through "the systematic editing out of certain groups or identities from officially endorsed versions of social reality" (Gray & Cooke, 2019, p. 203).

Literature pertaining to the characteristic of sexual orientation in ELT textbooks is lacking but analysis of Gray's work proved very informative and provided ideas that can be further developed in this research. In a cultural study of 10 UK-produced publications conducted by Gray (2013), a pioneer in queer linguistics, a dearth of sexual diversity is confirmed through a complete absence of any reference to non-heterosexual forms of sexuality. Furthermore, Gray recognised a trend. When the lives of 'out' celebrities, such as Elton John and Gianni Versace are discussed, despite several references to their craft and private lives their sexualities are omitted. As conspicuous members of the queer community, ignorance of a key component of their personal identity further positions heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation. In a unit focused on relationships, Gray revealed that *Face2face* (Redston & Cunningham, 2012) published by Cambridge refrained from the inclusion of 'civil partnership' when presenting vocabulary pertaining to relationship status despite civil partnership being legally recognised in the UK seven years before this publication.

Research in this field has indicated that in addition to the blanket avoidance policy often adopted, perhaps more detrimental is the attempt to quash potential alternative interpretations. At times when ambiguous readings could be ascertained, clear efforts to clarify situations ensue "lest readers get the 'wrong' idea" (Gray, 2013, p. 50). Gray identifies a prime example in an edition of *New Headway* (Soars & Soars, 2011) when viewers are introduced to Duncan and Nick who live together. They are pictured going out for dinner, then compiling a shopping list. It is possible to interpret a same-sex relationship between the two men, yet the accompanying listening practice eradicates this possibility by revealing that the future meal being prepared is for their girlfriends. Human experiences such as seeking romantic relations, being in a relationship or experiencing marital problems are generally presented as solely heterosexual affairs. Some publishers have attempted to

counteract this tendency with sexually ambiguous characters noted in the *Challenges* series published by Pearson (Tyrer, 2012). Despite this, it appears that for the most part the "course-book gays and lesbians [and other sexual minorities] …are still firmly in the course-book closet" (Thornbury, 1999, p. 15).

Research suggests that well-intentioned LGBTQ + representation can also backfire and enhance marginalisation. The identities of non-heteronormative individuals are sometimes not woven into the textbook tapestry but isolated in self-contained units or topics. For example, Moore (2020, p. 122) exemplifies this type of heteronormative marginalisation through reference to the tokenistic nature of "one-off" inclusions of non-heterosexual individuals, such as discussions regarding HIV or AIDS, when queer identities are otherwise ostracised. Whilst an important topic to discuss in order to raise awareness to the prevention and treatment of the disease, this singular mention is counterproductive as it serves to reduce the experience of gay and bi-sexual men to a single theme nullifying their experiences as complex and diverse individuals. These sporadic appearances present queer sexual behaviour as abnormal, meriting "an issue to discuss" (Leshchinskaia, 2017, p. 79) but not regular visual or textual inclusion. Physical marginalisation is also apparent with limited mention of sexual orientation confined to supplementary textbook materials with other alleged taboo themes. Gray identified problematic content in the additional online resources of Pearson publishers. In a unit in *Impact Issues 2* (Day, Shaules & Yamanaka, 2009), a rumour occurs surrounding two male classmates being gay. Through the reaction of other classmates and a discussion to confirm or deny the rumour, homosexuality is portrayed in a negative light as "a potential source of problems with implications for their reputation within their wider social networks" (Gray, 2013, p. 12). Exemplified when classmates begin to treat the individuals differently on account of this hearsay.

Another occurrence in Gray's (2013) analysis of UK and US ELT textbooks is heteronormative mainstreaming. This presents when non-heterosexual individuals "mimic traditional (Western) heterosexual relationship models" (Moore, 2020, p. 122). A phenomenon referred to by Moore (2020, p. 122) as "good gays," homosexual individuals are portrayed with similar lifestyles to the majority population. This serves to acculturate "non-heterosexual individuals to heteronormative ideals" (Van Dyck, 2019, p. 24). This transpires in monogamous same-sex couples married and/or raising children. In one textbook (Clarke et al., 1996, p. 44), Gray (2013) identified a middle-class family composed of two dads and a son searching for a larger house for their growing family. Aside from the lesser witnessed textbook representation of same-sex parents, this image is likened to a typical portrayal of a suburban family engendering a mainstreaming effect. Whilst the prevailing view is that representations of this kind could increase visibility of sexual minorities, it is important that they contribute to a larger reel which paint LGBTQ + individuals with varied personalities, occupations and lifestyles to avoid yet another form of generalisation. Having utilised ELT textbooks in a teaching environment, the researcher can relate to the outcomes of the analysis by Gray and others highlighted above and intends for this research project to help counteract the dearth of research in this area.

Disability

Ableism relates to a network of beliefs which determine a particular "perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human" type of self and body (Campbell, 2001, p. 44). Consequently, disability "as a physical or mental impairment [that] has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [your] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities" (Office for Disability Issues, 2011, p. 5) is often projected as a secondary state of being. The World Health Organisation (2021) predicts around 15% of the global population experience

disability: visible or invisible, diagnosed or undiagnosed, physical, mental or intellectual. Analysing literature regarding disability, it becomes apparent that attitudes towards individuals with disabilities have changed throughout history. In early societies, disabled individuals were perceived as "prized sexual partners," (Brzuzy, 1997, p. 82) during the Middle Ages the subject of curiosity and entertainment and within the Medieval Church, unsightly and deplorable (Hahn, 1988).

Nowadays, many non-disabled individuals receive little to no exposure to disabled individuals and typically possess explicit and implicit negative perceptions derived from under-representation or negative media portrayals (Bogart & Dunn, 2019). There remains a tendency for a person's disability to outshine other traits, positive or otherwise. In this vein, the language used to refer to disabled individuals has become an area of contention with friction between person-first or identity-first language (Bogart & Dunn, 2019), the consensus being that individuals should determine their preference. Widespread ableist language can be a form of indirect discrimination, common expressions such as 'fallen on deaf ears' or 'turning a blind eye' equate these conditions to a "wilful ignorance" and promote a segregated culture (Nović, 2021).

Two contrasting disability models have a sustained emphasis in this dissertation: the medical and social model (Oliver, 1996). The medical model attributes disability as an individual problem to be dealt with in family circles with the aid of medical professionals. Whilst the social model repudiates this notion asserting that disability is a social construction perpetuated by a lack of universal design to accommodate the needs of all individuals (Bogart & Dunn, 2019).[6] When accommodations are not woven into daily life and requested or

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[6] Example of universal design: Martha's Vineyard, USA. With a large population of Deaf individuals, most of the hearing population became bilingual in both English and sign language during the 17th- 20th Century (Johnson & Fox, 2003).

demanded, individuals can be singled out as receivers of special treatment leading to victimisation and discrimination.

Typically overlooked as secondary citizens, disabled individuals have been othered in textbook portrayals. In line with de Beauvoir's (1949) construction of the 'other,' "the superior meaning is assigned to 'self' and the negative, weaker and opposite meaning to 'other'" (Gulab & Khokhar, 2018, p. 57). ELT materials analysis undertaken in the UK revealed continued stereotypical references to disability, although representation has somewhat improved. Traditionally, people with disabilities have occupied positions of inferiority with their disability paramount to their identity. Linked to "adversity, misery, suffering…" (Gulab & Khokhar, 2018, p. 59), disabled life has been reduced to the portrayal of the helpless individual, only able to survive with financial and/or physical assistance and incapable of full participation as an active citizen in daily life. Reflective of the medical model, these portrayals instil pity towards disabled individuals rather than address the ways in which society contributes to the maintenance of barriers which prevent them from leading productive lives.

Whilst sole interest in the disability an individual possesses is problematic, it is equally demoralising for their disability to be scratched completely as it forms a large part of their identity (Alexiou, 2020). An example of this is identified by Brown & Nanguy (2021) in a publication of New *Headway* (Soars & Soars, 2012) which presents a passage about musician, Ian Dury, who experienced mobility loss due to contracting polio and relies on a walking stick. Neither within the text nor accompanying image is his disability mentioned, the shot only captures the musician from the waist up, a notable distinction from other images in the textbook. During his career, Dury heightened awareness and advocated for disability rights so concealing his disability in this passage is "a notable omission" (Brown & Nanguy, 2021, p. 55). Alongside erasure, there is a tendency for disability to be sensationalised with

individuals often adopting the role of hero or victim. Unless possessing some sort of celebrity status, the struggle continues for integration of the everyday experience of life with a disability in ELT textbooks (Bulut & Arikan, 2015).

In Bulut & Arikan's (2015) study, conducted on a range of UK-produced ELT textbooks, a mere 3.3% of content presented themes or characters referring to disability. These encompass what are perceived to be tokenistic inclusions. Their analysis of the series *New Headway* reveals that even in the exploration of the lives of famous artists who perfected their crafts in spite of their disability, the disability itself is glossed over. Additionally, the entire corpus of textbooks found "no passage on a specific type of disability or everyday problems of the disabled" (Bulut & Arikan, 2015, p. 16). Incorporating more relatable experiences of disabled life would offer a more accurate cultural representation of disability. With media and popular culture output contributing to the framing of societal attitudes towards the disabled, empowering representations of multi-dimensional individuals whose entire identities are considered in conjunction with their disability could engender more respectful and productive interactions between individuals with and those without a disability.

Why Do These Representations Matter?

The outlined literature is particularly pertinent to this dissertation which seeks to examine the extent to which the passing of the Equality Act has impacted the cultural representations in UK-produced ESOL materials. Whilst it is clear from recent literature, relating to pre-2010 textbooks, that progressive representation of protected characteristics is evidenced, persistent problematic constructions possess the potential to shape learner attitudes towards minority groups and mould social power relations. A combination of under-representation, misrepresentation and erasure contributes to the exclusion of individuals possessing these

characteristics from the world of English language learning. This could be detrimental to teachers and students, subjugating their existence and ensuring that they remain living "on the shadow-side" (Maley, Mashuhara & Mishan, 2017, p. 102). A nuanced approach focussing on the inclusion of individuals with protected characteristics through a range of diverse representations, including those which diverge from normative paradigms, would better reflect the UK's socio-political and cultural backdrop. More accurate representation in all aspects of life could curb discrimination and help minority groups gain the equal status promised in the Equality Act.

METHODOLOGY

<u>Social Semiotics</u>

Social Semiotics is a field of linguistics concerned with the use of signs and their meaning-making properties. With its origins in Systemic Functional Linguistics, Halliday's work (1978) centred on exploring the social functions of language. Specifically, the "available repertoire of signs and their use in context to communicate wider ideas, moods and attitudes and identities" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 19). Acknowledging communication as a semiotic process in which choice is a fundamental component to the construction of meaning, Halliday (1994) recognised three cogent metafunctions of language; ideational, interpersonal and textual. Social Semiotics, as a theoretical framework, examines the means of diffusion and communicative modes adopted by individuals to better comprehend their social world and forge power relations. Drawing on "qualitative, fine-grained analysis of artifacts, and texts, as records of meaning making," it studies the "production and dissemination of discourses across the variety of social and cultural contexts within which meaning is made" (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2019, p. 145).

Whilst initially a notion closely aligned with language, Social Semiotics has expanded to include multimodal communicative forms. Hodge, Kress and van Leeuwen (1988, 2001, 2010) have developed the work of Halliday, exploring the meaning potentials of signs more broadly with a specific focus on the visual mode. Through written text, visual imagery and other communicative modes, the semiotic choices employed by designers are laden with "ideas, values [and] assumptions" (Machin, 2013, p. 351) regarding human identity which realise and influence social practices and power relations. Language material writers cultivate meaning through the deployment of linguistic and audio-visual strategies which "appear

normal or neutral on the surface" but rather "seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 9).

Multi-modal Critical Discourse Analysis

Social anthropologists have long sought to understand the means by which social and material culture transmit the ideas and values upheld by a society. Formerly recognised as Critical Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged as a qualitative and interpretative orientation of inquiry, contrasting more systematic methods such as content analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Interested in the linguistic nature of social and cultural processes, CDA identifies semiotic resources within discourses to explore "the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466).

Discourses can be defined as "practices of textual production, transmission and consumption" (Hardy & Phillips, 2004, p. 299) situated in a socio-historic context. Fairclough (2013) further posited discourses act as dialectal connections between people and semiosis. These relations can bridge the "abstract and material world by attaching concepts, values, and ideologies to objects, situations and even people" (Mendez Perez, 2020, p.15). Their dialectical essence affords discourses the authority to both influence and be influenced by social practices, ideological structures and power relations.

In this vein, CDA aims to examine the representation of people, places, actions and events in texts and other semiotic modes to determine which elements are foregrounded, backgrounded or altogether excluded (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Criticality is fostered as CDA scholars not only denaturalise language to unravel social phenomena but also position and problematise meanings found within the data with respect to their broader socio-cultural context. MCDA recognises the multimodality of semiosis, specifically the dependent

interaction of dissimilar communicative modes such as "text, image, audio and video" (Uzum et al., 2021, p. 4) to generate more nuanced semiotic manifestations.

Research Approach and Inspiration

Employing MCDA, this dissertation aims to explore the cultural content of three contemporary ELT textbooks, published by renowned UK publishers and frequently used in language teaching facilities across the country. To respond to the research questions, it intends to decode hidden ideologies regarding the representation of individuals with protected characteristics pertaining to gender, sexual orientation and disability to determine whether the textbooks complement current UK equalities legislation. It will also compare the extent to which, if any, the cultural content of UK-produced textbooks has evolved since enactment of the Equality Act. A multi-modal approach has been adopted to consider the authors' intent regarding design choices, recognising the potential meanings engendered through a combination of interdependent semiotic modes.

Content analysis has long been utilised as an analytic tool to infer meaning and general patterns in media representations. However, this method is labour-intensive, objective and prone to error (Krippendorf, 2018) and can disregard the surrounding context of lexical items failing to produce meaningful explanations for data findings. Traditional discourse analysis centred on written and oral speech, but "language is always a *partial* bearer of the meaning of a textual/semiotic whole" (Kress, 2011, p. 38).

MCDA was adopted as it encourages a multi-layered analysis, contributing to a fuller understanding of potential cultural interpretations. However, it must be noted that this practice is highly subjective, as any given text can exhibit a plethora of interpretations, open to negotiation. Whilst this subjectivity can help decipher meaning potentials concerning the broader social context, it is important for MCDA scholars to adopt a reflective and critical

stance to their positionality within research. Wodak & Myer (2015, p. 22) attest the need for "careful and systematic analysis, self-reflection at every point of one's research, and distance from the data which are being investigated."

To render this research more systematic and replicable, inspiration was drawn from the framework proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012) which is a consistent focus of this dissertation. This entailed an inductive approach to data collection in which data was obtained in its entirety generating a bird's eye perspective (Etherington, 2004), before being reassessed, with prominent themes ascertained. To promote self-reflection, a reflexive journal[7] was utilised for the researcher to document prior and emerging assumptions and beliefs from a personal perspective. This was frequently reviewed to provide transparency by consciously acknowledging bias during the research process to formulate a trail of "gradually altering methodologies and reshaping analysis" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 696). In line with Scheurich's (1997) postulation, this ensured that the 'baggage' brought to the research was discernible.

Figures 1,2,3: Student Books for Analysis

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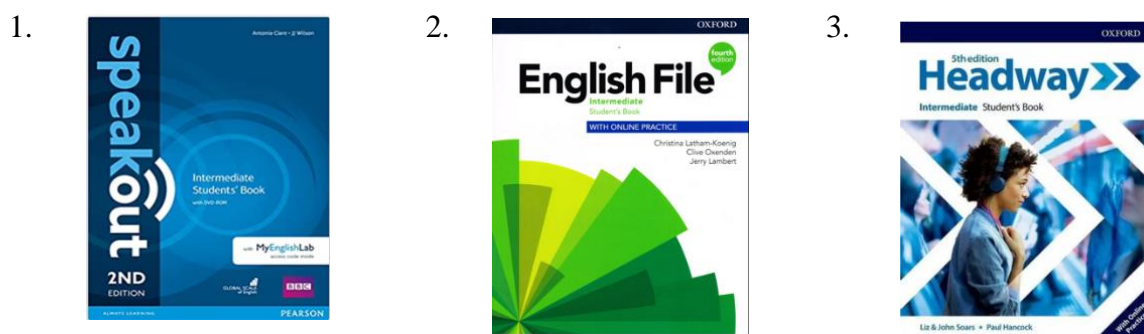
[7] A sample reflective diary entry can be found in Appendix 1.

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Table 1: Description of Data Sources

Title	Speakout	English File	Headway
Edition	2nd	4th	5th
Publisher	Pearson	Oxford University Press	Oxford University Press
Year	2019 (sixth impression)	2019	2019
Author(s)	Antonia Clare JJ Wilson	Christina Latham-Koenig Clive Oxenden Jerry Lambert	Liz Soars John Soars Paul Hancock
Units	10	10	12

Sources of Data

The textbooks derive from renowned UK ELT publishers, Pearson and OUP. ELT materials from both publishing houses are commonly utilised in English instruction in the UK and further afield. Both companies boast the reach of their markets, with Pearson (n.d.) "serving customers in nearly 200 countries" and OUP (n.d.) "helping millions of learners of English." These publishers offer a vast array of educational services and products, producing various coursebook series for a multitude of learner types.

The student books subject to analysis are Speakout 2nd Edition- sixth impression (Clare & Wilson, 2019), English File 4th edition (Latham-Koenig, Oxenden & Lambert, 2019) and Headway 5th Edition (Soars, Soars & Hancock, 2019) (see Table 1). The number of published editions speaks to the longevity of the series. Student books were specifically chosen as the material to which students are most exposed. All oriented for an intermediate level of study, whilst systematically developing an array of language skills they possess a strong communicative focus on oral speech. With a moderate level of English already acquired, there is room for a more profound exploration of cultural themes in intermediate-level textbooks. Exploring a range of topics, they present a modern, engaging and interactive impetus for language learning. The student books analysed were paperback, purchased specifically for this research project. Regarding ethical considerations, the authors and publishing houses have been credited throughout this dissertation.

Speakout prides itself on incorporation of authentic material, with "video content from the BBC." Whilst English File and Headway are accompanied by additional online practice materials. Designed and written by reputable authors, the publishers attest to relevant and reliable services and products. Pearson (n.d.) is currently working with the BBC to raise awareness to deforestation and carbon footprint educating learners about pertinent sustainability issues facing society. OUP (n.d.) ensures accountability through impact studies, undertaken to understand and reflect on the effectiveness of their work and make any necessary modifications to further their impact. Furthermore, both publishers' ELT websites contain sections pertaining to LGBTQ + inclusion.

Data Collection

Inspired by Machin and Mayr's toolkit for MCDA, this research assesses the lexical and visual choices of the textbook designers in relation to the cultural messages encoded. Machin

& Mayr's framework is clear, comprehensive and strongly founded on the principles of CDA. It incorporates elements of both lexical and iconological analysis, to examine "image vis-à-vis language" (Royce, 2002, p. 192). By dissecting vocabulary, salient themes can be determined regarding cultural representations. Different aspects can be considered such as connotations, suppression, overlexicalization and structural oppositions (Machin & Mayr, 2012). With lexical fields acting as a map, they uncover "…how areas are defined, what is shaded and not, where boundaries are placed" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 31). Similarly, through iconographical analysis, attributes such as setting, objects and positioning of images are carefully considered for their ability to "place people in the social world and to highlight certain aspects of identity we wish to draw attention to or omit" (Machin & Mayr, 2012 p. 77).

Further influenced by Uzum et al., (2021) and Mendez Perez (2020), data collection assumed five main stages. After each, a period of self-reflection was conducted with personal stance considered through journal entries and any necessary changes enacted to diminish researcher bias before commencement of the next step.

Firstly, an initial reading of the textbooks helped the researcher become familiar with the format and content of each series. The next stage encompassed a more profound exploration of each unit with plentiful notetaking and highlighting of pertinent sections. Following this, the multi-modal data was coded into the categories of protected characteristics: gender, sexual orientation and disability. This stage was conducted twice, first concerning lexical items (readings, written exercises, listenings), then visual (images, diagrams).[8] At times, data was applicable to more than one category and categorised as such.

Finally, the visual and lexical coded data was reconsidered concomitantly to generate broader themes and render a more nuanced interpretation. The units of data then

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[8] Sample coding analysis can be found in Appendix 2.

encompassed different combinations of semiotic modes, for example a reading exercise and

its corresponding image. A specific focus was placed on deciphering whether representations

of protected characteristics are omitted or presented in a "demeaning or stereotypical"

manner (Gray, 2013, p. 6). The proceeding chapter documents the findings from this analysis.

RESULTS

This chapter explores the prominent discourses interpreted from the data, with the proceeding sections reflecting the broader themes generated from the coding process. To provide clarity, this chapter utilises single quote marks to distinguish material directly quoted from the student books, rather than the conventional double quotation marks employed in the surrounding chapters.

Some progressive portrayals fostered equal representation, with a multitude of perspectives promoting diverse depictions of individuals, recognising but extending beyond their possession of said protected characteristics. However, negative portrayals materialised through both covert and overt under-representation, misrepresentation and erasure which demoralised certain identities positioning them as abnormal, ostracising groups of people from full social participation in the imagined social fabric of the textbook.

Female Subordination

Stereotypical Gender Roles

Overall, the student books boast well-balanced ratios of male and female representation, situating both sexes in an array of social and professional activities in textual and audio-visual design. Collectively, through real-life and fictional depictions, the textbooks help supress the notion of gender-oriented career paths. Women are depicted as plumbers, Artificial Intelligence consultants, veterinary surgeons, and polar explorers and men as hairdressers, teachers, receptionists and shop assistants.[9] In *English File* especially, sports and leisure activities appear as gender neutral undertakings, the opening unit presents a

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[9] Starting with plumber: Speakout p. 92; Headway, p. 81; Speakout, p. 48; English File, p. 22; Headway, p. 27; Headway, p. 70; Headway, p. 38; English File, p. 80

Swedish couple who are both 'keen ice hockey players' (p.10). A further progressive

representation is the recognition of paternity leave, alongside maternity, in *Speakout* (p. 54)

indicating the importance of shared domestic and familial responsibilities among parents.

However, some problematic representations persist regarding the perpetuation of

conventional and outdated gender differences. Whilst the other textbooks portray more of a

mix, leisure activities in *Speakout* still read as segregated for the sexes. Men dominate the

sporting world partaking in or engaging with an array of sports including but not limited to

running, football, tennis and boxing.[10] Despite infrequent representations of female athletes

such as a female tennis player (p. 80) and a girls netball team (p. 154), the ratio of textual and

visual inclusion appears skewed. Female pastimes are linked more to the expressive arts such

as acting and singing[11] whilst the aforementioned sports appear somewhat off limits.

Throughout the textbooks, there is evident progression negating women as the sole

responsibility for domestic tasks. This is epitomised through depictions of men shopping for

groceries, cooking and cleaning dishes.[12] However, the trope of the female caregiver is

upheld through other means. Whilst there is more variety in career choice for both sexes,

when depicted, the role of teacher, nurse and actor are still overwhelmingly occupied by

females. Teaching and nursing are commendable career paths however females dominate

these fields in the textbooks, reflecting a modified version of the caregiver simply out with

the domestic realm.

Connoted with objectification and the male gaze, the female 'actress' can also

perpetuate gender stereotypes. *Speakout* exemplifies this through over-generalisation. In a

section about 'Childhood Dreams' (p. 48), a gap-fill exercise insinuates that 'It's every young

girl's dream to be an actress...' spurred by watching 'beautiful actresses' on TV,' yet there is

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[10] Starting with running: Speakout, pp. 79, 153, 88, 21

[11] Example: 'My hobbies are surfing the net and singing. I sing every day, usually in the bathroom' (Speakout, p. 12)

[12] Examples starting with shopping for groceries: Headway, p.22, English File, p. 70

no mention of talent. In this sense, female actors are objectified for their beauty, without recognition of the time, effort and sacrifice involved in honing their craft. Furthermore, the lexical item 'every' represses the diverse occupations chosen by young girls every day, inspired by role models and equal opportunities. The accompanying exercises encourage students to discuss their own childhood aspirations but make no explicit effort to negotiate or deconstruct this assumption.

Figures 4,5,6: Student Book Depictions of Women's Shopping Habits

6.

4.

5.

Female beauty is a prominent theme with women often portrayed proceeding specific adjectives which denote physical appearance as of prime importance to the female characters and their male counterparts.[13] Aspects such as make-up, eating and shopping tendencies are widely discussed and contrasted with the male experience. *English File* recognises this distinction through an example in which David is confronting his partner Kate about the purchase of an expensive pair of shoes (p. 18). During this conversation, the individuals' shopping habits are contrasted. Whilst Kate has engaged in a frivolous purchase when they

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[13] Examples found in Headway: 'well-dressed lady' (p. 12), 'lovely wife' (p. 31), 'model girlfriends' (p. 60)

have outstanding bills, David's recent purchase of an Ipad, more expensive than the shoes, is presented as a more practical and calculated decision. Between all the student books, images are presented which accentuate the stereotypical behaviour of the appearance obsessed women and her trivial purchases of designer clothes and accessories (see Figures 4, 5, 6). However, *English File* (p. 22) effectively contrasts this notion by describing the polar explorer, Helen Skelton, as completing her expedition 'smelling awful' and with 'absolutely filthy' hair.

It must be noted that there is some further effort to confront stereotypes and inequalities. In *Headway* (p. 33), there is a reading with facts regarding work statistics, one of which exposes the gender pay gap with women earning '9.6% less than men for full-time work.' Students are encouraged to respond to these facts and compare them with other known figures about different countries. This affordance carves space for a discussion regarding gender inequality.

Similarly, stereotypes are addressed in *English File*. Introducing students to the 'The Pink and Blue Project' (p. 32-33), a listening exercise illuminates gender stereotypes as a social construct, through an exploration of their history, evolution and capitalisation by the advertising industry. With different positions exhibited, the following activity requests students' opinions and personal experiences. Additionally, *English File* (p. 65) explores the best sports for each body type, with most common being ectomorph, mesomorph and endomorph. With no gender disclosed, this reading helps deconstruct stereotypes with the propensity to succeed in sports attributed to body type, not gender differences alone. It also has a section (p.30) explicitly on gender stereotypes in which students engage in an exercise to consider the extent to which generalisations are completely, partly or wholly untrue. This activity recognises the element of truth in stereotypes, but also that they are usually

hyperbolic statements failing to account for the diversity of a situation, or the origins and system which uphold them.

Speakout introduces common gender stereotypes (p. 12) to discuss, but there is less explicit effort to deconstruct and problematise their existence.

Sexist language

Despite modern textbooks having supposedly near eradicated sexism, multiple instances of covert sexism were identified in textbook language. This prevalence contributing to the creation of an imagined world in which more importance is placed on the male experience, at the expense of female representation. *Headway* and *Speakout* frequently negate gender neutral nouns, utilising 'man' in various forms to describe human experiences. Both student books present an array of phrases: 'businessmen,' 'postmen,' 'rich man's game,' 'machine that man has invented,' 'man on the moon.'[14] Whilst 'man on the moon' as a historical event referred to in both *Speakout* and *Headway* (p. 23, p. 124) could almost be excused, there is a missed opportunity to alter the language to a more inclusive alternative and highlight a progressive move towards gender equality since the 1960s, especially as the reference in *Headway* is describing a 2017 Apollo Mission. The other instances act as more blatant refusals, for example 'businessperson' is a widely dispersed term and could easily be incorporated at no detriment to expression as the same activity (Speakout, p.45) includes 'police officers' rather than 'policemen.' A sub-unit of Unit 5 in *Speakout* is entitled 'Man versus Machine,' (p. 64) demonstrating that sexist language is not only incorporated into the narrative but also headlined in the design choices of the textbook.

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[14] Examples: Speakout, p. 45, Headway, pp. 30, 109, 124

Speakout and *English File* both feature the lexis 'actress,' distinguishing between the role of acting as it pertains to a man or woman.[15] This is an outdated concept during which various suffixes were attached to different words, when the action was undertaken by a woman. This practice serves to perpetuate the differentiation of men and women as requiring different means of expression. Additionally, 'actress' has also engendered negative promiscuous connotations, at times sexualising women in the field. *Headway* did not partake in this tendency, instead using 'actor' irrespective of gender. Similarly problematic lexis identified in the student books included 'waitress' and 'hostess.'[16]

Male-firstness is also commonly witnessed throughout each textbook, when pronouns are side by side the male pronoun is routinely placed first: he/she, Mr/Mrs, Sir/Madam.[17] An exception to the rule is presented in *Headway* (p. 33) when a speaking activity utilises 'she/he' in their prompts. However, this is perhaps employed due to a previous reading on the same page elucidating gender inequality. There was some demonstration of inclusive language, especially in *Speakout* where pronouns such as 'they' and the noun 'people' were often employed. In the same vein, *Headway* also utilised the gender-neutral noun 'human,' however this was interspersed with intermittent occurrences of 'man' complicating the narrative when referring to human experiences. Whilst some of this language derives from quoted material, its inclusion perhaps speaks to the choices of the textbook designers and their disregard to its ability to problematise gender equality.

Male Supremacy

Generally, men are afforded more prominent positions both in the lexical and visual framework of the textbooks. Witnessed in every student book, with only a handful of

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[15] Examples: Speakout, p. 25, p. 48; English File, p. 97
[16] Examples: English File, p. 34
[17] Examples: 'Interview someone you know about **his/her** job' (Headway, p. 33), 'the **man** and **his** wife' (English File, p. 87)

exceptions, positions of power in the workplace are inordinately attributed to men. Despite a wide array of occupations available to women, they appear relegated to non-managerial roles. The vast majority of leading positions in the narratives are male dominated, such as 'boss', 'manager' 'director', 'millionaire' and 'CEO.'[18] Representations in *Speakout* protrude as particularly problematic. On the front page of a unit titled 'Success' (p. 79), there is a dearth of female representation which is perplexing as it perhaps unintentionally links success to men. Prominent celebrities occupy this page including Usain Bolt, Daniel Day Lewis and Andy Murray. Yet of the three identifiable people, no female celebrities feature. This omission is perpetuated on the following page, only two out of eleven of the pictured individuals are female. The entire unit favours male representation, a pertinent contrast to other sections which appear more balanced.

Likewise, despite physical room on the page for representation of both sexes, in a reading on millionaires (Speakout, p. 44) a male millionaire is depicted surrounded by money, a sports car, watch and wedding ring. Whilst gender neutral language suggests it is possible for all people to achieve this amount of monetary success, the layout of the 2-page spread further connotes success to the male experience. With many female millionaires in modern society, inclusion of a woman either alongside or in lieu of the man would help negate this notion.

These types of representations help maintain the subordinate female position, indicating their struggle for the same status and level of success as their male counterparts. Gender inequality is epitomised in *Headway* (p. 48) through the inclusion of a folk tale which accentuates sex preference. The story of 'The Emperor and His Daughters' depicts the dissatisfaction of an emperor, and father, whose daughters choose to marry for love, over

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[18] Example: Three fictional company directors: 'David Johnson, Johnny Thomson, Tommy Davies' (Speakout, p. 42)

status. The daughters' sole purpose in life is portrayed as marrying princes, reducing the value of their own ambitions and aspirations: 'He had three daughters, but unfortunately no sons.' Whilst a fairy tale with an element of fallacy implied, there is no effort in the complementary activities to dissect the underlying themes nor discuss problematic attitudes towards sex preference.

Male Violence and Criminality

Gendered emotions

Figure 7: A Screaming Match Between Siblings

There is some visible effort to dismantle the notion of gendered emotions, especially in *Headway* and *English File*. Whilst representations of the impassive man and emotional woman present, they are blended with other dissimilar portrayals which demonstrate emotionality as a consequence of the situation, rather than sex difference. Women are portrayed as emotional female drivers, crying mothers and needy girlfriends,[19] however there are also numerous instances which negate melodramatic tendencies. Conversely, an example which is striking as a perpetuation of gendered emotions is found in an *English File* listening (p. 13).

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[19] Starting from emotional female drivers: English File, p. 28; Headway, p. 34, Speakout, p. 73

There are two stories regarding sibling quarrels. In the first, two teenage brothers are fighting and there is a violent accident in which one of them is stabbed with a penknife. Whilst this is a minor accident, violent tendencies are clearly linked to men. The following story surrounding two sisters is a much more passive affair, in which an accident leads to their pet bird escaping, a violation of their duty of care. Introduced by the premise of a time when a sibling behaved badly, there is evident bias regarding what is assumed to be bad behaviour according to gender. However, the accompanying image (see Figure 7) which portrays an argument between brother and sister nullifies this idea, as the girl of the photo appears as an equal agent in the altercation with both screaming at the other, rather than illustrating women as the victim of male rage.

Diversity of male emotionality is also apparent. In a reading about Jadav Payeng who tackled deforestation caused by environmental problems in his homeland (Headway, p.64-65), upon witnessing hundreds of dead snakes wash up on the riverbank he was emotionally distraught and 'wept.' This response serves to demonstrate male vulnerability, negating the emasculating pretence that 'men don't cry.'

Criminal Propensity

Crime is a prevalent theme throughout the textbooks, from petty to more serious criminal acts. An overarching theme is to portray men as criminals, with women often assuming the role of victim. Throughout all the student books, images reflecting criminality, whether cartoon or real-life examples, demonstrate supposed male figures and present criminality as an almost exclusively male activity (see Figures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14).

Figures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14: Crime as a Male-Oriented Activity

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8.

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12.

13.

14.
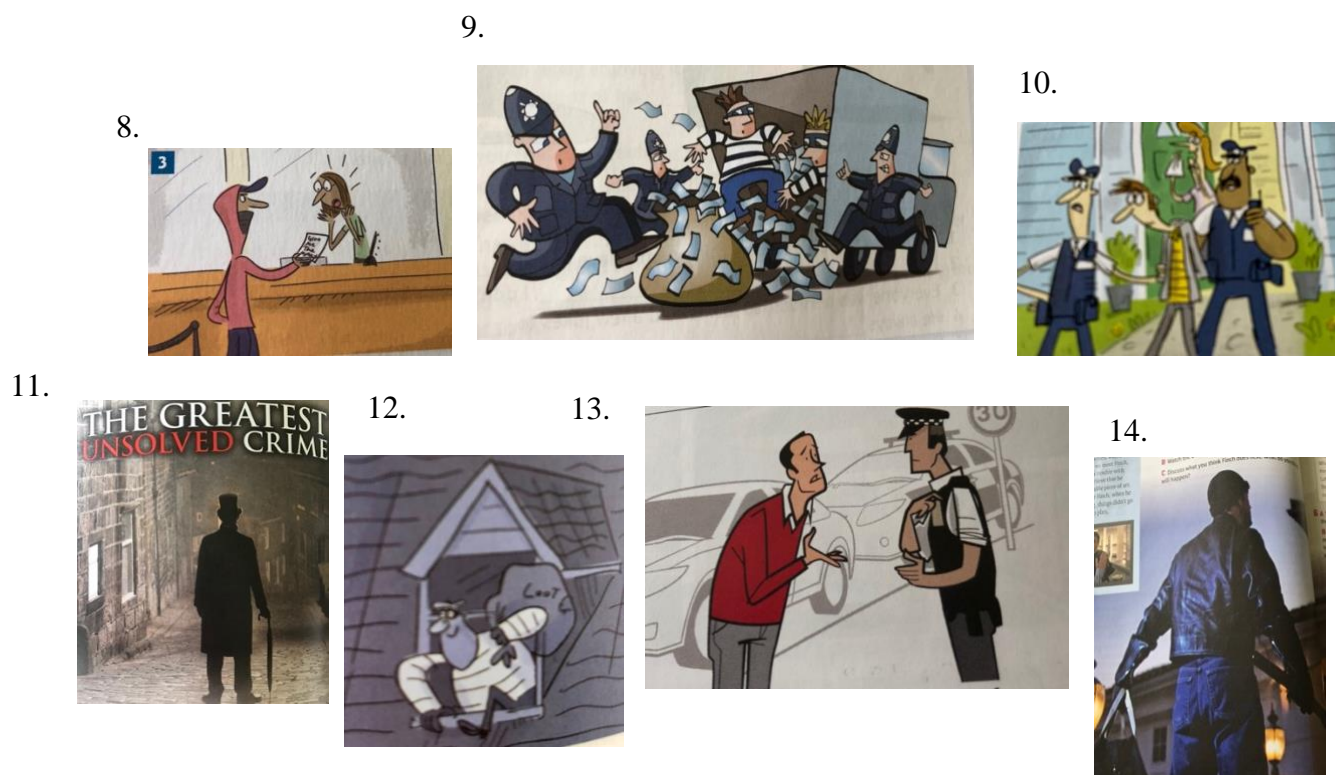
Independent narratives in grammar exercises also stress male perpetrators: 'When the man fired the gun…' (English File, p. 76), 'I took a bag through customs for a man who asked me to' (Headway, p. 33). As crime is woven into the social fabric of every community, it is not unusual for the textbook to include crime. In fact, its existence contrasts the tendency for textbooks to present overly positive or touristic outlooks. However, the lack of female representation in these depictions is problematic.

The only notable example of female criminal tendencies is highlighted in *English File* (p. 102), however the framing of this crime further renders gender bias. It is a crime of passion, where a fight over a male individual leads to the attempted murder of another woman. In this vein, it could be perceived that female crime is only deemed worthy to include when the act of violence is instigated by jealousy over a man.

English File also presents a reading on Jack the Ripper (p. 100), known for his killing spree of innocent women, there is a missed opportunity to explore the concept of gender-based violence. Whilst the corresponding activity could explicate violence against women and act as a potential learning opportunity to discuss its root causes, the close reading only requires students to objectively analyse the text's lexis and structure.

Heteronormativity

Erasure

Without a single overt instance of non-heterosexual conformity ascertained in any of the student books, erasure is a major tool employed to uphold heteronormative values and smother the voices of the queer community. With ample reference to relationship status in each textbook, heterosexuality is painted as the only existing sexual orientation. In *Speakout* (p. 11), students engage in an activity matching relationship vocabulary with its corresponding meaning. Students are to match 'fiancé and fiancée' with 'Which pair is going to get married?' Whilst a legitimate claim, there are other possible variations for marriage or life partnerships and when the lexical item 'partner' arises it corresponds to 'Which word is a general word for someone who you do something with?' This broad definition protrudes as problematic with no effort to explore different meanings of 'partner' or introduce civil partnership which would complement the other relationship defining vocabulary presented in this exercise.

Another instance of erasure occurs in the depiction of a family tree composing four generations (Speakout, p. 148). Despite non-nuclear representations of divorced and blended families, there is no deviation from heterosexual pairings in the accompanying images. Similar occurrences are found in *English File* (p.10), in a reading entitled 'The Modern Family,' themes such as divorce and single parenthood are breached with the accompanying

visuals portraying dissimilar family compositions and reference to 'stepchildren.' However, despite describing the changing trends of British family life, there is no mention of same-sex parents and the accompanying stick figure people are colour coded to negate ambiguity. The men are coloured blue wearing trousers whilst women are green in skirts. If this is to suggest modern British life, by erasing non-heteronormative identities it implies a distorted and backward, rather than 'modern' reality.

A quirky topic which derails traditional marital expectations is located in *Headway* (p. 104-105), an American journalist is engaging in a solo wedding in Japan. A growing trend, the article depicts the events of the ceremony which 'is a celebration of yourself' and involves a wedding dress, hair and make-up, as well as a professional photoshoot. The following page pictures a heterosexual couple discussing the article, they perpetuate heterosexual norms through phrases such as 'Do you mean there's no groom - no husband?' and 'Presumably, these girls don't have boyfriends' (p. 107). Again, subtly suppressing alternative sexual orientations and rendering LGBTQ + identities illegitimate in the realm of English language learning.

Clarification of Ambiguity

When there is some room for manoeuvre from heterosexual 'ideals' through portrayal of ambiguous relationships, most are quashed through clarification in images or rubrics. In an exercise about leaving notes on the fridge in *Speakout* (p. 34), the relationship between Leyla and Jen, presumed to be living together, is ambiguous. However, the previous page presents a conversation between Pete and Dax discussing weekend plans. Dax concludes the conversation stating he will ask his girlfriend, Leyla, if she wants to attend Pete's party. With Leyla a fairly uncommon name and fresh in the reader's mind, it is suggested that this note is between flatmates rather than a lesbian relationship. Despite several other names on that

page, it is only Leyla which features again and out of the four notes only the one between Leyla and Jen could generate ambiguity.

Little ambiguity exists in *English File*, the textbooks' images consistently portray individuals, heterosexual couples or normative families. In cases when images of same sex individuals are presented, there is some clarification in instruction or narration which depicts them as friends, colleagues or family members. Over-explanation also presents in *Headway* (p. 87), through a listening in which Jeff and Kevin are formulating weekend plans. Students have to 'complete their diaries.' The relationship between these two men could be left ambiguous at no detriment to exercise completion, yet the rubric clarifies they are 'two friends' which ensures no alternative readings can arise.

However, the same textbook does ambiguously depict the relationship of Cintia and Martina. (p. 28) Hungarian student Cintia is writing to her English friend, Paul, describing her exchange study experience in Ireland where she has met Martina. The relationship between the two is not defined but she mentions a cinema date, and the accompanying image pictures the two girls affectionately hugging allowing for the potential reading of a non-heterosexual couple. Therefore, despite affordances for insertion of students' autobiographical information in each textbook, the main narratives refrain from explicit LGBTQ + representation rendering queer declarations anomalous from the normative behaviour exhibited in the textbooks.

Attitudes Towards Disability

Celebrity Status vs Everyday Experiences

Whilst they vary in both quantity and quality of representation, each student book contains references to disability. It is striking that many of these adopt the guise of famous people, perhaps at the expense of everyday portrayals. Utilising inspirational stories in which the

protagonist is well-known in the public eye is a common tactic which helps buffer the presentation of disability as a success story in which surpassing barriers imposed by their condition allows these individuals to become productive members of society. However, there is a danger that representations of this kind can sensationalise disability, suggesting that its existence is only deserving of portrayal through extraordinary cases such as blind artists, paralysed scientists and autistic geniuses.[20] Adopted by the publishers of *Speakout* and *Headway*, this approach contributes to the impression that for content to be attractive and engaging, disability requires framing through a celebrity perspective.

This type of representation could inadvertently overshadow the more relatable everyday experiences of those living with disabilities. There is a tendency for the more mundane instances to be written into grammar and vocabulary exercises, rather than foregrounded in readings and listenings. These instances are somewhat progressive by recognising disability rather than refuting its existence, but their fleeting presence as a single sentence or paragraph which can be glossed over negates the chance to explore specifics or accurately reflect possible quotidian experiences. It is desirable to balance both fictional and non-fictional depictions of disabled individuals which reflect daily occurrences, alongside individuals in the limelight. This would demonstrate sensitivity, rather than sensationalism.

Ableism

For able-bodied people, it is challenging to recognise inherent bias towards disabled individuals as it pervades everyday encounters and language use. This unfortunately results in unconscious prejudice and a disparate power dynamic between the abled and the disabled, as a result ensuring that this social group remain disadvantaged in their everyday existence. Ableist attitudes are somewhat present in the student books, it could be argued disability is

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[20] Starting with blind artist: Speakout, p. 16; Headway, p. 81; Speakout, p.85

portrayed as the individual's problem rather than an inadequacy in universal design, and prejudice language is recognised in some reading and listening passages. The storylines serve to synonymise disability with inability.

In *Speakout*, there are extensive references to disability however they typically adopt a derogatory view, referring to the struggle of life with a disability which alienates and hinders basic life functions. Whilst these stories are communicated against a backdrop of success in different fields, prior to their achievements disabled individuals are deemed as incapable and unfavourably compared to their able-bodied peers. For example, two passages on the same two-page spread (p. 84-85) depict the lives of disabled people, the first a blind pianist and the second two gifted autistic men. In both passages, there is a profound focus on their inabilities and regressive form with the pianist, Paravicini, possessing an extraordinary talent for music but 'unable to count to ten…dress or feed himself.' The gifted men, Tammet and Wiltshire, have become known for their talents but 'experienced difficulties during childhood.' Whilst these aspects are presumed true, the disability itself is recognised as the cause of these shortcomings, allocating individual rather than collective responsibility. Instead of accommodating the individuals' needs so they can in fact participate as active agents in society, disability is perceived as problematic rather than societal behaviour.

This notion is only perpetuated by language which frames disability in a negative light. Word choice such as 'suffer,' 'difficulties,' 'problems,' and 'despite'[21] further accentuate a sense of inferiority which can lead to social exclusion. Inadvertently, disabled life is equated with misery unless some sort of talent can counteract this effect and aid social acceptance. Some more explicit expressions may also cause unintended offence: 'don't see eye to eye,' 'pulling my leg' and 'didn't get depressed [about it].'[22]

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[21] Examples: Starting with suffer: Speakout, pp. 85, 84, 20, 16
[22] Examples: Headway, pp. 76, 64

A positive representation of disability is recognised in *Headway* (p. 81), during a discussion about the field of Artificial Intelligence, Steven Hawking features as one of many experts. Rather than his disability requiring exploration or explanation, it is simply his work that is discussed and like everyone else, he is pictured. This is an example of disabled individuals being afforded equal representation, he is included due to his scientific achievements rather than to parade his disability. Yet, the accompanying image ensures that viewers are still aware of his disability as it concerns a part of his identity.

Mental Health Recognition

As non-visible conditions, it has been a long and arduous battle for mental health to be given the attention it deserves. Recently, attitudes have been changing and there has been wider global recognition of the impact and severity of mental health issues. Collectively, the student books reference a wide array of conditions from depression to eating disorders either extensively in reading and listening narratives or through more implicit mentions in grammar exercises. This could be a sign of progress, as disability, especially mental illness, have often been proscribed and representation eschewed.

However, there are instances which seem to misrepresent or downplay mental health which could serve problematic against changing public attitudes, at least in the UK. A prime example of misrepresentation occurs in *Speakout* (p. 20), in an exercise in which types of films are matched to their definitions. For 'psychological thriller,' the corresponding definition is 'The main character has mental problems.' Whilst this genre is known for its unstable protagonist with the storyline often told through their eyes, the wording of 'problems' could be seen to undermine the range and severity of different mental health conditions. Something akin to mental 'illness' or 'disorder' would perhaps appear less derogatory. This definition also contributes to sensationalism, as these types of films

demonstrate an extreme version of reality with the characters' conditions a source of interest and excitement but not reflective of the average life with mental illness.

Another negative portrayal of mental illness occurs in *Headway* (p. 120). In a reading problematically entitled 'The Long Lunch,' we are introduced to Joaquin García, a Spanish water engineer who left work one day without notifying anyone but remained on the payroll. When he is called to collect a medal for 20 years of service, his absence is finally acknowledged. With his prior manager presuming him to be dead, he goes in search of the missing employee. When he finally locates and contacts García, he refuses to explain his absence. The employer takes him to court and he is forced to pay reparations in the form of 27,000 euros. His reasoning for the abrupt departure was due to bullying at work and subsequent depression, yet this is given little to no attention in the storyline with no exploration into the factors contributing to the bullying or the measures in place to ensure a safe and healthy working environment. He is instead painted as the perpetrator through a comical portrayal, rather than the victim, with no concern for his mental health nor the circumstances leading up to the contract violation.

A phenomenon which presents itself in *English File* and *Speakout* alike is the tendency to erase or downplay mental illness and its potential consequences. In *Speakout* (p. 23), Elvis' death is explored with its cause related to him simply having 'taken pills for a headache.' His overdose is presented as unfortunate and accidental, and it fails to recognise his ongoing drug addiction. A similar effect manifests in *English File*, with the reason for Hendrix's death (p. 129) sugar-coated simply stating he died in a hotel, when he was a long-term recreational drug user and perished at a young age due to substance abuse. These omissions serve to consolidate the idea that mental issues such as addiction are shameful and should not be discussed, when in fact it is awareness and education which can help others better understand these issues.

DISCUSSION

In line with the central questions surrounding this research, these findings help to shed light on the representation of protected characteristics in recent UK-produced ELT textbooks and establish recognisable change since the passing of the Equality Act. The student books refrained from the sole inclusion of what Gómez Rodríguez (2015, p. 168) referred to as "surface" culture, introducing deep and meaningful cultural content through themes including crime, inequality, climate change and divorce. However, it could be argued there was a missed opportunity to explicitly incorporate themes which would resonate with groups with protected characteristics and better mirror present-day society.

The student books have modernised in their depiction of gender through visible effort to downplay sex differences and increase the quantity of female representation. Yet, there remain instances which perpetuate stereotypical gender roles through both visual and lexical design. The blatant erasure of non-heteronormative individuals is highly problematic and an ill-reflection of modern UK society. The student books are inflexible in their depiction of cultural values tied to heteronormativity, through the deliberate exclusion of queer individuals and rejection of sexually ambiguous readings. Whilst representations of disability are abundant, there is a tendency for portrayals to be sensationalised or associate disability as a problem at the individual level.

In this vein, representations of protected characteristics are gradually becoming more diverse but there is an evident delay in social change in the student books' imagined communities. Therefore, whilst the student books analysed appear somewhat diverse and progressive in their representation of characteristics protected under the Equality Act, it could be argued that they possess the power to influence individuals through the hidden curriculum,

with selected social groups repressed through either implicit or explicit misrepresentation and downright erasure.

Gender

Traditionally, ELT textbook materials reflected the same sexist attitudes portrayed in society, the feminist movement helped gain women greater representation. However, it remains to be determined whether quantity necessarily equates to quality of representation. Conventional roles emphasised sex differences, with binary representations of the female caregiver, against the more prominent male breadwinner exemplified by Tyrer (2012). This gender bias not only pertained to social activities, but also emotional behaviour. Representations which perpetuate the gender divide are problematic, with socialisation leading to the establishment of so-called normative behaviour, such as female dramatics and male aggression. The exponential levels of violence against women in the UK have been somewhat attributed to the pressure to conform to the masculine construct of aggression (Office for National Statistics, 2022). These factors concomitantly relegated women to second-class citizenship, whilst men became the domineering force within the realm of textbooks. Since this time, there has been recognisable change with Gray (2013) declaring the complete eradication of overt sexism.

Recognised in this research, it is confirmed that gender roles have become more blurred with women generally depicted in a more diverse fashion and in a wider array of traditionally male-oriented positions. However, as witnessed in previous literature, the trend continues for certain tropes to be apparent albeit in different forms. For example, the role of caregiver is now realised through professions akin to teaching and nursing which remain, in the student books, as female-oriented career paths. Whilst emotionality appears more associated with situation than gender, essentially all criminal acts were recognised as

exclusively male undertakings. Furthermore, the glass ceiling is still in force with the majority of managerial positions adopted by men. This is a subtle form of repression recognised in UK-produced textbook analysis (Tyrer, 2012) prior to amendments to the equalities legislation.

Underlying sexist themes also materialise through language choice, there is little deviance from the tendency to utilise male firstness and male-oriented nouns. When instances of female firstness prevail, there is an ulterior motive for use and it is applied out of necessity rendering its inclusion tokenistic. It must be noted that a major progression occurs through the student books' treatment of stereotypes. Explicit recognition helps to explicate the nature of gender-based stereotypes and offer affordances to negotiate their meaning and discuss their application. However, when stereotypes appear more implicitly in readings or activities, the same care is not taken to explicitly dissect them.

Therefore, the textbooks are progressive in their portrayal of women in a wider array of social and occupational positions, as well as the recognition of emotion as a human construct. However, sex differences are still emphasised through covert language use, as well as ignorance regarding women in positions of power. For greater equality, there should be a focus on a mix of the positioning of both male and female pronouns, as well as the deployment of neutral nouns for human experiences.

Authors and publishing houses should ensure that the content positively reflects the cultural landscape of the UK. Whilst there is a fair balance of male and female contributors to these student books (see Table 1), due to the politics of representation it is not a given that a greater quantity of female representation necessarily results in improved quality.

Sexual Orientation

In the present analysis, little change has been witnessed in the portrayal of sexual orientation. Despite integration of previously considered taboo aspects, such as divorce, non-nuclear family structures, alcohol and drugs, erasure prevails as the unspoken rule in publication with no deviance in the heterosexuality of both fictional and real-life characters in the student books. Whilst the UK has witnessed major progress in the strive for equality for queer individuals, this social change has not yet extended to representations in the textbooks, with heteronormativity materialising as a repressive ideology.

This blatant erasure corresponds to the findings of Gray (2013), when the sexualities of prominent celebrities were suppressed to avoid undue offence. An ill-reflection of modern British society, similar omission is noted in this research through the presentation of relationship vocabulary which deliberately excludes important terminology to discuss sexual orientation such as 'partner' and 'civil partnership.' This erasure complicates deviant sexual orientations, positioning them as abnormal without precedence for regular lexical and visual inclusion. When potential alternative meanings could have ensued from sexually ambiguous characters and their encounters, the designers were quick to eradicate these through excessive clarification of romantic and platonic relationships. Only one explicit example which could engender a different reading was detected.

Whilst Gray's (2013) research procured some examples of homosexual representation to dissect, this research was not fruitful in this endeavour with no explicit representations in any of the three student books analysed, nor their supplementary materials. This serves to position heteronormativity as the sole legitimate sexual identity, refuting the experiences of LGBTQ + individuals and complicating their strive for equality in society. For ESOL student books to truly reflect modern UK society, inclusion is paramount. It is imperative to uphold

the promised reality of the reformed British equality legislation and protect a social group already vulnerable to discrimination.

Disability

Previous literature determined representations focussed exclusively on the disability of an individual, negating other pertinent identity markers (Bogart & Dunn, 2019). This trend in ELT textbooks correlated to wider public attitudes, with representations of disability often simplified and tokenistic. For years, disabled people have been stigmatised as weak and ineffective contributors to society due to their perceived dependency on others.

The researcher found the student books all possess high levels of disability representation, with the erasure recognised by Brown & Nanguy (2021) non-existent. Yet, at times, disabled individuals continue to be segregated from the majority abled population, with their treatment in text and images somewhat concerning. Ableist attitudes are epitomised through an ideology which positions disability with the medical model, as an individual rather than societal concern. As witnessed in previous literature (Gulab & Khokhar, 2018), the disabled are deemed inferior or incomplete beings which can prevent full societal integration, with characters in the student books analysed explicating childhood struggles to form friendships and fulfil basic tasks.

Language choice further accentuates disability as a negative experience, with inability linked to the medical model and societal attitudes. However, it is precisely a collective effort to ensure universal design of societal infrastructure that can allow individuals with disabilities to become active agents in their everyday life. With the student books failing to reflect this, they uphold de Beauvoir's theory (1949) of 'othering,' casting a division between the abled and disabled and shaping their co-existence.

Recognised in *New Headway* by Bulut & Arikan (2015), the phenomenon of sensationalism is heavily employed in the student books with the admonishment of celebrity status illuminated as a route to more effective integration. Multiple disability representations were presented through famous figures as a sort of security blanket. An over-reliance on this form of presentation resulted in a dearth of more relatable depictions of disability. In order to ensure disability is afforded the equal status enshrined in UK law, the student books could strive for a balance in which these celebrity instances are included, but everyday portrayals are also afforded space in the textual and visual tapestry.

Despite a history of exclusion, this analysis identified reference to mental health issues but their presentation renders this inclusion somewhat ineffectual. There are several cases in which the misrepresentation or downplaying of characters' mental health project mental illness as shameful and not meriting exploration. Consequently, whilst disability representation is quantitatively abundant, some of these references perpetuate the long-endured societal stigma towards mental health conditions which the Act strived to eradicate.

Limitations of Research

As with any form of interpretative research, there are obvious limitations to this study. The qualitative nature of semiotic analysis renders it highly subjective, with researcher bias a major consideration (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Positionality must be acknowledged; reflective measures helped the researcher to reveal and acknowledge personal bias during the research process. To ascertain a wider perspective, this research could be enhanced by procuring the attitudes of both teachers and students by observing textbook classroom use. However, this approach would involve conducting and transcribing interviews or ethnographic fieldwork and thus out with the scope of practicality for the current research project.

The method of choice, whilst a systematic means of studying language and semiotics, is also somewhat developmental in the field (Machin, 2016). As a result, it remains an evolutionary process to iron out its specificities. However, to promote replicability, the Machin and Mayr's framework was employed due to its robust and detailed procedure which assisted the structuring and execution of this research. CDA has also been praised as it permits discourse analysts to maintain diligent handling of the data (Norris, 2019).

The sources themselves are also limited as they present snapshots of the wider complete series of each textbook issued by publishers, as such the analysis cannot consider previously acquired knowledge which may skew some of the researchers' interpretations. Furthermore, only textbooks pertaining to the intermediate level and adult genre were chosen to ensure continuity, as a result other levels of study were not considered. The analysis of a greater array of textbooks and publishers would also serve to confirm the existence of the present interpretations on a wider scale, as this research refutes universal applicability.

Significance of Findings

In line with Althusser's theory of interpellation, the social constructions identified in the cultural content of the student books possess the potential to influence learner attitudes and beliefs as "humans' interpretations of the world produce social reality [and] shared understandings among people give rise to rules, norms, identities, concepts, and institutions" (Schneider & Sidney, 2009, p. 106). Therefore, it is important for textbooks to reflect socio-cultural and political realities. However, UK publishing houses continue to reflect what they have deemed the idealist target culture, rather than seizing the opportunity to become more inclusive to project the beautifully diverse nature of British society.

This is not just a matter of political correctness, but also a pedagogical failing to prepare ESOL students for successful integration. With so much control over the semiotic

process, textbook publishers can continue to 'white-wash' cultural representations to assuage their fear of deviating into controversial territory. It is shocking that despite the student book publishers advocating for LGBTQ + inclusivity on their respective websites, this so-called inclusive attitude was non-existent in the present student book analysis. To counteract this mindset may require a complete reformation of the ELT material publishing industry. It is perhaps only through segmenting markets that publishers such as Pearson and OUP can be encouraged to better reflect the needs of their consumers, in this case ESOL students studying and residing in the UK.

CONCLUSION

Summary

This research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature concerning cultural representations in ELT materials, a MCDA was undertaken to examine the representation of protected characteristics (gender, sexual orientation, disability) through the lens of the Equality Act. The intention was to decode the hidden ideologies of three textbooks in relation to the potential messages emitted to ESOL students in a UK context. Comparing findings to previous literature pre-2010, before the passing of the Equality Act, it was determined that the textbooks have somewhat progressed to promote diversity. However, several troublesome constructions possess the potential to perpetuate discrimination against groups with protected characteristics, primarily through under-representation, misrepresentation and blanket erasure.

This analysis concludes that the most notable change occurred in the depiction of gender with the blurring of binary roles contributing to more female visual and textual inclusion. However, problematic representations persisted and served to harden the notion of the second-class citizenship of women. Regarding sexual orientation, the exclusion of non-heteronormative individuals complicated the social fabric of the student books, producing a reality ill-reflective of a UK context. Whilst disability as a concept was well integrated, the sensational perspective adopted rendered the more relatable and mundane aspects of life with a disability somewhat insignificant. In line with other researchers, an evident lag was identified between social change and its reflection in ELT materials, perhaps due to ulterior motives such as financial concern. The target culture represented within the student books simply failed to recognise or indeed embrace the 'winds of change' and the diverse reality of life in the UK.

Wider Significance

With the treatment of minority groups of growing interest in modern UK society, this research highlights the means by which students' exposure to certain representation holds the potential to shape their attitudes and interactions. Under the current equalities legislation, public services are obligated to ensure positive representation of protected characteristics. In an ELT context, textbooks and related media, still in frequent use, become a tool to diffuse cultural values.

It could therefore be argued that alongside the legal responsibility of institutions, there exists a moral duty for those involved in textbook design and publication to recognise and actively evade cultural bias. Exposure to positive representations of protected characteristics in textbooks' lexical and visual content could develop ESOL students' inter-cultural competence and better their integration in their immediate UK context. With current efforts to ensure global reach, perhaps publishers such as Pearson and OUP should consider segmenting markets to ensure that their offerings better reflect the cultural needs of students. As a final disclaimer, it is not the intention of this work to tarnish the reputation of the publishers and their educational output but rather to heighten awareness towards the ideological nature of ELT textbooks.

Future Research

To complement this research and existing literature, future research could include a widespread study involving both quantitative and qualitative data in which the analysis of multiple sources, including teacher handbooks and other related components, could engender a more complete account of cultural representations in UK-produced ELT materials. Analysing a greater array of publishers and examining the varying levels and target audiences

of their materials could both complement or contradict the current findings. In order to understand textbook use, there requires more field research to be conducted to witness how teachers and students alike engage with the material, utilise opportunities to broaden the conversation, identify with representations and are influenced by the cultural content.

The UK is also not the only context in which these protected characteristics, and others outlined in the Equality Act, are gaining public attention in their fight for equality. Consequently, similar research could be undertaken in a multitude of contexts and the results compared with these findings.

It is the hope of the researcher that future ELT material analysis may extend beyond the clinical definitions of the protected characteristics presented in this project, if the cultural information in forthcoming publications is enhanced to reflect the ever-evolving spectrum of gender and sexual orientation.

Personal Development

As a teacher in the TESOL field, cultural content in ELT materials was a point of interest before commencement of this project. However, both my fascination and understanding of cultural representations have blossomed during the research process. Recognising textbooks as cultural products with embedded ideologies has aligned my mentality towards their classroom use. As such, I understand the importance of reflecting on my teaching practice, to acknowledge my own cultural biases and ensure they remain controlled, as well as consider the potential cultural messages in materials effused to students. It is important to ensure all students feel visible in their learning experience and are exposed to cultural representations which enhance inter-cultural competence and foster tolerant and respectful relations with others. The greatest takeaway is the recognition that quantity of representation does not necessarily equate to quality. I believe these to be considerations which I may never have

fully realised throughout my teaching career, therefore I feel privileged that this research

project has opened my eyes to the politics of representation and contributed to my

professional development, perhaps shaping my future pedagogic practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Example Entry of Reflective Journal

<u>Reflective Journal Article, Entry 1:</u>

To understand my own positionality before conducting this research, I am utilising this journal to recognise my personal stance regarding cultural representations in teaching materials and other media representations, in an effort to help dissipate some of the researcher bias which can ensue from research of this kind.

As it is natural to have preconceptions regarding the type of cultural representations expected in the student books to be analysed, it is here I document my expectations. By doing so, I will refer back to this journal to help balance my views and ensure they are contextualised and grounded in valid and empirical research.

As the most prominent and perhaps evolved protected characteristic, I expect sex differences in the textbook cultural representations to be minimal. With global change inspired by feminism and other similar movements, there has been a drive to improve women's access to different resources, including education and employment. With endless global female role models in various fields, I assume that the textbooks will capitalise on ensuring gender equality through textual and visual inclusion. Perhaps this will occur through the blurring of gender roles by depicting women in traditionally male-oriented occupations and social activities, and vice versa for men. However, I am unsure as to the extent to which the textbooks will present an idealised world with gender equality a given, or explicitly discuss sexism and gender inequality as an ongoing aspect of society.

As a teacher in the ELT field and well-acquainted with English teaching materials, I will be extremely surprised to witness many, if any, overt representations of non-heteronormative individuals or topics. In my personal experience, I have never come across representations of this kind, and have previously supplemented textbooks to render them more inclusive to my student group and better their inter-cultural competence development. If they do present, I only expect more ambiguous readings as opposed to vocabulary about LGBTQ + individuals or explicit images of non-heterosexual relationships.

In terms of disability, I am unsure as to what representations will occur. There is a tendency in the media to somewhat ignore or forget about disability until it comes up in topic. Whilst this is problematic, I think it might transpire that disability in the textbooks will either protrude as deliberate tokenistic appearances which are carelessly integrated into the narrative or may be completely excluded. I do not think representations will be deliberately offensive, but if carelessly delivered could have this undesired effect.

I recognise the need to deal with these topics in a sensitive manner, as a woman I am perhaps tuned into gender inequality and understand that I may 'over-analyse' some constructions which were never intended to generate offence. However, I think this also puts me in the privileged position to connect with the material on a personal level. As neither an LGBTQ + or disabled individual, it is possible that my interpretations of the cultural information of the textbooks would not necessarily align with those in these respective communities. As such, I am aware of the role of my personal upbringing and life experience and its part in my interpretation of the student books which at times may need to be neutralised.

Appendix 2: Sample Coding

<u>Speakout Coding (pp.80-81), Gender</u>

Figure 2: Sample Lexical Analysis

Lexical Analysis

Sexist language:
- Male noun for human experience:
*"The secret of success in life is for a **man** to be ready for **his** opportunity when it comes."* – Benjamin Disraeli
- Equating success to men, excluding the female experience
- Benjamin Disraeli, 1800s British statement, outdated, irrelevant to social and professional gender roles in present-day British society, inconsiderately chosen without considering the effect on promoting gender inequality
- Better quote could have been chosen or this quote adapted to enhance inclusivity
- Not even courtesy of male firstness-e.g. man/woman, his/her
- Multiple examples of successful people in the accompanying exercises, ratio is strongly male dominated
- Listening exercise provides no females examples– 'Albert Einstein, John Lennon, Malcolm Gladwell'

Figure 3: Sample Visual Analysis

Visual Analysis

Male Domination:
- Images strongly male-dominated, ratio of women suggests tokenistic inclusion
- Main set of images- ratio 2/10 women

- Additional Exercise Title: 'What is the secret to success?'

Total 2 page spread- 9/11 male famous figures

Figure 4: Multimodal Analysis

Multi-modal Analysis

- The combination of male-dominated narrative and visuals is problematic, obviously favouring the male experience
- Instance of male noun further confirms gender bias
- Not a standalone occurrence, entire unit favours male representation- blatantly enhanced by accompanying images
- This is concerning due to the nature of this unit, it is about success therefore perhaps invertedly associating success as a male experience. Reflects the sort of attitudes which lead to men in leadership positions and women suffering from the glass ceiling.
- More lexical and visual gender equality has been witnessed in previous units, this makes the gender bias in this specific unit protrude, visibly surprising
- Would be easy and of no detriment to student comprehension to include more female representation, therefore could even be considered deliberate exclusion

Appendix 3: Recent Discrimination Against Protected Characteristics

<u>Newspaper Headlines</u>

Gender

o   'No 10 Pulls Sexist Covid Ad Showing All Chores Done by Women' – *The Guardian*

o   'UK Gender Pay Gap: Women Paid 90p for £1 Earned by Men' – *The Guardian*

o   'The 81 Women Killed in 28 Weeks' – *The Guardian*

o   'Gender Stereotyping is Harming Young People's Mental Health' – *The Guardian*

Sexual Orientation

o   'Heartstopper Cast Members Confront Anti-LGBT Protesters at Pride in London' - *The Independent*

o   'Recorded Homophobic Hate Crimes Soared in Pandemic, Figures Show' – *The Guardian*

o   'Boris Johnston Backtracks Over LGBT Conversion Practices Ban After Backlash' - *The Guardian*

o   'LGBT Tolerance 'Going Backwards' as Hate Crimes Up' – *BBC News*

Disability

o   'Ali Jawad: 'Paralympians Are Forgotten About Until the Next Games.' – *The Guardian*

o   'Disabled Talent 'Shut Out' and 'Invisible' in TV Industry and Hollywood' - *Forbes*

o   'University Discriminated Against Student Who Took Own Life, Judge Rules.' – *The Independent*

o   'I Was Dismissed as Simple: People Reveal the Reality of Disability Discrimination at Work' - *Metro*