The Evolution of Heteronormativity in EFL Textbooks

A Content Analysis of the Representation of Gender and Sexuality in English as a Foreign Language Teaching Materials in Flanders from 2003 to 2017

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to determine the evolution of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL textbooks. For this reason, the representation of gender and sexuality were investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively through a content analysis of nine textbooks published from 2003 to 2017 and commonly used in the first cycle of Flemish secondary education. Overall, the results revealed a steadily decreasing degree of heteronormativity throughout time, culminating in the textbooks published post-2015, which not only appeared to contain an equal number of female and male characters, but also a considerable number of female characters performing traditionally male-dominated activities and the first explicit mentions of homosexuality. Nevertheless, some persistent shortcomings were detected, including the lack of male characters shown in traditionally feminine activities, the disproportionately frequent association between masculinity and criminality or disruptive behavior, and the lack of diversity within the representations of same-sex relationships. Moreover, the findings revealed a need for, i.a., further research concerning classroom interactions with the teaching materials in question.

Keywords: EFL textbooks, heteronormativity, gender, sexuality, representation, education, teaching materials
ABSTRACT (NEDERLANDS)

Het doel van deze studie was om de evolutie van heteronormativiteit in Vlaamse EFL schoolboeken te achterhalen. Om die reden werden de representatie van gender en seksualiteit zowel kwalitatief als kwantitatief onderzocht d.m.v. een inhoudsanalyse van negen handboeken gepubliceerd tussen 2003 en 2017 en frequent gebruikt in de eerste graad van het Vlaamse secundaire onderwijs. Over het algemeen, onthulden de resultaten een mettertijd dalend niveau van heteronormativiteit, culminerend in de post-2015 gepubliceerde handboeken, die naast een gelijk aantal vrouwelijke en mannelijke personages, ook een aanzienlijk aantal vrouwelijke personages bevat die traditioneel mannelijke activiteiten uitvoeren en de eerste expliciete vermeldingen van homoseksualiteit. Desalniettemin werd notie gemaakt van enkele hardnekkige tekortkomingen, waaronder een gebrek aan mannelijke personages die traditioneel vrouwelijke activiteiten uitvoeren, de disproportioneel frequente associatie van mannelijkheid met criminaliteit en storend gedrag, en het gebrek aan diversiteit binnen de representaties van homoseksuele relaties. De bevindingen onthulden bovendien een nood aan o.a. onderzoek omtrent klassikale interactie met de desbetreffende leermaterialen.

Sleutelwoorden: EFL-handboeken, heteronormativiteit, gender, seksualiteit, representatie, onderwijs, leermaterialen
1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the early twentieth century spread of women’s suffrage in many Western societies and elsewhere, traditional gender norms did not change profoundly until the eruption of protest movements starting in the 1960s. The next decade would be shaped by a feminist revolution, which disrupted patriarchal society and the suppression of women. Habits, attitudes and perceptions about the capabilities and destinations of women and men were put into question and transformed irreversibly (Hauch, 2019). Additionally, as these movements fought against sexual oppression and pursued sexual liberation for women, a social climate was created in which heterosexuality as an institution was increasingly put into question. This led to the formation of many lesbian and gay movements, which “countered the widespread invisibility and denigration of ‘homosexuals’ with messages of unity, pride and equality” (Nelson, 1999, p. 374).

These transformations were the catalyst for many national and international legislative institutions to adopt ambitious policies striving for the eradication of inequality based on gender and sexual identity. On a global scale, the European Union has been particularly progressive in this regard. For example, both the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, which was enacted in 1999 and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which gained full legal effect in 2009, contain articles that explicitly state the Union’s aim to ensure gender equality in all areas and to actively combat discrimination on the basis of, i.a., sex or sexual orientation (European Union, 2007; 2010).

Even though remarkable progress has been made towards equality between women and men across the world, many obstacles remain. This is made painstakingly clear by the Global Gender Gap Report\(^1\), published yearly by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which assesses gender parity in 149 countries. After remarking in its most recent publication (2018) that only 17 nations have women as heads of state and that globally a mere 18% of ministers, 24% of parliamentarians and 34% of managers are female, it was concluded that gender inequality is still the most ubiquitous in the dimension of political and economic leadership. Additionally, it stated that women, on average, spend twice as much time on housework and other unpaid activities than men (WEF, 2018). When zooming in on the Belgian context, it is revealed that the country ranks in the bottom half of the twenty Western European countries listed and dropped eight places in the

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\(^1\) The gender gap is the measure of the overall level of inequality between women and men (Macionis & Plummer, 2008, as cited in Brusokaitė, 2013)
global ranking since the previous year (from 24th place to 32nd) after experiencing a widening gender gap in wage equality and health life expectancy (WEF, 2018; WEF, 2017). Furthermore, the statistical overview of education in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, for the academic year 2017-2018 indicates how multiple fields of study remain strikingly segregated by gender. For example, in secondary education less than 2 percentage of all students in car engineering and mechanics or electricity are female. Conversely, male pupils enrolled in body care and fashion make up only 5 and 7.5 percentage respectively. In tertiary education study domains, such as health care, social and community work, psychology and educational sciences, 80% or more of the students are women, whereas the exact opposite is true for domains such as industrial sciences, technology and nautical sciences (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2018).

The same can be said about rights for LGBTI\(^2\) individuals. Less than 18 years after the Netherlands became the first country to sign marriage equality into law in 2001, 27 other countries have followed suit. Yet, at the same time, 69 countries still criminalize consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults, of which seven carry out the death penalty (ILGA, 2019).\(^3\) Also, for the first time in ten years, the annual review of the legal and policy situation of LGBTI people in 49 European countries by ILGA-Europe (2019), the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association in Europe and Central Asia, reports countries moving backwards on the road to equality as they revoked existing legislations. More optimistically, however, the ranking also teaches us that, after Malta, Belgium’s legislative framework is the closest to approximating the best existing standards for LGBTI equality. Yet, several other studies remind us of the hurdles the country still have to overcome. Over the past five years, Unia (2019), the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, recorded a 38% increase in the number of reported incidences of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; a 2015 survey issued by the Flemish Government disclosed that one out of five people would have difficulties with their child having a relationship

\(^2\) LGBTI is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people, as used by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association to reflect their advocacy priorities (ILGA-Europe, 2015).

\(^3\) Since the publication of ILGA’s ‘State Sponsored Homophobia’ on the 20th of March 2019, several changes have occurred in the global policy landscape on LGBT+ rights. On the 17th of May 2019, Taiwan became the 27th country to legalize same-sex marriage (Kuo, 2019) and on the 13th of June 2019, Ecuador became the 28th country to do so (Fox & Zuniga, 2019). Botswana decriminalized homosexuality on the 12th of June 2019 (Osborne, 2019) and Brunei Darussalam became the 7th country where same-sex sexual acts are punishable by death (Robertson, 2019). The numbers in the text are updated to include this information.
with a member of the same sex (çavaria, 2018) and on top of that Missiaen and Seynaeve (2016) revealed the statistic that more than 26% of LGBT people living in Flanders had attempted suicide once or more throughout their lives. Moreover, ILGA-Europe’s (2018) concerns about the negative impact of the rising levels of populism and nationalism in Europe’s political climate on LGBTI people, appear to be confirmed in the aftermath of Belgium’s 2019 federal and regional elections. As the extreme-right party, Vlaams Belang, became the second biggest party in Flanders after experiencing a surge of almost 13% (Brzozowski, 2019), it has rained anti-LGBTI statements by newly elected parliamentarians and several online expressions of sympathy for explicitly LGBTI-phobic groupings have been brought to light by media outlets (“Na de ‘uitschuiver’ van Sneppe”, 2019).

In the fight against inequality, one of the most essential factors to bring about social and cultural change, is the eradication of gender and sexual stereotypes. The Council of Europe (2018) argues in their Gender Equality Strategy [GES] that gender stereotypes feed into discrimination and pose a serious threat to the achievement of gender equality as people’s natural talents, capabilities and opportunities may be limited by them, ultimately perpetuating women’s historic economic and social marginalization and sexist attitudes against all genders. As defined by the Gender Equality Commission [GEC] (2015), a key area in and through which these stereotypes ought to be combatted is education. According to them, the persistence of gender stereotyping in educational systems is directly connected to the ongoing gender discrimination in all spheres of society. Therefore, apart from calling for the implementation of the GEC’s recommendations on the matter, the GES also attaches great importance to gender mainstreaming in education (Council of Europe, 2018). Gender mainstreaming means the incorporation of a gender equality perspective at all levels of all policies. So, for the area of education, this implies the evaluation and improvement of measures surrounding a myriad of topics including teacher training, school climate, curricula and the legal framework (Committee of Ministers, 2007). The study presented in this master thesis takes a particular interest in ‘teaching materials’, taking its cue from the

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4 As defined by Masequesmay (2019) in Encyclopaedia Britannica, sexism is ‘prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially against women’. They continue, the term might involve the belief in the superiority of one sex (traditionally men) and imposes limits on what women and men can and should do through stereotypes. While the term emerged in the 1960’s during the second wave of feminism in order to create awareness about the institutionalized oppression of women, in recent years the meaning has oftentimes been ‘expanded to include oppression of any sex, including men, intersex people and transgender people’ (para.1).
Committee of Ministers’ (2007) recommendation to raise authors and publishers’ awareness of the need for a gender-equal approach in the production of school textbooks.

In a similar line of thought, education is also considered a priority for ILGA-Europe. Due to the taboo and lack of sensitivity and staff training on sexual and gender diversity, schools are often unsafe environments for LGBTI youth, which can severely impact their mental health. Apart from fighting explicit discrimination and school bullying, the scorching lack of visibility of LGBTI people and families in textbooks and curricula is also regarded as one of the main issues (ILGA-Europe, n.d.). The most noteworthy effort on this matter on the European level (and one of the only efforts) is the Committee of Ministers’ 2010 recommendation, which urges schools to “provide objective information with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity, for instance in school curricula and educational materials” (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 12).

Recognizing the importance of educational material as a small yet powerful stepping stone towards a more inclusive society, this study investigates how well adapted Flemish EFL (English as a Foreign-Language) textbooks are to the growing need of a more diverse representation of gender and sexuality. Moreover, we will examine if an evolution can be discerned in this regard by comparing the most current EFL textbooks produced by Flemish publishing houses with textbooks published in Flanders in the early 2000s and in the period from 2009 to 2011.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Heteronormativity

Due to the importance for this study, this chapter will start with clarifying the assumed distinction between the terms: sex, gender and sexuality.

First and foremost, sex is considered to be a biological or physiological category, which is assigned at birth to each individual based on, i.a., their chromosomes and/or reproductive organs. Contrary to popular belief or the current Belgian legal understanding, however, this is not a dichotomous category. Plenty of medical research points to the millions of intersex individuals worldwide, which is the collective term for people who either had a chromosomal variation between XX (female) and XY (male), were born with ambiguous (internal or external) reproductive organs or developed ambiguities upon maturing (Lugg, 2003; Transgender Infopunt, n.d.-a).

Defining gender, on the other hand, is more challenging as the concept has been subject to many reinterpretations throughout time. Yet, for the aim of this study, this study proposes the following definition, which was obtained through the combining of the definitions provided by a number of authors and institutions:

Gender denotes the wide set of socially constructed characteristics assumed by and of sexed bodies (i.a. women and men), such as behavioral codes and norms, social roles, identities and relationships, which are context-dependent, can change over time and are embedded in a power system, as they may be utilized for the conditioning and/or oppression of social groups (Butler, 1990; Lugg, 2003; UNESCO, 1990; World Health Organization, 2019)

As Butler argues in their influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990), gender may have little to do with the ‘natural’ or pre-discursive features of a person’s actual sex, but is in fact inherently performative. They explain that each individual continuously and involuntarily produces and reproduces gender through acts that are in compliance with dominant societal norms. It must be stressed that performativity does not equal ‘performance’, as the latter implies a temporal and
conscious act. In other words, instead of a subject producing performance, it is the performance who produces the subject (Butler, 1990; Lugg, 2003).

Lastly, the notion of *sexuality*, or *sexual identity* refers to one’s self-concept based on the gender (or other characteristics) of the person(s) to whom someone is or can be romantically and/or sexually attracted (Lumi, n.d.-a). Until recently, the predominant understanding of sexuality in the West presumed the binary opposition between the essentialist, stable and universal identities of ‘the homosexual’, which refers to a person attracted towards others of the same sex, and ‘the heterosexual’, who experiences attraction to members of the opposite-sex. This was also the reasoning behind the ‘born-this-way-argument’, on which the early lesbian and gay movements were primarily unified (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004; Nelson, 1999). Yet, with the rise of poststructuralism and queer theory in the 1980s and 1990s, these mutually exclusive notions were increasingly put into question and the idea that they too are socio-cultural constructs, entrenched in power-relations and aimed at ‘minoritizing’ and denigrating the non-heterosexual group, became more widespread (Katz, 1995; Nelson, 1999). Many queer theorists, therefore, suggest approaching sexuality as an open and fluid spectrum. In conclusion, the question on whether sexual identity categories are valid or not seems, as of now, stuck between the juxtaposed interpretations of them being either a source of oppression or the fundamental base for political empowerment (Gamson & Moon, 2004).

As attempted to clarify, these three concepts function independently from one another. Yet, as Cameron and Kulick (2003) rightly point out: “Whenever sexuality is at issue, gender is also at issue – and, importantly, vice versa” (p. 142). This was corroborated by Erlman (2015), whose literature review exposed how gender norms and sexual norms cannot be analyzed separately, as they are too interconnected. She then explained this paradox through the concept of ‘heteronormativity’, which essentially promotes the belief in the alignment of biological sex, gender (identity and expression), and sexuality.

Heteronormativity can be defined as the set of all mechanisms that upholds heterosexuality as the naturalized norm within an essentialist binary gender-system (Butler, 1990; Motschenbacher, 2010; Temple, 2005). This means that heteronormativity is based on three basic convictions: First, it presupposes a direct correlation between gender and sex (Baker, 2008). The assumption goes that when a person is born with male genitalia, they ‘are’ a man. In other words, one’s gender
identity is automatically expected to match the sex one is assigned at birth, which some may refer to as ‘cisgender’ (Lumi, n.d.-b).

Secondly, the heteronormative society knows only two legitimate genders and sexes: female and male, which are believed to naturally constitute two extremes of traits. This is where patriarchy comes in. A patriarchal society, as described by Holmes (2007), is “a social system in which men have come to be dominant in relation to women” (p. 2). Consequently, the characteristics ascribed to women and men reflect this power relation: women and femininity are equalized to passiveness, weakness, dependence and emotionality, whereas men and masculinity incarnate activeness, strength, independence and rationality (Amerian & Esmaili, 2015).

This brings us to the third and central condition: heterosexism, i.e. the staunch belief that heterosexuality is necessary to society and the only natural, acceptable, valid and conclusively superior sexual identity. Therefore, Butler (1990) also calls it “compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 22). Heterosexist attitudes are founded upon the conviction that while women and men are each other’s natural antithesis, they are also complementary and thus destined for one another (Baker, 2008; Butler, 1990; Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Carosone, 2015; Miceli, 2007; Motschenbacher, 2010; Paiz, 2015).

As a consequence, heteronormativity is also an inherently oppressive structure. In order to cement heterosexuality as the naturalized norm, it stigmatizes, marginalizes or sometimes even completely erases other sexual identities or behaviors (Carosone, 2015; Miceli, 2007), which benefits the promotion of homophobia, “the irrational fear of and discomfort with homosexuality and homosexuals” (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008, p. 171). Subsequently, proving one’s heterosexuality becomes a priority for many and in order to do so, conformity to the rigid gender-script is of the essence. As Vantieghem and Van Houtte (2016) write; “heterosexuality and the social construction of gender differences are interwoven, and people who defy one of these norms are often assumed to equally violate the other norm” (p. 151). Subsequently, anyone who fails to uphold this gender performance is generally assumed to be non-heterosexual, while actual non-heterosexual people are often assumed to act in gender non-conforming ways (Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2016). Ultimately, running afoul of gender expectations may carry the punishment of homophobic name-calling by peers (Miceli, 2006; Renold, 2005) and in some rampantly heterosexist societies even subject you to severe political or legal sanctions (Lugg, 2003). The fact that gender norms and sexual norms in the heteronormative discourse are so tightly intertwined, is eventually also what fuels transphobia, “the irrational fear of and discomfort with transgender individuals” (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008, p. 172), which includes a wide diversity
of individuals whose gender identity and/or expression does not, partially or entirely, align with the sex or gender they were assigned at birth (Transgender info-point, n.d.-b; n.d.-c).

In extension to this, Rich (1980) emphasizes that the oppression of non-heterosexual people is intimately tied to the oppression of women. As Erlman (2015, p. 17) explains, the binary, patriarchal gender system, which demands ‘opposing genders’, and the naturalization of heterosexuality are mutually reinforcing. It is, therefore, imperative to note that heteronormativity not only supports patriarchy, but is actually its very foundation.

2.2. Effects of a heteronormative school climate on first cycle students of secondary education

Flemish secondary education consists of 6 years, which are clustered in three cycles. The first cycle consists of the first and second year, in which generally students around the ages from 11 to 14 are enrolled (Eurydice, 2018). Many scholars consider this stage of life, in which most children enter – or already have entered – puberty, as crucial to the development of their identity, and more specifically their gender and sexual identity. As De Groof (2015a) stresses that even though the process of shaping and reshaping one’s identity is not limited to the period of puberty and in actuality spans a lifetime, this process accelerates considerably during puberty, due to the a series of complex physical, social and psychological changes that characterize this stage of life. One of the most vital changes is the acquisition of the cognitive ability for abstract and hypothetical thinking. This ability broadens the adolescent’s perspective of time and allows them to imagine their own future, ultimately fueling the sudden urge to discover ‘who they are’ and ‘who they want to become’. These questions may be a major source of stress, especially for students who do not feel attracted to the traditional paths society expects them to take, such as heterosexuality and gender-conformity. Because puberty is also usually coupled with the growing importance of the social approval of peers and the overarching desire to a sense of belonging, these children may experience extraordinarily high pressure to conform to these ideals, which may hinder their identity development and negatively affect their sense of self-worth and educational functioning (De Groof, 2015a, Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2018). One of the major forces squeezing students into certain ‘model identities’ during early adolescence is heteronormativity.
2.2.1. Gender-atypical and/or non-heterosexual students

An exceptionally vulnerable position is held by the partially overlapping groups of gender-atypical students and those who have discovered (or are discovering) that they may (also) feel romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same-sex (Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2016).

A person is considered to be gender-typical when they regard themselves as a proper example of – and identify strongly with – their gender category. Conversely, gender-atypical people do not feel affiliated with any or most of the expectations belonging to the gender category they were assigned at birth (Egan & Perry, 2001). Subsequently, this category may, however not exclusively, include transgender individuals. Research has shown that the pressure to uphold a heteronormative gender performance, may jeopardize the well-being and academic careers of teenagers who perceive themselves as gender-atypical, as they may be discouraged to explore their talents, interests and capacities to the fullest. Vantieghem’s (2018) research discovered that gender-atypical students in general feel significantly less motivated to study and experience less school effectiveness than gender-typical students.

Similar findings are well established about non-heterosexual students. A direct correlation was found between the feeling of being accepted for who you are and being motivated for school, which is something lesbian, gay, bisexual pupils on average reportedly lack more than heterosexual pupils (Legate & Weinstein, 2012). As a consequence, a number of studies have pointed out the on average poorer school results of non-heterosexual students than their heterosexual peers (Aerts et al., 2011; Murdock & Bolch, 2005), their impaired sense of school safety (çavaria, 2018; Toomey et al., 2012), school belonging and overall mental health (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Poteat et al., 2014).

Moreover, both non-heterosexual and gender-atypical students are substantially more at risk for school victimization through, i.a., ridiculing and bullying, which is arguably detrimental to anyone’s feeling of self-worth and school belonging (Toomey et al., 2012). More specifically, transgressing gender norms or sexual norms was found to be sanctioned more frequently and more severely with boys, and by extension all children who are male assigned at birth, than with girls, or children who are assigned female at birth (Epstein, 1998; Herek, 2002; Swain, 2005; Young & Sweeting, 2004). Vantieghem (2016) links this to the fact that while women have experienced a
broadening of appropriate role behavior in the last decades, masculine behavior is still very strictly
delineated.

2.2.2. Gender-typical and heterosexual students

Interestingly, several analyses evidence that not only gender-atypical, but also gender-typical
adolescents feel worse in highly heteronormative school environments (Vantieghem & Van
Houtte, 2016). Vantieghem and Van Houtte (2018) discovered that students who conform to the
gender norms felt a higher pressure from the outside world to succeed in school, than gender-
atypical students. It is mooted that these children are perhaps to a greater extent predisposed for
the internalization of external expectations, i.a., regarding aspired academic achievements and
gender-conformity. However, Vantieghem also suggests that the more pressure early adolescents
experience to conform to traditional gender norms, the more they tend to portray
overcompensating behavior, pursuing the extremes of masculinity and femininity. It may be this
creation of opposite gender-cultures that lies at the basis for the increased perception of external
pressure by gender-typical students. In opposition to traditionally masculine qualities, feminine
qualities, such as kindness, orderliness and communicativeness, integrate well in the educational
system. Therefore, generalizations about girls being ideal students, whereas boys are
troublemakers or class-clowns are widespread among teachers (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Leaper &
Brown, 2014; Van Houtte, 2007) and is bound to weigh on the classroom experiences of girls and
boys. On the one hand, gender-typical girls may struggle to live up to the high expectations of
teachers and parents (Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2018), while gender-typical boys, on the other
hand, are disproportionately subjected to disciplinary actions (Consuegra, Halimi & Engels,
2015). Vantieghem and Van Houtte (2018) conclude that, whereas heteronormative assumptions
causes both gender-typical girls and boys to experience an excessive pressure to achieve good
results at school, this may be caused by two vastly different processes.

Moreover, since the 1990s, several authors have been calling attention to the fact that the negative
social and scholastic outcomes of robust heteronormativity appear to be remarkably larger for
boys than for girls. Due to the same heteronormative perceptions of masculinity, boys in western
industrialized countries are overall linked with lower school effectiveness, lower academic
participation and motivation, a lack of confidence in academic achievements and a higher
tendency to violence and criminality (De Groof, 2015b; Epstein, 1998; Halimi et al., 2016; PISA, 2009; Vantieghem, 2016; Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2018).

2.3. The politics of the textbook

There is much a school can do to make their learning environments, more accepting, more equitable and less heteronormative. It has been suggested by a number of studies that strategies, such as the promotion of LGBT-inclusive lessons or the installment of anti-bullying policies, are effective tools for increasing the perception of school safety for students who do not conform to heteronormative ideals (Toomey, McGuire, & Russel, 2012). This study, however, will focus on the textbook as one of the major vehicles for change.

“One can read the history of textbooks as a political history of who has meaningful power to shape what is taught – and who does not” (Lugg, 2012, p. vii). This conception anchored itself in the 1970s when an increasing number of researchers, such as Apple (1975), started to expose how economic and political elites shape the curriculum and use it, both overly and covertly, as an instrument to maintain the dominant structures of power and oppression present in current-day Western society (Foster, 2012). Consequently, because of their strong connection to the curriculum, the textbook became considered to be the main instrument through which politicians and corporations enforce their intellectual and moral authority (Apple, 2006). In contrast to their strongly held reputation as “neutral transmitters” of “official knowledge” (Miceli, 2007, p. 381), Smith (2000) argues that schoolbooks are involved in a hegemonic process, in which the social organization of inequality is reproduced at multiple levels. This process involves including the culture, history, morals, behaviors, norms and values of the dominant group (i.e. upper- and middle-class, white, heterosexual men) in textbooks and presenting them as natural or neutral and thereby ultimately rendering them invisible (Miceli, 2007). Concomitantly, historically minoritized sociological groups and their knowledge are inescapably demonized, trivialized or delegitimized (Apple, 2006; Hickman & Porfilio, 2012; Temple, 2005). This is sometimes referred to as the “hidden curriculum”, in opposition to the official curriculum (Bank et al., 2007; Miceli, 2007).

In the European context one of the most salient examples hereof can be found in the persistence of a Eurocentric and neocolonial narrative in history books, which not only downplays European
historical responsibility for, i.a., African underdevelopment, but also perpetuates justifications for colonial and neoliberal intervention and exploitation (Weiner, 2016).

In a similar line of thought, textbooks on several educational subjects, such as history, biology, psychology and foreign languages, have been criticized for fostering a gendered and sexualized, i.e. a heteronormative, world view (Erlman 2015, Hogben & Waterman, 1997; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008; Temple, 2005; etc.). This may be specifically damaging for gender-atypical or non-heterosexual students as research suggests that when curricula and teaching materials are not reflective of the students’ personal experience, their learning process may be obstructed and they may suffer from a loss of desire for learning, which might even provoke passive resistance to school activities (Pavlenko, 2004; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015). When the opposite is true, however, they are more likely to become engaged in class, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the material and ultimately to stay and succeed in school (Kosciw et al., 2016; Snapp et al., 2015). Therefore, as Carosone (2015) explains, by ignoring non-heteronormative identities in the curriculum and literature, schools cease to be democratic environments as by doing so they inevitably also silence the voices of their actual gender-atypical and/or non-heterosexual students.

Nevertheless, when textbook publishers put energy into constructing positive images of non-heterosexual or gender-atypical identities, society at large may reap the benefits. After all, De Groof (2015b) found that the exposure to positive examples of gender-atypical individuals who lead successful lives helps students to obtain less traditional gender role attitudes (p. 88), which might in turn contribute to a more fluent identity-making process for all students, an improved self-esteem and eventually better school results. Furthermore, after using teaching materials that actively defy gender norms, all students, including heterosexual students, have reported hearing fewer homo- and transphobic slurs, feeling safer at school, experiencing less victimization, feeling less inclined to miss school and experiencing greater acceptance from their peers (Kosciw et al., 2016; Snapp et al., 2015, p. 251).

Using the terminology of Bishop (1990), Blackburn and Miller (2017) explain that presenting narratives of non-heterosexual individuals as potential mirrors for all students to find themselves within the broad spectrum of gender and sexual identities – rather than as windows for heterosexual and/or gender-conforming people to observe them –, is the only way to effectively disrupt heteronormativity and reassert the fluidity of sexuality and gender. So, while textbook
content may be an ideological mine field and textbook publishers might feel restricted by the inescapable focus on profit margin, they should never be discouraged from problematizing heteronormativity and embracing inclusive materials. The reason for this is that their efforts may not only contribute to the demolishing of rigid gender and sexual norms, but also to the creation of a generation of students who have obtained the necessary critical thinking skills to put into question oppressive biases and have developed the ability to build a more equitable society for all (Blackburn & Miller, 2017; De Vincenti et al., 2007; Temple, 2005).

Admittedly though, the power of textbooks must be nuanced. Due to the rapid diversification of society and the increasing impact of digitalization on students, education is now progressively extending beyond the classroom walls and out of the control of teachers and schools. Because of this, alternative information is becoming much more accessible to students, which might potentially pose a threat to the monopoly on knowledge traditionally held by governments and corporations (Foster, 2012).

Moreover, theorists, such as Sunderland (2000), rightly so stress the cruciality of teacher initiatives, classroom dynamics and the student’s own interpretation of the material. They write that “a text is arguably as good or bad as the treatment it receives from the teacher who is using it” (Sunderland, 2000, p. 155) In other words, a teacher can ‘rescue’ a text entrenched in gender or sexual bias through, i.a., the encouragement of sensitive class discussions, but can also easily undermine a text written with progressive intentions (Sunderland, 2000; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2015). Whereas this is undoubtedly true, the power of teachers, in turn, should not be overestimated either. Since curricula are becoming more prescribed, systemized and standardized, and teachers are under intensifying scrutiny, research indicates that many educators resort to exclusively teaching theory that is legitimized by textbooks (Kauffman et al., 2002; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). Correspondingly, Sadker and Zittleman (2001) state that 80-95% of the time spent in class revolves around the textbook and it is also not uncommon to use the textbooks as material for homework, creating a situation in which the educator cannot comment on the content (Erlman, 2015). Therefore, one might conclude that, building an inclusive learning community that acknowledges a plurality of voices, requires the combined effort of both schoolteachers and textbook publishers.
2.4. The particularity of (foreign) language teaching

In their pioneering research on sexism in EFL materials, which originally set the study of textbooks in motion, Hartman and Judd (1978) state that “language learning is essentially a culture-learning process” (p. 373). Their statement is based on the widely endorsed sociolinguistic theory which claims that language is the filter through which we experience reality. This would also mean that our perceptions, thoughts, values, feelings and even behaviors are influenced, if not determined, by language, and that speakers of different languages may conceptualize a different reality from ours (Anderson & Taylor, 2006; Mineshima, 2008). Learning a foreign language, therefore, always coincides with getting acquainted with the way native speakers view the world (Brusokaité, 2013). As Widdowson (1990) theorizes, foreign language textbooks contain two types of knowledge: systematic and schematic. Systematic knowledge involves the specific properties of a language as an academic discipline, i.e. syntax and semantics, whereas schematic knowledge is made up of the values, norms and attitudes of the social environment of the target language. The latter may also be referred to as unconscious learning, in opposition to conscious learning (McLaughlin, 1990) or as the previously mentioned hidden curriculum, of which the influence on pupils is considered to be of more significance than the official curriculum’s (Liu, 2013). In order to investigate the representation of social minority groups, foreign language textbooks may, therefore, be an ideal source, as they are supposedly developed to reflect the attitudes of a society relatively truthfully (Hartman & Judd, 1978).

As a result, however, it may appear unavoidable that language textbooks will also implicitly perpetuate harmful gender biases and sexual norms (Gershuny, 1997; McClure, 1992). As Martinez-Roldan (2005) research revealed that language learning and students’ gender development appear to go hand in hand. Furthermore, Pawelczyk and Pakula (2015) underwrite the indivisibleness of these themes, by calling attention to the fact that even “the grammatical structures commonly practiced in the (E)FL classroom are almost always peopled with individuals who are recognizably men or women” (para. 2).

Nevertheless, the heteronormative bias of a textbook frequently goes unnoticed by teachers (Paiz, 2015). This is presumably less so in biology or sociology classes, where gender and sexuality might be part of the official curriculum, than in EFL classes, where sexist and essentialist conceptions of gender continue to be conceived in a trivialized, naturalized and unquestioned
manner (Decke-Cornill & Volkmann, 2007). As a number of researchers have concluded, language teachers often lack awareness on how sexuality and gender are already integral subjects of their courses, and therefore may consider them to be of marginal importance, or at worst invasive, to their job (Menard-Warwick et al., 2014; Nelson, 1999; Pawelczyk et al., 2014; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015). As Porreca (1984) theorizes, “the role played by language in maintaining and strengthening sexist values [...] is less widely understood or acknowledged [than economic gender inequality,] probably because linguistic sexism is much more deeply rooted and far more subtle than other forms of sexism” (p. 705). Linke (2007), however, also attributes this to educators’ preoccupation with “the language issue itself” (p. 137). They explain that FL-classroom interaction, is oftentimes characterized by a struggle to even satisfy basic communicative needs, leaving little space for the consideration of, i.a., gender-sensitive language.

For this study, English was chosen as the subject of interest. Apart from French, English is the most widely taught foreign language in Flemish secondary education, and its importance, arguably, continues to grow during the diversification and internationalizing of society. Moreover, while being spoken on six continents by an estimation of a third of the world’s population, English has come to be regarded as a global language (Crystal & Potter, 2018), the gender norms and sexual norms publishers of EFL textbooks communicate to young learners might potentially also be interpreted as global or universal, and thus could be exceptionally impactful on the learner’s understanding of those concepts.

2.5. Previous research on heteronormativity in EFL textbooks

This chapter will attempt to provide an overview of the previously conducted research on heteronormativity in EFL textbooks. However, since the overwhelming majority of studies focused either on the representation of gender or of sexuality, rather than on the interlocking dimension of the two identity categories, this chapter, too, will discuss them separately.

2.5.1. Representation of gender

The first feminist criticisms on the content of EFL textbooks appeared almost five decades ago (Kemp, 2011). Since then, many scholars have called out both the explicit as the implicit gender bias present in these teaching materials. Yet, as Porreca (1984) affirms publishers have initially
shown reluctance to take corrective measures. Besides, gender bias is perceived to be one of the “best camouflaged – and hardest to budge – rocks on the road to gender equality in education” (Blumberg, 2007, p. 4).

2.5.1.1. **Quantitative representation**

Previous studies make apparent that gender bias in textbooks most commonly expresses itself through the invisibility, exclusion or omission of non-male, i.a. female, characters. Moreover, Sadker, Sadker and Klein (1991) consider invisibility to be “one of the most pernicious forms of bias” (p. 351). “When females do not appear as often as males in text as well as in illustrations”, Porreca (1984) explains, “the implicit message is that women’s accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings are not important enough to be included” (p. 706). Hence, female invisibility ought to be of primary concern to researchers investigating the construction of gender in teaching materials (Mineshima, 2008).

The first to ascertain this phenomenon were Hartman and Judd (1978), whose reviewed textbooks all, but a few, portrayed an underrepresentation of women with the worst female-to-male ratio being 27 percent to 73 percent. Follow-up studies from all around the world in the late twentieth century obtained similar results (e.g. Davies, 1995; Hellinger, 1980; Jaworski, 1986; Renner, 1997). Most notably, Porreca (1984), who examined the fifteen American EFL schoolbooks that were most used at the time, concluded that, in total women were mentioned and depicted half as much as men.

Since the turn of the century a couple of studies have suggested an improvement of female visibility. For example, Mustedanagic (2010), Saarikivi (2012) and Vilalta Puig (2018) compared the numerical representation of women and men in older textbooks published in the 1980s and 1990s, to more recent ones published after the year 2000 in respectively Sweden, Finland and the United Kingdom. Each of them found that, while the oldest textbooks are immensely dominated by male characters, the more modern textbooks display a more equal gender distribution. Nevertheless, neither of them reported complete equality in this respect. This remaining imbalance was also discovered by a myriad of other textbook-analyses (e.g. Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Blumberg, 2007; Brusokaité, 2013; Foroutan, 2012; Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Khurshid et al., 2010; Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee, 2014; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015; Stockdale, 2006; Ullah &
Skelton, 2013; Van Craeynest, 2015; Verikatié, 2012). Nevertheless, some promising exceptions to this trend were found. For example, Mineshima (2008) and Kemp (2011), who respectively analyzed a Japanese and an American EFL-textbook, tallied approximately the same number of female and male characters. Similarly, one out of the four Indian EFL textbooks studied by Verikaité (2012) was reported to feature fairly equal quantities of women and men.

Even though this study will not do as such, a major part of the previously mentioned investigations on female invisibility performed a linguistic analysis. Therefore, with the intention of facilitating a more holistic understanding of the concept, it was decided to include a brief overview of the major findings of this research branch: The most tangible evocations of female invisibility on a linguistic level are the use of masculine generic constructions and the concept of ‘male firstness’. Masculine generic constructions denote the usage of gendered words, such as ‘man’, ‘mankind’ or ‘he’, to refer to people in general or a person whose gender is unknown. Male firstness designates the linguistic feature of the English language by which male nouns are routinely mentioned first whenever they are paired with a female noun. Typical examples are ‘men and women’, ‘husband and wife’, ‘boys and girls’, ‘he or she’, etc. (Porreca, 1984). One of the few exceptions to this is ‘mom and dad’, which Lee (2014) lays to the stereotype of women being the more suited caregivers and the home being their premium place. Both the employment of masculine generics and male firstness reinforce the deep-rooted idea that women are subordinate to men, but can be easily avoided by using female-inclusive (or sex-unbiased) nouns, such as ‘individuals’, ‘people’ or ‘humankind’, and by switching up the order of male and female nouns (Porreca, 1984).

2.5.1.2. Qualitative representation

Evidently, the equal number of occurrences of female and male characters is not the be-all and end-all for the eradication of gender bias in textbooks. Plenty of studies highlight the omnipresent portrayal of women and men in a stereotyped manner in both old and new textbooks.

Porreca (1984) identified the division of occupational roles for women and men as one of the customary modes through which gender stereotypes continue to be established. They found, i.a., that women were far less often depicted in paid occupational roles than men and that the variety of occupations in which women were portrayed appeared to be much narrower. Illustratively, it was clarified that “for every woman worker appearing in the text, there are six male workers” (p. 17).
Many studies from the last two decennia indicate little improvement in this area as comparable results were repeatedly obtained (e.g. Brusokaitė, 2013; Hall, 2014; Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Vilalta Puig, 2018). A few studies, however, contradicted this. Mineshima (2008), Kemp (2011) and Lewandowski (2014), for example, documented a fairly egalitarian distribution of occupational roles in respectively Japanese, American and English textbooks.

Nevertheless, when analyzing the types of occupations women and men are portrayed in, almost every reviewed study took notion of some form stereotyping. For example, higher status and powerful jobs were more regularly reserved for male characters (e.g. Hall, 2014; Lewandowski, 2014; Mineshima, 2008; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015; Saarikivi, 2012; Ullah & Skelton, 2013), whereas household chores and nurturing of children appeared to be generally associated with female characters (e.g. Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Blumberg, 2007; Brusokaitė, 2013; Hall, 2014; Kim, 2012; Lee & Collins, 2009; Mustapha, 2012; Mustedanagic, 2010; Otłowski, 2003; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015; Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Van Craeynest, 2015). Moreover, Mineshima (2008) found that while men are systematically shown to be inadequate to fulfil the household duties, this characteristic was never identified in women. Thus, more broadly, as Saarikivi (2012) puts it, many textbooks still tend to constrict female characters to the domestic sphere, whereas they relate male characters to the public sphere. Other occupational categories that were found to be chiefly dominated by either gender, include sportive or physically demanding activities for men (Brusokaitė, 2013; Lee & Collins, 2009; Mustedanagic, 2010; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015; Ullah & Skelton, 2013; Van Craeynest, 2015; Vilalta Puig, 2018) and shopping or artistic occupations for women (Brusokaitė, 2013).

Porreca (1984) also pointed out that women are proportionally more often than men depicted in roles that designate parenthood or marital status. This was corroborated by Saarikivi (2012) and Van Craeynest (2015), who ascertained that in their examined textbooks female characters were much more frequently introduced through family relationships than male characters, and by Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004) and Ullah and Skelton (2013), who shone light on the pattern whereby women are more often defined through their relationships with men than vice versa. In other words, they concluded that there are “more wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, than there are husbands, fathers, brothers and sons” (Van Craeynest, 2015, p. 48). On the other hand however, the Japanese and Australian textbooks analyzed by respectively Mineshima (2008) and
Lee and Collins (2009) purportedly mentioned family relations an equal number of times for women as for men.

Lastly, by analyzing the adjectives allocated to women and men, Porreca (1984) discerned the following stereotypes: When providing descriptions of female characters, the books routinely focused on their emotional state, physical attractiveness or marital status, whereas adjectives used to characterize male personalities predominantly commented on their intellect or reputation. Similarly, Kim’s (2012) analysis of Korean EFL textbooks teaches that these conceptualize the leisure time activities of male characters as intellectual, but rarely value those of female characters highly. Additionally, several studies have found the clichéd linkage between femininity, emotionality, weakness and passiveness to still be ubiquitous in contemporary textbooks (e.g. Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Blumberg, 2007; Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee, 2014), while Lewandowski (2014) subsequently problematizes the lack of emotional diversity in male characters.

An unfavorable stereotype that was not yet identified by Porreca (1984), but came to the forefront in more recently issued textbook-analyses, is the association between men and criminality. After analyzing a Lithuanian, an Argentinian and a British textbook, Brusokaité (2013) came to the conclusion that while female characters may be sporadically involved in misconducts, such as cheating on a test or bullying, more serious crimes, such as stealing, burglarizing, opening fire or being arrested, are exclusively committed by male characters. Correspondingly, Lee and Collins (2009) found that in a chapter about crime and punishment male characters dramatically outnumbered female characters, with the female-to-male ratio being 40 to 143. On top of that, while men were repeatedly shown to behave violently and physically, either as villains or heroes, the women in these chapter were either wrung in passive positions (e.g. as victims) or in assisting roles (e.g. care-givers).

Even though the majority of studies suggested that stereotypes are still rampant in present-day EFL textbooks, some subversive practices have been observed too. More specifically, some textbooks included explicit discussions on gender norms. For example, two textbooks, one Flemish and one British, analyzed by Van Craeynest (2015), directly asked the opinion of students on statements such as “ballet is not for boys”, “men should be the sole income providers” or “boys and girls should be brought up differently” (pp. 45-46). Kemp (2011) also recounted the inclusion of an entire page devoted to the discussion on occupational gender stereotypes by carrying photographs that go against them (e.g. of a female pilot or a male babysitter). Most strikingly,
however, may be the Japanese textbook analyzed by Mineshima (2008), which was not only stated to include many counter-stereotypical characterizations, but even included statistics on worldwide gender equality and dialogues which unequivocally criticize the gender norms in Japanese society.

2.5.2. Representation of sexuality

The 1990s saw the emergence of a stable influx of studies on LGBTI issues in the language classroom, which then culminated in the first publication of the specialized Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education in 2003 (Gray, 2013). Yet, compared to the long tradition of research on gender representation in curricular texts, explorations of the representation of sexual identity herein appear to be relatively scarce, especially in the EFL context. Nevertheless, the studies that do exist conclude almost unanimously that mainstream teaching materials are still brazenly riddled with heterosexism.

2.5.2.1. Quantitative representation

Twenty years ago, Thornbury (1999) asserted that even though textbook production had become increasingly determined by a regime of inclusivity in which the modes of representation of social minority groups underwent major transformations, “coursebook gays and lesbians [...] are nowhere to be found. They are still firmly in the coursebook closet” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 15). Later in his article, while drawing a parallel with Porreca’s (1984) study on sexism in EFL textbooks, he applies the concept of omission to the analysis of sexuality in EFL teaching materials and concludes that “gayness is about as omitted as anything can be” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 16). His observation that even a seemingly progressive textbook, which dealt with controversial topics such as euthanasia, the legalization of drugs and gun control, circumvented any issue related to homosexuality, led him to pessimistically profess the unlikeliness of even the slightest improvement regarding this matter in the foreseeable future.

De Vincenti, Giovanangeli and Ward (2007) who screened French, Italian and Japanese FL textbooks, figured that inclusion of same-sex sexuality could be achieved either implicitly or explicitly. Whereas explicit representation may be enacted through, i.a., the presentation of same-sex couples, the specific acknowledgment of an individual’s non-heterosexual identity or the portrayal of LGBTI symbolism (e.g. the rainbow Pride flag), implicit representation refers to
providing material that could lead to critical in-class discussions on sexual identity, such as stories about same-sex flat-mates or single parent families, which allow different viable interpretations. However, somewhat confirming Thornbury’s prediction, plenty of studies, apart from theirs, found foreign language textbooks to avoid both almost entirely (e.g. Gray, 2013; Kemp, 2011; Nelson, 2019; Paiz, 2015; Pakula et al., 2015; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015; Vilalta Puig, 2018). Moreover, Paiz’s (2015) extensive evaluation of 45 American EFL reading texts and textbooks published between 1995 and 2012, concluded that there has been practically no decrease in the amount of omission throughout this period. Instead, most of these textbooks “strategically privilege” (Gray, 2013, p. 43) heterosexuality by continually favoring representations of heterosexual couples or traditional nuclear families. Even when references to famous people were made who are renowned for being, i.a., homosexual, such as Oscar Wilde, Elton John, Alan Turing or Gianni Versace, mentions of their sexuality were hermetically avoided (Gray, 2013; Nelson, 2019; Thornbury, 1999;).

Keeping same-sex attraction invisible and queer voices silent is a vital step for establishing heterosexuality as the naturalized norm (Temple, 2005), since, as Shortall (1998) cleverly formulates, “inside the classroom what is not said is more significant than what is said” (p. 61). Another sturdy roadblock to inclusion is the widely spread perception of the ‘innocent child’, implying that since children are expected to have not yet developed their own sexuality, they are still much too young to comprehend or deal with the topic of sexuality in any way (Robinson, 2005). Nevertheless, as Robinson (2005) states, this assumption blanketly ignores the fact that the construction “heterosexual desire is part of everyday early childhood settings” (p. 230), as exemplified by the organization of mock heterosexual weddings, having girlfriends or boyfriends or children’s kissing games. Yet, these activities remain broadly uncriticized, as they are believed to normalize both heterosexuality and gender-conformity in young children’s development (Robinson, 2005). On top of that, Sears (2003) argues that school environments tend to desexualize opposite-sex attraction, meaning that they reduce heterosexuality to safe, everyday social interactions, while simultaneously reducing homosexuality to (dangerous) sexual activity, which could also provide an explanation as to why the inclusion of non-heterosexuality in teaching materials remains to be thought of as inappropriate. Regardless, after interviewing senior employees of publishing companies, Gray (2013) once and for all brought to light that textbook authors are in fact very aware of the heterosexist nature of their materials and that the systematic omission of non-heterosexuality is a consciously sustained choice, mostly motivated by economic benefits.
Out of all the reviewed studies concerning EFL textbooks, only two made notion of explicit evocations of non-heterosexuality. Firstly, Sunderland and McGlashan (2015) recounted two representations of gay couples in a British EFL textbook from 2003. Yet, ironically enough, both of them were erased in the following edition of 2005. Secondly, Gray (2013) detected a few occasions of same-sex sexuality, but these occurred in supplementary textbook materials that are specifically adapted to the local contexts of audiences.

2.5.2.2. Qualitative representation

The inclusion of non-heterosexual identities as an objective in itself is not enough to combat heteronormative bias in textbooks. Representations can never perfectly mirror reality. They are, in fact, ought to be understood as a set of conscious choices made by authors and are therefore inevitably entrenched with ideology. Because of this, harmful stereotypes about non-heterosexual people and contexts that reify homophobia are ubiquitous in the few representations that exist, even if they are well meant (Sunderland & McGlashan, 2015).

For the ensuing discussion on problematic portrayals of non-heterosexuality, a number of extra studies on the representation of sexuality in curricular texts outside of the EFL context were taken into consideration.

Unsurprisingly, not all representations of same-sex sexuality are made with emancipatory intentions. Sometimes textbook authors make very little effort to conceal their heterosexist attitudes. For example, one of the supplementary EFL teaching materials reviewed by Gray (2013), that was tailored for an Asian audience, included a unit about two male best friends who are rumored to be gay because they spend plenty of time together. Instead of encouraging critical thinking, the entire chapter frames homosexuality as something inherently shameful and potentially threatening to young people’s reputation. One dialogue even disclosed that, on account of that rumor, another student had already refused working with them. Even more disturbingly, Pawelczyk et al. (2014), discovered instances in Polish textbooks where homosexuality is framed as a behavioral deviation caused by excessively watching pornography and curable by electrotherapy.
Yet, there are many representations which may be very well intended, but can still be analyzed as covertly bolstering heteronormativity. These ‘negative’ modes of representation include fragmentation, pathologization and homonormativity:

Fragmentation refers to token attention to the topic of (sexual) diversity (Kelly, 2012). For instance, schoolbooks may attempt to disrupt the heterosexual norm by explicitly discussing other sexualities in a separate, specialized chapter. However, as Schmidt (2010) argues, they may end up doing the exact opposite. By ghettoizing and isolating non-heterosexual identities from the ‘normal’ curriculum, they may actually have the unwanted effect of stigmatizing them as abnormal or outsiders (Schmidt, 2010; Snapp et al., 2015; Whatley, 1992). For example, one of Temple’s (2005) surveyed Canadian textbooks had inserted a brief chapter, called “Understanding and Respecting Sexual Orientations”, but made no notion of sexuality on any other page. Likewise, Sunderland and McGlashan (2015) deemed the representation of a gay couple in a British EFL textbook problematic as it was embedded in a chapter entitled “Taboo”. These examples also illustrate how fragmented representation problematically assumes the heterosexuality of the student reader. In other words, while normalizing heterosexuality, this practice alienates same-sex sexuality, rendering it impossible for anyone to identify with these experiences and leaving hegemonic power imbalances unquestioned (MacIntosh, 2007; Temple, 2005). As a possible solution Clark and Blackburn (2009) propose the continual evocation of non-heterosexual identities throughout the entire textbook, and not only during conversations about sexuality or diversity (as cited in Blackburn & Miller, 2017).

Secondly, a popular tactic used for stimulating sympathy for non-heterosexual people is focusing on ‘victim narratives’ about, e.g. societal discrimination, bullying, harassment, intolerance, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, HIV/AIDS or suicide. For instance, almost 80 percent of the mentions of same-sex sexuality in Temple’s (2005) study were placed within such contexts. However, focusing too extensively on these dark themes might spectacularly backfire as non-heterosexual identities risk being essentialized as pitiable, hapless victims lacking any form of self-determination or agency (Blackburn & Miller, 2017; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008; Temple, 2005). Moreover, these narratives may also unintentionally reinforce negative stereotypes. Using Fine’s (1988) terminology, this type of representation creates “discourses of sexuality as violence, as victimization and as individual morality”, while entirely ignoring the “discourse of desire” (p. 29). Nevertheless, calling attention to the ravaging effects of institutionalized heterosexist discrimination is necessary and unmeasurably meaningful. It can be
advised, however, that textbooks balance these stories with counterexamples of empowered, happy, healthy and well-adjusted non-heterosexual individuals who, despite the hardship they may face, are successful in their personal, daily and professional life and unabashedly exhibit their pride (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008).

The third ‘negative’ mode of representation was also touched on by Gray (2013), who problematized the portrayal of a gay couple with an adopted son and three dogs, who are in hopes of buying a bigger house in their extraordinarily accepting neighborhood. Whereas this very positive and non-sensationalist context might be interpreted as evidence of progress, Gray points out that this form of representation, which he refers to as ‘the good gays’, does not actually contest the dominant oppressive system. Whereas this notion was not introduced in any of the reviewed studies, this may arguably be a pronounced case of ‘homonormativity’. As defined by Duggan (2003), homonormativity is the aspiration of gay and lesbian people for societal acceptance by upholding and sustaining the existing, oppressive political and economic systems, assumptions and institutions.

Part of this involves the assimilation of non-heterosexual individuals to heteronormative ideals. Consequently, this often results in insisting that “gay partnerships are far more like heterosexual relationships than they are different” (Young & Middleton, 2002, p. 95). Whereas this may come across as a benign statement, it also serves to fortify the idea that it is perfectly justifiable to valorize same-sex relationships through comparison with the norms of heterosexual culture, including marriage, monogamy and parenting (Connell, 2014; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). It also leads to convulsively trying to prove adherence to the binary and fundamentally sexist gender system (Temple, 2005), which may translate into both the continual emphasis on gay men’s masculinity and lesbian women’s femininity, but also into the sexist underrepresentation of non-heterosexual women compared to men. Illustratively, none of the non-heterosexual identities in EFL textbooks were female and Whatley’s (1992) inspection of photographs in 30 health and human sexuality textbooks, found that gay men were pictured more than double the amount of times than lesbian women.
3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In the Flemish context, several efforts on the level of the curriculum have already been made to obtain a less heteronormative school environment. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the most important developments in the recent years that are relevant for this paper.

In 2011, çavaria, the Flemish advocacy group and umbrella association for LGBTI people and organizations, published the results of the ‘Open Boek’-project, which was commissioned by the former Flemish Minister for Equal Opportunities and Education, Pascal Smet. Smet emphasized that accomplishing a nuanced and non-stereotypical representation was of high priority to him and acknowledged the crucial role educational publishers play in achieving this goal (Boekenvak, 2011). He commissioned çavaria to screen 52 (Dutch) language schoolbooks used from the second to the sixth grade of primary education for gender and sexual stereotypes.

Their findings differ little from the ones summed up in the previous chapter, in the sense that these materials too seemed to adhere to a heteronormative worldview. In summary, they ascertained an overrepresentation of male characters, significantly higher percentages of men portrayed in paid occupational roles, sportive activities, manual labor and criminal behaviors, a higher share of women portrayed in a nurturing position and, with the exception of one lesbian couple, no other non-heterosexual identities in the entire corpus. Nevertheless, they also found that a meaningful number of female characters were portrayed in traditionally male-dominated jobs, such as an astronaut or a firefighter (even though the opposite was not found to be the case), and discerned no correlation between women and domestic chores (çavaria, 2011a).

As a result, çavaria created a checklist, which educational publishers and teachers could use to disrupt heteronormativity in their learning materials and classrooms. The checklist not only calls for an end to the numerical underrepresentation of both women and non-heterosexual people, but also, among many other things, makes publishers attentive to the use of gender-neutral language and warns them against fragmented representation of sexual diversity (çavaria, 2011b). Interestingly, in response to çavaria’s study, the Flemish Book Publishers Association (Vlaamse Uitgevers Vereniging) swiftly signed a charter in which they pledge to actively apply the checklist and also to explicitly forbid all utterances of sexism, genderism and homophobia in their future publications (çavaria, 2011c).
Seven years later, in 2018, çavaria published the results of their school climate survey, which provided an overview of the experiences of LGBT+ youth in Flemish schools. One of major discoveries, which sparked quite a lot of public debate, read that more than four out of ten LGBT+ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation. For this reason, almost a quarter of them avoids spaces that are segregated by gender, such as toilets and dressing rooms for physical education, and 22% reported skipping school at least once per month. Apart from the pervasiveness of negative comments about LGBT+ people, which the respondents almost unanimously reported hearing at school, and persistent verbal and physical homophobic bullying, their sentiment of unsafety was also found to be due to the invisibility of LGBT+ themes in class. When, however, students have had one or more positive discussions on gender and sexual diversity in class, more than six out of ten reported feeling more accepted by their peers afterwards. These numbers are, of course, another strong motivation for, i.a., continuing the work on achieving a more positive representation of gender and sexuality in textbooks.

That same year, on the 5th of December, the Flemish Parliament approved a renewal of the final learning objectives [eindtermen] for the complete first cycle of secondary education, which will take effect on the 1st of September 2019. These learning objectives set the minimum bar for all Flemish schools as to what knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire. As part of the overarching aim for the development of students’ competences on physical, mental and emotional awareness and health, the new objectives explicitly state the conceptual knowledge about “sexual orientation, identity and gender” (Flemish Government, 2018a, p. 19; 2018b, p. 19). This means that schools will now be obliged to provide lessons on the topic and they may be scrutinized by the government on whether they do this successfully. This is very different from the previous learning objectives, which were decided upon in 1997, in which the topic of sexual diversity was considered a rather indistinct cross-curricular interest, which merely obligated schools to show some kind of commitment to the topic, instead of focusing on the actual acquirement of conceptual

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5 The report of the survey added the ‘+’-symbol to the abbreviation in order to include all sexual and gender identities. This was necessary, since more than 20% of the respondents identified their sexual orientation as pansexual or queer, for example. Additionally, almost 15% identified as gender non-binary (çavaria, 2018).

6 Starting from the 1st of September 2019, the first cycle will be subdivided in two grades: the A-stream meant for most students with a certificate of primary education and the B-stream meant for students without said certificate or who experience more difficulty with theoretical education (Eurydice, 2018). The discussed final objectives apply to both grades.
insights (Lissens, 2018). Moreover, in the context of civic competences, schools will also be expected to teach students about the stratification and dynamics of (their own) intersectional social identities within society. More specifically, the objectives call for attention to the intersection of gender (Flemish Government, 2018a; 2018b).
4. RESEARCH FOCUS

The primary aim of this thesis is to discern whether the degree of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL textbooks for the first cycle of secondary education has increased, decreased or remained the same throughout the last two decades. In order to solve this question, a content analysis was conducted on the representation of gender and sexuality in nine textbooks, divided in three groups, based on their publishing date: 2003-2005, 2009-2011 and 2015-2017. Through the obtained results, it will be attempted to answer to the following six subordinate research questions for each time period:

1. How balanced is the numerical representation of gender in characters?
2. How are gendered characters allocated to the domestic sphere and the public sphere?
3. How are gendered characters defined through family bonds or romantic relationships?
4. Which activities are gendered characters shown to perform and do these challenge or affirm gender stereotypes?
5. How often are representations of same-sex sexuality included?
6. How many representations of same-sex sexuality can be considered to be problematic?

The answers to these questions will then be used to make a statement on the average measure of heteronormativity in the textbooks of each time period, which is necessary as to ultimately formulate an answer to the core research question of this study:

7. How has the degree of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL textbooks changed throughout the last two decennia?
5. METHODOLOGY

In order to measure the evolution of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL textbooks, this study will conduct a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of gender and sexuality as portrayed through individual characters in the texts and illustrations. The following section will define the specifics of this study’s content analysis: the corpus selection, the collection of data and the processing thereof.

5.1. Content analysis

According to Sunderland (2006), most early studies on the representation of gender in foreign language teaching materials were content analyses. The main purpose of a content analysis is to detect patterns in any type communication, either written, verbal, audio-visual or electronic and is “a technique which lies at the crossroads of qualitative and quantitative methods” (Duncan, 1989, as cited in Kondracki et al., 2002, p. 224). An important example of this is the beforementioned pioneer work of Hartman and Judd (1978).

However, since the 1990s, there has been a noticing decline in the number of content analyses of gender in language learning books, making way for other methods, such as linguistic analysis (Vettorel & Lopriore, 2013). Linguistic analysis screens textbooks at the level of vocabulary and grammar using concepts such as ‘firstness’ (i.e. the order in which men and women are mentioned) and the prevalence of ‘generic masculine constructions’ (i.e. the use of ‘mankind’ and ‘firemen’ instead of ‘humankind’ and ‘firefighter’) (Mustedanagic, 2010, pp. 9-12; Vilalta Puig, 2018, pp. 5-8). Another existing method within the field is the discourse analysis, which investigates the written dialogues and focuses, i.a., on the number of spoken instances amongst female and male characters, as well as potential speech differences between the represented sexes (Erlman, 2015). However, most studies, among which the very influential publication of Porreca (1984), yield a combination of these types of analysis in order to obtain an even broader perspective of gender bias in textbooks (e.g. Amerian & Esmaili, 2015; Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Kemp, 2011; Lee & Collins, 2009; …).

In comparison, studies on the representation of sexuality in language teaching materials are more scarce and, as of now, know a less wide range of possible methodologies. Similar to this study, most previous studies (e.g. De Vincenti et al., 2007; Gray, 2013; Temple, 2005) investigated
above all the number of separate occurrences of non-heterosexual relationships or identities in the books and how – and in which context – each of these occurrences was represented (Erlman, 2015, p. 13). In order to formulate an answer to these research questions, most researchers too identified content analysis as the required methodology.

As explained, the history of gender analysis in foreign language teaching materials knows a wide variety of methodologies. Nevertheless, this study’s double focus on both gender and sexuality led us to identify content analysis as the most suitable methodology. The procedure of content analysis is defined by the systematic coding and organizing of raw communication elements (e.g. words, phrases, topics, characteristics, etc.) according to a coding scheme, which ultimately allows for a more effortless retrieval of content related to research questions. Once identified, the data may be analyzed either quantitatively, qualitatively or both. Using a quantitative analysis, elements can be counted to determine numerous phenomena, such as the relative emphasis on or avoidance of certain topics. In turn, qualitative analysis is more suitable for revealing underlying or latent meanings and interpretations of the analyzed communication (Kondracki et al., 2002, p. 224). However, similarly to an abundance of previous studies on the representation of gender and/or sexual orientation in EFL teaching materials, however, this study will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

5.2. Corpus selection

Since the aim of this research is to get a clear perspective of the evolution of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL education and to consequently offer relevant and useful critiques for the further development of foreign language teaching materials, it was deemed necessary that the corpus of this research was comprised of textbooks that actually are being or have been used in Flemish schools. In order to safeguard this criterium, the course cards [vakfiches] published online by the Central Examining Board for secondary education of the Flemish Community were taken into consideration. Apart from describing the subject-specific learning goals, as determined by the Flemish Government, the course cards also contain a list of textbooks, websites and other study materials that are most commonly being used in Flemish secondary schools. The course card for English in the first cycle of secondary education contained a rather extensive list that included ten different book titles from a total of five publishers, among which three Flemish publishers, one British and one Dutch. Whereas this would have already been an interesting corpus to analyze,
the course card also states that, even though this list is regularly actualized, it is possible that newer materials or recent changes may not have been included yet (Flemish Government, 2019). Plus, since this research hopes to make a statement about the changes in EFL textbooks throughout time, the corpus cannot merely exist of currently used textbooks.

Therefore, the second step in selecting the corpus involved scanning the internet for the titles of both newer and older book releases from the five publishers mentioned in the course card. When checking their commercial websites, it was indeed found that four out of five publishers had already released newer textbooks, that were not yet included in the list of the Central Examining Board. After also gathering the titles of older textbooks, a list was compiled of thirty-two EFL teaching books whose publication years ranged from 1986 to 2018.

I also discovered that due to the taking effect of the renewed final objectives for the first cycle of secondary education on the 1st of September 2019, the three Flemish publishers have already scheduled the release of brand new EFL teaching methods in the preceding months. Since these methods are currently still in the process of development, however, it was not possible to include them in the corpus of this study. Nevertheless, further research to see whether these books will have made progress concerning the critiques voiced at the end of this paper, would be highly interesting.

To identify which of these thirty-two books are certain to have been used in Flemish EFL classes at some point in time, their availability was checked in the libraries of all fifteen Flemish university colleges [hoge scholen] that offer bachelor programmes in Secondary Education (i.e. teacher training) with English as a possible educational subject. This was done by using their online library catalogues. The reasoning behind this was that since these institutions prepare their students to become adequate EFL teachers, it is to be expected that they will want to accommodate their students with the most commonly used teaching books.

After visualizing our findings in Table 1, some important conclusions were drawn. Firstly, it became clear that the textbooks of publishers D and E would not be relevant for the purpose of this research. Even though the Central Examination Board included these books in their list of recommended learning materials, their predominant absence (or complete absence in the case of publisher D) in the libraries makes it safe to assume that they are not frequently worked with in Flemish secondary schools. A possible explanation for this might be that publishers D and E were the only two non-Flemish publishers in the list. On the contrary, the textbooks of
Table 1. Availability of EFL textbooks in the fifteen Flemish teacher training libraries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of teacher training libraries in possession of the book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A1(^7)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A2(^8)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A4(^9)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A5</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B1(^7)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B3(^8)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B4(^9)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B8</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B9</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B10</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C1(^7)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C2(^8)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C3(^9)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>D1</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>D2</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E1</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E4</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E6</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E7</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E8</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E9</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^7\) Most modern group of textbooks; each published around the year 2016.

\(^8\) Group of textbooks published around the year 2010.

\(^9\) Oldest group of textbooks; each published around the year 2004.
publishers A, B and C that were released after 2003 turned out to be available in the majority, if not all libraries (with the exception of textbook B6). So, considering that this collection of EFL textbooks comes from recommended publishers by the Flemish Central Examination Board, is with relative certainty used by teacher training programmes throughout Flanders and covers a time span of more than fifteen years, it was decided that this was the definitive group from which the final corpus for this research would be selected.

In order to more easily investigate the evolution of heteronormativity within the corpus, three groups of three books each were formed based on their years of publication. By clustering these books, the results of the content analyses can be interpreted beyond the scope of the individual publication and may actually reveal something about the time period in which these books were published. The first group consists of textbooks A4, B4 and C3, which are all released around the year 2004. The second group of analysis is made up of books that appeared around the year 2010, namely A2, B3 and C2. These are also the books that are mentioned in the course card of the Central Examination Board. The last and most modern group of textbooks contains books A1, B1 and C1 which are all published around the year 2016. This way the three groups have an interval of six years. Interestingly, prior to this research, no studies analyzing EFL textbooks published post 2014 were found, implying that the obtained results from the third group of textbooks may be indicative of some of the most recent developments in the field of textbook publication.

5.3. Data sampling

As stated by Brugeilles and Cromer (2009), the level on which gender is most visibly constituted in schoolbooks are the characters. The actions they are involved in and the interactions they have with other characters, provide students with an insight in what it means to be a woman or a man in society (15-16). However, a character exhibits more than just a gender. In fact, each character embodies the intersection of a plethora of social identity axes, such as gender and sexuality, but also age, ethnicity, (dis)ability, etc. and has the capacity of being perceived as a representative for the entire demography of people that share one or more of these identity intersections. Keeping this in mind, the characters will form the core elements of analysis for this study.
The entities this study considers relevant for analysis are the separate chapters – or units – that compose the textbook, since they are the most likely to feature characters in text or images. On the other hand, pages with a table of contents, register or bibliography, Dutch-English wordlists or pages entirely devoted to grammar rule were deemed irrelevant for the content analysis due to the absence of characters. Instead of collecting all grammar rules and vocabulary lists in specific sections at the end of a chapter of a book, some textbooks – especially the more modern ones – incorporated this type of informative content in the actual chapters. Nevertheless, these segments were consistently disregarded for this study as well.

Additionally, it was considered imperative to analyze textbook chapters in their entireties. The reason being that it is possible for a character to appear multiple times throughout a single chapter and that for them to be interpreted accurately their entire context needs to be taken into account.

Analyzing every chapter of the entire corpus, however, would be an incredibly time-consuming task considering that the total amount of relevant pages would be well over 1500. Therefore, it was decided to screen randomly selected chapters until the minimum of 1/3 (33.33%) of each textbook’s relevant pages was reached. No extra single pages were coded in order to reach this percentage. Table 2 visualizes for each textbook its total amount of pages and relevant pages, its total number of chapters and selected chapters, the sum of all the analyzed pages and their percentage of the book’s total quantity of relevant pages.

Table 2. Overview of data sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pages (total)</th>
<th>Relevant pages</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Analyzed chapters</th>
<th>Analyzed pages</th>
<th>% of relevant pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B3</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B4</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4. Coding scheme

For the analysis itself, Google’s Spreadsheet application was used to create a coding scheme. Each row in the coding scheme belongs to a distinct character. In the first seven columns information was stored on the identification and (perceived) gender of the character (Table 3). Per textbook, each character was given a unique code starting with a hashtag (#), which would make it easier to refer to specific characters in the process of analyzing the results. Then, the chapter and first page of appearance and the total amount of pages the character appeared on were coded. The latter was considered necessary since some characters pop up several times throughout a book, and we wanted to be able to identify them as one character but also get an impression of the number of appearances of this character. The fifth column registered the type of source – textual, visual or both – in which a character was presented, while the sixth column could be used to add any extra potential identifiers, such as names. Lastly, the (perceived) gender of each character was coded, so eventually a female/male-ratio of each textbook could be discovered.

Table 3. Coding scheme 1/3 (excerpt from textbook C3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique code</td>
<td>First chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to acknowledge, however, that coding a character’s gender sometimes involves unavoidable subjectivity. When a character is solely shown in an image, it is simply impossible to determine its gender with complete certainty. Considering that this thesis is written within a framework of feminist and queer theory, which states one’s gender expression (i.e. their physical appearance, worn clothing, etc.) essentially can never be taken as a measure to verify their gender, it certainly seems contradictory to attempt to do so for a drawn or photographed character. Nevertheless, it is naïve to assume that the textbook authors or students seeing these images will have the same thought process. While in theory the illustration of a character with long hair, a skirt and high heels could be female, male, or any other non-binary gender, due to the existence of almost universal and inescapable gender norms, we believe it is safe to assume that the majority
– if not all – students will perceive this character as a woman. Thus, coding this character as female was deemed important enough for accurately answering our research questions. Only when a character had a gender expression that was not stereotypically male or female or when gender-neutral names were used, without them being followed or preceded by other linguistic gender indicators, such as the pronouns ‘he’ or ‘she’, the gender was coded as ‘non-specific’.

The second part of the coding scheme was used for collecting the information most relevant to the analysis of gender and sexuality norms in the textbooks (Table 4). First the space(s) in which a character was presented were coded in terms of ‘inside’, meaning the private or domestic sphere, and ‘outside’, which encompasses the entire public sphere. Secondly, the activities and occupations of a character were described. The next columns contain information on the relationships that were made explicit whenever a character was described. First, a qualitative description of the relationship was included. Then, it was decided whether the relationships had the nature of romance or family relatedness and eventually it was specified whether the characters involved in a romantic relationship were of the same sex or the opposite sex. Lastly, a column was provided for any additional notes that could possibly be relevant for the final qualitative analysis of the data.

Table 4. Coding scheme 2/3 (excerpt from textbook C3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Relations</th>
<th>Same-sex (1)</th>
<th>Opposite-sex (2)</th>
<th>Notes for qualitative analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside / Outside</td>
<td>Activities and occupations</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>Romantic relationship</td>
<td>Notes for qualitative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Queen, horseback riding, marrying</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again, coding relationships can require a degree of subjectivity. In an attempt to limit the amount of subjective interpretation, a few guidelines were invoked. First and foremost, for it to be qualitatively included in the coding scheme, a relationship had to be explicitly stated in text. For example, the sentence: “Ethan’s mum does all the shopping.” (Textbook C1, p. 193) includes two characters, but only one family relationship: mother. For Ethan, the word ‘son’ is not included in the coding scheme, since it was not made explicit. Secondly, when characters are only shown in illustrations with little or no accompanying text, we stayed away from interpreting family
relations. Romantic relationships, however, were included – although only quantitatively – when the characters were involved in actions which culturally imply romance or love. Such actions include, i.a., kissing and holding hands. Other affectious actions, such as hugging for instance, were not considered strong enough indicators of a romantic relationship and were therefore not registered as such in the coding scheme.

After having recorded the occupational roles of the characters qualitatively, the third and last phase of the data processing involved clustering all the activities for quantitative analysis. Based on the results of previous studies, seventeen clusters relevant for gender-analysis were distinguished (see Table 5).

The first seven clusters deal with the type of activity. Activities that are performed professionally fall under the category of ‘paid work’. Activities can also be considered ‘unpaid work’, i.e. all tasks regarding domestic chores or children raising, or can be performed as a ‘leisure time activity’, such as reading a novel, playing a board game, travelling or putting on make-up. It is critical to notice, however, that an action was only counted as a leisure time activity, when there is no possibility of it being unpaid work. Therefore, activities such as walking the dog or cooking dinner were consistently classified as unpaid work, despite the fact that they may be carried out as a form of enjoyment in one’s free time. The next clusters are titled ‘school’, which encompasses all activities performed by students for educational purposes, ‘crime and rulebreaking’, for which an instance was counted whenever a character made a criminal offence or broke a rule with less heavier implications (e.g. in school), and ‘emotion-related actions’, which was provided for actions such as crying, fighting, shouting, begging, getting a divorce, etc. Finally, the last cluster, titled ‘other’, is home to all the activities and occupations that remain ‘cluster-less’, such as driving, falling, saints and even dying.

Secondly, ten clusters were generated in order to obtain a clearer perspective on the percentage distribution of female and male characters in different activity domains. The nine differentiated domains are: ‘sports’, ‘arts, entertainment and media’ (abbreviated as AEM), ‘education’, ‘science, technology, engineering and mathematics’ (abbreviated as STEM), ‘politics’ (including royalty), ‘safety’, ‘health’ (both human and animal), ‘service’ and ‘manual labor’; and they are supplemented by a tenth, convenient rest cluster: ‘other’. While most clusters are self-explanatory, the rather broad service- and manual labor-clusters are in need of clarification. Occupations that are counted under ‘service’ are characterized by customer-interaction, such as bank clerks,
lawyers, waiters, shop assistants, stylists, secretaries and hairdressers. On the other hand, jobs classified under ‘manual labor’ do not necessarily involve customer-interaction and often require a lot of physical endurance. Some examples are: construction workers, plumbers, chefs, postal workers, gardeners, farmers and all kinds of jobs in the transport-sector. Lastly, it ought to be mentioned that dancing, while arguably also belonging to the AEM-cluster, was invariably counted as a sport.

Table 5. Coding scheme 3/3 (excerpt from textbook C3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities and occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime &amp; RB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Queen, horseback riding, marrying 1 0 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0

Note. RB = rulebreaking; AEM = Arts, entertainment and media; STEM = Science, technology, engineering and mathematics

However seemingly evident, it should be noted that ‘mundane’ activities, such as sitting, eating, walking, etc. were never included in the coding scheme for quantitative analysis, since they were considered to be of not enough relevance for the research questions.

5.5. Coding book

5.5.1. Images

Illustrated characters were only coded when they met two conditions. Firstly, the character has to belong to the central focus of the image and thus ought to be of importance to the pictured situation or action. For instance, image 1 contains two characters that are in focus. The pupils in the background of the photo are not considered relevant for coding. Secondly, the character has to be visible enough to ascertain their gender at a glance. Oftentimes seeing a character’s face, a considerable part of their body or a pronouncedly gendered clothing item, such as a skirt, can
suffice. The character nearest to the camera in image 2, however, is an example of when this condition is not met.

Image 1. *(Textbook C1, p. 71)*

Image 2. *(Textbook C1, p. 155)*

### 5.5.2. Groups

Groups of people, both in image and in text, were treated differently in the coding process than individual characters. Photographs or illustrations often feature sizable groups of people, for which coding each individual seemed rather impractical and redundant. Therefore, it was decided to code illustrated groups with more than 10 members as a singular character. Accordingly, the gender for this ‘character’ was then listed as female, male or both, depending on whether the composition of the group was gender-segregated or mixed. Whenever a specific group member was discussed separately in the text, the character was also coded individually. Lastly, in consistency with rule 5.5.1., when a group is not the central focus of the image, it was not coded as a character in the coding scheme.

Occasionally, texts also refer to a group of people. It was decided not to code textual phrases which refer to an unknown amount of people with an unspecified gender. This results in the exclusion of common phrases such as ‘my parents’, ‘the kids’, ‘my friends’, ‘the police’. When the amount of people is mentioned, however, but not their gender (for example with the sentence: “[They] have seven children.” *(Textbook C1, p. 13)*), a corresponding amount of gender non-specific characters was coded. When the opposite is true, i.e., the gender of the group is revealed, but not the number of group members, or the number exceeds the maximum of 10 people (for example with the phrase: “Hundreds of girls broke down in tears” *(Textbook B4, p. 152)*), the group was included in the coding scheme as one individual character with a female and/or male gender.
5.5.3. References

When the textbook mentioned the name of an author, photographer or illustrator with textual or visual materials, they were included as a character in the coding scheme.

5.5.4. Anthropomorphism

While most characters in the textbook are human, every now and then occurrences of anthropomorphic animals or objects were observed. In order to safeguard the consistency of the coding scheme, non-human characters were coded each time the text explicitly assigns them a gender. For example, textbook C1 (p. 21) includes a humorous, adapted newspaper article about a seagull, Mr. Pooh, who thinks he is a cat, whose three best friends are cats and who owns a nest with a female seagull, Ms. Pooh. Because the article discusses their gender, both seagulls were counted as characters. The cats, on the other hand, were not included in the analysis, since their gender remains unspecified.

5.5.5. Family trees

Textbooks often employ schematic representations of families in the shape of a family tree when teaching students vocabulary on family relations. Whereas each family member was certainly included as a character in the coding scheme, their family connections were not registered under the category ‘relations’, unless it was mentioned separately in text. On the other hand, romantic relationships visualized in the family trees were counted quantitatively.

5.6. Analysis

The analysis of the obtained results will first be analyzed quantitatively in order to detect patterns in the construction of gender- and sexuality norms within each textbook, as well as within the three time periods the textbooks represent. Secondly, these patterns will be discussed more in depth through qualitative analysis.
6. RESULTS

In the selected chapters of the nine EFL textbooks a total of 2115 unique characters were identified. This section will give an overview of these characters and their properties. First, the characters will be discussed in terms of gender representation, and secondly, the results on the representation of sexuality will be presented.

6.1. Representation of gender

This section will examine the representation of gender in the corpus on the basis of four major themes, in this order: (in)visibility, space, relationships and activities.

For the accurate interpretation of the results on female and male representation, it was decided to include the data for gender non-specific characters in this section. However, this study does not have the ability to make statements about the representation of gender non-specific characters as a group. The main reason for this being that it is impossible to retrieve whether authors consciously refrained from assigning the female or male gender to characters or whether it was merely a case of coincidence, which would render the analysis of this subgroup inconsequential.

6.1.1. (In)visibility

Figure 1 shows the overall gender ratio of characters in each of the nine textbooks, organized by average publication year. These results illustrate a clear evolution towards a more equal representation of female and male characters throughout time. Whereas in the oldest textbooks, published around the year 2004, female characters appear prominently less frequent than male characters (an average of 31% versus 62%), the characters in most recent publications are marked by an almost fifty-fifty gender distribution. The biggest transformation is undergone by publisher B. Their oldest textbook contained ± 3.8 times more male than female characters, which is the largest proportional discrepancy out of all analyzed textbooks in this study. Astonishingly, the book even contains an entire chapter with only two female characters (a secretary and a grandmother), compared to twenty-one male characters. Nevertheless, their newest publication has a gender gap of only one percentage point in favor of female characters, which is the closest any textbook in this study gets to complete gender equality in terms of numerical representation.
Publisher C, on the other hand, has experienced the least change as they, historically, have always been ahead of the other publishers in terms of having the smallest representational gender gap. Hence, their 2010 publication appears to be the first to approximate numerical gender equality.

Figure 1. Percentage of female, male and gender non-specific characters in each textbook.

Out of all identified characters 57 percent, i.a. a total of 1204 characters, are presented in identifiable surroundings. These ‘space-specific’ characters appear in either a private setting, a public setting or both. Figure 2 visualizes the sum of characters that occur in private settings per textbook, made relative to the total number of space-specific characters of either female or male gender. For reasons of clarity, gender non-specific characters were not included in the graph.

The first noticeable trend is that in all three time periods, the textbooks of publisher A seem to contain an almost equal relative amount of female and male characters in private settings. This is not the case for the other publishers, however. The earliest publications of publishers B and C are marked by a palpable overrepresentation of female characters in a private context. Almost half of all space-specific women in the oldest textbook of publisher C inhabit the domestic sphere, compared to only one-fifth of space-specific men. Similarly, the proportion of female characters
in private settings in the 2004-textbook of publisher B is four times as high as that of male characters.

Figure 2. Proportion of female and male characters in private settings throughout time.

Nevertheless, as soon as 2010 changes towards more balanced proportions are noticeable. Publisher C appears to have radically narrowed its wide gap between female and male representation in private contexts and upholds this in their most recent publication. Also publisher A managed to close the small yet existing gap in their latest textbook edition. Publisher B exhibits a more gradual change. The dichotomy between the relative amounts of female and male characters in private surroundings shrinks with each new publication, but equal proportions remain unobtained.

It must be acknowledged, though, that the presence of male characters in the private sphere, does not necessarily guarantee the subversion of gender roles, as exemplified by the comparatively high proportion of men watching tv (see: section 6.1.4.1.) or by the classic images of male paternal figures reading a newspaper while they sit together with their families at the dining table or in the living room (in publisher B’s newest and oldest book respectively).
6.1.3. Relationships

The aim of this section was to make a statement on whether female characters are more often defined through family bonds and romantic relationships than male characters. Figure 3 demonstrates the number of female and male characters presented through any kind of relationship made relative to the total number of characters of either female or male gender in each textbook. Similar to the previous section, gender non-specific characters were left out of the graph to prevent unclarity. The outcomes of the qualitative analysis of romantic relationships will be discussed more thoroughly in section 6.2.

Figure 3. Percentage of female and male characters presented through relations per textbook.

These results seem to confirm that in the oldest textbooks female characters used to be positioned as family members and/or partners more commonly than male characters. Most significantly, in publisher A’s oldest textbook almost half of all women, compared to only approximately 1/5 of all men, are discussed in relation to their status as a family member or romantic interest. In line
with the previous results, publisher C seems to have closed this discrepancy in their 2010-publication, with the other publishers following suit in their most recent publications.

Qualitative analysis did not prove noticeable differences in the types of relationships in which female and male characters are presented in the latest textbooks. I.e. there do not seem to be significant discrepancies in the relative amount of times women and men are presented as parents, children, siblings, lovers, spouses, etc.

6.1.4. Activities

In order to give an accurate overview of the gender distribution among activities, the seven distinguished activity types and ten activity domains will be discussed independently. For each subject a comprehensive table will be provided, presenting the overall number of coded instances per gender category and their relative quantities within an activity-cluster. The results will be presented per time period, rather than for each textbook separately.

6.1.4.1. Types of activity

Table 7 summarizes the distribution of gendered characters the seven activity types. Once again, it becomes clear that the gender distribution in newer textbooks is more balanced than in the older materials. This trend is clearly visible in the majority of the activity types. Ultimately, however, not a single activity type but schoolwork approximates an equal representation by male and female characters. Most activity types are still marked by a gender imbalance, even though the gap has decreased. For example, the professional world, i.a. ‘paid work’, is still dominated by men, despite the fact that the proportion of female characters doing paid work increased from 26% to 40%.

The share of men portrayed doing domestic work, i.a., ‘unpaid work’, remained largely stable (from 32% in 2004 to 38% in 2016). Throughout the entire corpus, tasks such as cleaning, doing the laundry and doing the dishes are fulfilled two times more by female than male characters. Only few household chores, such as mowing the lawn or barbequing, appear to be only fulfilled by men. Interestingly, some recent textbooks still contain contents that seem to reify the association between women and household chores. For example, publisher C’s newest edition
features an interview of an actress at a red-carpet event, in which the third question the interviewer asks her is: “Can you cook?” (p. 160).

Table 7. Overview of the gender distribution within 7 activity types per time period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Gender non-specific</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime &amp; rulebreaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, it stands out that a relatively common trope when talking about the role of men in the housekeeping is focusing on their incompetence or laziness. For instance, publisher B’s 2016-textbook contains an e-mail from Caroline in which she, i.a., sums up all the chores done by each family member for dinner at Sunday night. Whereas everyone seems to provide a helping hand, she writes the following about her stepbrothers: “Jacob and Patrick… They are Jacob and Patrick.
The first one plays computer games and the other one watches TV. I think they drive my mum crazy from time to time” (p.101). The same textbook also includes the image of a man dusting off of a cupboard while wearing oversized, clownish heart-shaped glasses, possibly conveying the message that a man who cleans is laughable or not to be taken seriously.

The pattern of men being depicted as sloppy and careless, in contrast to the well behaved and skillful female, transcends into other domains as well. When looking at schoolwork for example, the pupils that perform badly or act inappropriately are nearly always male. At least four textbooks contain male students who are late for school, do not do their homework, receive punishments, disrupt the class or cheat on tests. They are often juxtaposed by a female student, who is put forward as the ‘good student’. A striking illustration hereof can be found in the 2010-publication of publisher C. The authors imagined the action plans of two pupils, one boy and one girl, who want to become class president. The plan of the boy, who calls himself ‘Mr. Cool’, involves tips on how to avoid tests or chew gum without the teacher noticing, on where to secretly smoke at school, and more. In a remarkable contradiction, the girl, who tellingly titles herself ‘The Brain’, uses her plan to call for a healthier lifestyle (i.a. by not smoking or chewing gum in school) and encourages her peers to clean litter from the playground and to arrive on time in class.

The association between men and bad behavior also comes forward in the overwhelming discrepancy between female and male characters in the activity cluster of criminal and rulebreaking behavior. Out of the 67 men and women in the corpus engaged in criminality or breaking rules, only two are female; the first one being Queen Mary I of England whose mass execution of protestants is discussed in the 2004-book from publisher A, and the second instance being a pupil who receives detention from a male principal for wearing clothes that are too revealing in the 2010-publication of textbook C. By contrast, men are shown in a myriad of immoral or illegal behaviors, such as carjacking, hurting people physically, making traffic violations, murdering and executing people, waging war, robbing a bank and abusing drugs.

Likewise, when analyzing the cluster of actions that are motivated by emotions qualitatively, it stuns that throughout the corpus male characters are two times more frequently moved by anger than female characters. This ratio also does not appear to change, even though the proportion of men in this cluster seems to increase slightly over time. In contrast, the gender ratio for actions related to sadness does seem to undergo an evolution, in which it shifts from an overbalance of
female characters in the six older textbooks, to one of male characters in the most recent textbooks. Thirdly, actions related to love were most prevalent and appear to be performed an approximately equal amount of times by female and male characters.

Another visible development is the surge in the proportion of female characters spending leisure time, ultimately outnumbering male characters in this area. It appears, however, that quite a few leisure activities are still overwhelmingly segregated by gender. Watching television, for example, is apparently predominantly predisposed for male characters. In the modern textbooks, seven female characters were shown watching tv, compared to fourteen male characters and when looking at the entire corpus, this female-to-male ratio magnifies to 9-31. Likewise, gaming, which, after being counted ten separate times, struck as a popular pastime in the three newest textbooks, was only engaged in once by a female character. Revealingly, one piece of text in publisher C’s edition speaks volumes on the gender bias concerning this hobby: When complaining about Ethan’s expensive taste for video games and his tendency to spend hours in a game shop, his mother says that she hopes “a girlfriend can change that” (p. 193), illustrating the underlying assumption that it is very unlikely for girl to be keen on computer games too. Contrarily, shopping for clothes continues to be an activity primarily carried out by female characters in the 2016-textbooks. Not only is the female-to-male ratio of shopping characters 20-4, but six other male characters are also explicitly stated to hate shopping or to not care for it. Then again, the only ‘professional shopper’, i.e. a stylist, to be featured turns out to be male. Transcending the individual level, publisher C’s newest publication carries some weighty generalizations about the supposed gender dimensions surrounding this topic. In a chapter about shopping two characters are quoted separately: a girl, named Madison, who confidently states that ‘girls want to look good and want to impress people’, and a boy who is brought to the conclusion that, since his girlfriend wants him to wear more colorful clothing, ‘she doesn’t understand men at all’. Both claims communicate strong messages about femininity and masculinity and are presented without any nuance.

Lastly, two noteworthy observations were made within the rest-category, ‘other’. Firstly, this category contains five (super)heroes and nine saints, all of which are male and occur in the six oldest textbooks. Secondly, it is remarkable how eleven characters in these textbooks are said to drive a car, yet none of them is a woman. The three latest textbooks, in comparison, feature eight drivers; four female and four male.
6.1.4.2. Activity domains

When looking at Table 8, which visualizes the distribution of gendered characters in the ten activity domains, it quickly becomes apparent that male characters are dominant in every activity domain. Even more so, females are entirely absent in the safety domain and the rest-cluster. Yet again, the modern textbooks evidence a trend towards a more equal representation of women and men. In seven out of ten activity domains the proportion of female characters enhanced, while the male share of the domain experienced a decline, causing a narrowing of the gap between the two genders in four domains: ‘sports’, ‘arts, entertainment and media’, ‘safety’ and ‘other’.

While being largely overrepresented by men in 2004, it looks as if the sports domain and the artistic domain are the only two clusters in the modern publications to be represented by virtually equal shares of female and male characters. The majority of sports and artistic disciplines, including soccer, swimming, cycling, dancing, playing an instrument, acting and taking photos seem to be done by approximately the same number of women as of men.

Nevertheless, qualitative analysis revealed that, even in these contemporary textbooks, gender expectations about some of these crafts continue to emerge sporadically. Publisher B’s most current textbook, for example, contains a passage in which a boy named John proclaims the ensuing: “I’m a real guy and that’s why dancing isn’t my thing. You won’t see me in a ballet outfit! I also hate baking cupcakes” (p. 300). Through this a definite judgment is passed on men who enjoy dancing as well as on men taking pleasure in typically domestic tasks, such as cooking. Furthermore, a few different activities, such as skating and playing basketball, whose female-to-male ratios are respectively 2-10 and 0-9, still exhibit a pronounced degree of gender segregation.

The opposite is true for activities concerned with safety, in which men continue to hold the overshadowing majority. In seven out of nine textbooks women are completely absent from the safety-domain. In point of fact, the complete number of women portrayed doing safety jobs in the entire analyzed corpus is three (a police officer and a lifeguard in the 2016 publication of publisher A and another police officer in the 2010 publication of publisher C), which pales in comparison to the 39 men performing safety tasks.

The same discrepancy can be found in the rest-cluster, ‘other’, which mainly includes personalities that seem to be marked by an entrepreneurial or adventurous spirit and suppose a
Table 8. Overview of the gender distribution within 10 activity domains per time period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Gender non-specific</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3 14%</td>
<td>17 77%</td>
<td>2 9%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>9 18%</td>
<td>34 69%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>96 43%</td>
<td>103 46%</td>
<td>24 11%</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>29 29%</td>
<td>70 69%</td>
<td>2 2%</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>29 44%</td>
<td>36 55%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>34 49%</td>
<td>33 47%</td>
<td>3 4%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1 50%</td>
<td>1 50%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>14 47%</td>
<td>13 43%</td>
<td>3 10%</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>7 44%</td>
<td>3 19%</td>
<td>6 38%</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2 33%</td>
<td>4 67%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4 40%</td>
<td>5 50%</td>
<td>1 10%</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>5 63%</td>
<td>3 38%</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>14 30%</td>
<td>33 70%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>8 25%</td>
<td>23 72%</td>
<td>1 3%</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3 25%</td>
<td>9 75%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>15 83%</td>
<td>3 17%</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1 6%</td>
<td>15 94%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2 13%</td>
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<td>4 27%</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>3 60%</td>
<td>1 20%</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>16 70%</td>
<td>5 22%</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>17 49%</td>
<td>13 37%</td>
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<td>Manual labor</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>6 29%</td>
<td>10 48%</td>
<td>5 24%</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3 27%</td>
<td>7 64%</td>
<td>1 9%</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>12 26%</td>
<td>32 70%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>11 85%</td>
<td>2 15%</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>13 100%</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>2 25%</td>
<td>5 63%</td>
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considerable degree of initiative taking or personal freedom; namely philosophers, hunters, travelers and explorers, business owners, a manager, an advisor, a stockbroker, an animal spotter, a businessperson and a handful of religious occupations, i.a., priests, popes, bishops and cardinals. The total number of counted instances is 34, yet remarkably only two were performed by a female character, both of them were business owners and both of them appeared in one of the newest textbooks (from publisher A and B).

In three domains; ‘STEM’ ‘Health’ and ‘Service’, the proportion of female characters surpassed that of the male characters to a considerable extent. Interestingly, the female to male ratios of these domains in the newest textbooks seem to mirror those of the oldest books. No meaningful differences between the specific roles portrayed by women and men within these areas were discovered through qualitative analysis, however.

The only clusters where the gender gap seems to have widened and the proportional presence of male characters increased throughout time are ‘politics’ and ‘manual labor’. Eventually, when analyzing which specific activities the very few female characters in these areas perform, we stumble upon one specifically striking result. Within the political domain, all 26 female characters are either queens, princesses or other forms of royalty. Conversely, the political roles of the 64 male characters include, in addition to royal titles, presidents, prime ministers, emperors, a dictator, a mayor and other forms of politicians.

Every so often, the textbooks even appear to actively tap into the debate on gender norms. For example, while discussing the life of pilot, Wally Funk, in the oldest textbook of publisher C, her feminist aspirations are mentioned forthrightly. She is, i.a., stated to fly around the world to promote female careers in the airline industry, “not as flight attendants who serve drinks to the passengers, but as pilots” (p. 51). Notably, Publisher A’s most current schoolbook even includes the following famous riddle, which is aimed at revealing one’s unconscious gender bias:

« A man and his son are in a fatal car accident. The man is killed instantly. The boy is alive, but unconscious. He is rushed to hospital and needs immediate surgery. The doctor looks at the boy and says: “I can’t operate this boy. He is my son.”. How is this possible? » (p. 150)
The seemingly self-evident answer; the doctor is the boy’s mother, is rarely guessed and is, therefore, usually accompanied with a debate on societal gender expectations, etc.

Not all materials referring to gender roles are aimed at challenging them, however. For example, one exercise in publisher C’s 2010-textbook claims that “there is a big difference between boys talk and girls talk” (p. 208) and proceeds by summing up a list of conversation subjects, such as sports, clothes, pop groups and computer games, which the pupils are then supposed to assign to either one of these two genders. Since the exercise is not followed by any sort of critical note or nuance, nor is there space provided for discussion, it certainly appears as if this exercise is solely based on the reification of gender roles, rather than the questioning of them.

6.2. Representation of sexuality

For the discussion on the representation of homo- and heterosexuality in the corpus, romantic relationships were considered the most useful units for analysis. The bar chart in Figure 6 compares the absolute amount of times a textbook explicitly communicates a romantic relationship between two characters of the same sex, which was then confidently interpreted as an evocation of homosexuality, and between two characters of the opposite sex, which was correspondingly coded as an evocation of heterosexuality.

Figure 6. Number of characters in a homo- or heterosexual relationship per textbook.
It appears that including same-sex relationships in EFL textbooks is a rather recent phenomenon. None of the analyzed chapters in the textbooks published before 2015 contain an evocation of homosexuality. The chapters screened in the modern textbooks, on the other hand, all included at least one homosexual couple.

In all three of the textbooks, the same-sex relationships appear in chapters which focus on family. Publisher B talks about two fictional women, Ann and Nicky, and their son, Mike. Instead of developing their own characters, the authors of Publisher C discuss the diverse families in the American television series *Modern Family*. One of these families is headed by two fathers, Cameron and Mitchell, who have a daughter, called Lily. Interestingly, this family is also referred to by publisher A’s textbook, together with another fictional gay couple, Jack and Ashton, who are photographed with their son, Cameron. It is striking how each same-sex couple is shown in a parental role and they each have one child. Moreover, none of these characters seem to transgress normative expectations, i.e. each of them appears to be middle-class, able-bodied and seem to conform to the dominant gender norms.

Additionally, two other instances of homosexuality were counted for publisher A’s textbook, which require some further clarification.

Firstly, the textbook features an excerpt of the song, ‘ABC’, performed by the cast of the television series *Glee*, consisting of both women and men. They sing: “Now, now, now I’m gonna teach you all about love, dear. […] One, two, three, baby, you and me, girl.”. These lyrics suggest that the song is directed towards a girl, who the singers claim to love. Consequently, this song can be interpreted as containing both an implication of homosexual and heterosexual attraction. The excerpt does not confirm, however, whether the attraction is reciprocated. Therefore, instances of homosexuality and heterosexuality were counted only once.

Secondly, the family tree of the American, retired decathlete, Caitlyn Jenner, was given. The family tree portrays Caitlyn as the ex-wife of Kris Jenner. From the perspective of Caitlyn, this counts as a same-sex relationship. Yet, from Kris’ perspective, their relationship was of a heterosexual nature, since Caitlyn had not yet come out as a transgender woman and was at the time still assumed to be male. Considering that these people are public figures and it is highly probable that Caitlyn’s gender identity will be discussed in class while filling out the exercise, one evocation of homosexuality and one of heterosexuality were counted.
Translating these numbers into percentages, leaves us with these results: on average, 6% of the romantic relationships in the three latest textbooks are between two characters of the same sex. When analyzed individually, however, publisher A appears to be ahead of publishers B and C in terms of visibility of homosexuality. Slightly more than one out of ten romantic relationships in their latest textbook assumes homosexuality, compared to 3.9% and 3.6% respectively.

Whereas not included in the quantitative analysis, homosexuality certainly does seem to be apparent on a more implicit level in earlier materials too. For example, the 2004-textbook from publisher A contains the lyrics of ‘Jailhouse Rock’, a song about a party in a male prison. The third stanza contains the following lines: “Number forty-seven said to number three: ‘You’re the cutest jailbird I ever did see. I sure would be delighted with your company, come on and do the Jailhouse Rock with me.’” An attentive reader might catch this as a wink to homosexuality. Nevertheless, the level of personal interpretation was deemed too high for inclusion in our quantitative analysis.

Lastly, when analyzing the representation of the four homosexual couples qualitatively, a rather thought-provoking narrative was detected in publisher B’s textbook. The book features a questionnaire for a family-exchange experiment filled in by Mike, the son of Ann and Nicky. Herein, Mike reveals that one of his motivations for partaking in the experiment is his desire to be swapped with a ‘traditional’ family. Whereas it remains unspecified what exactly is meant with ‘traditional’, it certainly has the capability of coming across as if Mike wishes to have heterosexual parents, especially since the only noticeably ‘untraditional’ aspect of his family is the fact that he has two mothers.
7. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, it will be attempted to summarize and interpret this study’s major findings in order to adequately provide answers to the central research questions. Simultaneously, it will be discussed where these findings position themselves within the broader field of research.

7.1. Evolution of the representation of gender

When looking at the quantitative representation of female characters, one clear evolution could be discerned: The pattern of female invisibility, which dominated the earliest textbooks, has been largely annulled in the most recent textbooks. The evolution towards numerical gender parity already became observable in the textbooks published in the interim period around 2010. Since the 2004-period, the average percentage of female characters had increased slightly from 31% to 39% and the representational gender gap in publisher C’s textbook had already been virtually closed. In the three modern textbooks, it is safe to conclude that the overall number of female and male characters is balanced and thus in concordance with reality. Compared to the fact that only three previously conducted studies reported similar results, namely Kemp (2011), Mineshima (2008) and Verikaité (2012), these outcomes are rather surprising and hopeful.

Furthermore, the qualitative analyses indicate a similar evolution towards gender equality. While in 2004 the domestic sphere was still disproportionately occupied by female characters, all of the most recent textbooks contain more equal proportions of women and men in the public and private sphere, with publishers A and C even reaching complete gender parity. The examination of the amount of times female and male characters were described through a family role or as a romantic interest revealed a comparable move towards gender equality. It looks as though differences between women and men in this respect have been entirely eradicated in the newest textbooks, whereas in every single one of the 2004 publications women were astonishingly more often than men defined through their relations with others. Together with the results of the quantitative analysis, one might conclude that the gradual progression towards a (more) equal representation of women and men surfaces as a consistent trend.

Taken together, these results also painstakingly highlight two noticeable differences between the individual publishers. Quite prominently, publisher B turned out to be the slowest improver as it
was the only publisher whose most modern textbook showcases a remaining gender gap in one of the examined categories, namely in the disproportionate allocation of female characters to private spaces. In contrast, publisher C emerged as the fastest learner, considering their 2010 release was not only the first one to have closed any of the investigated gender gaps, but closed all three of them at once.

So far, all of these results indicate rather optimistically a shift away from heteronormative constructions of gender. The assessment of the division of activities in the most recent textbooks, however, produced less clear-cut outcomes. In some areas the efforts of publishers to transcend gender stereotypes definitely transpired. Yet, in throughout areas these stereotypes undeniably persevered. One of the positive findings is the fact that the share of female characters portrayed in paid professions has increased significantly over time. Moreover, when looking at the specific activity domains in which women and men were conceived, it becomes clear that the authors made sure to substantially subvert the traditional dominance of men in several domains, such as STEM, health and sports. Also in the artistic sector the modern textbooks closed the gender gap.

Nonetheless, in many other domains the stereotypical gender distribution remains unchallenged or even magnified. First and foremost, women appear to be almost entirely absent from physically demanding jobs concerning safety or manual labor, and from occupations full of initiative, such as adventurous jobs, entrepreneurial careers and (non-royal) political mandates. Secondly, the sexist notion of women’s predestination for fulfilling the household chores remains largely undisputed in the most recent textbooks as men are often explained to be inadequate at doing so, supporting Mineshima’s (2008) observation.

One of the most staggering findings of this research is the major trend of presenting male characters as having plenty of negative qualities. As corroborated by Lee and Collins (2009) and Brusokaité (2013), characters showcasing criminal or disruptive behavior almost exclusively turn out to be male. Moreover, this study highlighted the parallel between this and the textbooks’ representation of boys as undisciplined and unruly school goers. This portrayal of masculinity is likely to have considerably harmful effects as it may reinforce the generalized conception with teachers that boys require more disciplinary sanctioning in order to effectively integrate in the school environment, which in turn may be linked to the reality of boys underperforming academically, feeling less motivated to achieve academic success and ultimately being more prone to violent or criminal conducts (De Groof, 2015b; Epstein, 1998; Halimi et al., 2016; PISA, 2009; Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2018; Vantieghem, 2016).
These findings lead us to a conclusion that resonates with Mustedanagic (2010) and Saarikivi (2012), who expressed their concerns that in reaction to the long tradition of feminist critiques, the representations of women and femininity have become less constrained to gender norms, whereas the representations of men and masculinity did not undergo a similar transformation. Similar to the findings of Witt (1996) and Evans and Davies (2000), this study seemingly confirms the hypothesis that “any progress made in minimizing sexism [in teaching materials] relates only to female depictions; males are still shown in a stereotypical light” (Evans & Davies, 2000, p. 258). Negative stereotypes about femininity are in growing numbers countered with examples of independent female characters, who wade in traditionally masculine areas, such as sports, health or STEM, while negative traits stereotypically associated with masculinity are much less often countered with male characters performing traditionally feminine activities, such as nurturing children, fulfilling household chores or shopping. Conversely, the textbooks even seem to endorse negative stereotypes about men. This, however, inevitably damages both women and men as it obstructs the route towards a more gender fair society. To put it in the words of Evans and Davies (2000): “True equality in which all people can reach their individual potential will never be achieved if only one side of the continuum is affected by change” (p. 269).

7.2. Evolution of the representation of sexuality

In resonance with the evolution of female visibility, homosexuality also became more visible throughout the years. Although, taking into account that not a single relationship featuring two members of the same sex was registered in publications prior to 2015, the increase in the visibility of homosexuality started later than the one of female characters. As mentioned before, the average proportion of same-sex relationships in the three most recent textbooks is 6%. Deciding whether this is in accordance with reality is, however, somewhat more precarious. Considering that, on their website, Sensoa (2019), the Flemish expertise center for sexual health, averages the percentage of non-heterosexual people around 3-10%, we may deduce that the quantity of homosexual relationships in the latest textbooks is representative of society. Even publisher C, whose textbook has the lowest percentage of homosexual relationships (3.6%) still passes the test. Nevertheless, estimating the demographics of sexual orientation in real life is tricky, since there is no foolproof method yet to establish whether a person is heterosexual or not. I.e., one’s sexual behavior may not overlap with one’s self-perceived sexual identity or one’s romantic attraction to
one or more genders (if any). Additionally, while keeping queer theory in mind, which configures sexuality as a fluid, time- and context-dependent concept, drawing exact lines between who is part of the minority group and who is not, becomes problematic if not impossible. Therefore, statistics have historically come up with drastically different results. Most referred to, is Alfred Kinsey (1948; 1953), whose research on male and female sexual behavior lies at the roots of the popularized notion that 10% of the population is homo- or bisexual. Notwithstanding, later studies came up with contesting numbers, ranging from 1% to 20%, greatly depending on geographical location, historical period and even the researchers’ political orientation (Spiegelhalter, 2015).

Upon dissecting these representations of same-sex couples qualitatively, it was revealed that each of them pops up in a chapter specifically revolving around family. Due to the limited sample size of this study, it is uncertain whether any other chapters featured homosexual couples. In spite of that, the low actual number of instances and the fact that same-sex sexuality is never ‘casually’ mentioned in textbook elements where the relationship is not the central focus, the impression is given that the textbooks apply a fragmented representation of homosexuality. Even though the couples are not ghettoized in a chapter specifically about homosexuality, restricting them to chapters about ‘family’ still possibly reads as token attention to diversity and fails to present homosexuality as something else than a peculiarity next to the heterosexual norm, which is kept intact (MacIntosh, 2007; Schmidt, 2010; Temple, 2005; Whatley, 1992).

Another realistic critique may be that these representations adhere to a homonormative worldview. Each of the couples has one child and the individuals involved do not seem to transgress gender boundaries in the way they look or behave. Admittedly, the opportunities for textbooks to paint nuanced pictures and round characters are limited. Moreover, due to the brief time spent in class on each exercise, deciding to stick to a homonormative image might in the end turn out to be more beneficial for the overall advancement of positive attitudes towards non-heterosexual relationships and feelings. However, this is merely a hypothetical statement and requires a more thorough and specific investigation.

What is also striking, and tightly linked to the notion of homonormativity, is the lack of diversity in between the evocations of same-sex sexuality. Three out of four couples are male, all four are white, appear to be middle-class and able-bodied. The denial of non-heterosexual people as possibly having multiple non-normative intersectional identities has already been problematized by a few previous scholars. For example, Whatley (1992) wrote that since there are so few
evocations of non-heterosexuality in textbooks, each one “may be taken as representative of gay men or lesbians as a group” (p. 199). Moreover, Macgillivray and Jennings (2008) explain that the impact of a representation of an underrepresented group is considerably higher as audiences are apt to attaching “all their ideas of what it means to be gay or lesbian, for instance, to that one image of a gay or lesbian person” (p. 174). Therefore, the representations in the textbooks of this study might subconsciously reinforce the conception of homosexual people in students’ minds as ethnocentric, androcentric, classed and able-bodied, which might ultimately create new marginalized and disadvantaged out-groups (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). For example, a young white gay pupil might finally feel represented by these teaching materials, while a black gay boy might still feel invisible in or excluded from their learning environment and the dominant society overall.

Interestingly, six out of ten non-heterosexual individuals referred to by the textbooks are celebrities or famous fictional characters from a tv-series. Whereas this may simply be a coincidence, it may be an indication of the author’s discomfort with creating an original character due to their awareness of the many potential ‘mistakes’ – i.e. the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes – that can be made when representing this social minority group (or any social minority group for that matter). In this case, opting for ‘premade’ characters might be a clever way of evading eventual future critiques about problematic aspects of the character, considering that the responsibility thereof lies with the characters’ original creators rather than with the textbook authors.

Lastly, no cases of pathologization and flagrant heterosexism were found. The only somewhat ambiguous heterosexist message was the aspiration of Mike, the son of the lesbian couple in publisher B’s textbook (and only lesbian couple in the entire corpus), to partake in a family-exchange experiment because of his longing to be swapped with a ‘traditional’ family (see: page 54). The ambiguity of the reading of this example as heterosexist lies in the fact that it is impossible to retrieve what the author originally intended to denote with the word ‘traditional’. Regardless, it is undeniable that this content has problematic qualities, simply due to the fact that a heterosexist interpretation is not only feasible, but very likely, which might therefore ultimately justify or incite school victimization of non-heterosexual children or any child associated with non-heterosexual individuals, such as parents or siblings (Kosciw et al., 2016; Miceli, 2006; Renold, 2005; Snapp et al., 2015).
8. CONCLUSION

The last part of this dissertation will formulate a final answer to the central research question, which reads: “How has the degree of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL textbooks changed throughout the last two decennia?”. Moreover, the shortcomings of this study’s research focus will be considered and some suggestions for further research will be offered.

As a result of the completion of the literature review, content analysis and discussion thereof, it can be stated with relative certainty that the overall degree of heteronormativity in Flemish EFL textbooks for the first cycle of secondary education has decreased considerably within an almost consistent and linear evolution.

It is concluded that the representations of gender and sexuality in the earliest textbooks published between 2003 and 2005 – apart from a few sporadic positive exceptions – mimicked the majority of previous studies’ findings, which deemed their textbooks to be either brazenly sexist, heterosexist or both. On average, women are underrepresented, both the female and male gender is portrayed in a stereotypical manner and the existence of homosexuality is entirely ignored and denied. The depictions of women can be bluntly summarized as ‘the passive housewife whose main reason for existence is restricted to taking care of the family’, whereas the representation of men invariably involves a high level of independence and activeness, which translates into two major omnipresent archetypes: ‘the bread-winner with intellectual superiority’ and ‘the violent criminal’. Later it was found that the second group of investigated textbooks, which were published in 2009-2011, indicated small changes towards a less heteronormative representation of gender. Most notably, publisher C emerged as a pioneer in this respect. Most of these changes kept a steady course and ultimately culminated in the third bundle of textbooks published in 2015-2017, in which not only the quantitative representational gender gap had been closed, but also a number of qualitative representational gender gaps, resulting in more diverse interpretations of femininity and masculinity. Lastly, this group of textbooks was also discovered to pull homosexuality out of invisibility by including the first explicit references to same-sex couples.

Notwithstanding, the biggest challenge for textbook publishers interested in disrupting heteronormativity apparently remains to be overcoming gender stereotypes. Whereas authors of the newest textbooks showcased their gender-awareness by overturning the overrepresentation of
men in paid labor, sports and in the sectors of arts, entertainment and media, health and STEM, female characters were still mainly absent from the domains of politics, safety and manual labor. Secondly, this research drew special attention to the narrow and problematic representation of men. Despite all advancements in the 2016 textbooks, the share of male characters doing domestic chores or nurturing children has barely risen, while criminality, disruptive behavior and anger are traits that remain to be solely inhibited by male personalities. It is argued that due to the considerable impact foreign language textbooks can have on adolescent students and society as a whole, leaving these heteronormative stereotypes unchallenged may have damaging consequences. As contended, both gender-typical and gender-atypical, adolescent students may subconsciously internalize these gender norms, potentially inciting long-term drawbacks on their self-esteem, academic performances, social behavior and overall well-being (Brusokaité, 2013; Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2016; 2018).

While this study initially also tallied all representations of characters whose gender remained unspecified or whose expression did not overtly adhere to the gender binary, making interpretations about their numbers was found to be inconsequential as doubts arose about the author’s intentions surrounding their inclusion.

With respect to the representation of sexuality, it was deemed nonviable to determine whether the number of non-heterosexual individuals in the latest textbooks is in line with reality. However, as suggested, the next step for textbook publishers might be to prevent a fragmented representation of same-sex sexuality as a way of countering the naturalized notion of heterosexuality, and to acknowledge the diverse, multiple identities of these characters, in order to prevent the marginalization of smaller subgroups.

As established before, the results of the oldest groups of textbooks are rather unsurprising as they are entirely in line with the main findings of the preceding research discussed in the literature review. Conversely, with the exception of a small minority of studies, generally none of these studies reported results that are comparably progressive to the outcomes of the analysis of the newest textbooks, which is in all likelihood due to the fact that not one study was found to have studied schoolbooks published post 2014. Taking this into account, the conclusion of this study, which found the degree of heteronormativity to have been considerably decreased in textbooks published post 2015, might optimistically be considered as an indication that the Flemish schoolbook publication industry is finally putting in significant work for a more inclusive learning
environment. Their sudden efforts might arguably be a result of çavaria’s Open Boek-project in 2011 and the subsequent signing of a charter by the Flemish Book Publishers Association, in which they pledge to take far-reaching measures for the eradication of, i.a., all forms of sexism and homophobia from their teaching materials. Nevertheless, the scope of the present study does not allow us to make a statement about the causes of the measured developments.

8.1. Limitations and recommendations for further study

Evidently, there are a few limitations to the evidence of this study. Firstly, as mentioned previously, due to the restricted sample size per textbook, it was impossible to obtain a complete understanding of how gender and sexuality are represented in the books. Even though it is likely that the sample of 1/3 of each textbook’s relevant pages may be representative of the entire book, it may certainly be possible that other chapters employ different modes of representation. Especially for the analysis of sexuality, the limited sample size is problematic. Considering the low actual number of same-sex relationships in the reviewed chapters, adding an extra chapter to the analysis might shake up the results substantially.

Secondly, it must be repeated that textbook characters exhibit more than just gender and sexuality, but are in fact the embodiment of the intersection of an endless number of social identity axes, such as age, ability, ethnicity, class, etc. While the low actual number of homosexual relationships allowed for a more intersectional reading of the results, the analysis of the representation of gender mainly disregarded other intersections of the characters’ identities. Therefore, further research on how (if at all) the representation of gendered characters differs depending on other intersectional identities might help considerably to fully understand the implicit messages textbooks convey about their identities and those of the people around them and might be successful in identifying points of improvement for future production of educational materials.

Moreover, further research is also of the essence in order to be able to interpret our obtained results with more certainty. As touched upon previously, a major limitation of this study is the exclusive focus on printed textbooks. In language learning environments, teacher mitigation and peer discussions are essential components and they have the ability to subvert the intentions of any written text (Sunderland, 2000). For example, under the right circumstances and through the input of either a teacher or one or more pupils, the highly problematic exercise about girls talk and boys
talk, as discussed on page 53, can be transformed into a very gender critical learning moment. Yet, this possibility was not taken into account for this study. For this reason, a follow-up study including observations of classroom interactions and interviews with teachers, may prove to be exceptionally insightful.

Consequently, this type of study may also help us to gain understanding of how the inclusion of same-sex relationships and gender-atypical characters in textbooks is perceived by diverse classroom settings. For example, it may turn out that in order to safeguard positive discussions on gender and sexuality, different classroom contexts require different modes of representation thereof, whereas now there is little differentiation in the content of teaching materials for different school populations. Hypothetically, classrooms in big cities which contain pupils with very diverse cultural and religious backgrounds might require a different approach than classrooms in suburban areas with a majority of white, middle-class students. Similarly, schools who predominantly offer vocational training may have a different reception of the content than schools with mainly academically-oriented fields of study. However, a study involving classroom observations would be necessary to make conclusive statements on this matter.

Moreover, while the present study suggested that the evolution towards less heteronormative textbook content might be linked to the 2011 Open Boek-project by çavaria and the charter of the Flemish Book Publishers Association, this remains merely a hypothesis. A study investigating the intentionality behind the current patterns asserted by this study could provide a valuable insight into how conscious – if at all – and why textbook publishers are supporting these developments. Gray’s (2013) study, in which interviews with senior employees of publishing companies unveiled the economically motivated choice to exclude same-sex attraction from schoolbooks, may serve as an example for this. Through interviews it may for example be discovered which measures – if any – authors are taking for the eradication of sexism and gender stereotypes in their publications and whether they add up with the results obtained through this study. For instance, it could also be investigated whether authors are aware of the sudden inclusion of homosexual relationships and if (and why) they are consciously applying a homonormative way of representation. Moreover, this kind of study can also help shedding light on the intentions behind the inclusion of gender non-specific characters and the use of gender-neutral language, which might even retroactively benefit the understanding of the results obtained through this study.
To conclude, it bears repeating that since the Flemish Parliament approved new final objectives for the first cycle of secondary education, each of the three investigated publishers will have released new and more up to date EFL teaching materials by the 1st of September 2019. Clearly, a follow-up study would be enlightening to determine whether these newer publications will maintain the trend of decreasing levels of heteronormativity and whether or not some of the remaining shortcomings identified by this research will persist. Moreover, it would be interesting to observe whether textbook publishers will have adapted their content to the new learning objectives surrounding conceptual knowledge about sexual orientation, identity and gender or to those aimed at promoting awareness of the implications of (the students’ own) intersectional social identities in society (Flemish Government, 2018a; 2018b).


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