



# **Gender Representations in Portuguese ‘English as Foreign Language’ (EFL) Coursebooks**

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## **Abstract**

The present research focuses on gender representations in Portuguese EFL [English as Foreign Language] coursebooks adopted between 2015 and 2021 for grades 4, 6 and 9. The research draws on a conceptual framework that integrates gender theory with intersectionality, thus broadening the understanding of gender discrimination with implications on EFL material analysis. Methodological procedures privileged content analysis, qualitatively enriched by specific exemplary cases of subtle stereotyping and intersectional segmentation of the gender concept by ethnicity, age and ability. Findings suggest increased gender parity in terms of visibility of male and female characters in text, image and audio, and fair representation of men and women in mix-gender dialogues and identical opportunities to speak first. Nevertheless, stereotyped representations of male and female characters in action are apparent. Despite authors' effort to provide equal gender portrayal, evidence shows that gender stereotypes linger on, broadened by intersectional approach. There is an overwhelming omission of disabilities, and also invisibility of the elder, besides reduced Asian and Brown male or female presence. Overall, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender representation and underscores the importance of critically examining teaching materials for their potential impact on students' perceptions and identities. It is our belief the emerging findings have implications for curriculum development and pedagogical practices aimed at promoting gender equity and inclusivity in education.

## **Keywords**

Gender; Representation; Stereotype; EFL; Intersectionality; Content Analysis



## Resumo

A presente investigação centra-se no estudo das representações de género nos manuais escolares de inglês como língua estrangeira (ILE) adotados entre 2015 e 2021 para os 4.º, 6.º e 9.º anos. A investigação baseia-se numa estrutura conceptual que integra a teoria de género com a interseccionalidade, alargando assim a compreensão da discriminação de género com implicações na análise de material de ILE. Os procedimentos metodológicos privilegiaram a análise de conteúdo quantitativa e qualitativamente enriquecida por casos exemplares específicos de estereótipos subtis e segmentação interseccional do conceito de género por etnia, idade e capacidade. Os resultados sugerem uma maior paridade de género em termos de visibilidade de personagens masculinas e femininas em texto, imagem e áudio, e uma representação justa de homens e mulheres em diálogos mistos e oportunidades idênticas de falar em primeiro lugar. No entanto, são evidentes as representações estereotipadas de personagens masculinas e femininas em ação. Apesar do esforço dos autores para fornecer uma representação equitativa de género, as evidências mostram que os estereótipos de género persistem, ampliados pela abordagem interseccional. Há uma omissão avassaladora de incapacidade e também invisibilidade dos mais velhos, para além da reduzida presença asiática e *brown* (masculina ou feminina). De um modo geral, esta investigação contribui para o discurso mais amplo sobre a representação de género e sublinha a importância de examinar criticamente os materiais didáticos quanto ao seu potencial impacto nas perceções e identidades dos alunos. Acreditamos que as descobertas emergentes têm implicações para o desenvolvimento curricular e para as práticas pedagógicas que visam a promoção da equidade de género e da inclusão na educação.

## Palavras-chave

Género; Representação; Estereótipo; ILE; Interseccionalidade; Análise de conteúdo



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## List of Acronyms

AA&O – Actions, Activities and Occupations CAN - Content analysis

CLIL – Content Language Integrated Learning

EFL – English as Foreign Language

ELT – English Language Teaching

ESL – English as Second Language

p.c. – per cent

Pr – Priority

SLT – Social Learning Theory

SRT – Sex Role Theory

TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030

*Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls SDG, United Nations*

The long personal and professional experience in teaching has been facilitating contact with a large number of students. Being assigned for over 20 years at the same school allowed me to get to know the neighbourhood, the families and the community well. The institution is located in a disadvantaged social region. During the period in question, I noticed that comments and interactions very frequently appeared strongly loaded with stereotypical representations of gender, inside and outside the classroom. In this sense, as an educator, I thought about whether it would be possible to contribute to a context of greater respect for the ‘other’, especially with regard to the feminine condition.

As English as Foreign Language (EFL) teacher, I am aware of the greater responsibility in contributing to build up each student's own identity as a global citizen in relationship with others, based on attitudes and values of tolerance, cooperation between individuals, raising awareness towards diversity, cultures, ethnicities, gender:

All of the evidence points to the enduring importance of textbooks as basic tools for education in the twenty-first century [...] have economic and ideological implications [...] are a basic vehicle of socialization, conveying knowledge and values [...] have an impact far beyond the immediate confines of school and learning (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009b, p. 6).

Before the ‘Carnation Revolution’ (25th Apr 1974), Portugal had high illiteracy rates (about 50%, in the 1950s),<sup>1</sup> limited educational access, and low investment, especially in rural areas, due to poverty and an authoritarian regime that stifled progress (Crato, 2020). After the revolution, Portugal made extensive reforms to expand education access, aiming for universal education and social equity, prioritising primary and secondary education and teacher training, establishing schools as instruments for reducing social inequality (OECD/PISA, 2009).

In the 1980s, decentralisation granted local authorities more control over curricula, allowing regional adaptation. The 1986 Education Act (Lei de Bases do Sistema

Educativo [LBSE]) introduced a three-level education system (preparatory, secondary, university) and a unified, inclusive nine-year basic education. These reforms aligned our country with European standards, emphasising English proficiency as Portugal integrated into the European Economic Community.

Following the implementation of the new national programs (Decreto Lei n.º 286/89), specific regulations concerning coursebooks were introduced in 1990. These developments will be examined in further detail under the section *Coursebooks and the Socialization Process*. The Portuguese government explicitly assumed responsibility for ensuring the pedagogical and technical quality of coursebooks. This included issuing regulations concerning the selection processes—assigning this responsibility to teachers and schools—and establishing timeframes for coursebook usage (Decreto Lei n.º 369/90).

In alignment with the guidelines established during the first General Conference of UNESCO in 1946, an action plan was published advocating for the improvement of coursebooks and teaching methodologies. Subsequently, influenced by the feminist movement of the 1970s, more targeted recommendations were issued to eliminate or prevent discriminatory representations based on gender. This aligns with the conceptual framework introduced in 1972 by the sociologist Ann Oakley (2016) who distinguished between *social sex* (gender) and *biological sex*.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, international recommendations progressively emphasised the obligation of governments and state institutions to eradicate all forms of gender-based discrimination in educational materials across all levels (UN, 1980). Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) have highlighted Andrée Michel's 1986 publication,<sup>2</sup> which synthesised various national studies, developed frameworks for identifying sexism in coursebooks, and compiled extensive bibliographical references to support the analysis of gender representation in educational content.

UNESCO's *Guiding Principles for the Development of International Education Programs and Textbooks* (1988/1991) established clear objectives regarding the knowledge students should acquire. These principles positioned the coursebook not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a key ideological medium. The guidelines explicitly stated that coursebooks must denounce all forms of discrimination—whether racial, sexist, or otherwise—while actively promoting equality, peace, and human rights.

Moreover, another critical dimension underlined the role of coursebooks in poverty eradication. In many developing regions, coursebooks represent the primary—and often only—educational resource available. Consequently, access to coursebooks is fundamental to the realisation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education as a pathway to development and the alleviation of poverty (Mbuyi, 1988, as cited in Brugeilles & Cromer, 2005). The urgency of this issue is particularly pronounced in developing

countries, where classroom interactions and educational content often perpetuate biased representations of women. Despite increased attention to gender equality, stereotypes persist in educational settings (Montagne, as cited in Brugeilles & Cromer, 2005, p. 14).<sup>3</sup>

In Portugal the Dec.-Lei n.º 286/89 included specific regulations on coursebooks, to improve teaching materials, ensure pedagogical quality through teacher involvement, aligning with global civil rights movements and UN guidelines.

*Background of EFL in Portugal* – English Language Teaching (ELT) in Portugal began in secondary schools in 1836, focusing on oral communication through the Direct Method, later shifting to the audiolingual approach. In the mid-20th century English became increasingly important in education, culture, and facilitating career opportunities. It was gradually integrated into the basic cycles of the education system.

By the late 1970s, the ELT focus moved to 'communicative competence', emphasising practical communication, critical thinking, student autonomy, and intercultural understanding (Hurst, 2014). In 1991, Portugal introduced the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR], setting common proficiency standards, and in 2010, English became compulsory in the 5th and 6th grades.

In 2014, new legislation made English compulsory from the 3rd year of schooling, ensuring greater equity in access to the language. By 2017, measures initially implemented in with 286/89, were fully adopted so as 9th graders finish with adequate English proficiency, therefore totally complying with the CEFR (Despacho 124/ME/91) closely concurring with key competences defined in Perfil dos Alunos à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória [PASEO].

Although Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda (2016)<sup>4</sup> aims to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, promoting gender equality and empowerment, UN data shows slow progress in women's participation in governments and management positions. The Covid pandemic worsened outcomes for girls and minorities, "school closures have affected girls [...] children with disabilities and [...] from ethnic minorities more than their peers" (4. ODS).

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Ursula Von Der Leyen emphasised: "It is the Union's responsibility, in all its actions, to promote equality between women and men [...] a fundamental value of the EU, a fundamental right, and a key principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights [...] an essential condition for an innovative, competitive, and prosperous European economy" (statement A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025).<sup>5</sup>

Recognised as being at the forefront of gender equality, fourteen EU countries are among the top twenty ranked globally in terms of gender respect and the implementation of equity policies between men and women. Nevertheless, full gender

equality remains a goal on the horizon, as overall progress is acknowledged to be slow (EU – March, 2020).<sup>6</sup> According to the same source, while significant advances have been made in reducing gender inequality in education, the same cannot be said for professional issues or representation in decision-making positions. Sexist hate speech and gender-based discrimination persist, and public reactions such as the #MeToo movement demonstrate the widespread nature of these issues.

In Portugal, gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, and initiatives like Citizenship Education aim to integrate gender equality into curricula.<sup>7</sup> The National Education Strategy for Citizenship promotes tolerance, non-discrimination, and prepares students for democratic participation. Teacher training and project-based methods support these goals (cf. Preface of Despacho n.º 6173/2016, de 10 de maio).

The increased emphasis on citizenship in education reflects the intention to ensure a set of rights and duties that should be conveyed through the education of Portuguese children and young people. The goal is that, in the future, they grow into adults who demonstrate civic conduct that promotes equality in interpersonal relationships, embraces diversity, respects Human Rights, and upholds the values and principles of national citizenship.

### **1.1. School coursebooks and the socialisation process**

“As educators and social justice advocates, we understand the importance of examining curriculum materials for gender and other intersectional biases (e.g., race) as these can increase students’ susceptibility to stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when an individual conforms to a common negative stereotype about their (gender or racial) group by “self- characterizing” that stereotype”

*Southworth et al., 2020, p. 24*

Gender equity in Portugal has been a fundamental priority in terms of social policy. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009b) refer to the role of coursebooks at this regard, stressing the need to cover them “by policies which respect and include the rights of girls and women for their full enjoyment of a good-quality education” (p. 22). In this context, naturally, school coursebooks can and should be understood as important agents (ibid., 2009b) in the socialisation process, “powerful levers for social change in propagating universal values” (p. 7), by actively promoting the transmission of constitutive principles of human rights, the most important rules of social justice, active movements for their implementation. Following the foreword statement of UNESCO (2005) “At every level and in every subject area, textbooks can be important vehicles for promoting human rights, [...] gender equity and nondiscrimination”. In short, as the article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 proclaims, it is

essential to understand whether teaching coursebooks prepare the child “for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”

As essential elements in the training and socialisation of children and young people (Frasher & Walker, 1972; Mineshima, 2008; Porreca, 1984), coursebooks can be — and often are — a means of transmitting stereotypes that can have a decisive influence in cognitive (understanding) and affective (sentimental) terms. Kızılaslan (2010) would underline that “identifying and countering gender bias in ELT materials and [...] promoting gender equity in the classroom [...] could help fight the problem of textbook sexism that may impair girls’ and boys’ understanding of the world and their places in it” (p. 3531).

In the context of foreign languages learning, the presence of prejudice more or less subtly expressed in coursebooks have persistent effects on students who use them daily (Rifkin, 1998; Sunderland, 1992): i) unconscious negative conditioning in learning, leading to ii) withdrawal and disinterest due to the absence of figures with whom they identify and the implicit iii) marginalisation of women through the presentation of stereotypical models, with the aggravating factor being presented to them from the very first contact with a language they are learning for the first time (Maehara, 2010). In the context of gender equity and underrepresentation, Rifkin (1998) further emphasised, “the exclusion of girls [...] seriously impairs their abilities to understand the target language” (p. 218).

We apprehend the world around us through language (Mineshima, 2008), which subliminally shapes our perception, our behaviour and the persistent structuring of our ideals. Like so many other means of transmitting representations and stereotypes, the internet, television, music... (Ribeiro, 2014), school coursebooks must be understood as one of the most powerful socialisation agent. Donzelli (2024) describes them as “filters for understanding the world, allowing students to engage with authentic life scenarios and plausible stories through the characters they present”(p. 9) significantly shaping younger learners' perceptions of the world whose expression can lead to the persistent and permanent internalisation of inequality and discrimination. Therefore, the importance of identifying the social origins of gender inequality and the role played by school coursebooks in these processes is undeniable (Law & Chan, 2004; Benaissa, 2024).

Taking into account that the use of the coursebook occupies an immeasurably larger part of the class time (Sadker & Zittleman 2009), “as much as 80 to 95% of classroom time”; that teachers make most of their “instructional decisions based on these texts” (p. 88), and especially if we also take into account the work carried out using it at home, we may not ignore its active and unusually intense role as a 'socialisation agent'.

As Forbes (2018) quite well points out “The implications of viewing textbooks through this lens [as socialisation agent] are far reaching, with ramifications for social change and individual identities, attitudes and values” (p. 12). Also Carole Brugeilles and Sylvie Cromer (2005), regarding the interest surrounding educational publishing, point out the importance of mastery and control of the content conveyed but above all its function as (p. 18):

Sources d’informations, organisateurs privilégiés de l’état des connaissances et des savoirs, capital culturel d’une société, ils transmettent, de manière explicite, une compréhension de l’histoire et une vision du monde, [...] mais aussi des modèles de comportements sociaux, des normes et des valeurs.

Playing such a crucial role in socialising students, authors must carefully consider both how and what social depictions to represent. It is widely understood that coursebooks often avoid controversial topics to ensure they appeal to a broad audience. If they alienate readers, their marketability is threatened, limiting their use and sales. Coursebooks tend to cater to the majority, often overlooking minority groups evidenced in the underrepresentation of non-binary gender (Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020) as well as the minimal inclusion/omission of people with disabilities in coursebooks and educational visuals (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023) we will later discuss in this study.

Another concern, related to “how” social groups are portrayed, is the stereotypical depiction of women—a much wider and in-depth studied topic.

The consideration, in particular, of EFL coursebooks as potential transmitters of inequality, seems to us to justify deepening the area of study of gender representations in this educational materials as a field of significant and pertinent research, contributing to the development of research both at national and international level (Bachore & Semela, 2022; Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Guo & Wang, 2023; Southworth et al., 2020).

Brugeilles and Cromer (2009b) would add in this regard that achieving coursebook fair representation of all societal members, necessarily implies adopting a rights-based approach<sup>8</sup> policy advocated by the UN since 2005. The concept of the right to Education for All has been significantly shaped by the push for equal rights between men and women, particularly in terms of educational access. Although numerous declarations and conventions have been adopted in recent decades, true gender equality in education remains elusive.

Following an increasingly significant position within the social sciences the adoption of an intersectional perspective will likely broaden our understanding of gender discrimination. It has been firstly sustained by Crenshaw (1989) that gender cannot be

examined in isolation from other categories of subjectivity— such as race, age, class and ability — which are also shaped by unequal recognition within processes of socialisation and identity formation. Overlapping diverse social identities arguably allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the complex and interrelated mechanisms that sustain inequality. Therefore, recognising that the idea of gender intersects with other social identities not only deconstructs the concept but also enhances the dismantling of the male-female split.

In the educational context, intersectionality offers a valuable framework for understanding how power dynamics shape the interconnections among various social identities. It reveals how these identities are culturally constructed and situated within broader systems of inequality (Tefera et al., 2018). Recent studies (R'boul & Saidi, 2023; Padilla & Vana, 2024) have shown that EFL coursebooks and pedagogical practices frequently reinforce intercultural racism and structural inequalities by centring White, Western racial realities in cross-cultural or intercultural education.

Therefore, this perspective has important implications for the study of gender in EFL coursebooks. It provides a rich conceptual framework for analyzing gender representation and also how it intersects with other identity markers. Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) have declared, “sexual representations are developed in a fine and complex way thanks to the combination of the particularities of each of the characters and in their interactions” (p. 18). In this sense, such approach supports the deconstruction of dominant narratives by challenging stereotypes and reductive portrayals that often rely on binary thinking and perpetuate systems of oppression and power (O’Cinneide, 2022).

Overall, coursebooks, as vital educational tools, play a key role in cultural enrichment, academic success, and teacher development. Beyond this, they are powerful agents of social change, promoting universal values. In this context international agreements highlight the critical need to address gender inequalities, which obstruct justice and slow progress. As a result, it is our belief, coursebook policies must prioritise the rights of girls and women, ensuring they have equal access to quality education that fosters their overall growth and success. Following Donzelli (2024) we too consider it to be “imperative for textbook policies to prioritise and uphold the rights of girls and women, ensuring their equal access to a high-quality education for their holistic development and empowerment”(p.21).

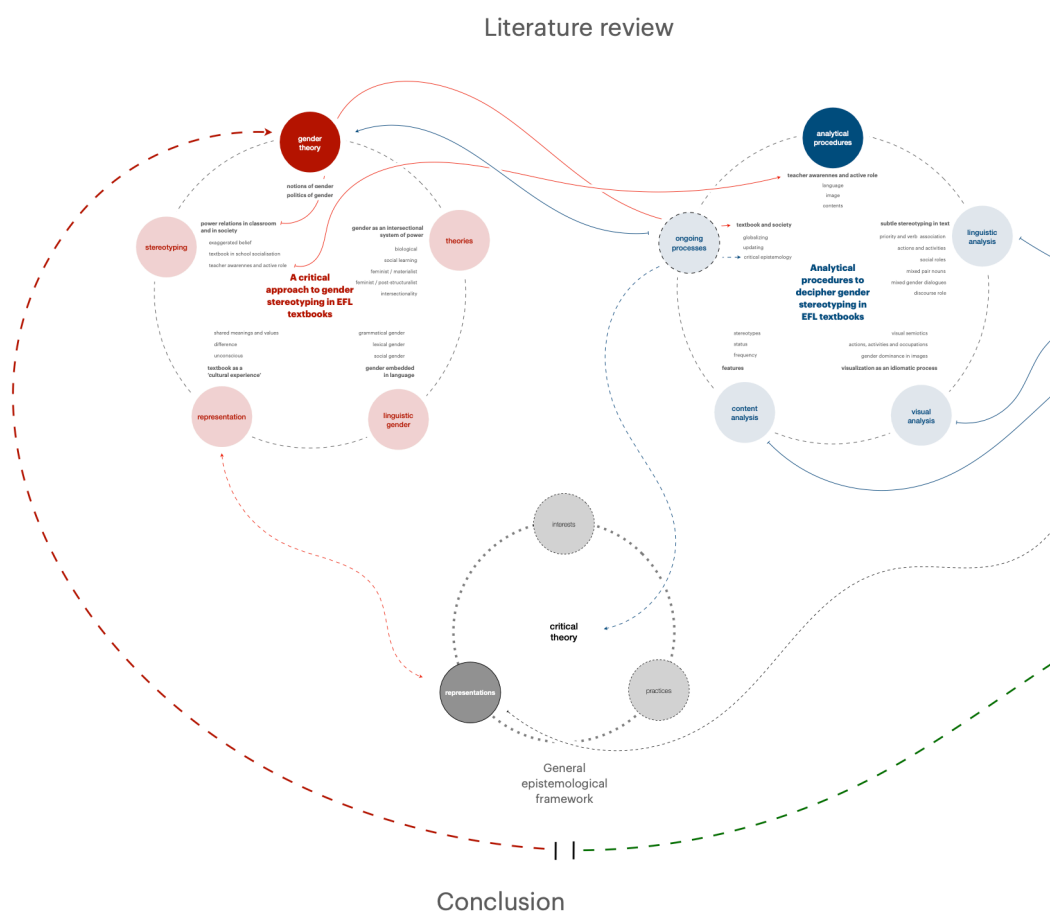
## **1.2. Research aim and questions**

The general aim of this study is to understand whether genders are equally represented in national English as a Foreign Language (EFL) coursebooks in grades 4, 6 and 9.

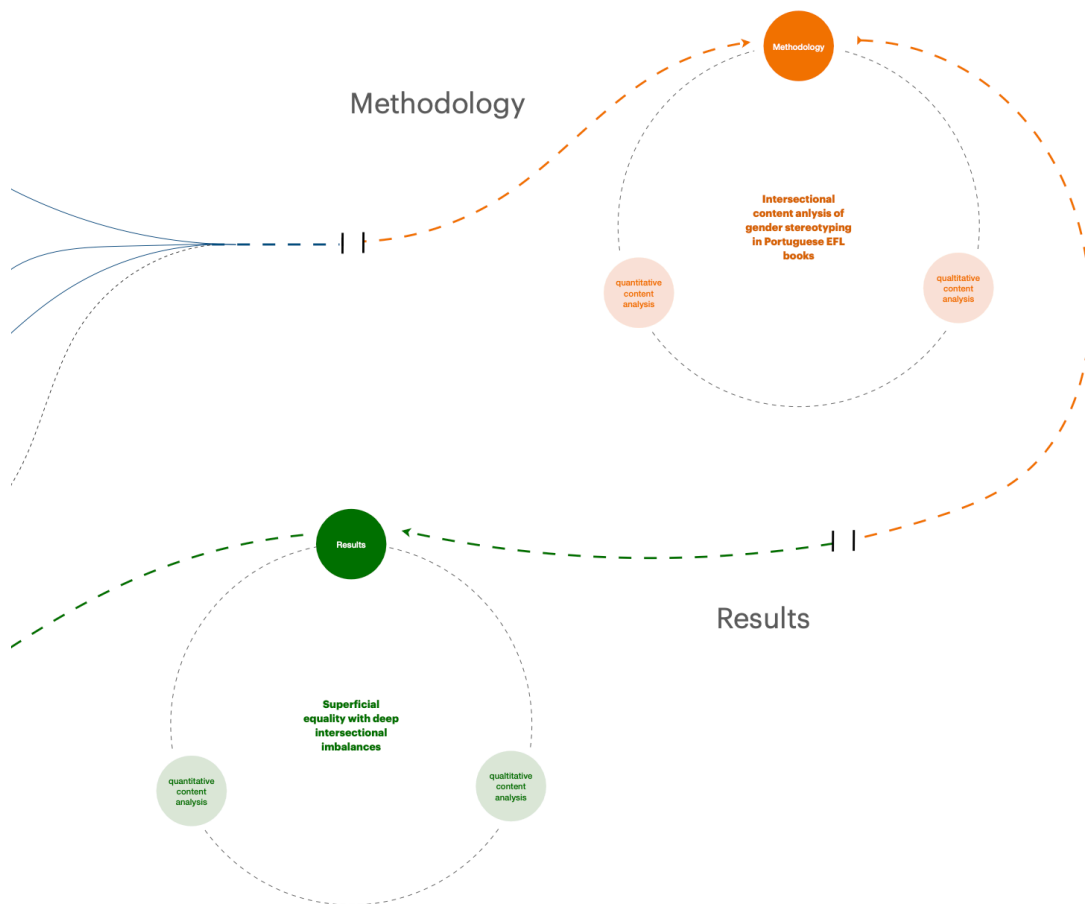
Closely following Rachel Forbes (2018), the answer to the aforementioned objective will be based on three specific research questions: 1) How are male and female characters represented in the coursebooks? 2) To what extent, in image, text and audio media, do representations of female and male character traits reflect gender stereotypes? 3) Which intersectional dimensions are most relevant in the characterisation of the female gender?

Our research aims to contribute to the study of gender analysis in EFL coursebooks, by assessing representations of male and female characters in current literature, based on data collected from three local EFL coursebooks widely used in Portugal (see ‘Methodology, ‘Corpus’).

Chapter ‘Theoretical and Methodological aspects and problems’”, will examine literature relevant to the object of our work. The following one ‘Methodology’ will discuss and justify the use of content analysis as a research strategy; The results will be presented and discussed in ‘Findings and Discussion’. The last chapter ‘Conclusion’, will present a reflection on the implications of the study, possible limitations and recommendations for future research (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1**  
*General epistemological framework*





## Chapter 2

# Theoretical-methodological aspects and problems

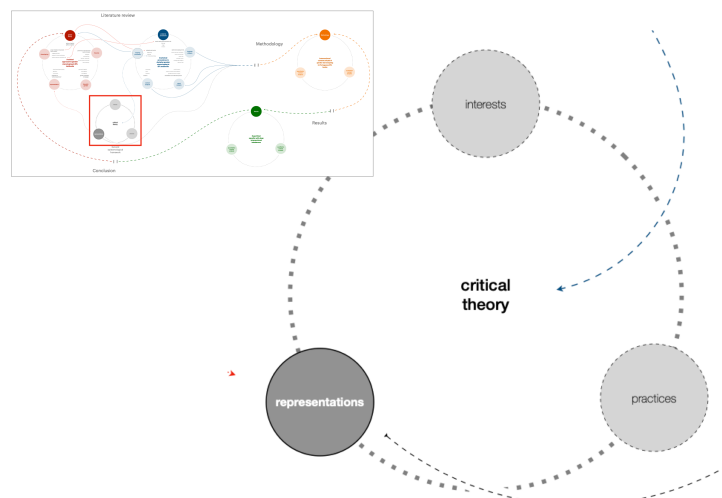
[O]n nous exhorte: « Soyez femmes, restez femmes, devenez femmes. » Tout être humain femelle n'est donc pas nécessairement une femme ; il lui faut participer à cette réalité mystérieuse et menacée qu'est la féminité.

*Simone de Beauvoir, 1949 (p16).*

This title aims to come to terms with the evolution and present-day status of research on representations of male and female characters in EFL teaching materials. To better understand the extent to which it is revealed, the concept of gender and the condition of stereotype will be explored simultaneously. The tradition of investigating this relationship between the issue of gender representation and the construction, conscious or unconscious, of more or less crystallised stereotypes of these representations, falls into three more general types of procedures: linguistic analysis, visual analysis and content analysis. Therefore, in the following titles, we will review some works and some authors whose research work has essentially aimed to facilitate a critical understanding of gender stereotyping in coursebooks. These conceptual and theoretical manoeuvres have been considered in the epistemological domain of 'critical theory', meaning how 'representation', (which is the main focus of the present study) integrates the 'uncrackable' mutual relationship with power interests and practical routines of everyday life (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2**

*Critical study of Representation*



Source: Ribeiro, A. M., Paixão, M. F., Guimarães, S. C. (2024, detail)

## 2.1. Two and more genders

Margaret Mead, Mirra Komarovsky, Viola Klein, Simone de Beauvoir, Ruth Herschberger – five theorists from different areas of knowledge and different regions of the planet, whose work in the post-war years (1945-1960) had in common concerns about the concrete lives of women and a radical rethinking of women's gender roles. We have been granted (Tarrant, 2006) “the vocabulary for understanding how society creates and enforces ideals of femininity and the tools for analysing the political dimensions of sex-role ideology” (p. 346). Although they did not identify themselves as feminists, they preceded and greatly influenced theorists and researchers in the study of sex and gender issues, specifically the understanding of the idea of gender as a socially constructed concept, in a period that is believed to be completely devoid of feminist thought. Feminists adopted the term ‘gender’ in the late 1970s to distinguish between the biological mechanisms and social aspects of masculinity and femininity. Likewise, the concept appears introduced in the ‘mainstream’ currents of Psychology, shortly put (Unger, 1979) as “characteristics and traits socio-culturally considered appropriate to males and females” (p. 1085).

‘Gender’ and ‘sex’ are conceptually different, even though they often replace one another in contexts that are not pertinent, depending, as previously observed, on the strong presence of ‘biologism’ in social science and in more common sense culture, which most requires clarification within the strict conceptual use necessary for an investigation of the kind being undertaken.

‘Sex’ is a physiological concept, rooted in biology, which refers to the simple distinction between physical reproductive attributes, typical of male and female mammals (Butler, 2002; McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Talbot, 2010; Unger, 1979). Even the genital-reproductive biological condition is not universal in the physiological scope, as medical practice has always known (cf. the famous ‘Borghese Hermaphrodite’ statue,<sup>9</sup> widely disseminated in classical antiquity), hybrid organisms that do not fit into binary notions typical of male or female bodies,<sup>10</sup> which also naturally implies the issue of subjective constitution and its social and cultural representation (Brod & Kaufman, 1994). Lindsey (2015) would add “[s]ex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned” (p. 4). Although, this binary division has been criticised for decades, it remains easily (and frequently) reproduced in society. In this sense, this social and narrow dichotomy based on sexual distinction is nothing more than a social construction, and the idea of ‘sex’ must therefore be thought of as a ‘continuum’ between the extremities abstractly defined as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ poles (Oakley, 2016).

Gender, in this same conceptual scope, is understood as a ‘spectrum’, extended (sometimes distended) between the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ paradigms. Masculinity is not reserved for men, nor is femininity attributed only to women, as Marchbank & Letherby (2014) declare (p. 6):

Both male and female bodies can express both masculinity and femininity for, as social construct, other than biological characteristics, gender is not restricted by genes. However, most explanations of gender difference retain focus on gender duality and seek to explore why polar ends of gender continuum make real differences in people’s lives.

New configurations of the concept of gender (Walby, 1990) have emerged in terms of active identity policies: “gendered subjectivity is created everywhere, there is no privileged site, neither early childhood, nor sexuality. Indeed changing gender relations in all sites provides bases for the generation of new norms of femininities and masculinities” (p.104), sometimes incorporating surgical intervention of transformation (Wickman, 2003) resulting in “new identities [...], transsexual and transvestite [...], people defining themselves gender-benders gender-blenders bigender [or], more loosely, transgender” (p. 14), assuming that the body can, freely — since it is part of an induced social construction — possess and performatively practice elements of both paradigms of masculinity and femininity.

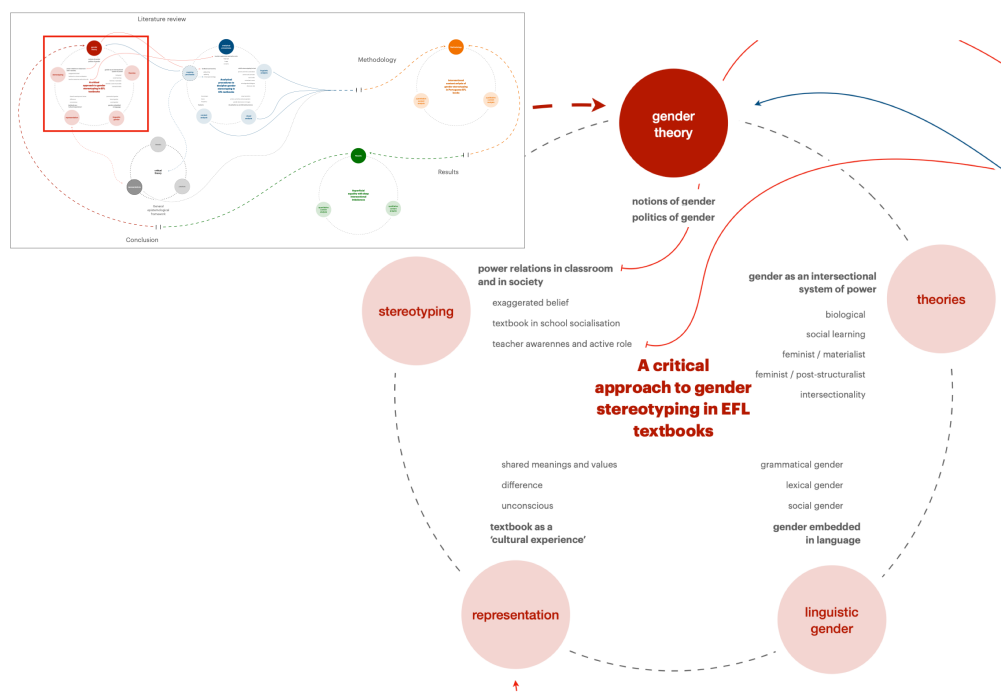
Recent studies (e.g., Brill & Pepper, 2022) have revealed not only that youth embrace and experience changing understandings of gender beyond the gender binary, but also have demonstrated the existence of a generational divide when reasoning about gender “while [...] uncomfortable, [...] these changes are also empowering and liberating for everyone, not just for gender-diverse people” (p.4)

## **2.2. Theoretical context**

Theories that substantiate the rationalisation around gender differences can fall into some broad categories (Forbes, 2018): biological; social learning; post-structuralism/materialist realism; intersectionality; relationship of gender with discourse and language. This study, as will be further deepened, despite taking into account contributions from the broad theoretical spectrum available, will focus especially on the conceptual considerations of language and gender (Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3**

*A critical approach to gender stereotyping*



Source: Ribeiro, A. M., Paixão, M. F., Guimarães, S. C. (2024, detail)

The biological argument, also known as ‘Sex Role Theory’ [SRT],<sup>11</sup> suggests that the identity of social gender roles originates from sexual differentiation. With a naturalistic bent and marked physiological functionalism, gender identity is considered as an induced result of the species instinct, and the social role of ‘man’/‘woman’ predetermined in the direction that is most ‘naturally’ appropriate.<sup>12</sup> A predisposition or potential, as Hesselbart describes (1981), stressing that sex role theories assume a wide range of sex differences in character and social position which reflect common stereotypes. It is inferred that the creative instinct, the reproductive function and the assumption of “expressive roles” in the nuclear family naturally suit the woman; whereas the man, (Parsons & Bales, 1956) competitive and aggressive, “unequivocally designate[s] the husband-father as the ‘instrumental leader’ of the family as a system” (p.13).<sup>13</sup> The binomial representation of masculine and feminine, inherent to such theory, suggests and validates heterosexual identity and practice. Although functionalist sociology does not explicitly advocate that ‘anatomy is destiny’, it underlines the almost universality of patterns associated with men (e.g. economic productivity) as opposed to the caregiving patterns attributed to women. Disagreements arise regarding how much should be attributed to biological factors, as well as their importance.<sup>14</sup>

The categorisation of human beings as male or female does not always adjust to regional realities. ‘Mixed’ gender identities, transgender people who perform specific social roles valued by the community – such as the *xanith* from the Arab state of Oman and the *hijras* in India, described as a ‘third’ gender, the North American *berdache*, the *kathoey* in Thailand and, more currently, transgender people in American popular culture – suggest that the primary category of gender is more than just male and female, suggesting the result of a social construction. Like intersexuality, transgender contradicts the principle of sexual dimorphism and confirms the powerful impact of culture on both gender identity and sexual orientation (Brill & Pepper, 2022; Lindsey, 2015, Marecek et al., 2004). However, even though current research trends have moved away from the strict limits –and their deterministic consequences– of biological theory, its influence continues to manifest in social sciences and, above all, in common sense culture.<sup>15</sup>

The centrality of the biological argument that underpins ‘sex role theory’ is critically assessed by social learning theory [SLT], for ignoring the way in which gender identity can result, in its multiple forms, from conditioning by the social sphere;<sup>16</sup> and for not explaining the diversity of gender identities of individuals who refuse to conform to the terms of the opposition of this dichotomous vision. In the 1960s, psycho-anthropologist Mead (1962) demonstrated how different cultures generate different roles and identity formations in terms of gender:<sup>17</sup>

The differences between individuals within a culture, are almost entirely [...] in conditioning, especially during early childhood, [which] is culturally determined. Standardized personality differences between the sexes are of this order, cultural creations to which each generation, male and female, is trained to conform (p. 280).

The tension between cultural and biological aspects to explain differences in gender roles is manifested in her work: greater focus on the weight of cultural socialisation in *Sex and Temperament*, and greater analysis of biological and psychological explanation in *Male and Female*. The way she treated the interaction between biology and culture was unparalleled for anyone who writes about such a historically complex topic in Western thought (Sanday, 1980), as Mead herself summarises in 1935: “if she shows that different cultures can mold men and women in ways which are opposite to our ideas of innate sex differences, then she can’t also claim that there are sex differences” (p.340). In fact, as demonstrated, gender roles are extremely changeable in all societies. Examining different cultures, over time and space, Mead (1975) would conclude

different meanings/messages arise and are conveyed on what being a woman and a man means (p. 136):

The growing child in any society is confronted then by individuals ... classified by his society into males and females, in terms of their most conspicuous primary sex characters, but who actually show great range and variety both in physique and in behaviour. Because primary sex differences are of such enormous importance, shaping so determinatively the child's experience of the world through its own body and the responses of others to its sex membership, most children take maleness or femaleness as their first identification of themselves.

Starting from this range of findings, SLT conceptually considers 'gender' as a set of behaviours learned from birth, a 'social product' (Aydinoğlu, 2014) resulting from the structuring process of socialisation. Oakley (2016) had described it as being part of one's identity, under continuous construction. The notion of 'gender', and its identity mechanisms, is therefore considered (Talbot, 2010) as a socially constructed concept: "sex is biologically founded whereas gender is learned behavior" (p. 7), or, to use the synthetic version proposed by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in relation to female socialisation, "On ne naît pas femme, on le devient" (p.12).

It is impossible to entirely separate the biological and social influences that are at the heart of the two theoretical proposals described, for the reason that it can rightly be argued that many socialisation messages are themselves biologically directed, (Birke, 2001) giving rise to some content having, distinctly, women and men as differentiated recipients:

Immediately when a baby is born, we allocate it to one sex or the other, on basis of what its genitals look like. We take this allocation very much for granted; so much so, that most people are horrified when mistakes are occasionally — if rarely — made, and a child is allocated to the 'wrong' sex. Culturally, we attach great importance to the existence of two different sexes: a child is brought up as either one or the other, and we expect that. Everyone we meet will be either male or female. But biology is not always as clear-cut as that simple dichotomy would imply (p. 310).

Equivalent criticism (Walby, 1990) to that raised against the 'biologist' theory can also, in the same terms, be directed at SLT which is, itself, limited as it boils down to a

restricted dichotomous range of masculine and feminine qualities, not allowing, in the same way as SRT, to account for the diversity of gender identity mechanisms beyond the fixed poles of masculinity and femininity dominant in society:

The socialization theorists made an effective argument against notions that femininity and masculinity were biologically given attributes. But they were limited to accounts of how people became feminine or masculine, and could not account for the content of these ideas. Further, they were typically unable to deal with the variation in the content of gender identity between classes, ethnic groups, or cultures, or with social change. (p. 103)

On these grounds, one concludes the social approach does not contemplate, nor explains, the different types of resistance to socialisation messages. However, even if one might question the homogeneity or universality of its effects – by subordinating the issue of gender to a social construction and arguing that it is an overly simplified view of gender identity – the influence of elements of socialisation (Mead, 1975) in the embodiment/definition of gender behaviours is undeniable:

But once this identification (sex membership) is made, the growing child begins to compare itself not only in physique, but even more importantly in impulse and interest, with those about it. Are all of its interests those of its own sex? [...] “I am a boy,” but “I love to run soft materials through my fingers; an interest in touch is feminine, and will unsex me.” “I am a girl,” but “My fingers are clumsy, better at handling an axe-handles are for men.” So the child, experiencing itself, is forced to reject such parts of its particular biological inheritance as conflict sharply with the sex stereotype of its culture.(p. 137)

The theoretical debate on the conceptual nature of ‘gender’ and the underlying structure of its subjective formation, received an important contribution from post-structuralist [PS] and realist-materialist [RM] arguments, denouncing the hegemonic nature of the gender dichotomy (Barrett, 1996) “One cannot overlook how masculine hegemony becomes a successful strategy for subordinating women” (p. 140). Much influenced by Foucauldian discourse analysis, an influential study (Connell, 2000) on gender identity and the social mechanisms of its formation and stabilisation, explains that language and discourse create plural contexts of social existence around the masculine and feminine ordering poles, “complexity, ambiguity and fluidity are central

themes in post-structuralist and post-modernist theories of gender. Although [...] not logically necessary consequences of a concern with discourse, in practice they have gone together” (p. 19); in other words, the flexibility and fluidity associated with the conceptual categorisation of gender take priority.

Concepts and categories do not directly and undoubtedly reflect the surrounding world, rather, what is considered to be reality takes shape and meaning from available classification systems. In this sense, language itself constitutes a power-laden representation, incorporating shared and specific meanings to the culture it represents and conveys (Crawford, 1995 apud Marecek et al., 2004). Subsequently, one may declare that concepts and categories associated with gender, sex and sexuality such as ‘gay’, ‘straight’, ‘bisexual’ embody hierarchies of value, prestige, morals and power. As a ‘medium’ between reality and the individual, the linguistic system constitutes a space for negotiating power relations acquiring materiality and agency (an activity with practical, material consequences). If on the one hand language represents the dominant power, resistance, change and contestation of its own discourse lay, as well, embedded in it, via subtleties of message-meaning, irony and humor... As Marecek et al (2004) explains:

When we say that gender or sexuality is socially constructed, we do not mean that it is social rather than biological, learned rather than innate, or the result of environment rather than heredity. Rather, we mean that the assumptions and linguistic constructs that enable people to talk and think about the phenomena are products of social negotiation and are therefore not universal or fixed. (p. 193)

Rejecting the binary approach of previous approaches, Judith Butler (2002) holds the idea of gender as a cultural and historical construction, “a stylized repetition of acts” (p. 179), constantly changing according to the social space; an essentially (ibid, 2011) “performative’ [...] ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (p. xv). Authors closer to materialist realism (Connell, 2000), are critical of this reasoning arguing performative excess would remove visibility to ‘objective’ gender inequality in various societal domains.

Materialism alongside poststructuralism emphasises the idea that social organisations reflect and reproduce historical and social relationships. Class relations and patriarchy reinforce men's interests and crystallise social representation which validates and reproduces them. Rowbotham (1973) would declare:

We encounter ourselves in men's culture as 'by the way' and peripheral. According to all reflections we are not really there. This puzzles us and means it is harder for us to begin to experience our own identity as a group. ... we are the negative to their positive. We are oppressed by an overwhelming sense of not being there (p. 35).

Realist-materialist proposals positioned in the long Marxist tradition of social sciences,<sup>18</sup> associate the wide gender identity range to the complex interconnected network of women's economic and material subordination, prime subject of their critical focus (Barrett, 1986; Hartmann, 1979; Mitchell, 1984; Rowbotham, 1973). The association of sexuality and domesticity to historical production/exploitation systems, capitalism and female oppression are explored. It is argued these systems validate and sustain masculine interests, further increasing, even situations of sexism in an unhealthy way (Zaretsky, 1988) caused by the separation between salaried and household work. Barrett (1986) would detail at this regard:

The oppression of women under capitalism is grounded in a set of relations between several elements...the economic organization of households and its accompanying familial ideology, the division of labour and relations of production, the educational system and the operations of the state. Yet, the continuance and the entrenched nature of this oppression cannot be understood without a consideration of the cultural processes in which men and women are represented differently - created and recreated as gendered human subjects. Nor can it be understood without an analysis of sexuality and gender identity, and the complex question of the relationship between sexuality and biological reproduction as it affects both women and men (p. 41).

The main focus is to identify how the institutions of society as a whole reinforce and reproduce the division of labour between men and women in the various realms of social and productive life. According to Sylvia Walby (1991):

Marxism feminist analysis [consider] gender inequality to derive from capitalism, and not to be constituted as an independent system of patriarchy. Men's domination over women is a by-product of capital's domination over labour. Class relations and the economic exploitation of one class by another are the

central features of social structure, and these determine the nature of gender relations (p. 3).

For some materialist authors, the concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine' are not so important in themselves as opposite identity poles, but rather a 'relational' expression. Gender is revealed and represented as the inner tension of the relationship between a dominant, exploitative patriarchy of an oppressed femininity, whose workforce is constantly underestimated. In 1950, Holter (in Connell, 2000) had written "Industrial capitalism itself 'engendered' its opposite, world of domesticity as against world of wage work, and women as others of men. The 'one' of wage labour is work, and the one doing it is a he" (p. 21). Thus, clearly far from the biological argument, but also presenting signs of universality, the materialist-realist approach to the concept of gender highlights social organisation analysis which reflects the historical and socially reproduced relationship<sup>19</sup> opposing 'visible public wage working man' to 'semi-hidden private caring domestic woman'.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, as Walby (1990) critically points out, Marxist feminism narrowly focuses on capitalism, " [...] unable to deal with gender inequality in pre-and post-capitalist societies [...] incorrectly reduces gender inequality to capitalism, rather than recognising the independence of the gender dynamic (p.4).

### **2.2.1. Intersections**

Drawing both on the recognition of the complexity of human experiences and identities in their multiple dimensions as well as on the need for a more socially comprehensive understanding, the intersectional perspective has been assuming an increasingly relevant position, influencing a variety of studies within the social sciences (sociology, representations in the media, public policy) particularly, in gender studies.

Understanding gender discrimination through this lens was firstly broadened by Crenshaw's notion of 'intersectionality' (1989) which recognised the complex interconnectedness of deeper mechanisms of gender discrimination. Later on, she (1991) would clarify that this position suggests that gender cannot be considered in isolation, without considering other subjectivity categories,<sup>21</sup> also themselves object of unequal recognition within the process of socialisation and identity constitution:

Experiences of women of color are the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism and how these tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both (p. 1244).

In this sense, gender identity need be actively segmented taking into account multiple variables, such as age, ethnicity, class..., as Shields (2008) observes “social identities which serve as organising features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another” (p. 302), all of which are interrelated and, in the inseparable group they form, aggravating situations of discrimination. Thus, mutually constituting each other, gender identity assumes its meaning as a category connected to another category, in a dynamic process of identity construction practice; that is, the categories by which an individual recognises oneself as member of a group while the personal traits associated become ‘evident or “basic” through the lens of another category(ies).<sup>22</sup>

The recognition that the idea of gender intersects with other social identities, might be envisaged as a way to dismantle or flatten the dichotomy of the male-female binomial. This deconstruction has occurred in different ways, some of which have already been debated in the present study, through the acceptance of the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities, and via the more recent assumption of the many different ways of ‘doing’ and experiencing gender, which have been academically demonstrated in gender studies.

According to G. Pratt and M. Kraft (2014), this is possible through two approaches. On the one hand, “To emphasize the way intersectionality creates interlocking matrices of oppression”(p.94),<sup>23</sup> situations of ‘racialisation’, ‘gender attribution’ and ‘sexualisation’ interrelate, mutually reinforcing situations of marginalisation or privilege;<sup>24</sup> ‘non-white’ women and men experience gender identity differently, and ignoring such differences or generalising the experiences of white people, accepted as the norm, can contribute to the maintenance of race and ‘first world’ privileges (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Lindsey, 2015; Mohanty, 2003). Upon concluding that black women were excluded from both feminist and anti-racist discussions, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), as previously mentioned, considered an intersectional broader approach since “both feminist theory and antiracist politics have been organised, in part, around the equation of racism with what happens to the Black middle-class or to Black men, and the equation of sexism with what happens to white women” (p. 152).<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Valentine (2007) stresses the need “to reveal the complexity and fluidity of identities, how they are made and unmade in everyday lives” (p. 18): from the incorporation of different femininities and identities one may conclude that performative diversity does not result from a intention but an identity interaction, potentially causing anxiety and marginalisation.<sup>26</sup>

There is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or how others interact with us. As a result, one may infer from an academic standpoint, such perspective (Shields, 2008) arises from this same need to adequately understand how we live multiple identities:

Identities are fluid in that they can change over time; at the same time, however, they are experienced as stable, giving the self a sense of continuity across time and location. Some identity categories, perhaps most notably gender, are found in all historical periods and cultures, though how and to whom the identity category applies can vary as do the social meanings attached to the category.(p. 304)

Overall, deconstructing the concept of gender takes us further than just questioning this primary category from new perspectives; it is a process that deeply interferes or disturbs a central dichotomy that structures our subjectivity, our deepest and most comprehensive patterns of thought.

### *Ethnicity*

Ignoring ethnic diversity when discussing gender discrimination and stereotype on EFL learning context, might contribute to teacher's reinforcement or perpetuation of unfair identity and social representations in schools and in society as a whole.

*(R'boul, 2024)*

At the present time social theories have been reflecting this trend by examining intersecting experiences of oppressions. Alexander and Mohanty's (2013) experiences of the multiple sites of racism have led them to recognise the need to "understand the local as well as the global manifestations of power" (p.xiv). In Europe back in 1997 already Mirza grasps female enduring multiple "sites of struggle: migration, work, white feminist theory, and now identity and difference"(p.21). Researchers expressed (hooks, 1989) the need to include in academic works perspectives of realities defined by other people because "writing about cultures or experiences of ethnic groups different from one's own becomes most political when the issue is who will be regarded as the 'authoritative' voice" (p. 44-5). Following the same point of view, using and furthering an interpretive framework on ground-breaking works which explored interconnections among systems of oppression, Collins (2022) examined how oppression affects Black women's lives detailing its different dimensions. In a world she considers divided and dominated by distinctions of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, religion, and citizenship, black women ought to be perceived as "embodying universal issues of equity, fairness, and humanity" (p. xxiv). Worldwide women from oppressed groups currently strive to understand new forms of injustice, she would declare further on "In a transnational, postcolonial context, women within new and often Black-run nation-states in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia struggle with new [identity] meanings" (p.13).

As regards education, intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how power dynamics uniquely affect the connection of various social identities, which

contributes to discovering the essence of how social identities become culturally constructed. (Tefera et al., 2018). Recent research (R'boul & Saidi, 2023; Padilla & Vana, 2024) on the matter, addressing particularly the southern hemisphere, has demonstrated frequent inequalities and intercultural racism to be mostly reinforced through EFL coursebooks and teaching practices, which often centre White intercultural racial realities in cross-cultural or intercultural education.

Therefore, intersectional perspective has significant implications for the study of gender in EFL coursebooks, as it offers a richer conceptual framework for understanding not only the representation of gender but also how it relates with other characteristics. Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) had already emphasised “sexual representations are developed in a fine and complex way thanks to the combination of the particularities of each of the characters and in their interactions” (p. 18). It facilitates the deconstruction of dominant narratives, challenging stereotypes and reductive representations of the individual normally based on binary categorisations and structures of oppression and power as described in the 2023 conference on ‘Human Rights and the role of Intersectionality’. As Colm O’Cinneide (2022) puts it:

Intersectionality is an essential tool for understanding the multiple dimensions of discrimination, including (a) its individual, structural, institutional, and historical dimensions as well as (b) its ‘cross-ground’ dimensions (race, gender, disability and so on). Incorporating intersectional perspectives into anti-discrimination law and policy makes sense – even if it some imagination may be required to do this effectively.

Overall, the traditional siloed approach to equality legislation and policies is being questioned by encouraging a shift towards a multidimensional understanding of discrimination issues in order to adopt the specific measures necessary to erase it.<sup>27</sup> We would like to be able to add to our study the deepening of intersectionality relationships, thus expanding its scope of central analysis: gender representations.

A study (Facciani et al., 2015) on Modern Age American comic books currently becoming mainstream as it includes comics, movies, TV shows, games, trading cards, toys, content analysis was applied focusing on gender, race, and class. It revealed that white males dominated as overall characters, main characters, and aggressors, while black characters were more likely to be portrayed as having lower socioeconomic status. Black characters were significantly underrepresented compared to their white counterparts, highlighting a broader issue of underrepresentation of women, especially women of color. Similarly, Romero (2020) applied intersectional lens in conjunction with a qualitative content analysis demonstrating the significance behind the

multidimensional representation of strong, powerful women from diverse backgrounds pertaining to racial/ethnic, LGBTQ+, and disabled communities.

Regarding EFL classes as intercultural and racialised spaces (Moon & Holling, 2015) concerns about race(ing) must be thought through its intersection with interculturality as the experiences of the dominant are often centred. Teachers' critical view on how whiteness may influence their perceptions, along with awareness of how to deconstruct intercultural racism and racial inequalities in language classroom, are necessary. Therefore, it is essential to critically analyse the situated knowledge embedded in foreign language coursebooks in order to perceive/discover whether understandings of the complexity of crossing identities and issues are conveyed to future and diverse generations of students (R'boul & Saidi, 2024).

## *Age*

“The sense of ‘decline’ underpinning the corporeality of aging is different from the ‘corporealities’ of race or gender [...] The ‘look’ of agedness can perhaps be better considered akin to the way that disability theorists have identified the role of ‘able-bodied-ness’ in marginalising non-standardised bodies; in how society has long been organised by such bodily classification and in how the interests of the able-bodied majority are followed by”.

*Abberley, 1987 apud Gilleard 2022*

Having extended on gender and ethnicity intersectional identity, our study will now focus on the overlapping gender and age counterpart as grounds for multiple situations of discrimination.

The concept of age identity refers to the inner experience of a person's age and ageing process, and is, along with gender, another primary<sup>28</sup> identity category (Westerhof, 2009); “the outcome of the processes through which one identifies with or distances oneself from different aspects of the aging process” (p.10).

Firstly tagged by Robert Butler (1969) “age-discrimination or age-ism [describes] prejudice by one age group toward other age groups”(p.243). Despite the long history of literature on the theme, (Allan & Johnson, 2009; Allan et al., 2014; Arnold-Cathalifaud et al., 2008; Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; Butler, 1969; Dodson & Hause, 1981; Emerson et al., 2013) not many studies have examined discrimination based on age directed towards older adults with diverse racial and gender identities. In addition, the focus has predominantly been on men rather than women, which would likely reveal, the results from the double marginalisation of older women based on age and gender” (Lemish & Muhlbauer, 2012; Loy-Ashe et al., 2024; Prieler, 2020).

One might “generalise” that in western countries the concept of elderhood has currently been redefined: the meaning of growing older, the transforming way medicine approaches the process, the reimagination of life beyond retirement have made it possible (Aronson, 2019). Back in 1969, already Butler would anticipate Ageism to be

the greatest issue of the forthcoming years, the increase of electorate over 65 and the upcoming of 'Senior Power' as he well put it, "We don't all grow white or black, but we all grow old" (p.246). Also, in 2022, the World Health Organisation [WHO] would emphasise this turned out all the more important as ageing represents an experience that everyone is expected to undergo and therefore should be regarded as the most universal of human experiences.

According to the same source, the population ageing rate has been increasing much faster than in the past, Despite the significance of these facts and the notorious percentage of elderly worldwide (~15% in 2015) expected to reach 22% by 2050 (WHO, 2022), research has shown they are nearly invisible (Prieler, 2020). Older individuals get frequently portrayed in a negative light, often seen as obstructing opportunities for younger generations and other marginalised groups (Martin & North, 2022). Ageist attitudes and behaviours are widespread (Phibbs & Hooker, 2018) but one should see it distinctively from other forms of prejudice we have so far analysed along the present work.

Ageism manifests shaped by prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against older people; like disability, it is primarily socially constructed (Butler, 1975), as are female body ideals that embrace youth. Older female, particularly, face biased perceptions and greater scrutiny regarding a double standard of ageing: looks and ability. They are more likely, and even expected, to try to slow the process, as keeping a youthful appearance greatly associates to the perception of successful ageing. (Hofmeier et al., 2017). Regarding elderly representations in the Media (advertising, TV, magazines...) in particular, Edström (2018) demonstrated masculine and feminine are often depicted differently, reflecting broader societal gender biases conveying "ideas of gender, desires, and prescribed styles of performances,[being]... in this sense normative and prescriptive"(p.78). More recently, Liddy (2023) also focused on the 'double jeopardy' of gender and age intersection examining its influence on women in the screen industry.

In a series of 20 books on Sociology and Social Gerontology, it was found (Kalab, 1985) that individuals over 65 were frequently labeled as "old people" and "elderly"; likewise a descriptive study using content analysis and quantification 50 social work texts out of 700 books tackled very little (only 3%) the ageing topic (Kramer et al., 2003). Another content analysis research of 27 different books on marriage and family found that elderly individuals although engaged in varied activities were presented apart from the rest of the household and family events (Stolley and Hill, 1996).

Despite occasionally appearing as benevolent, ageism reveals mostly on hostile attitudes, resulting in neglect, abandonment and abuse of old people (Cary et al., 2017). Young children were found (Bellingtier et al., 2024; Kite et al. 2005) to hold negative perceptions of the elderly from quite early, with negative consequences both for the

latter, as well as for the children themselves when they reach older age. Believed to be increasing in positivity, age stereotypes have instead become more negative suggesting (Levy, 2017) the need to create more opportunities for intergenerational contact in order to decrease the 'spatial' institutional and cultural gap of older from younger individuals. Accordingly, in this regard, (Garuma et al., 2020) coursebooks are considered "of critical value in ageing education [in order to] equip children with positive knowledge about (and positive attitudes towards) aging" (p 632). As Kite et al. (2005) sum up; "it is time to get aside the question of whether ageism exists and continue to explore when and where the consequences are most severe"(p.259).

Considering the upbringing of primary, preparatory and high-school pupils, along with the major socialisation role of coursebooks, the representation of male and female older individuals plays a significant part. A relevant comprehensive study of 800 children and adult fiction books, (Dodson & Hause, 1981) demonstrated 'senior citizen' stereotyping was still prevalent, often depicted as frail, passive, unhealthy, and consistently described as 'sad', 'worthless', 'poor'. In addition, they are usually underrepresented in coursebooks, and when they are included, they are frequently depicted in stereotypical roles such as grandparents, relatives or retirees.

Age biases were also demonstrated in a study examining 44 coursebooks used in Taiwanese schools (Huang, 2011) whose results highlighted that older people were not only underrepresented but also depicted in a limited range of contexts. When older individuals appeared, they were often portrayed in passive roles, lacking agency and vitality.

Gans et al (2023) investigated age differences in young adults' perceptions of ageist behaviours directed at older targets with intersecting ethnic (black/white) and gender identities and concluded old white men were more targeted with hostile ageist behaviour. The results might most likely be related to current increase in social justice advocacy supporting anti-racism and anti-sexism (Martin & North, 2022) which might have prompted young adults to perceive the least marginalised group (i.e., old white men) to be the most acceptable targets of hostile ageist behaviour compared to more marginalised groups (i.e., black older adults and women).

Frequent portrayal of older men as authoritative figures playing parts that emphasise experience and wisdom, as opposed to older women depicted in household or caregiving roles (Allen & Mendick, 2016) reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. Similarly, evidence of older female underrepresentation (39% against 56% male), aggravated by the limited to family-related activities women engaged in was revealed, whereas older male were shown in a wider variety of professional and public roles (Huang, 2011). Likewise Kaya et al (2014) on a 12-coursebook-examination found "an insubstantial amount of visuals, texts, and visuals & texts about aging education and elderly people" failing to represent an ever increasing group of population. Yet the

qualitative analysis of the visuals significantly depicted old men as leaders which might be interpreted as cultivating positive perceptions and attitudes towards ageing and the elderly. Unfortunately, from a gender basis perspective, it became apparent that elderly male were overrepresented, the same is to say that “not only are elderly women subjected to ageism but also become the objects of negative stereotypes [...] usually dressed in a kind of work uniform, covered hair” (p. 3035) performing menial tasks or engaged in childcare (for more see Couper & Pratt, 1999; Stuart-Hamilton & Mahoney, 2003).

Conversely, a few research exceptions to what Arnold-Cathalifaud et al.(2008) configures as a “gerontophobic social atmosphere” (p.121) with findings reporting overall positive or at least neutral attitudes (Femia et al., 2008; Hughes et al., 2008) revealed representations of older characters in coursebooks in more positive and active parts, perceived as kind, affectionate and cooperative (Eftekhari et al; 2022; Garuma et al., 2020).

The underrepresentation and stereotypical portrayal of older adults in coursebooks have significant implications as they contribute to the perpetuation of ageist attitudes, influence young people's perceptions of aging, and impact the self-esteem and identity of older individuals. Ageing process perception significantly impacts one’s psychological development, physical health, and even longevity. Nonetheless, the denial of ageing can unintentionally reinforce societal beliefs that view old age as a period of decline. It is therefore important to construct identities of old age that are positive in and of themselves (Loy-Ashe et al., 2024).

During the current century, Gerontology experts and educators should be ready to face the challenges (Anderson, 1999) of responding to the needs of “employers and health care providers, [and] of the general public, institutions of higher education will be faced with both new and old challenges, including educating the general public, and recruiting and training students”(p.572).

### *Ability*

Both the underrepresentation of disability and the depiction of disability predominantly from one perspective prevent students from learning about people with disabilities and the discrimination that affects them

*Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023*

The concept of disability<sup>29</sup> appears closely associated to age as it is substantial among long-living individuals, often increasing when growing old (Park-Lee et al., 2012). Both are rarely viewed as a positive way to relate to the world. Gender/disability is the last interesectional identity under analysis, notwithstanding being not the least important. Next, we will briefly examine the complex interplay between these two axes of identity.

Drawing upon Gillborn, (2015) dis/ability is conceptualised as a “socially constructed categor[y] that actively re/make[s] oppression and inequality”(p.280) often overlooked as a marginalised identity and underexplored as an aspect of classroom/school diversity. Defined as “the devaluation of disability”, ableism is described (Hehir, 2002) as the outcome of:

societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids. (p.3)

Millions of students worldwide have disabilities and nowadays most receive their education in mainstream education setting (in Portuguese Schooling System since the 80s), sharing classrooms with typically developing peers. Similar to other diverse students, they may not find their identities reflected in classroom materials and coursebooks which frequently reveal ableist perspectives (Deckman et al., 2020; Hayden & Prince, 2024). This sort of discrimination against people with disabilities leads to compounded disadvantages, impacting students’ access to resources, representation in curricula, and overall educational outcomes (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023).

An innovative empirical study (Braun et al., 2021) demonstrated that “classroom interaction is framed by ableist norms pervasive throughout society, such as the performance expectations associated with the ability to see, which make recognition among equals, if not impossible, at least decidedly more difficult” (p.72), leading to disabled students being ‘assessed’ by participation in activities in the same way as their non disabled peers. Drawing on key referenced works, Hehir (2002) sheds light on ableist practices by examining the historical and research contexts related to deaf, blind or visually impaired students, as well as individuals with learning disabilities. He argues that “the widespread presence of ableist assumptions in the education of children with disabilities not only reinforces existing biases against disability but may also contribute significantly to lower levels of educational achievement and employment” (p 15).

Theorising disability through a critical, intersectional lens that acknowledges the influence of power dynamics and systemic inequalities, Erevelles (2011) argues for the necessity of an inclusive approach that not only addresses the specific needs of disabled individuals but also challenges broader societal structures that perpetuate exclusion and oppression. By exploring disabled feminine multiple marginalisation, she holds they become invisible and stereotyped in both disability and gender contexts “located perilously at the interstices of race, class, gender, and disability, [they] are constituted

as noncitizens and (no)bodies by the very social institutions (legal, educational, and rehabilitational) that are designed to protect, nurture, and empower them (p.22). Further, she believes these social organisations perpetuate traditional gender roles while also failing to accommodate disabled students' specific needs thereby reinforcing ableist and sexist ideologies.

Studies on representation of disabled individuals have shown that coursebooks and educational materials rarely feature disabled characters, particularly women, and when they do, it is often confined to stereotypes or through a medical model, which emphasises limitations (Connor et al., 2008; Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023). This lack of positive representation might impact the self-esteem and identity formation of disabled students, especially girls, who struggle with societal expectations regarding both gender and ability (Deckman et al., 2018). More recent findings (Deckman et al., 2020; Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023) suggest greater dis/ability representation in coursebooks forwarding current inclusion trends. Nevertheless, it remains evident they address normatively-abled readers versus dis/abled mostly referred to as different. Furthermore, "mainstream or normative markers are provided as evidence of success and those with dis/abilities who have been successful are positioned as overcoming their limitations" (p.2).

Overall, institutional policies and practices in education have reflected and perpetuated ableism and gender discrimination. For example, standard testing and rigid curricular structures can disadvantage students with disabilities, who may require different forms of assessment and instruction (Hehir, 2002). Moreover, girls with disabilities are less likely to receive the same level of support and encouragement as their male counterparts, further limiting their educational and career opportunities (Shah, 2007), as might be understood: "some [disabled girls] perceived the lack of support [by mainstream education] was a significant problem ...[feeling] restricted from pursuing their own aspirations [and] and ambition to work" (p. 434).

### *Intersectional approach is essential for education researchers*

Intersectionality is essential for education researchers; requiring them to incorporate multiple identity and social dimensions into their work, move beyond one-dimensional analyses to explore the gaps and interactions between categories, will enhance their understanding of structural inequalities (Gillborn, 2015; Padilla & Vana, 2024). In addition, as Harris & Leonardo (2018) point out, engaging with the concept of intersectionality reminds scholars and activists to "be humble and to look for who is missing in the room" (p. 20).

The perspective of intersectionality is already partially foreseen in European jurisprudence. Nevertheless, there continues to be resistance from the legislative and criminal system, justifying difficulties in fair application.<sup>30</sup> Also, a theoretical critique

(Tefera et al., 2018) addressed to intersectionality is that while seeking to provide a comprehensive understanding of how various social categories interact, there is a risk that focusing on too many intersecting factors simultaneously dilutes the impact of each factor. This can hinder addressing specific issues or formulate targeted interventions, as the unique influence of each dimension might be overshadowed by the broader analysis. Prieler (2020) points out that besides the few studies on several dimensions “(an example is Rivadeneyra (2011) who analysed gender, race, and age) generally, quantitative studies have faced problems using intersectional analysis examining several dimensions at the same time since this approach has led to very small sample sizes (e.g., older male black individuals versus older female black individuals), which made statistical analysis less powerful. Thus, in such instances, qualitative analysis methods might be more appropriate” (p.85).

Beyond the hitherto considered variety of theoretical approaches focussing on the concept of gender and the process of identity formation, lays the consensus around the significance assigned to this scope of investigation: i) the subjective definition of social individuals; ii) the need for further research on gender issues, with special emphasis on its inner discrimination and inequality systems. As Brod and Kaufman (1994) declared: “gender is a system of power and not just a set of stereotypes, or observable differences between women and men”(p.144). Such a system of power implies a tension between groups - the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1975) - not static or absolute, but in mutual and mutually conditioned conflict in which the oppressed group actively participates in its own subordination, actively resisting it.

The multiple individual identities and the embodiment of a complex network of relations of power and powerlessness, consequence of the interaction of “sex, race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, intellectual and physical skills and pure chance” make gender issues a process nothing but linear. At this regard, Crenshaw (1991) would accordingly underline that “implicit in certain strands of and racial liberation movements is the view that the power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction” (p. 1242).

Currently, the idea that intersecting relationships create and exist as space of oppression but also its opposite is consensual. It may facilitate or frustrate access to benefits, status and opportunities to different intersections. Thus, depending on our “social location”, being privileged is more than avoiding disadvantages or not suffering oppression, it is a room/means of opportunities and empowerment.

Even though recognising the hegemonic ideal of gender and the power associated with it as a social reality, we are driven to deal with pressures and possibilities not seldom mutually conflicting. Hence, starting from the recognition of both centrality of male power and privilege, there is a need to challenge it. Brod and Kaufman (1994)

would further explain “as men [...] not only in support of feminism, but [as]recognition that the social and personal construction of this power is the source of the malaise, confusion, and alienation felt by men in our era as well as an important source of homophobia” (p. 157).<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, understood as a ‘system of power’, the concept of gender and the phenomenon of its subjective constitution, enhances the need and significance of exploring issues of imbalance, in order to correct potential issues of injustice and discrimination (Walby, 2016). Justifying situations of gender inequality and discrimination as mere consequence of structures of patriarchy and capitalist economic systems would be oversimplified, particularly considering there are other patriarchal structures, such as sexuality and violence. Years before, when accounting for gender subjectivity, she (1990) detailed drawing upon

[...] the theoretical tools of discourse analysis, strengthened with a firmer account of patriarchal power, tempered with a more thorough interconnection with economic relations both in the household and paid work, with the state, violence and sexuality (p. 104).

More recently, we have observed movements of growing support to include intersectional forms of discrimination within the legal framework. Academics and activists agree that the currently envisaged focus based on a ‘single-axis’ identity category proves to be ineffective and inadequate, criticising too ‘formal’ approaches to solving the problems of discrimination and social inequality with a focus on the rationale for less favourable treatment rather than on its substantive impact. Systems of privilege and oppression are overlapping, that’s why developing students’ understanding of themselves either as privileged or as discriminated individuals (R’boul & Saidi, 2024) requires nuance with a major focus on a broader perspective.

It is within the scope of a comprehensive research program and with these ‘critical’ interests in mind that we wish to include this study on gender representation in EFL coursebooks in Portugal. The analysis of gender biased representations deepened by an intersectional approach to such materials will hopefully provide more accurate understandings of the existing framework and may also — and this is explicitly a critical objective of the research — point to new/meaningful perspectives to the problem of gender imbalance, as well as possible ways it might be addressed in the future, abiding to Unesco’s guidelines (2014):

All people engaged in educational action must have adequate teaching materials and resources at their disposal. In this connection, it is necessary to make the

necessary revisions to coursebooks to remove negative stereotypes and distorted views of 'the other'.(p. 33)

Like Mollo-Bouvier & Pozo Medina (1991) we too argue that EFL coursebooks represent powerful vehicles of relay, “part of the cultural capital of a society at the same time [...] responsible for reporting on it, disseminating it, transmitting it” (p. 12) which, used by educational and governmental institutions, may reinforce conventions, sometimes strongly biased, uneven gender identity, unfair men and women labour division. Similarly Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) wrote “[t]hrough the discourses they convey but also through a staging of daily life of which they offer an expression, they contribute to the ‘sustained sorting process’ which leads to a sexual social division of identities, roles, statuses” (p. 16).

The context of the analysis of national EFL coursebooks for the 4th, 6th and 9th grades, draws on particular significance, due to the fact that, being validated by the ministry, and ratified by schools and community, they express the ‘democratic’ representation of Portuguese society on the topic of gender identity regarded as the most appropriate for citizenship education of its youngest members.<sup>32</sup>

Concerning the promotion of educational policies and practices that respect human rights on the whole and gender equality in particular and the subsequent quality of coursebooks production, the UN highlights the following as fundamental: the quality, availability and inclusion of Human Rights (Unesco, 2005), simultaneously defending:

an approach grounded in the core concepts of peace, human rights and sustainability [...] support of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, [...] facilitate a process that enables learners to take charge of their lives, make substantial and meaningful contributions to their communities, participate in creating cultures of peace, and become knowledgeable citizens of the world (p. 1).

After reviewing some approaches that, within social theory, have produced a range of significant concepts in the field of problematising the concept of gender and characterising the underlying structures of its identity formation — ‘sex role theory’, ‘social learning theory’, post-structuralism, realism-materialism and intersectionality — in the following title we will especially explore the mutually constitutive relationships of gender identity and its representation within the scope of language.

### 2.2.2. Gender and language

#### *Grammatical gender*

Gender designates a grammatical category that, although absent in nouns in English, does not prevent the idea of 'gender' from being expressed. Categories such as lexical and social gender can also convey gendered messages. The biological distinction based on 'natural gender' (Yule, 2017) between "reference to female entities (she/her), male entities (he, his) and things or creatures, when the sex is unknown or irrelevant (it, its)" (p. 250) of the English language is different from the one used in languages with 'grammatical gender' based on masculine and feminine nouns not 'linked to' gender. These systems are called 'Gender Languages' because they classify 'the name' according to gender, requiring the agreement of articles, adjectives or other markers. In any case, although the English language does not employ the category of grammatical gender, lexical gender is present and becomes visible in its referents; the pronouns (he, she, it, his, her, its). Hellinger and Bußmann (2015) refer to personal pronouns and nouns such as 'mother', 'father', 'sister', 'son' as lexically denoting semantic properties of 'masculinity'-'femininity', which they call 'lexical gender', classified as well as 'gender-specific', as opposed to names such as 'citizen', 'individual', considered 'gender-indefinite' or 'gender-neutral' (p. 7).<sup>33</sup>

The Portuguese language is characterised by the almost ubiquity of the gender category to classify nouns, pronouns and adjectives.<sup>34</sup> However, despite being frequent, the unchanging noun lexical "fairness" disappears when preceded by mandatory markers which identify the gender of the referent. This 'referential gender', is made possible due to the context in which the name appears: 'o' [masculine 'the'] / 'a' [feminine 'the'] *jovem* ['youngster'] | 'um' [masculine 'a'] / 'uma' [feminine 'a'] *estudante* ['student'] (Endruschat, 2015).

The debate surrounding the almost universal use of 'generic masculine', to refer to masculine and feminine, as well as the traditional androcentric adoption of the generic 'he' or 'him(self)', for cases in which there is no distinct gender reference, has been the subject of wide controversy, as it appears to be sexist in linguistic terms, with frequent suggestions being made that it should be replaced (in many cases already adopted) by the plural 'they'. In fact, in languages with grammatical gender such as French, German or Portuguese, grammatically feminine personal nouns tend to be specific to the female sex, while masculine nouns have a traditionally broader lexical and referential potential.<sup>35</sup> In any case, the favouring of masculine expressions as norm (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2015) reflects "an underlying gender belief system, which in turn creates expectations about appropriate female and male behavior" (p. 10) results in the invisibility of the feminine reflecting asymmetries and a system based on gender differentiation.

In this sense, the debate around language and gender has focused especially on the categories of noun and pronoun as they represent an essential and culturally significant field: they are used to communicate about the self and the other, identify the individual or group, transmit attitudes and representations of social roles and occupational activities. In psychological terms, it can condition the construction of identity in a more or less positive way: repeatedly derogatory nominalisation of someone can cause feelings of inferiority or irritation. As gender is a ‘first’ identity category, it is essential to broaden the understanding of the way it is negotiated and constituted through the linguistic structures that make it up.

Gendered languages personify even inanimate objects with a specific male or female gender, and such personification unconsciously reinforces attitudes about gender (Boroditsky & Schmidt, 2000; Jakobson, 1959 apud DeFranza et al., 2020) as in the following example:

[I]n languages where the sun is given a male gender (e.g., French and Spanish), it is perceived to be more powerful and courageous but when it is given a female gender (e.g., German), it is considered warm and nurturing (p. 7).

After a brief consideration of gender in language and the importance of studying its main constituents, noun and pronoun, we will focus our attention on the expression of gender in lexical and social terms and its relationship with the cultural, political and social structures that determine relations between men and women in the community. The SGC (2018) defines as gender-sensitive, the language which “treats women and men equally, without perpetuating stereotypical perceptions of each person’s gender roles”(p. 7).

Languages that present gender as a grammatical category use it in the classification of nouns (Yule, 2017). This kind of categorisation is often significant as it relates to biological sex (as we saw in the previous point). The implications of such assignment is relevant, particularly considering some research (Boroditsky et al., 2003; DeFranza et al., 2020) that believes that our perceptions are influenced by gender.

Boroditsky and his colleagues (2003) stress “English speakers never need to worry about grammatical gender agreement between the verb and the subject of a sentence. By contrast Russian speakers do [...] so their thinking for speaking is necessarily different” (p. 62). The significance of this fact is supported by Whorf’s argument (1956) that language decisively influences the cognition and conceptualisation of reality, in the sense that the way we understand the world is closely linked to language systems: “we dissect nature along lines laid by our own language. [...] the world is presented as a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds— and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.”(p. 272). Impressed by the

enormous linguistic diversity, he then describes how language shapes thought and perception: categories and properties of different linguistic systems produce distinct understandings, analyses and actions in the world.<sup>36</sup> Thus, as languages differ, their speakers and users necessarily understand reality and act differently in objectively similar situations. Moreover, the absolute division of language constituents into linguistic groups, as they translate their own grammatical and logical properties (for example name/verb in English) translates a bipolar division of nature that does not reflect such quality in its essence.

Although Whorf (1956) does not explicitly refer to grammatical gender in his analysis of “types of grammatical category found in languages, using a worldwide view of linguistic phenomena”(p. 87), his linguistic relativity theory suggests that the grammatical categories identified in certain languages may influence thinking and the interpretation of reality.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, systems imbued with gender classifications will certainly have an influence on the way an individual interprets the world, participating in the formation of social and cultural concepts related to gender and identity (DeFranza et al., 2020).<sup>38</sup> Boroditsky (2002) developed such an explanation, proving how the grammatical gender of the mother tongue also influences representations that may become evident in other linguistic systems “Spanish and German speakers rated an object more similar to a person when the grammatical gender of the object matched the biological gender of the person than when the genders did not match.”<sup>39</sup> (p. 72). Objects acquire masculine or feminine identity through the way people think about them, associating with them characteristics of similarity only possible through language: “people deliberately look for similarities between items assigned to the same grammatical category” (p. 49). This process will explain the emergence of stereotypes in the descriptions observed (Boroditsky & Ramscar, 2002; Gentner & Namy, 1999, Gentner et al., 2003) which we will analyse in more detail in the Stereotypes chapter. In short, speakers of different languages ‘behave’ not identically but according to the distinctions of their mother tongue, indicating that grammatical characteristics shape individuals’ cognitive structures.

Quite recently a study (DeFranza et al., 2020) quantitatively examined the prevalence of gender attitudes (e.g. ‘male-good’/‘female-bad’) across 45 world languages. Findings demonstrated that languages with grammatical gender were more likely to reveal male-good/female-bad association... whereas *none* of the languages without grammatical gender (including English) revealed such an association. Therefore, it may be inferred (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022) that structural features of a culture’s language are likely to contribute to the prevalence of gender associations communicated in that culture.

Moreover, it has been demonstrated (Charlesworth et al., 2021) that group representations are predominant and consistent in language in multiple sources

(books, TV/films, Internet), varying according to language, culture, across time and social changes such as immigration, social protests. The same is to say that this proves stereotypes as collective representations have a strong presence in language and have the power to influence how society perceives and treats different social groups. In a recognisable mutual complex interdependence, Charlesworth & Banaji (2022) hold “The language of a culture shapes individuals’ thought but individuals’ thoughts also influence the language of a culture “(p.21).

Recalling the latest and current Dan Jurafsky’s work on natural language processing and computational linguistics, the significance of studying languages other than our own has been strongly emphasised; learning how they develop over time helps scholars understand what lies at the foundation of humans’ unique way of communicating with one another, but mostly it helps to discover what it means to be human.

The consequences of introducing the English linguistic system (‘less gendered’), as L2, to Portuguese students, who have a stronger history of grammatical gender, are unknown. However, despite not being considered within the scope of the present study, it would be unwise to conclude that there is no effect and this could be a well grounded area of study.

After analysing and distinguishing between different uses of the concept of gender; ‘biological or natural’, ‘grammatical’, ‘lexical’, we will then address ‘social gender’, as a form of social categorisation of individuals based on gender.

### *Grammatical social gender*

Another aspect of language associated with the issue of gender with implications for EFL materials is the idea of ‘social gender’, a category that describes socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985),<sup>40</sup> and which is closely related to ‘gendered language use’: “la manière de désigner une personne est porteuse d’un ensemble de jugements socio-affectifs édictés et sous-tendus par des règles et des valeurs qui lui sont antérieures (Adama Ouadreago, 1998 apud Brugeilles & Cromer, 2005). One of its important characteristics is revealed in the very designation we make of individuals; First name, surname, kinship relationship or role such as mother, brother, or even a professional status or political role are indicators of social categorisation in the sense that they show how we relate to each other in a given social structure.<sup>41</sup>

Patterns of co-occurrences foster an association between women and cooking, making the concept of women and work less conceivable (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022) illustrating how language exposes social representations that connect “groups (women/men) with attributes (home/work), even without explicit reference”(p.4). In essence, social representations are deeply embedded in language and intertwined with collective memory, preventing them from being clearly evident which makes it essential to careful

analyse beyond the surface level of language to examine the deeper, often concealed, context of words and their meanings.

Social gender is directly related to stereotypical positions regarding which social roles are appropriate for females and males. Such imposition and social prejudice, expressed through language, becomes visible in several situations: the pronominalisation of an unknown referent such as the anaphoric use of 'he' to refer to 'lawyer', 'surgeon' or 'she' when referring to 'secretary' and 'teacher' are examples of the presence of social stereotypes reflected in language. In short, high-status professional designations, when not defined, are often 'he' and, on the other hand, low-status occupational terms are pronominalised by the feminine anaphoric 'she'. Regardless of whether the language has grammatical gender or not – underlying it is the “masculine as norm” principle that will force the formalisation of deviations from the norm, giving rise to expressions such as 'male-nurse', 'female-doctor' (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2015). There are also several studies on gender representation in EFL materials focused on formulations in which masculine nouns and pronouns refer to the whole (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Porreca 1984)<sup>42</sup> and which in the case of English, Porreca (1984) attributes to a process of universalisation that dates to the creation of the first dictionaries by male writers and a patriarchy when English received a strong infusion of male-as-norm elements (Miller & Swift, 2000) which contributed to “sexist usages of English, which by no means obligatory, were accepted as normal and standard” (p. 705). However, more recent studies (Lee & Collins, 2009) demonstrate the increasing tendency to use 'neutral gender' through examples such as 'they', 'he/she' or 's/he':

The increasingly relaxed attitude towards generic 'they' found amongst English speakers today is reflected in its strong representation in the 10 textbooks [...] Another strategy adopted by writers to avoid masculine generic pronouns is the use of paired pronoun expressions [...] and the use of symmetric phrases that include both men and women.(pp. 364-5)

After reviewing grammatical, lexical and social manifestations of gender in language, a more detailed analysis of the concept of 'representation' will be presented with greater emphasis on 'gender representation'.

### **2.2.3. Representing gender**

Representations are essential in shaping identity, forming relationships with others, and developing knowledge. They are not inherently correct or incorrect, nor are they fixed; instead, they allow individuals and groups to define themselves and determine which characteristics are important in constructing their identity in relation to others.

From a constructivist approach (Dang, 2020; Forbes, 2018), understanding the concept of ‘representation’ suggests that knowledge and its meaning are structured from the cumulative composition of individual experiences. Hall (1997) ‘à propos’ would highlight the same concept:

[R]epresentation involves making meaning by forging links between three different orders of things: what we might broadly call the world of things, people, events and experiences; the conceptual world — the mental concepts we carry around in our heads; and the signs, arranged into languages, which ‘stand for’ or communicate these concepts (p. 61).

According to this point of view, representations produce and are produced in a “shared cultural ‘space’ in which the production of meaning through language — that is, representation — takes place” (p. 10). This understanding of culture as shared ground, closely associates it with linguistic systems, essentially representational, where the exchange and production of meaning occurs between individuals and society, through signs and symbols to communicate concepts, ideas and feelings. Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) describe representations as “common sense knowledge that is constructed in social interactions” (p. 15) a way of knowing and adjusting in the world, but also a guide for action and communication, intertwining the social and psychic realms. Such knowledge depends crucially on language, both inextricably woven into one another; concepts and representations only take shape if and when we have the words and structures to express them (Montgomery, 2008).

Yule (2017) also refers to this interdependence,

While we inherit physical features such as brown eyes and dark hair from our parents, we do not inherit their language. We acquire a language in a culture with other speakers and not from parental genes. An infant born to Korean parents in Korea, but adopted and brought up from birth by English speakers in the United States, will have physical characteristics inherited from his or her natural parents, but will inevitably speak English. (p. 67)

Viewing the concept of gender from this frame of mind (Hall, 1997; Montgomery, 2008; Sunderland, 2004), the construction of identity is based on one’s interpretation of the surrounding ‘discourses’.<sup>43</sup> As Montgomery (2008) shortly states, language “informs the way we think, (..) experience, and interact with each other” (p. 282), thus,

like gender, it needs be seen as a social institution and its use as a social practice (Fairclough, 2001).<sup>44</sup> Hall (1997) would add at this point:

sounds, words, notes, gestures, expressions, clothes — are part of our natural and material world; but their importance for language is not what they are but what they do, their function. They construct and transmit [...] the meanings we wish to communicate (p. 5).

Likewise, coursebooks (Brugilles & Cromer, 2005), through the “discourse that they convey but also by a staging of daily life of which they offer an expression” (p. 16) contribute to a social division of gender identities and roles. In particular, EFL coursebooks and materials (Aydinoğlu, 2014), as means and tools for learning a foreign language and thus a second culture, contribute to “learning the behaviors and beliefs that are assigned to [...] sex by culture” (p. 233).

As educator and researcher it is our interest in this study to discuss how gender is maintained; how certain patterns of behaviour are perpetuated and how individuals can or do resist them; following Dang (2020) one needs to “consider the positive and negative biases that can accompany gendered language when (..) teaching young individuals who are in the process of developing their identity, their self-worth, and their opinions of other individuals”(p.9). Overall, and drawing upon Sunderland’s view (2000) it is necessary to see gender in language education in a new and nondeterministic way as understandings of gender are now more sophisticated than ever.

### *Culture, a problematic concept*

The idea of ‘culture’ is of particular importance. In a clear break with the prominent notion of the commonly designated ‘classical culture’, Williams (1989) elaborates around the concept, understood as the description of a particular way of life that expresses certain meanings and values, not only in art and science, but also in institutions and in common human behaviour.

Culture is ordinary: that’s the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land [...] yet it is also made and remade in every individual

mind. [...] We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort (p. 93).

Described as a set of specific meanings to groups, either family, place, or institution (Hall, 1997; Yang et al., 2021) culture emerges as interface between the individual and the world; the nerve of our multiple interpretation. As for Geertz (1973) culture is designated as “historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols (...) by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life”(p. 13) similar to a complex, concrete and significant network of meaning. Yule (2017) defines it as a set of “ideas and assumptions about the nature of things and people that we learn when we become members of social groups” (p. 749). On the whole, it is understood as socially constructed knowledge between individuals who share concepts and images, this common structure/framework allows similar modes of thinking and feeling the world, thus, originating identical interpretations. Social behaviour arises, therefore, embodied by culture and language, as both agent and product.

In short, as social phenomena shared by human beings, culture and language (Risager, 2006) cannot be separated, “[h]uman culture always includes language, and human language cannot be conceived without culture. Linguistic practice is always embedded in some cultural context or another” (p. 4).<sup>45</sup> From an EFL perspective we are interested in understanding culture-language as mental processes through an anthropological framework. Fundamentally, as Hurst (2014) puts it “culture controls and guides how the members of a social unit behave and provides the means how to make sense of the other members’ (and outsiders’) behaviour (including language)” (p. 42).

Building on the cultural analysis of the meaning of ‘representation’ presented by Hall (1997), Sunderland (2004) clarifies it as something that is *other* – ‘something’ or ‘someone’ other than oneself – by ethnicity, gender, customs. In opposition to the representation of the self that later on she (2015a) appropriately designates as ‘construction’, the idea of representation appears closely linked to what is *other* or *different*, a formation intentionally elaborated from the selection “from a pool of possible choices, with the availability and desirability of choices being filtered through ideology and an awareness of what is transgressive and the consequences of transgression” (p. 20). In this sense, representations necessarily imply interpreting: words selected from a particular collection, previously shaped by the community, or by parts of it, to which one belongs to. Likewise, Montgomery (2008) would claim there is no absolutely neutral and objective, fair way of apprehending, understanding and

representing the world, given that we inevitably resort to linguistic formulations that help to select, organize and evaluate experiences.

One additional process has currently been interfering with ‘cultures’ around the world; the consumption of products and services via globalisation. As a result of multiple political, economic and social forces, culture influences and is influenced by existing institutions (formal schooling, media and informal networks) whereby originating new ones. At this regard Stromquist (2002) would state “Education is affected by the forces of globalization and creates products (educated citizens) that in turn contribute to what globalization becomes” (p. 24). Yet, despite the significant process, our study will not focus on this topic.

### *A common way of life*

Without systems of meaning it would not be possible to assume or reject identity and thus participate in the construction and maintenance of what Hall (1997) designates as a common way of living:

[I]t is difficult to know what ‘being English’, French or Japanese means outside of all the ways in which our ideas and images of national identity or cultures have been represented. (p. 5)

In similar terms Woodward (1997) describes representations as “signifying practices that produce meaning [...] including the power to define who is included and who is excluded. Culture shapes identity through giving meaning to experience, making it possible to opt for one mode of subjectivity - such as the cool, blond femininity or the fast-moving, attractive, sophisticated masculinity” (p. 15; cf. also Mustapha & Mills, 2015; Yang et al., 2021; Padilla & Vana, 2024). This point is crucial for us, since language is a representational system: signs and symbols are used to transmit concepts, feelings and ideas (meanings), allowing communication between participants, in this case the English classroom. Moreover, she clarifies, identity manifests in relation to the ‘other’ in a connection that can reveal itself through similarity or opposition:<sup>46</sup> “identifying with others, either through lack of awareness of difference or separation, or as a result of perceived similarities” (p. 15). Recognising the us versus them relationship in the construction of the self, Hall and Du Gay (1996) would rather emphasise its non-dichotomous character: a meaning that is not fixed but suspended, in the sense that it continually arises out of distinctiveness “[i]dentities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (p. 4). Furthermore, the dissimilarity unveiled by the other merges with identity fluidity transfigured in personal and social terms. At this point, as regards the context and procedures of ELT, the present research considers it is the target culture that provides the most substantial point of reference in determining

difference. One cannot either fail to mention the possible impact of a Western cultural perspective and especially that of Southwest, Mediterranean and Atlantic Europe (Ribeiro, 1945), which is evidently our own, on the interpretation and conclusions that will emerge from the present study and which will be explored in the 'Methodology' chapter

Since the representations we create depend on one's inner reading of the world then they may not be regarded as true reflection of 'reality'. Instead, there will necessarily be a range of variations in meaning directly related to one's cultural origin (Stephens, 1992). The same occurs when individuals (especially children and teens) internalise gender norms: a learning process of what norms are, understanding why they have value or make sense, and accepting them as one's own (Donzelli, 2024).

Brugilles and Cromer (2005) also refer to representations as simultaneously "a mode of knowledge" that participates in the elaboration and diffusion of "individual and social identities [embedded in] norms, behaviors, values" (p. 15). Therefore, as mode of knowledge, they contribute both to the development of individual and social identity as well as to the dissemination of norms, behaviours and values. In this regard, Sunderland (2004) points out, as unconscious authors of 'readings/representations' of the world which turn out rather 'efficient' regarding one's socialisation process, it becomes "hard to establish intention particularly since representations are often pre-framed, based on stereotypes" (24).

At this issue feminist theories (Butler, 1990, 1997;<sup>47</sup> Mills,<sup>48</sup> 2004) argue that representations position us, and make us recognise ourselves as subjects<sup>49</sup>, in a process of increasingly powerful immersion of popular culture that shapes our subjectivity. Regarding our identification as a female or male subject, (Mills & Mustapha, 2015) one constructs (negotiates) the individual we think and wish we could be, and what we consider appropriate "we are bombarded by a range of images and messages about what individuals can feasibly be, through advertising on television, in magazines, on billboards and in books" (p. 3). Shortly, as Brill and Pepper (2022) put it, it's not just about a little girl who likes to play with cars nor a boy who occasionally prefers a flashy outfit, it's rather an "overall, ongoing pattern of self-identification, behaviour, and preferences" (p.5) which grow more intense over the years causing unhappiness and distress.

### *Representation in coursebooks*

Issues surrounding representation and identity construction have been the subject of broad and in-depth attention in the educational system, in particular the biased representation in language teaching materials where stereotype is unconsciously manifested by the author/editor, sometimes even in a sense of humor or intending to attract readers. Relevance of research has already been subject of controversy

(Cameron, 2010); some questioning whether gender issues and their manifestations in language have been exhausted. Yet, like Sunderland (2020), we too agree on the current importance of further studies; as feminine and masculine reveal themselves in dialogues and texts as performance, then gender is a 'verb', an action, not a quality of the individual (Austin, 1962;<sup>50</sup> Butler, 2002; Cameron, 1997a,<sup>51</sup> 1997b; Goffman, 1959).<sup>52</sup> It follows that the characters represented in the text (fictional or not) are gender constructions, but one may infer they act in the same way as real people (as matter of fact, at this point there is an unequivocal epistemological distinction). Lastly, performing is often a privilege associated with power, largely male dominated where stereotypical discourses are noticeable, revealing feminine disempowerment, prejudice and imbalance, particularly evident in the media (Freed, 2014). A critical view to such manifestations of imbalance in gender representation that emerge through language - be it irony or the subtlety of the stereotypical message - remains, therefore, necessary and rather significant from our point of view. In addition, representations are the result of authorial or illustrator choices (Sunderland, 2011) picking up an adverb to describe a character's action rather than an available and allowable other derives of conscious decisions.

We agree that, overall, gender representation has become qualitatively and quantitatively more balanced, however, continuous manifestations of sexism, either subtle (Lazar, 2005), *indirect* (Mills, 2008) or *explicit* (Sunderland, 2015a) persist: "There is clearly a limiting representation of gay/lesbian sexuality in relation to gender, with stereotypical representations of women as more nurturing, men as more sexual, which can be seen as a form of sexism" (p. 22).<sup>53</sup>

The problem of representation and its stereotypes is necessarily translated into teaching coursebooks. Generally composed of images and text, the coursebook provides content for certain age groups, thus transmitting the cultural capital of a society to younger people, launching the principles of essential basic learning and a set of cultural values and principles (Brugelles & Cromer, 2009a; Padilla & Vana, 2024).

Gender messages conveyed by coursebooks can add to children's gender schemas because characters in coursebooks invite them to identify with these characters (Lee, 2014 apud Rozenberg et al., 2023). When male and female characters in coursebooks are depicted in distinct roles, this gendered information embedded in the hidden (also designated as informal) curriculum influences girls and boys' gender schemas. These messages are then internalised, shaping youth's gender identity and behaviour. (Bachore & Semela, 2022; Evans & Davies, 2000; Lee, 2014 apud Rozenberg et al., 2023; Southworth et al., 2020).

For example, the overrepresentation in coursebooks of male characters in occupational roles although not intentional, reflects authors' unconscious biases, or the usual and intentional exclusion of LGBTQ characters decided to suit the norms and

values of the schools that select these books. In both cases, gender norms and stereotypes may potentially be conveyed to readers (Rozenberg et al., 2023). There's consensus on the idea that during schooling career students are exposed to an 'informal curriculum'<sup>54</sup> about gender roles, perceiving and internalising those that are considered appropriate, whether through the occurrence of the feminine present in coursebooks, for example, in leadership positions, the frequency with which they initiate a dialogue, especially in the case of foreign languages; the professions, activities and actions they carry out; the type of adjective or noun associated with her or him (Ceessay, 2014); the space in which it moves, social status. Research into gender and language issues continues to reveal, expose and denounce the way in which school coursebooks question and interact with their readers (Canale, 2021; Mustapha & Mills 2015b; Sunderland, 2015a); and it does so through the linguistic analysis of the vocabulary associated with male and female representation, the content analysis of what the female and male character pronounces or through discourse analysis.

In the specific scope of EFL or ESL, a linguistic and culturally complex reality (Risager, 2006) facing two linguistic systems that represent social, national and ethnic differences "it is not difficult to find examples of language and culture not always being inseparable" (p. 7). In other words, the L2 classroom is the privileged space for a better understanding of the relationship between language and culture, through a primarily cross-curricular setting.

Likewise, another fundamental part of the learning narrative are the characters presented in the dialogues, images, and audios, who necessarily embody certain physical (gender, ethnicity, age, ability), cultural (actions, opinions, beliefs), and social attributes (occupations, activities). How then do we grasp the representations? Reuter (2000) defends they are embodied in the character, who facilitates the access to the social representations of what a man, a woman, a girl, a boy is in a given society. Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) clarify stressing that it is at the moment of the characters' depiction that more or less stereotypical representations of each of these areas get incorporated "the representations are there [in the coursebook] fixed in a privileged way, circulating in the images, the texts, and forming a system" (p. 15).

The very theme of culture, or the 'cultures' of the world, is in itself a constituent theme of the contents of the EFL program integrated into the classroom via the coursebook (Sileo & Prater, 1998) which "facilitates the integration of content about ethnically, racially and culturally diverse populations" (p. 514). For all these reasons, it is easy to understand that the power of under- or over-representation of gender, ethnicity, age, the aggravating omission of the disabled or any other constitutive trait of society may be associated with them.

Coursebooks play an important role in creating representations, Brugeilles and Cromer (2005) citing Chombart de Lauwe & Feuerhahn (1989) highlight the following

on the topic: “The stories, which feature characters and situations, convey representations, which can be integrated by young people [...] with reference to their experiences [or] to broaden and readjust their conceptions and representations” (p.16). In the present study, we will follow Sunderland’s (2011) concept of ‘representation’ “seen as construction, in the sense that words in a fictional text are not only representing something, they are also constructing that something anew”(p.7). We mean to understand its implementation in the images, texts and audios of the coursebooks in order to characterize, with some extension and depth, the extent to which ‘representations’ transmit gender stereotypes, a concept that we will analyse in the following title.

#### **2.2.4. Gender stereotyping**

Stereotypes, both in general and pertaining to gender, have harmful effects on individuals and society: they contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender norms and inequalities, limiting individuals’ opportunities and spreading discriminatory attitudes

*(Donzelli, 2024, p. 23)*

Gender stereotypes —beliefs about the nature of each gender— have been more recently defined by the European Union Council as human traits and characteristics as being feminine or masculine, with more positive social values attributed to men, which entirely fails to account for the reality of people’s lives (2014). This kind of gender representations has been targetted by critical analysis, as they reveal fixed and oversimplified ideas considered anachronistic and outdated, like for example, the female representation associated with the home and family, in a subordinate relationship compared to men in the workplace. Mustapha & Mills (2015a) would denounce/criticize such stereotypical representations which, despite being widely presented as true for all women and all men, constitute mere clichés and narrow conventions which do not entirely correspond to the truth, rather expressing “ideological formations [...] presented to the reader as if they represented common sense, knowledge which appears to present itself as if it were ‘natural’ or self-evident” (p. 4). Such ideological knowledge constitutes an imaginary representation of reality (Althusser, 1984), one needs to deconstruct by first recognising its characteristics and understanding the reasons why (underlying political, economical interests) these particular biased ideias were created.

#### *Belonging and belief*

Gender stereotyping may be understood as an individual cognitive process, one needs to efficiently organize important personal information, incorporating feelings, memories, affections, positive and negative experiences, in short, our retrospective order of the life path. Accordingly described (Blaine & Brenchley, 2017) as “[c]ultural

worldviews [which] order life, impart meaning, and protect us from life's uncertainties” (p. 59). Allport (1954) would further see them as “exaggerated beliefs” positive or negatively “associated with a category [whose] function is to justify (rationalise) our conduct in relation to that category” (p. 191). This ability to organize the dispersed and fragmentary materials of individual and social biography occurs intuitively, sometimes unconsciously, through the involuntary use of stereotypes in everyday situations (Devine & Sharp, 2009). Shortly put (Forbes, 2018), understood as “assumed beliefs about people who belong to a specific social group, onto individuals who appear (based on our internal conceptions), to belong to that group”(p. 20), they may impact opportunities and work outcomes for both men and women.

The concept of stereotype was applied to gender and has been widely discussed since the 1960s, when the great transformations resulting from the May 68 movement in Europe and human rights movements in the United States brought, among others, women's rights to the centre of social and academic concerns (Yang, 2011).

It is often argued that stereotypes have a self-perpetuating quality, outcome of cognitive distortion (Heilman, 2012; Hilton et al., 1996). Nevertheless, despite the inflexibility of people's beliefs in the maintenance of traditional gender stereotypes, one believes (Hentschel et. al, 2019) them to be mostly enhanced by skewed gender distribution into social roles. Regardless of recent advances toward gender equality in workforce participation and the flattened rigid representation of individuals in long-established gender roles, gender bias seem not reflect this change and a true shift in social roles remains ambiguous. Therefore we believe that there may be some degree of collective responsibility in the crystallisation of gender stereotypes in today's society; as Spivak (1994) states:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization. These consideration seem valid for a history of sexuality in the West [...] The subaltern cannot speak. [...] [R]epresentation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish. (pp. 102)

Moreover, she still stressed, the issue of ‘epistemological violence’, regarding gender stereotypes analysed early on by feminist theory denounced the type of discrimination that gender stereotypes promote, and above all, have endeavoured to dismantle the resulting effects of humiliation, grievance, and inferiorisation (Britton, 2000; Collins, 2022; Harding, 2004, Mirza, 2021; Williams, 1989).

The representation of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ identities results from an intense, partly non-conscious, subliminally formed process that operates from the first years of life. Its continuous, permanent and persistent development depends on several areas of socialisation that interrelate and complement each other: school, group culture, religion, family life... (Harding, 2004; Hentschel et al., 2019; Holmes, 2009). In a process of self-stereotyping which influences one’s own identity, stereotyped characteristics can thereby be internalised and become part of one’s gender identity, learning how to behave in gender-appropriate ways through socialising experiences whose influence persists during a lifetime. As the European Union’s equity policy states (2014):

Modern culture, including social media, are powerful influences in the development of children and young people and convey messages that reinforce rather than challenge gender stereotyping [which] leads to the perpetuation of discrimination against women, as most of the human traits seen as feminine have less social value.<sup>55</sup>

Aydinoğlu (2014) also supports the idea of gender identity construction resulting from the influence not only of elements such as family, school, the Media, but that is also strongly conditioned by the language that permeates them all to in continuous process of subject formation: “All the beliefs and systems of a culture are embedded in its language” (p. 233). This socialisation process that tells (Holmes, 2009) us “girls should act in certain ways, such as being caring and boys in different ways, such as being strong and independent” (p. 3) is highly gendered, however, it can be the basis for awareness about gender roles, the starting point for debate in the classroom, being part of the “dialogue about the text” facilitating and allowing the deconstruction of stereotypical messages (Mustapha & Mills, 2015b, Sunderland, 2010, Dang, 2020).

Regarding our work, and drawing upon (Aydinoğlu, 2014) we will mainly consider the educational school context and EFL course’s as “tools of learning a second language and a second culture. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to maintain gender equality in them to enhance gender equality in life” (p. 233). Schooling, teaching and learning, educational materials prove to be fundamental in the training of young people because from a very early age children are exposed to their use on a daily basis during their educational journey, being particularly effective in the context of primary and basic education (Thun, 1996 apud Kereszty, 2009):

Elementary level textbooks are considered as particularly important, since they contain the basic factual knowledge and skills children are supposed to acquire,

which strongly influence their view of life, their gender socialization, and also the reproduction of gender inequalities and stereotypes in the society. (p. 3)

Therefore, if a coursebook includes biased or prejudiced representations regarding gender issues, such a stereotype could significantly influence (Kereszty, 2009) the construction of each young person's individual opinion:

[Textbooks] show what it means to be a child in a particular context, which also contains learning the gender identity through socialization. In that process children learn the particular behaviors related to their genders, therefore textbooks are important in their gender socialization.(p. 3)

The presence of 'clichés', or prejudice related to gender in school coursebooks has obvious harmful effects on the child's cognitive development (Kızılaslan, 2010, Gerdeman, 2019). Britton and Lumpkin (1977) have since long argued that gendered messages conveyed by coursebooks may shape students' self-esteem and influence their perceptions of both sexes during a highly impressionable stage of life. Stromquist and her colleagues (Mills & Mustapha, 2015b), discussing the conditions of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, stressed the lasting influences left by both coursebooks and curricular content "memories as phrases and stories heard as roles which we see represented for men and women condition our minds" (p.11) taking part in the multiple possibilities of individual gender construction.<sup>56</sup>

The use of coursebooks, the readings carried out necessarily imply an interpretation; each reader, when trying to make sense of the text, image and dialogue, elaborates its own representation (Mustedanagic, 2010). Therefore, the presence of sexism<sup>57</sup> in language in school coursebooks has harmful pedagogical consequences for women and girls (Poulou, 1997;<sup>58</sup> Frank & Treichler, 1989, Borgonovi et al., 2023) particularly, foreign languages coursebooks as both tools for learning the language and vehicles for cultural transmission. Underlining the need to eliminate gender stereotypical depictions as well as language sexism in EFL school coursebooks, Christopher Renner (1997) claims the need to provide a gender balanced learning environment where all learners stand on equal terms.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, their continued and constant lesson use together with usual school homework, exerts an influence which may be positive or negative depending on its quality as it conditions young learners' perception of (in)equality issues (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008).

Discussing the harmful effects of gender stereotyping in the classroom and specifically, the way they are inscribed in EFL materials, it is argued (Kereszty, 2009,

Mihira et al., 2021) that gender stereotypes necessarily contribute to the strengthening of social inequality,<sup>60</sup> since the coursebook might become, for a large number of students, an effective transformation agent, whether strengthening or reducing power relations developed or developing in the classroom and society.

Brugilles and Cromer (2009b) would detail the following at this regard “Textbooks are [...] a tool for both education and social change. To monitor their content, ensure that they are distributed and guarantee their use in society, a clear policy is necessary” (p. 14). This represents a significant consideration for the present study, as we seek to broaden the understanding of the extent of such power relations in the context of EFL coursebooks in Portugal.<sup>61</sup> Analysing national/domestic context (Ferreira, 2016) it becomes essential to further compare the emerging conclusions with those from other studies from diverse social and cultural geographies. This way we will hopefully acquire/grasp/get a richer and more objective comprehension on how the effects of gender stereotypes differ or resemble in diverse communities, representing different cultures and multiple, but to the same extent inequality-inducing, gender stereotypes. In his theory of prejudice, Allport (1954) clarifies “all groups develop a way of living with characteristic codes and beliefs, standards and ‘enemies’ to suit their [...] needs (p. 39).<sup>62</sup>

### *Coursebooks, an expression of a broader reality*

The research that has been carried out has consistently found the presence of common and frequently reproduced gender stereotypes in school texts, as can be seen in Blumberg’s (2008) conclusions for UNESCO:

[T]hough gender bias in learning materials is less dramatic an issue than getting girls into schools for the first time, it is consequential: textbooks take up the lion’s share of class time for both teachers and students and reflect a nation’s curricula [...] gender bias in textbooks is hidden in plain sight. Their stereotypes of males and females are camouflaged by the taken-for-granted system of gender stratification and roles. (p. 33)

Naturally, the presence of gender stereotypes in teaching coursebooks does not constitute an isolated phenomenon, being a component — not the least important — of a more global phenomenon that, under different manifestations, structures the entire society, each of its culturally significant communities, and of each of their active socialisation groups (Blumberg, 2008; Caniceiro, 2012; Charlesworth et al., 2021; Davies, 1995;<sup>63</sup> DeFranza et al., 2020; Law & Chan 2004; Yang, 2011).<sup>64</sup>

If we consider the context of language teaching, we have not only 'space' for the development of linguistic and intercultural skills but also for the socialisation of norms in a kind of social microcosm (Caniceiro, 2012). Necessarily, educational materials resulting from discriminatory educational policies will reflect such values, assuming a central role in their implementation/maintenance.

Language learning may, therefore, be inferred as implicitly playing a role in the process of implementing gender discrimination reform. For learners, it is in the classroom that linguistic objectives and 'broader social planning', they first come into contact with. Thus, quality teaching materials and coursebooks, as fundamental learning/teaching support tools (Yang, 2011), most likely become major sources of influence in the instillation of positive values and attitudes:

[M]aterials planning should closely be into line with other social objectives. Gender stereotyping and how gender is represented in the textbooks in an important issue for consideration as part of materials planning both at the system level when the Education Bureau authorizes textbooks [...], and at the local school level when teachers and schools select textbooks. (p. 86-87)

Such attitude underlies the idea of impartiality, one of the core principles in the UN Guidelines for Educational Materials (2024) which declare that quality coursebooks must evidence no prejudice in the content, such as excessive generalisation and stereotypes and content and illustrations not involve any form of discrimination based on gender, class, ability, ethnicity (...) nor suggest exclusion. In line with this framework, Yonata (2021) points out:

The massive movement for dismissing gender stereotypes has arrived in educational institutions. Therefore, as teaching and learning practitioners, teachers and researchers need to be aware of and be sensitive to contents in materials related to gender stereotypes (p.28).

Overall, as coursebooks represent the main learning resource in classroom interaction, one expects that social values and human rights are adequately transmitted. Global advancement has made us global citizens, implicating justice for all from a sociocultural perspective. Gender roles are one of the social values influenced by sociocultural context and have been receiving attention from academics and UNESCO as the global national agency for global peace and justice. The massive movement to discard gender stereotypes has reached educational institutions. Therefore, as teaching

and learning professionals, being aware of and sensitive to the content of materials related to gender stereotypes becomes extremely necessary and fundamental.

### *The importance of addressing stereotypes in the teaching-learning process*

Due to their significance within the teaching-learning process, teachers must thus be aware of the negative effects of gender stereotypes and even have a duty to limit and reduce them (Ferreira, 2016; Forbes, 2018). Moreover, as regards teachers undeniable fundamental role played in their students' personal development, their lasting attachment and continuous interaction, their manifest expectations towards each pupil may have a profound effect on both its self-confidence and personal achievements. Their behaviour and practices, often carried out unconsciously, obviously can and do contribute (EU Conference, 2014) to the maintenance of representations and stereotypical gender construction:

Teachers not only deliver the formal curriculum in schools, they also contribute to the hidden curriculum [...]which includes all formal and informal interactions with pupils, language used; unwritten rules; conveys to pupils powerful messages, which influence their self-perceptions and self-confidence. (p. 9)

Probable existence of training teachers' relative lack of concern regarding the possible harmful effects of gender stereotypes on students' self-esteem (Kızılaslan, 2010), should be seen as a chance to re-elaborate the training of future teachers (EU, 2014) so that they might "reflect on their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and understand the consequences of stereotyping pupils on the basis of gender"(p. 10). This has been increasingly taken into consideration within the concerns of most training centres, since Stromquist (2006) rightly put "teachers untrained in gender issues usually reproduce conventional views of femininity and masculinity"(p. 149) thus being a pertinent occasion and opportunity for their progressive empowerment in this regard.

School gender norms reshape, redefine appropriate gender behaviour in the family and community, which are then turned into appropriate gender academic and social practices in educational environments. In short, schools reproduce not only cognitive results, but also cultural, ideological and emotional ones. Therefore initiatives must be undertaken to help them in this process of raising awareness, take action and reduce gender stereotypes (Stromquist, 2006). All the more so since it has recently been (EU Conference, 2014) concluded that,

societies remain strongly gender stereotyped and that the education system, which is a subsystem of the societies they serve, reproduce the values and culture

of those societies without challenging their possible limitations on the life opportunities and experiences of their pupils. (p.4)

Gender equality in and through education constitutes an essential step forward, that does not go without the necessary and continuous investment in the quality of education offered to girls and boys. Reviewing the conventional values and messages conveyed in the curriculum, changing teachers, principals and students practices is fundamental, mostly because schools exist as a space where gender expectations are continually reproduced. According to EU (2014) family and school influence on young people's personal and social development has been increasingly reduced by the broader and growing use of social networks. Nevertheless, the socialisation and learning school experience remains a fundamental 'arena' for gender identity construction (Stromquist, 2006). Therefore, national educational policies need carefully include gender balanced principles or an overall human-rights based approach.

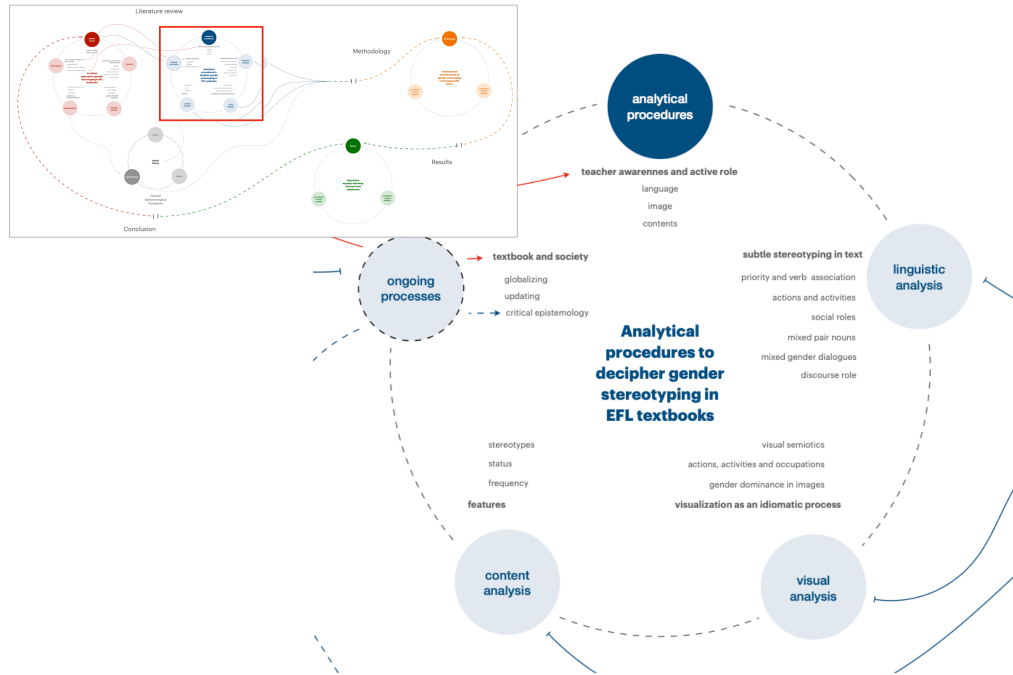
Although our study does not specifically address educational policies nor the awareness of young teachers regarding gender stereotypes, we will not fail to monitor – and convene whenever pertinent – the directions of ongoing and future research especially as evidence has demonstrated the serious consequences of perpetuating discrimination. Awareness and deeper knowledge on the consequences of gender discrimination (Mustapha & Mills, 2015b) would surely contribute to its progressive disappearance along with the extinction/flattening of its negative effects in the classroom “teachers' role (their talk with students around the text) in the classroom has been brought under scrutiny as their part in entrenching the dominant culture (gender unfairness) of society also contributes towards gender inequality.(p. 10). On that account, our work will highlight the manifestation of gender stereotypes in three EFL coursebooks, produced by national publishers, for teaching the language to students in Portugal.

Next, an approach will be made to previous studies, essential for a better understanding of the extent and type of gender stereotypes in EFL materials. Therefore, in the following title, we will describe some results of several studies on gender stereotypes in EFL and ESL materials.

### **2.3. Stereotype critical history**

There is already, in extent and variety, a significant number of studies that focus specifically on the representation of gender (Fig. 4) and its main stereotypical crystallisations in coursebooks (Goyal, 2018; Guo & Wang 2023; Mustapha & Mills, 2015b), especially in EFL coursebooks for students whose language is non-mother tongue.<sup>65</sup>

**Fig. 4**  
*Analytical procedures to decipher gender stereotyping*



Source: Ribeiro, A. M., Paixão, M. F., Guimarães, S. C. (2024, detail)

Common to all academic works is the belief that learning materials are gender biased, a characteristic inimical to the achievement of gender equality.<sup>66</sup> So we closely follow Mustapha and Mills (2015b) when they state:

This type of biased representation might in/directly shape gender identities not augur well for educational goals of our contemporary society, especially the need for gender equality in education and the empowerment of women for social, economic and national development (p. 10).

The gender imbalance revealed through the greater number of male characters compared to female characters was one of the most consistent conclusions of the first studies (Hartman and Judd, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Porreca, 1984) typically focussing on both visual and textual portrayals of male and female characters. Much investigation on gender representation in coursebooks has from then on flourished. Those carried out during the 2000's (Blumberg, 2007; Carlson, 2007; Healy, 2009) have mostly constituted follow-up studies, assessing responses and reforms applied to learning materials showing signs of improvement in the direction of gender fairness though still far from gender equity. Further studies (Gharbavi and Mousavi, 2012; Hamdan, 2020, Gillani & Hashmi, 2010, Sunderland, 2015) have extended the focus beyond

coursebook representations to “talks around the text” revealing the limitations of the so called ‘progressive textbooks’. Despite undoubtedly following current trend of gender balance and presenting greater quality regarded as significant, teachers’ role and the way biased educational materials might be addressed has been its major focus.

A teaching-learning environment freer from the contamination of gender stereotypes has become a whole education community purpose. Attaining this goal, more or less successfully, has been the result of two major reasons/points: i) a greater critical awareness among teachers which has led to a progressive improvement in the preparation of coursebooks; ii) the explicit intention of commercial publishers to accompany the effort of promoting gender equity that society in general, and in particular the educational community, have been demanding.<sup>67</sup> This is how Brugeilles and Cromer (2009b) summarised it:

Therefore textbooks should be at the heart of education policy through mobilization of: national and international policies to achieve the goal of Education for All (EFA), not only in its educational and economic dimensions but also in its political dimension; a large number of actors to implement these policies, ranging from policy-makers to publishing houses to distributors, and possibly donors; the whole of the teaching profession, together with pupils, their families and communities. (p. 6)

It is therefore essential to identify and understand the ways gender stereotypes are presented and expressed in teaching coursebooks, recognising as previously stressed, their central role in students’ socialisation process, particularly in younger children. To achieve this, we explored some specific examples of scientific studies.

### **2.3.1. Linguistic analysis**

The debate surrounding the above title would be incomplete without first clarifying certain concepts in the area of linguistics, textual and discourse analysis. We would also like to emphasise from the outset that the concept of ‘text’ underlying these areas has been the subject of numerous definitions within the social sciences.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), a “text is regarded as a semantic unit, [...] related to a clause or sentence not by size but by realization, the coding of one symbolic system in another [...] does not consist of sentences; it is realized by, or encoded in, sentences” (p. 2). More recently, with the expansion and adoption of digital technologies and the multimodality of textual forms in our daily lives text has been referred to (Halliday, 1994) as “any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language” (p. 3). From an identical perspective,

Fairclough (1995) goes further, describing the text as “social space in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction” (p. 6); a kind of textual multifunctionality necessarily formed in language through which texts constitute themselves as systems of knowledge (ideational functioning), social entities (identities, forms of self) and even social relations between (categories of) subjects.

Fairclough's work is instrumental in demonstrating that linguistic analysis is not just about understanding language itself, but about how this system functions within social contexts. Language use is therefore viewed as ‘a form of social practice’ he (1995) defines as ‘discourse’, while examining the way texts “work within sociocultural practice” (p. 7). Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to form, structure and textual organisation at all levels; phonological, grammatical, lexical, but also at the more complex textual organisation and argumentation structures, all of them forming a valuable single body for any critical and ideological perspective. Hence, when dealing with the more traditional grammatical aspects, linguistic analysis should be envisaged as (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2022 apud Kosir & Laksminarayan 2024) part of a more textual or discursive analysis, as it also studies aspects at the level of textual organisation and cohesion, including dialogue organisation properties, like for instance ‘turn-taking’. Although generally considered ‘hidden’ in opaque technical terminology, a linguistic critical view has more recently acquired a significant role in scientific research especially since the advent of computational methods and neural networks and the works at the level of ‘pragmatics’.<sup>68</sup>

Halliday (1994) described language as a “system of networks [...] a resource for making meaning [out of] systemic patterns of choice” (p. 23), characterised by being inherently functional,<sup>69</sup> focussing on the relationship between form and textual organisation within a given context. In this regard we would underline the observation of the presence of morphological and lexical elements but also its reverse, that is the exclusion or omission of structures as highly positive. Porreca (1984) had already noted “One of the most widely examined manifestations of sexist attitudes is omission” (p. 706). This perspective is of particular significance in the present study as we will address aspects of presence and omission of female representations, aspects of visibility and priority in texts, images and audio.

Overall, the investigation of language from a systemic-functional perspective is considered particularly useful in scientific terms (Halliday, 1978, 1994; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Thibault, 1991). The structure is an integral part of the content (Fairclough, 1992), so a comprehensive and adequate study of the latter is inseparable from the analysis of the former, as it is necessarily carried out in itself; the same is to say different communicative content and purpose imply different forms and vice versa. To conclude this point of view, Halliday and Hansan (1976) argued that the critical

observation of a textual ‘corpus’ implies socio-cultural contextualisation, intertextuality, while at the same time underlined the importance of cohesion and unity analysis.

Employing Fairclough’s multi-dimensional framework, a recent study (Curaming & Curaming, 2020) on gender representations in a widely used English primary coursebook series analysed 92 short stories to assess gender portrayals. Their findings revealed a persistent male dominance in character representation, despite the inclusion of strong female characters and the authors’ apparent intent to promote gender equality which suggests that entrenched societal norms continue to influence educational materials, even in countries which rank highly on global gender equality rates.

It is through language and text (in particular, currently the media) that social control and dominance is exercised, negotiated or even resisted. Through this lens, linguistic analysis becomes a tool for uncovering and challenging the ideologies that underpin societal power relations (Thibault, 1991).

Linguistic critical approach may represent, therefore an important policy resource, e.g. in connection with efforts to establish critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1995) as an indispensable element in education. One of the most important spheres of society (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), is school discourse which refers to “particular ways of representing and constructing society which help produce and reproduce unequal relations of power, domination and exploitation” (p. 258). Consequently, educational systems and materials should be regarded as paramount structures capable of maintaining social power and perpetuating inequality (Mkuchu, 2004). As previously referred to in this study, coursebooks, as major part of educational organisation and the curriculum, may shape social power and gender biased representations (Kobia, 2009; Mineshima, 2008).

The global understanding of such concepts will be pertinent in the analysis of our EFL coursebooks corpus, as our study will examine certain linguistic aspects of language regarded as a part of content analysis.

An uncomfortable issue related to the status of women in society has been “sexist” (gender-biased) language. Through the debate fuelled by the feminist movement that began in the 1970s,<sup>70</sup> some critics considered sexism transmitted through language as a strict form of oppression, which contributes to the invisibility and subordination of the feminine, defending the need for ‘linguistic reform’ in promoting equality of gender. The role played by language in maintaining and strengthening sexist values, although widely recognised, needs greater understanding as it is deeply rooted and in a much more subtle way than other manifestations of discrimination. In fact, language is a function so involuntary and so closely linked to culture that it makes a distanced perspective and an objective look difficult (Porreca, 1984).

As already pointed out in the title *Gender Stereotyping*, educational coursebooks convey representations, values and beliefs about gender identity that may reinforce or challenge the construction of identity in young learners. If the presence of gender biased representation in texts is observed and accepted as dominant by such group, the instillment of discrimination and imbalanced processes may turn out rather difficult to avoid.

It is extremely important to prevent students from developing prejudice and gender stereotypes about themselves, about the 'other', through norms and values that informally permeate coursebooks or other educational materials. Therefore, the representation of gender stereotypes in language must be monitored, and efforts should be made to give rise to a 'fair-gendered language'. The use of linguistic techniques such as the examination of frequency of occurrence of gender terms and their correspondents, would ultimately contribute to creating a more balanced and egalitarian classroom; whether through the choice of the set of activities and actions associated with verbs, the control and mitigation of the use of sexist language, the balanced gender representation in dialogues and lexical references, or through the adoption of alternative ordering in the reference that contradicts the frequent situation of 'male firstness'.

Before detailing on some of these aspects in the following sections, we will provide a few pertinent examples of linguistic approach specifically applied to ESL educational materials: the use of 'generic masculine' (Lee & Collins 2009, 2010); the occurrence of 'male firstness' manifest in more or less conventional expressions and 'paired nouns' (Hartman and Judd, 1978); the use of sexist language (Porreca, 1984); activities and actions carried out by characters, focusing on verbal expressions (Halliday, 1994; Hellinger, 1980); verbal association of activities and actions performed and the effect of male and female action in the world; or lastly, regarding the grammatical category of the name, the way characters are designated (first name, full name, nickname), a "social actor network" Van Leeuwen (2008) proposed to represent the character itself.

As regarding the creation of stereotypes Linguistic Analysis quite often constitutes the possibility of showing subtler aspects of language, through the analysis of, either 'verbal association' [VAs], 'order of priority' [PrO], or 'mixed gender pair dialogues' [MPD].

#### *Verbal formulations and priority.*

An extensive and influential study (Hellinger, 1980) on over a hundred texts widely used in German coursebooks, carried a systematic linguistic analysis and discovered verbal formulations associated with female characters reflected stereotypical behaviours. Taking into account the way in which the relevant frequency of association of certain verbs with feminine nouns reflected interaction actions, Hellinger argued this

represented a significant distortion in relation to reality, as if feminine activities were conditioned mainly by the male presence.<sup>71</sup> Regarding the analysis of verbs related to different types of movement, findings demonstrated that the 'feminine verb' never appears in connection with means of transport, automobiles or motorised vehicles, while men drive cars, fly planes and travel.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, out of over a hundred feminine predicates found, only one appears related to power and authority. Another conclusion that the author presents has to do with the nature of oral discourse: in her opinion, the prejudiced idea that women speak more than men is reinforced when in frequency counts her study demonstrated the opposite, that men speak four times more than women. Hellinger (1980) would declare having found:

Particular linguistic phenomena [of sexism] in more than one category. Thus, the fact that women speak less than men is an instance of exclusion as well as subordination, it may also represent distortion (in the sense of passivity) as well as degradation (women seem to talk rather than make substantial contributions through other channels) (p. 247).

The presence of sexist language in foreign language coursebooks is incompatible with the goals of foreign language teaching, which include not only linguistic proficiency but also the development of specific social behaviour patterns and attitudes. Language teaching materials must therefore conform to the constitutional reality granted to women. Considering the guiding role of coursebooks in young learners' socialisation process as well as the effects of the use of sexist language in social interaction, their disappearance will be a crucial step in the construction of societies based on equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

Multiple and recent studies on the presence and extent of gender stereotyping in coursebooks follow the research and method employed by Hellinger (1980), adopting identical techniques for analysing the agreement of verbs associated with characters, actions and activities in 'feminine' and 'masculine'.<sup>73</sup> A study of EFL coursebooks carried out a detailed analysis of the verb 'work', and concluded it appeared most frequently associated with the 'masculine' pole (Carroll & Kowitz, 1994).<sup>74</sup> Still in the field of linguistic analysis (Jasmani et al., 2011) applied to action verbs, "categorised<sup>75</sup> as activity, process, bodily sensation, transitional event verbs and momentary which showed a male-female ratio of 2:1"(p. 70), another work carried out a quantitative analysis in six Malaysian coursebooks recognising the existence of gender imbalance. In Japanese coursebooks, 'affirmative' verbs were found (Lee, 2014) mainly associated with the personal pronoun 'he', "the higher frequency of saying verbs associated with men" (p. 51) which could be understood as representing male individual as the most

affirmative and with a more considered opinion. Similarly, the same author later found that the 'masculine term' was presented as more active than the feminine one and that the latter appeared more frequently visible as a caregiver or children educator.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, in another study from 2014, Jakie Lee (2014) would observe the inclusion of the representation of success in the 'feminine term', visible in verbal expressions such as 'elect' and 'voter'. Analysing collocations of gendered terms such as He/he, She/she, Man/man, Woman/woman, and anticipating the balanced 'feminine'/'masculine' representation of future EFL materials, she discovered a more significant number of active female characters, in outdoor occupations instead of the stereotypical representation of women as delicate and fragile.

[F]emale is no longer delicate or weak but is described as even stronger than a male. In domestic and occupational roles, females are no longer portrayed only as housewives who do all the household work, but they also work in society as doctors or school principals who take care of the whole school, and males do share the household work with females at home[...] Not only can males be good at sports, but also females (p. 45)

The representation of gender stereotypes may also manifest through the order of 'priority' assigned to female and male, e.g. 'Him and her' 'Mr and Mrs' classified as 'male firstness' (Porreca, 1984). Previously, a pioneering study (Hartmann & Judd, 1978) analysed both the presence of gender stereotypes expressed in language in ESL materials, and the priority applied to 'mixed pair nouns' ('brother and sister', 'husband and wife'). Findings revealed the systematic secondary position of the female individual, which researchers criticised, claiming that "automatic ordering reinforces second-place status" (p. 390). The only exception found was the persistent use of the expression 'Ladies and Gentlemen', which, in our view, is nothing more than recognition of prejudice, since such formal expression, used in formal refined contexts, rather confirms male priority as it is used as a 'presentation' of women's objectified character. Recent studies carried out on Australian English teaching coursebooks used in Hong Kong reflected the same phenomenon: greater prevalence of masculine priority applied to men/women when mentioned together, as well as the same formal expression of courtesy understood as an exception (Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010). Samadikhah & Shahrokhi (2015) conducted a critical discourse analysis of two ELT coursebook series. Males appeared more frequently in subject positions and dominated in pictures. Analysis concluded the presence of bias toward males in pictures and in text. Both series exhibited gender bias in dialogues, with males being given firstness significantly more often. The use of titles<sup>77</sup> such as Mr, were more often presented as

compared to 'Mrs', 'Miss' or 'Ms' which may be seen as emphasising marital status for females thus reflecting a form of gender discrimination. Interestingly, females were depicted as engaging in more social activities than males in both series. Both series favoured males in dialogue firstness and titles, except for social activities, where females were more prominently featured.

In contrast to these studies, the analysis (Healy, 2009) of a widely used coursebook from a British publisher, recognised the frequency of male and female priority in terms of equality. The representation of male and female genders is observed equally in terms of "amount of talk [...] represented women first nearly as often as men, [balanced] spoken discourse with women and men making similar amounts of moves, using similar amounts of words and speaking for similar lengths of time" (p. 98) without registering the presence of prejudice in terms of gender.

In the present context of linguistic analysis, the expression of gender stereotype, conveyed through different types of predicates associated with the male and female individual, will not be directly part of our focus. Instead, we will analyse the issue of male and female priority, as well as the content in 'dialogues with female and male characters', which will be discussed in the following title.

### *Dialogues with female and male characters*

Dialogue, as a textual genre commonly used in school coursebooks, has been the subject of particular study and analysis in EFL/ESL (Jones et al., 1997; Poulou, 1997). Its frequent adoption is justified not only by its potential use in the classroom (male students reading the feminine and vice-versa) but also by the different types of discourses and diversity of "voices" that it potentially transmits. Regarding the representation of gender roles found there, multiple attitudes embodied in different characters may emerge, with more or less traditional points of view (Sunderland, 2015a). In quantitative terms, we can question ourselves about the number of female and male characters in each dialogue; who speaks more or has greater discursive quantity (measured by the number of interventions, or number of words); who initiates and concludes the dialogues and, in terms of discursive representation, the different speech acts (questions, statements, expression of hesitation...) associated with the female and male character as well as their frequency. Sophia Poulou (1997) discovered that women tended to ask for information, make requests, while men gave information and instructions: most utterances belonging to sub-categories, i.e. ordering, commanding, instructing; advising, recommending, suggesting; offering, inviting were [given by men] (p. 70).

The theme of the text under analysis is also an important aspect to consider in linguistic analysis, that is, understanding the context or thematic area in which the male and female characters are represented in interaction. A study of English

coursebooks used in Australia and Hong Kong found the masculine character mentioned in association with subjects related to crime, politics, national identity and success stories while the female character appears associated with the themes of friendship, illness and physical appearance (Lee & Collins, 2009, 2010).

Regarding the analysis of dialogues where the presence of female and male characters appears, extensive research in the context of gender stereotype often highlights greater opportunity for male expression. In addition to the lower frequency of 'speech', the female character also performs more limited discursive functions. When analysing a sample of texts, Marlis Hellinger (1980) discovered that the vast majority (80%) of discursive expression was male. The same discrepancy is confirmed in studies of coursebooks used in Singapore (Gupta & Yin, 1990) where the frequency of male oral production is higher and broader "in both [textbooks] there are fewer female characters [...] speakers, and protagonists [...] females are under-represented as protagonist speakers [...] speak less (in terms of both measures) than male characters" (p. 38), a situation that also occurs in Malaysian coursebooks,<sup>78</sup> aggravated by an increased discrepancy in the extent to which the level of education increased (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008).

The portrayal of gender roles in Iranian English language coursebooks (Dahmardeh, & Kim, 2020) has been carried out through content analysis on the frequency and context of male and female representations across various themes and activities. Significant imbalance was revealed, with male characters predominantly featured in active, public, and professional roles, while female characters were often depicted in passive, domestic, or supportive positions. Such disparity and reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes within educational materials, will like and potentially influence learners' perceptions of gender roles.

Another recent study (Kostas, 2021) on the discursive construction and positioning of gender in primary school coursebooks concluded they were strongly male focused, expressing male dominant discourse while women feminine traits were highlighted. Thus, we would stress that revealing the hidden ideologies in everyday language is fundamental because recognising and challenging oppressive discourses constitutes a source of individual/group empowerment.

Conversely, encouraging levels of balance may be found regarding the frequency of 'speech' attributed to women in the analysis of mixed-gender dialogues. The study of three widely adopted British coursebooks (Jones et al., 1997) displayed promising levels of gender balance; greater number of expression opportunities conveyed by female characters contributed to a promising level of gender justice "gender differences found are too small either way to be significant" (p. 481). The trend is confirmed by another study on a secondary education coursebook in Japan (Pihlaja, 2008) where the frequency of female speech is greater than the male counterpart, although it needs be

stressed, on account of greater number of female only character dialogues; however, “equality of speakers in mixed-sex environments, is worth noting as males and females contribute equally to almost every conversation” (p. 5). Recent research (Forbes, 2018; Dang, 2020) continues to reveal the existence of stereotypes, not only in terms of gender representation but also imbalance with regard to gender equity in dialogues with male and female characters. It is not yet possible for researchers to prove beyond doubt that the improvement shift is heading towards full equity.

From our study of coursebooks widely used in Portugal, we will examine how this trend is revealed, not excluding subtle forms of persisting imbalance in female and male relationships (see also Gomes et al., 2007; Pires, 2014). The importance of gender representations in pictures justifies focus on the principles and procedures of visual analysis in the following title.

### **2.3.2. Visual analysis**

A fundamental element in teaching coursebooks is the presence of the image (Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010). Goffman (1987) would state “Any scene [...] can be defined as an occasion for the depiction of gender difference, and in any scene a resource can be found for effecting this display” (p. 77). Specifically within the scope of EFL/ESL, visuals have attracted enormous attention. If on the one hand, coursebooks convey values and representations through a linguistic system, on the other, the same occurs with pictures in an increasingly substantial way. Gender biased visuals foster learners’ identification (Liao & Huang, 2003), contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of a less fair and exempt society (Fatemi et al., 2011; Giaschi, 2000; Good et al., 2010; Healy, 2009; Nakamura, 2002; Paivandi, 2008; Queirós & Botelho, 2006; Sano et al., 2001). The communicational value of the image goes beyond the expressive capacity of oral or written language (Giaschi, 2000), often more than a thousand words.

In fact, it is argued that, like words, images actively participate in the construction of knowledge, a statement which accounts for a few considerations. The wide range of methods for analysing the visual ‘object’ used in the social sciences (Banks, 2001; Rose, 2007) include Iconography (explanation of the meaning of discrete symbolic elements applied by Basto, 2015) and Semiology that looks to deep structures within an image. At present, however, the most common method focuses on a series of aspects of the image content that resembles discourse analysis (Rose, 2007) looking to the effects of particular texts and institutions in practice.

As a starting point, the concept of image (Roberts, 2016) is to be regarded ‘as text’, according to which “images comprise a language of signs that can be decoded by the reader” (p. 233), something which is possible to make sense of, grasping its message and how it relates to other cultural texts. The visual object, like any other text, draws its

significance upon other culturally embedded signs, symbols and discourses. Analysing visuals may therefore, constitute a possible approach to critical understandings, a reading and interpretation of particular codes which communicate through its multiple constituents/elements: framing, perspective, positioning. Currently, as previously observed in heading 'Linguistic Analysis', social sciences concur on the idea that meaning is not inner to the object or its representation, rather it anchors in the viewer's cultural systems being determined by its relation to shared texts. Meaning of visual images (Rose, 2007) is made by particular people in particular places. turning audiences fundamental in elaborating their effects.

Recognising image as practice (Gregory et al. 2009) will also contribute to a richer and broader visual analysis; "ensembles of visual practices that structure what is visible and invisible in specific ways" (p. 801). Roberts (2016) would also describe them as material objects which "do things and have real effects" (p. 233), highlighting its power in creating and reproducing social relationships, playing a role in the world, in the construction of identities, forging social and personal relationships. Displayed publicly, consumed on the street, at school but also in private, at home, in digital mode through different technologies or in simple family albums, the image currently acquires material status 'everywhere' as a physical object in the world.

Interestingly, 50 years before, Goffman (1987) had declared "In seeing what picture makers can make of situational materials, one can begin to see what we ourselves might be engaged in doing" (p. 27) explaining that identity construction and particularly, gender behaviour are shaped by attitudes and practices that advertising replicates from ones' relationships and which reciprocally returns, transforming constructed images into the "people" represented. In conclusion, visual power (Roberts, 2016) lies above all in this particular way of how it "can make [...] meanings appear natural and pre-given" (p.234) easily converted into fixed and oversimplified concepts/stereotypes.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) refer to a 'mise-en-scène mode', the creation in, by and through the image of a (determined) desired atmosphere, a kind of theatrical composition through the use of "elements such as lighting, setting, and props to create a particular atmosphere or convey a particular meaning" (p. 43). A set of principles akin to grammar that describe multiple forms of decoding images and visual messages, explicitly or unconsciously conveyed: i) how images depict the world and organize content; ii) gaze, distance, and angle; iii) how visual elements are arranged guiding the viewer's attention and interpretation all combined create complex visual messages.

Furthermore, as image 'active viewers,' and being part of specific cultural contexts, we interpret pictures filtered by one's knowledge of the world. As academics one must not disregard the pertinence of considering/acknowledging one's own viewing position and ethical considerations when interpreting visual images (Roberts, 2016). All the

same, Gillian Rose (2007) would refer to the need to understand image through production, content, and consumption.

A significant study on gender representation in advertising images, (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) highlighted the role played by context in/for the interpretation of visual communication, arguing that image significance derives from the social and cultural framework where it is produced and consumed. Overall they emphasise that visual communication is culturally specific and reflects power relations, much like verbal language, offering insights into how images are structured to convey messages and influence audiences. Similarly, Roberts, (2016) stressed the role of visual analysis in exploring the discourses, social constructs, and ideologies that images (re)create.

The presence of gender stereotypes transmitted by various films, advertisements and even by 'video games' illustrates just that; 'moving images' that simultaneously echo and naturalise inequalities through the reality effect they fabricate (Ash & Gallacher, 2011). A highly elaborated nature alongside their complex politics foreground, have been recognised, stressing they might incorporate broader discourses and ideologies, thus never being neutral (Woods, 2021).

Recent analysis is concerned with what images do rather than say, for example, embodied responses or how people use images to construct identity or 'sense of place' (Roberts, 2016) acquiring, at times, human materiality of 'bodily involvement' by 'touching' the spectator (Anderson & Ash, 2015) who constructs an image through unconscious physical/material past experiences: "forms of exchange and communication that often exist beneath the thresholds of humans' conscious awareness, or indeed do not phenomenally appear to humans at all" (p. 14). The sense of vision reveals itself (Roberts, 2016) affective and multi-sensory "an embodied process; rather than purely cognitive, involving eyes and the mind, it engages the whole body" (p. 242).

Although recognising the relevance of a more detailed investigation into current artificial multimodal digital image, this work will rather focus on the more traditional visual object: illustration and picture in EFL coursebooks.

In short, if on the one hand, the visual object may contribute to the reinforcement of a certain status quo due to its referential character (generally understood as transparently reflecting the real world), on the other hand, it represents a potentially subversive agent of such dominant meanings, acting as a form of resistance. Therefore, the use, analysis and creation of visual images implies careful and judicious reflection on the meanings that may be (re)produced, such as discourses linked to unequal power relations or discriminatory situations.

The issue of gender inequality has been the subject of multiple studies since the 1980s (van Dijk, 1998, 2015),<sup>79</sup> both in the field of ELT and in other powerful media, like the press and communication networks.<sup>80</sup> A comprehensive and systematic visual

analysis of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ image representations may contribute to identify gender bias through 1) the frequency of occurrence of female and male in images; 2) the images of male and female characters involved in particular actions, activities and occupations<sup>81</sup> and 3) visual semiotic organisation. Illustrations and visual representations of the feminine associated with a narrow and stereotypical range of activities, occupations and social roles can also reinforce traditional female gender roles primarily involved in domestic tasks.

### *In presence*

As previously mentioned, much investigation has shown that, for the most part, the female character is less visible in texts and dialogues. Conversely, male representation is not only more present but also appears more frequently in images: “Out of the twenty textbooks analysed the heavily biased ratio of male to female characters became evident” (Lee & Collins, 2008).<sup>82</sup> In 2009, Lee and Collins carried out another extensive analysis of images presented in 10 secondary education coursebooks no longer in use. It became evident – even though the female character remained underrepresented compared to the male counterpart – the greater frequency of female representation, especially in more modern EFL teaching materials. Despite quantitative improvement towards fairness, gender representation biases became evident in the greater male representation (57 p.c) of images of exclusively male representation versus 19 p.c of images exclusively representing the female “[t]he unbalanced depiction of males and females in the textbooks extends to their pictorial representation” (p. 360). Other studies mirrored the same result, revealing on the one hand prejudice in favour of men, obscuring the presence and voice of women, giving greater visibility to men in all categories (Samadikhah & Shahrokhi, 2015; Stockdale, 2006).

Aggravated discriminatory representation was demonstrated by Barton and Sakwa (2012) examining female portrayal in stereotypical roles “there is a male doctor and a female nurse; a male party guest and a female waitress. As in the text, the ratio of female to male is higher in those pictures where females are performing domestic roles such as looking after children or carrying water” (p. 180).

Women are depicted in stereotypical roles twice more often than men, particularly in domestic and caregiving tasks. Men appear in these roles less frequently, indicating unequal representation. This disparity suggests the presence of gender stereotypes in these coursebooks (Swara & Mambu, 2024), where women are mainly associated with domestic and nurturing roles, and men, though less often, are portrayed in a somewhat broader range of activities.

Another investigation into the representation of gender images in English primary school coursebooks (Kobia, 2009) confirmed, as in the previous study, the underrepresentation of females in the images as well as the number of characters.

Identical purpose animates the present study, considering the careful observation of the frequency of representation of male/female characters in image, text and audio, in three local EFL coursebooks. In the same way, we will proceed with regard to the representations of male and female characters involved in different actions, multiple activities and occupations, a topic under analysis in the next title.

### *In action*

In addition to analysing the frequency of presence of male and female characters in different sources, a great number of studies have characterised multiple representations of actors involved in actions, activities and occupations [AA & O].

A critical analysis of images (Giaschi, 2000) conveying gender stereotypes sought to identify i) the activity represented; ii) the active and passive person in the image; iii) status; iv) body language; v) clothing vi) the direction of the participants' gaze. It was demonstrated that male figures played more active roles and appeared associated with more prominent occupational domains (managers, leaders, protagonists) while female characters were represented in passive roles and with connections to the world of fashion. Similarly, another study revealed that in the professional space and in an environment related to working activities there was often greater visibility of male characters to the detriment of female representation (Otlowski, 2003). The same happens in a study carried out more recently in which 73 p.c of the occupations indicated in the illustrations in the coursebooks are for men while women occupy only 27 p.c. added to the fact that the occupational role assigned to men is much more varied (doctor, manager, judge), better paid and of 'higher status' (Barton and Sakwa, 2012).<sup>83</sup>

Two studies, (Lee & Collins, 2008; 2009) previously mentioned, through extensive visual analysis regarding the frequency of male and female characters, sought to draw the various associations of feminine and masculine in relation to the activities and occupations in which they appear involved, having confirmed the same results, that is, the male figure appears associated more frequently and with greater prominence in professional terms given the greater invisibility of the feminine "pictures illustrating household activities [...] reinforce traditionally gendered roles: there are more women than men engaging in various kinds of household chores and care for children (6:0)" (p. 362). Once again, the presence of stereotypes regarding the female and male representation was determined as male characters were represented more actively and more frequently involved in sporting activities or more prominent professions.

Rohmawati and Putra (2022) also showed a significant disparity in the number of photos of women in the public domain compared to men, suggesting that women were more commonly depicted in traditional gender roles like cooking, cleaning, watering plants, caring for children, and other domestic tasks. Male occupations were found to be more prevalent and more diverse in the context of occupational gender stereotypes.

Moreover, men were portrayed as having a broader range of career options than women when it came to societal responsibilities.

More recently other findings (Swara & Mambu, 2024) have highlight ongoing gender inequality and stereotypes, with coursebooks often depicting unequal household responsibilities and linking certain jobs to specific genders. Men are largely shown (53 instances against 32) in professional roles as well as performing physically demanding and prominent occupations (firefighters, farmers, astronauts, pilots), whereas women appear associated to educational and caregiving roles such as teachers, hairdressers, and nurses. Similar gender imbalance regarding depiction of occupational roles in EFL coursebooks was found in Aini et al., 2021; Ariyanto, 2018; Setyono, 2018.

The present study aims to extensively and in-depth analyse the diverse representations of male and female characters involved in a wide range of AA & O in three EFL coursebooks produced by national publishers. It is our intention to better understand the phenomenon of gender bias in coursebooks, contribute to the development of knowledge of stereotypes in EFL and ESL educational materials, and thus allow us to mitigate and limit their effects in the classroom, on young people and in society in general.

We will therefore continue in the next part with the critical observation of representations related to gender stereotypes, based on the approach of elements included in the sphere of visual semiotic analysis that relate to the qualitative analysis.

### *Visual signs*

Visual semiotics is described as a ‘grammar of images’, (Kress e Van Leeuwen, 2006) in the sense that it interprets the relationship between signs and the message conveyed, especially based on how people, places or objects are depicted in images, and the way they combine for a meaningful whole: “a grammar of visual design’, to make explicit how the available resources of visual grammar form a potential for the representation and communication of meaning through spatial configurations of visual elements” p. 266). Recognising that visual communication draws its meaning out of the composition of a visual coding made up of color, composition, perspective, context is also held to play a significant part as agent and result of the social and cultural framework where it originates and is seen. Recent studies have begun to focus their multimodal analyses on gender, incorporating categories from visual semiotics.

A study of gender representation of male and female characters (Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010) applied the semiotic analysis<sup>84</sup> recommended by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), enriched by a content analysis proposed by Goffman (1987),<sup>85</sup> to investigate the gender positioning<sup>86</sup> of images included in coursebooks. The images analysed revealed the feminine in a more frequently ‘reactive’ way, playing the role associated with the private, domesticity and domestic tasks, apparently less competent and capable, as

opposed to the male character, more 'active' in a position of greater "social power and prominence" (p. 72), framed in professional occupation spaces, workplaces or, also, in outdoor spaces. The analysis revealed a consistent presence of gender stereotypes applied to women, represented not only as less 'empowered' socially, but also as an object of desire, whereas the male individual was associated with power, playing the role of 'breadwinner' of the family.

Another recent study on EFL university coursebooks examined the presence of gender stereotyping as well as the issue of female 'invisibility' in images and illustrations in terms of: clothing worn, participation in sporting activities, and occupations. It was clear that the largest number of social roles represented men, while women appeared as students or in professions of low social status (Levine & O'Sullivan, 2010). Mirroring the same biased reality, other work on secondary school EFL coursebooks used quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine verbal elements and illustrations. The result revealed an unbalanced representation in favour of men, as well as a lack of representation of the real variety of roles played by women in society (Fatemi et al. 2011). Gender representation examined (Wijayanti et al., 2022) in visual artefacts was found in terms of stereotype, quantitative imbalance, and male firstness.

A current EFL coursebook study (Rezki & Yassine, 2024) also relying on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar combined with Sunderland's (1994) framework for the categorisation of gender representation within EFL coursebooks demonstrated uneven portrayal of female and male characters in images. Nevertheless, despite men's greater visibility and prominence, efforts by designers to create balanced materials was evident.

Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) model applied to a comic book analysis unveiled similar results: the male character appeared to be more visible, more frequently portrayed as conveying opinion and information from the outside world, as opposed to the invisible or underrepresented female character, passive in her domestic role (Marefat & Marzban, 2014).

Similarly, Chavez (1985) examined comic strips as a form of mass media, emphasising their role in perpetuating gender inequality. Findings showed that men were overrepresented relative to their actual proportion in the population, while women were significantly underrepresented.

Likewise, we intend to provide our study with the application of some elements of visual semiotic analysis, to better understand the extent of the representation of gender stereotypes in three EFL coursebooks. The content analysis procedure applied to gender studies will then be discussed, as a way of incorporating a significant methodological domain, in order to, more objectively, reveal the presence of gender stereotypes.

The effect of the gender stereotype conveyed by images as opposed to images that contradict the stereotype on text comprehension and learning in general requires further analysis in critical literature. A research carried out experiments with various texts accompanied by stereotypical and counter-stereotypical images and concluded that female text comprehension was greater after viewing counter-stereotypical images (Good et al., 2010).<sup>87</sup> Conversely, boys showed better textual comprehension after viewing stereotypical images. Although specifically referring to the study of more or less stereotypical images in academic performance in the area of science, it is clear that this will not be the only cause of the gender disparity in school results. However, they have been shown to influence student learning and may play a role in maintaining the gender gap in this field. The same may as well be concluded if applied to EFL coursebooks, language learning and students' school positive achievement.

### **2.3.3. Content analysis**

Having previously discussed linguistic analysis and visual analysis, it is now important to consider content analysis [CtA] separately, as it has been widely used in research to reveal gender stereotypes in EFL coursebooks. Globally applied mainly as a quantitative method, to determine the frequency of selected characteristics, CtA by no means represents the full extent of coding employed in qualitative research.

Pioneers and practitioners of content analysis emphasize that the method is a science, characterised by precise rules, standard procedures, and systematic approaches. The methodology core principles—such as careful sampling for generalizability, the conceptualisation and operationalisation of variables to ensure reliability, validity, achieving intercoder agreement for objectivity and replicability—highlight its scientific foundation. However, despite the structured and quantitative nature of content analysis, it is argued that there is still space for a degree of 'art' in the process (Sharrer, 2019), allowing for some subjectivity, creativity, and interpretation.

CtA appeared mainly used in journalism and communication research at the beginning of the 20th century. Formerly designed as 'quantitative newspaper analysis', (Krippendorff, 2004) and used alongside a narrow view of science based on the apparent objectivity of quantification (Lasswell et al., 1965), CtA entered social sciences in the 1980s (Krippendorff, 2004, Preface to 2nd Edition) redirecting its focus to the study of texts/images, whose written and visual constituents required greater understanding.

Having been applied to a considerable and rich corpus of magazine issues and photographs, Lutz and Collins (1993) described it as a quantitative descriptive coding technique that, after the coding of instances of key themes proceeded to quantifying its priorities.<sup>88</sup> Krippendorff (2004) defined it as an "empirically grounded method", exploratory in the process and inferential in intention that studies "data, printed

matter, images, or sounds — texts — in order to understand what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does” (p. 3). Findings are then typically coded in standard statistical analyses (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002) to determine frequencies, correlations and variations.

As a scientific approach it has survived the challenge posed by the radical transformation of the ‘textual fabric’; the widespread availability of digitally readable electronic texts, particularly computer-assisted language analysis, (Riffe et al., 2023; Bianchi et al., 2023; DeFranza et al., 2020; Lucy et al., 2020, Lindgren et al., 2020) have placed it at the heart of society’s understanding of itself.

Even though content based research involves a type of coding frequently used in quantitative works, it has developed into a particular approach (Krippendorff, 2004) studying “data that stems largely from how the object of analysis, content, is conceived” (p. 18) and in this sense we will not fail to highlight its application in qualitative studies, “[m]ost content analyses start with data not intended to be analysed to answer specific research questions.” (p. 30). Regarded as ‘text’, the data under investigation are “meant to be read, interpreted, [...] understood by people other than the analyst” (p. 30) and used to communicate. Out of the study of printed, audio, visual or artistic content, meaning becomes visible.

As a technique, content analysis is considered (Krippendorff, 2004) a scientific tool, involving specialised procedures (“learnable, objective, reliable”) which result in replicable discoveries based on a “systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter” (p. 3) implying multiple procedures in ‘text’ treatment. Meaning emerges during the process in which the text is analysed in relation to a specific context.

Similarly Scharrer & Ramasubramanian (2021) consider it as a social science method for analyzing media and cultural artefacts, helping to determine if content reflects broader trends or is unique. It explores how and why these features function as cultural products, revealing insights into their creation, use, and influence. Content analysts must be systematic throughout their process, starting with clear decisions on what units to analyse and which samples to observe. They must precisely define and apply their concepts, ensuring consistent judgments among coders, which are then statistically tested for agreement. The resulting analysis follows the scientific method, involving hypothesis testing, exploration, and explanation. Nevertheless, the objective of the study is not limited to the operationalisation and conception of the methodology, the ultimate purpose will be to contribute to deepening and expanding knowledge, providing new perspectives, increasing scientific understanding of specific phenomena.

The relationship between a given communication exchange and its social context requires the appreciation of culturally specific ways of speaking, writing and organising thoughts (Lune & Berg, 2017), that is, understanding the purpose and meaning of a

given communicative interaction in a distinct socio-cultural context. The way we express ourselves leads us to elaborate and perceive particular visions “[c]ounting terms, words, themes [...] allows the researcher to ascertain some of the variations and nuances of the ways in which parties in an exchange create their social worlds” (p.192).

Krippendorff (2004) highlights a fundamental idea in this type of approach; the consensual perception that all texts are produced and read by ‘others’, recognising that they are or will be significant to her/him as they are to the researcher:

[A]s linguistically competent communicators are able to transcend the physical manifestations of their messages and respond instead to what those messages mean to them, content analysts cannot remain stuck in analysing the physicality of text - its medium, characters, pixels, or shapes. Rather, they must look outside these characteristics to examine how individuals use various texts. (p. 22)

Finally, content analysis serves as a core method for exploring and theorising data. Coding is integral to analysis, blending the two processes into a continuous cycle. Based on initial codes tied to research questions and literature, interpretative coding evolves, revealing patterns and relationships. As Krippendorff (2004) notes, analysis requires drawing specific inferences from texts within the research context

Content analysts infer answers to particular research questions from their texts. Their inferences are merely more systematic, explicitly informed, and (ideally) verifiable than what ordinary readers do with texts. Recognizing this apparent generality, our definition of content analysis makes the drawing of inferences the centerpiece of this research technique. (p. 25)

The study of stereotypical representations regarding gender in ESL and EFL, in particular, has adopted content analysis employing different criteria all around the world. Pioneering authors (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Oliver, 1974; Lee & Collins, 2009; Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009a; Chandran and Adullah 2003; Mukundan, 2003; Cincotta, 1978; Hellinger, 1980) have demonstrated, for the most part, a focus on the male figure playing prominent roles in different spheres of life as opposed to the underrepresented female figure, denoting invisibility and marginalisation. Among experts in the field, we highlight the important research by Porreca (1984), who placed particular emphasis on the quantification of sexism in several EFL coursebooks, having extensively investigated: 1) the absence of women in text and images; 2) order of mention (firstness); 3) female occupational visibility in texts and images 4) nouns that describe the female and male character; 5) male gender constructions; 6) adjectives attributed to

the male and female character. These first studies were fundamental in the critical perception of gender imbalance in teaching materials, demonstrating that EFL coursebooks revealed prejudice against women.

The 2000s were the stage for a second phase of research into gender issues. Following recommendations from institutions such as the UN, the reforms implemented in learning materials were evaluated. In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), which produced guidelines for teaching materials; describe coursebooks, particularly, as (Clark, 2016) as promoters of gender equality if:

(a) females are protagonists, (b) females and males are not described according to a stereotypical sexual division of labor, (c) ways of living free of conventional ideas of femininity and masculinity are described positively, (d) topics encourage students to think about sexual discrimination and gender equality, (e) topics encourage students to reconsider various issues close to them from a gender perspective, and (f) topics encourage students to think about female's human rights as a global issue (p.1).

Such changes resulted from the conclusions of previous studies which showed improvement in the quality of educational materials regarding the presence of gender bias. Although, overall, still far from gender equality, it was concluded that (Blumberg, 2007; Carlson, 2007, Healy, 2009, Pihlaja, 2008) coursebooks were undoubtedly more balanced, specifically the field of EFL.

More recent studies (Gharbavi and Mousavi, 2012; Hamdan, 2020, Gillani and Hashmi, 2010), besides analysing the greater or lesser presence of coursebook bias, consider it essential to be complemented by the analysis of how texts and images are addressed in the classroom. It was argued that the analysis focused on teaching materials although 'fair gendered', was reductive, alerting to the importance of taking into consideration the dialogue elaborated around the 'text' and how the teacher negotiated and presented it in the classroom.

Although most recent educational materials produced in countries with a sound tradition in this matter are considered to be qualified materials, duly verified and institutionally validated, 'third generation' studies highlight the current need to study the use of 'text' by teachers (Durrani et al., 2022). As learning facilitators, teachers may condition or guide interpretation, transforming situations of imbalance that are evident in the coursebook into opportunities for debate and empowerment of young people.

Therefore, the focus should be on the teacher's use of the text expressed in the 'talk around the text' phrase. Sunderland (2015b) would clarify this viewpoint:

The distinction between textbook texts and uses of those texts in the classroom clearly concerns students and student-teacher interaction as well as the teacher [...] we cannot predict from a given text what the students will think or say about it; in particular, sexist representations can be recognised and resisted/critiqued [...] teacher behaviour is also unpredictable from the text itself (p. 17).

Moreover, she would add, the perception of 'effects' has undergone a significant transformation. It is currently acknowledged that readers possess the 'agency' to oppose (or reinterpret) what they read, hence responses to a particular text are now acknowledged as potentially diverse. Not only can different readers exhibit distinct responses, but the same reader might as well (Sunderland, 2011).

For the future, the UN and human rights organisations consider the application of the content analysis a valid and sound method for the study of 'prejudice intensity measures' (such as stereotypes, derogatory representation of female, violence inflicted on women for violating traditional gender norms, etc.) which might be included in this type of investigation. This will prove especially useful in assessing progress in a second generation study, or in gauging differences between societies with higher and lower levels of gender inequality.

As previously mentioned at the beginning of this title, content analysis has been widely used to determine the extent of gender stereotypes in EFL coursebooks. Early studies, primarily applying a quantitative approach, focused especially on: male overrepresentation (Hellinger, 1980); the superiorisation of male 'status' and its dominant occupational functions (Porreca, 1984); stereotypical representation of female activities and emotions (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Porreca, 1984); and, even, situations of ridicule of characteristics traditionally associated with the female condition (Hartman & Judd, 1978).

Some of the above mentioned stand for pioneering studies of overrepresentation and, therefore, examined dated situations. However, in addition to their historical value, they have the importance of highlighting the way in which research in the field has produced definite results, with clear permanent advantages for the creation of more quality pedagogical materials. Some examples, whose validity remains pertinent, constitute the subject of greater attention in the following title.

### *Overrepresentation*

Hellinger (1980) found overrepresentation of male characters in almost all texts of German ESL coursebooks. Another study of gender representations in EFL coursebooks in primary schools in Tanzania (Mkuchu, 2004) revealed that the feminine was underrepresented in comparison to the masculine, concluding the presence of the dominant idea of traditional masculinity. Ansary and Babaii (2003) investigated gender bias in text, illustrations, and dialogue in two English language teaching (ELT) coursebooks from Iran and found that male character appeared 1.4 times more often in texts and 1.6 times more frequently in illustrations than its counterpart. Additionally, about 65% of the themes in dialogues and reading passages were male focused.

Other studies, however, demonstrate that in more recent times the situation is evolving towards greater balance. Lee & Collins (2009) found male overrepresentation in 10 Australian coursebooks, on the order of approximately 3 to 2. These results were replicated in subsequent studies (Lee & Collins, 2010) and demonstrated a closer representation of female characters (53 p.c.) and male (57 p.c.). In addition, a Japanese EFL coursebook (Pihlaja, 2008), has even demonstrated an objective equivalence of representation. Conversely, in Uganda, Barton & Sakwa (2012) found a greater discrepancy with male characters reaching 64 p.c. and females 36 p.c..

Nevertheless, the overrepresentation gap has progressive and consistently been narrowing (Aydınöğlü, 2014; Bataineh, 2017; Demir and Yavuz, 2017; Nagatomo, 2010; Yaghoubi-Notash & Nariman-Jahan, 2012). Furthermore, there have already been an increase in longitudinal studies in the field of education whose conclusions have consistently demonstrated improvement in gender representation: Goyal, 2018; Hall, 2014; Lewandowski, 2014; Siregar et al., 2021; Vettorel & Lopriore, 2013.

### *Men's occupations*

The evidence of male dominance in the workplace and the domestic role attributed to women (Hartman & Judd, 1978) is reaffirmed in other studies (Hellinger, 1980). Men are associated with a wider and more prestigious range of occupations (engineers, scientists), while women often take on occupations such as 'cafe maids', 'housewives', 'secretaries', 'cleaning ladies'. Other studies (Ansary & Babaii, 2003; Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Gupta & Yin, 1990) explored gender stereotypes in coursebook texts, finding a greater variety of occupational roles among men than among women, most of whom were portrayed in childcare or teaching professions.

Recent studies show that this trend remains firmer, escaping the intention to remove male overrepresentation that has been manifested in other areas (Bachore, 2022; Lee & Collins, 2008, Swara & Mambu, 2024; Söğüt, 2018; Zahra et al., 2024).

Košir and Lakshminarayanan (2022) found women largely depicted in household roles, domestic work as well as menial labour, while men were portrayed in professional and leadership roles, which validates gender asymmetries in structure and role.<sup>89</sup>

There seems to be a differential approach to the search for balance, with editors and coursebook authors being more focused on the balanced quantitative representation of the masculine and feminine terms. Nevertheless an unbalanced attribution of social roles runs deeper with female characters playing a significant number of occupations, such as secretaries, receptionists or engaged in domestic tasks (Lee & Collins, 2010), in a scenario that almost always presents women as less 'busy' (Barton and Sakwa, 2012).

### *Stereotypes*

Studies that had as their main objective the study of representations of affections and emotions in teaching coursebooks where "[overemotional women] are linked to the traditional 'female' instabilities" (Hartman & Judd, 1978), recorded a significantly higher number of emotions 'out of control' (such as irritation or fear) associated with women, made even more evident when it came to the physical act of crying (Sakita, 1995). In general, a general background of structural opposition is recognised between 'aggressive', 'opinionated', 'competitive' men and 'affectionate', 'compassionate', 'tender' women (Evans & Davies, 2000).

The underrepresentation of women is partly driven by gender stereotypes that associate men with traits focused on achievement and agency, such as assertiveness and decisiveness. This bias is reflected and reinforced in language, where women are often described in less agentic terms compared to men (Lawson et al., 2022).

Similar research (Košir & Lakshminarayanan, 2022) indicate predominantly androcentric and unequal gender depiction with the omission of female or in subservient, submissive, passive roles, such as caregivers, performing household chores; often shown in stereotypical jobs such as teachers, nurses, front desk attendants, while men are depicted as engineers, pilots, leaders, and managers.

Quite recently another study on Indonesian ELT coursebooks portrayed gender reinforcing stereotypical social constructs, (Zahra et al., 2024) with men depicted in leading and active roles, presented as strong and heroic, while women are typically shown in passive or secondary positions being described as supporting.

In addition, some studies record a profoundly negative characterisation of the term 'feminine' as ignorant, uncreative, and incapable to organize their work (Kobia, 2009) whereas positive character traits like hardworking, creative, wise were more frequently assigned to males.

Conversely, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) found that despite clear gender bias with male character outnumbering its counterpart, alongside evident male

firstness, male negative stereotyping was also perceived. Even if associated with energetic actions most of the negative personality traits identified were found exclusively related to male character presented as aggressive, malicious or breaking rules.

The recent trend is, undoubtedly, to prepare coursebooks with less male overrepresentation and less female invisibility. Despite improvements, there is still much to be done regarding the female role in an occupational context and stereotypical personal characteristics. Each of the areas mentioned will be taken into consideration in the present study, with the relating results presented in the chapter 'Results'

## **2.4. An open research program**

Curriculum and coursebooks play a crucial role in upholding and perpetuating structural inequalities, particularly those related the intersections of gender with other social factors, such as ethnicity, age and ability. Over the past few decades, research has consistently shown that curriculum and coursebooks are used to reinforce patriarchy by promoting male superiority, while marginalising women in societal roles (Bachore & Semela, 2022; Southworth et al., 2020). This pattern persists across different countries, regardless of geographical and cultural variations (for example, see Blažević & Blažević, 2023; Blumberg, 2007; Mirza, 2004; Sedmak, 2022; Southworth et al., 2020)

The opinion gathered through this literature review is unanimous, highlighting the need for systematic and updated research, in order to allow the elaboration of a global, objective and relevant framework, which in Portugal is perhaps felt more acutely than in other European Union countries. Our study hopes to address this question by analysing three EFL coursebooks produced by Portuguese publishers. The trend towards the reduction of gender stereotype representation in the field is evident, particularly since the first and influential studies, such as those by Hartmann and Judd (1978) and Porreca (1984), which came across profound inequalities. However, the great significance of continuing a systematic study is reiterated, as essential for a better and more complete understanding of the phenomenon in question. Continued collection of empirical data and regular academic research are necessary to clarify the extent of (in)equality of gender representation in ELT coursebooks' (Demir & Yavuz, 2017).<sup>90</sup>

In addition to this point, Goyal (2018) would further "Though these studies suggest an overall pattern of longitudinal improvement, there is a paucity of studies comparing old and new coursebooks" (p.25) stressing the importance of a longitudinal investigation perspective as fundamental for perceiving how gender relationship changes taking place in the real-world are being addressed/kept up with in ESL materials.

Despite having applied an intersectional approach in the present study, we feel it is necessary to broaden and deepen research in the area, particularly crossing gender with other social identities such as - age, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality ability - some of which we have previously discussed in title *Intersections* in order to contribute to a more complete and critical perspective of discrimination based on gender. Since education in developing countries has been acquiring prominence the academy has increasingly turned its attention to the portrayal of gender equality in ESL/EFL coursebooks in this part of the world which explains proliferation of such studies in African and Middle East Asian countries (Afreen et al., 2022). In this line, the same would be regarded as highly positive in the Portuguese context where studies on gender representation on ESL and EFL coursebooks seem, to my knowledge, not to exist and would surely benefit from this kind of critical viewpoint.

The focus on gender issues and their representation, more or less biased, in coursebooks has until now been the representation of the white heterosexual female in comparison to male counterpart. Other objectives to address might be “to queer the issue of gender representation”, in addition to normative heterosexuality, and consider the way in which ethnicity and class are represented (see Blažević & Blažević, 2023). calling for a reassessment of the normative aspect of rationalisation and class representation in coursebooks (Bucholtz 2011). Finally, another suggestion might consider reducing the presence of gender bias in school coursebooks and learning materials, turning it into a useful indicator for measuring gender equity in society (Stromquist, 2007; Blumberg, 2008)

Situating the current study in the Portuguese context (in a universe of 1991 women), the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (2022) found a country with a predominance of ‘women in high academic degrees but that is not translated into their participation in power, economic, political and academic decision-making, where they clearly remain a minority; the ‘pay gap’ is 25 p.c to the detriment of women; a country where out of ‘10 people identified as “injured/offended” in crimes against freedom and sexual self-determination, 9 are women and 1 is a man’.

Ranked in the Global Gender Gap Report (2022), Portugal, in 29th place among 146 countries, cannot be described as a sexist country. However, considering that gender stereotypes still prevail in fundamental areas, standing against gender discrimination needs continue to be part of the fundamental social and political action agenda in a systematic and consistent way. Recognising the impact of the socialisation of discriminatory norms and values based on gender, as indicated in the UN Strategic Plan, the need to (Adpt. Unicef 2021):

Positive gender socialization [which takes] place both in the family, schools, the media [should] seek to challenge and change negative gender norms, beliefs,

policies and practices that lead to inequitable outcomes and reinforce those that lead to equitable outcomes.

The following title 'Methodology' defines the data collection methods used in the present study in order to describe and better understand the representation of gender in three widely adopted EFL coursebooks produced in Portugal.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

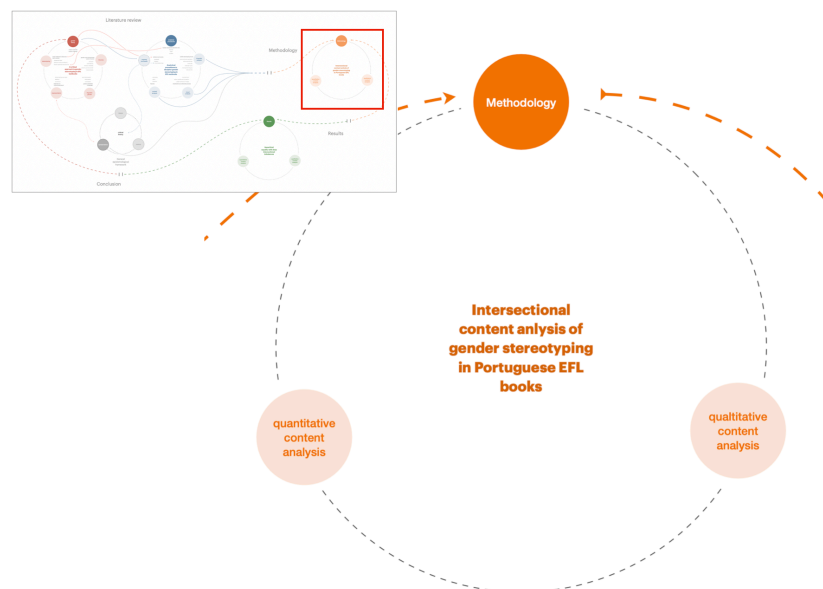
The methodology adopted will relate to the research question, as well as the intellectual affiliation of the researcher.

*Sunderland, 2011, p. 18*

In this part of our study we will detail the strategy defined to achieve our purpose (as impartially as possible) for understanding whether genders are equally represented in Portuguese EFL coursebooks in 4th, 6th and 9th grades (Fig. 5).

**Fig. 5**

*Methodology*



Source: Ribeiro, A. M., Paixão, M. F., Guimarães, S. C. (2024, detail)

We will focus on i) the corpus for analysis, ii) the selected methods iii) the specific procedures for each method; iv) data collation and, finally, v) concluding synthetical results, and its discussion. We believe it is possible to achieve the general objective of this study by answering the following guiding questions of our research:

- 1) How are male and female characters represented in coursebooks?
- 2) How, in image, text and audio media, do representations of feminine and masculine characteristics reflect gender stereotypes?;
- 3) Which intersectional dimensions characterise feminine and masculine genders?

As previously mentioned in the introductory chapter, the author has extensive personal experience in teaching and has frequently observed the recurring presence of strongly stereotypical gender representations both within and beyond the classroom. This observation prompted her to reflect on the potential connection or influence of teaching coursebooks in shaping and perpetuating such perceptions. This line of inquiry led to the present investigation, which aims to assess the balance of male and female representations and evaluate the extent of gender-based discrimination.

The representation of gender stereotypes in EFL coursebooks has been the subject of extensive academic and social debate. In Portuguese context, and particularly with regard to EFL teaching materials, we have started a process already more developed in other countries. In this way, any knowledge acquired will contribute to the study of gender representation in EFL, ESL materials. Subsequently it will contribute to the development of a global picture of gender representation within TESOL.<sup>91</sup>

The contribution of the current study to a more rigorous and complete picture of the phenomenon under analysis must not fail to take into account the researcher's southwestern European cultural perspective and the likely effects on the research process and subsequent results. According to several academics (Chiao, 2009; Hedden et al., 2008) cultural diversity gives rise to multiple perspectives and understandings of the world. Nisbett (2003) states:

[T]here is good evidence that for East Asians the world is seen much more in terms of relationships than it is for Westerners, who are more inclined to see the world in terms of static objects that can be grouped into categories. Child-rearing practices undoubtedly play a role in producing these very different visions. East Asian children have their attention directed toward relationships and Western children toward objects and the categories to which they belong. Language probably plays a role, at least in helping to focus attention, but probably also in stabilizing the different orientations throughout life. (p.163)

Taking into account that human behaviour is not an innate expression but is constructed and elaborated according to different cultural moulds and constraints, individuals from diverse backgrounds will necessarily think differently, influenced by different environments, social structures, philosophies, educational systems (Nisbett, 2003):

Only the Greeks made classifications of the natural world sufficiently rigorous to permit a move from the sorts of folk-biological schemes that peoples constructed

to a single classification system that ultimately could result in theories with real explanatory power (p.24).

Such implications indicate a different reading of the same event, if done from different cultural perspectives, for cultural context appears to be a potentially important variable in understanding the range of human cognition, and may provide a window into the mechanisms by which individual differences in cognitive processing arise (Chiao, 2009). Consequently, the author's interpretation, the results and conclusions that may arise from it, may differ if carried out by a culturally distinct academic. It has been demonstrated (Hedden et al., 2008) the existence of :

striking cultural modulation of brain responses during simple visual tasks that involved culturally preferred and nonpreferred processing modes [which] complement those of behavioral studies [that demonstrate] experience in and identification with a cultural context shape brain responses associated with attentional control even during a relatively simple and abstract task (p. 17).

This fact could be read as considerably significant with regard to the present work, given that the corpus under investigation has been produced and distributed in Portugal for local students and teachers. This is the moment to discuss with ourselves the question of the author's subjectivity and its effects on research: keeping this aspect in mind, we will then proceed with the presentation of the selected teaching coursebooks.

### **3.1. The corpus**

The justification for analysing this series of coursebooks is related to several reasons: i) the selected coursebooks represent significant stages at the end of the learning cycle (grade 4, 6 and 9); ii) they have been elaborated by Portuguese authors and produced by local publishers (Porto Editora and Leya, the two largest publishing groups of school coursebooks in Portugal, which concentrate production for all levels of education and all subjects); iii) they have been adopted in the School Group the researcher is attached to, allowing proximity and ease of access through personal teaching practice; iv) the same students, at different times in their lives, have used them; v) they have been widely distributed; vi) have been sanctioned by the responsible Ministry, which guarantees their scientific-pedagogical quality, compliance with the national curriculum, programs and guidelines, as well as physical characteristics of appropriate size and weight. In terms of national implementation, they have been widely adopted, competing with large foreign publishers. Overall, they are described as coursebooks

aimed at developing fundamental communicative, strategic and cultural skills in the 4 areas of learning: 'speaking, listening, reading, writing'.

EFL teaching has been mandatory in Portugal from the 3rd year of schooling onwards, since 2014, being included in the mandatory component in the 5th year of Basic Education curriculum in 2010. Therefore, we consider there is valuable coursebook educational publishing tradition in Portugal, as well as sound experience by national authors in preparing teaching coursebooks. The 4, 6 and 9 year coursebook selection is justified as students may be subject to global or national exams carried out at national level: as final cycle years, they are considered relevant goals for Portuguese pupils. In short, the diachronic investigation will focus on three coursebooks used by students throughout their school career between 2017 and 2023. They present wide coverage, they have been recently edited, and address distinctive teaching proficiency/ age groups.

The selected coursebooks are:

In 2017-2018, *Let's Rock!4* was adopted in the 4th grade – Porto Editora, authors Cláudia Regina Abreu and Vanessa Reis Esteves, review by Jon Nesbit (128 pages).

The coursebook is organised into 7 units: Unit-0, 'Let's get organized!' provides some basic content such as numbers, special dates, classroom language and introduces the main characters (a class, a teacher, a headmaster and a cat). The remaining six units address the curriculum: Unit-1 'Let's protect the planet!'; Unit-2 'Let's visit the zoo!'; Unit-3 'Let's boogie!'; Unit-4 'Let's eat healthy food!'; Unit-5 'Let's go around our city!' and Unit-6 'Let's have fun outside!'.

Units start by introducing vocabulary followed by a whole page story for listening/ reading comprehension. Time to rock with songs and rhymes, cross-curricular activities, 4 skills and culture are also organised along the different themes and content of the coursebook.

In 2019-2020, *High Five 6*, for 6th grade – publisher Asa (Leya group), 2018 (1st) edition, according to the Curricular Goals, by the authors Ana Santos, Catarina Pedrosa and Clara Bugalhão, and reviewed by Dave Tucker (161 pages).

The coursebook is organised into 7 units: Unit-0, 'Remember', recalling essential content from previous year. The remaining six units are in line with the 6th grade curriculum: Unit-1 'Me and the world around me'; Unit-2 'School is cool!'; Unit-3 'What do you look like?', Unit-4 'City life!'; Unit-5 'Around the world!' and Unit-6 'Welcome Summer!'

Units are divided into three parts organised into headings that develop specific themes, vocabulary and grammar with activities and exercises on listening, reading, speaking, writing and interacting.

In 2022-2023, the 9th grade *Upgrade-9*, publisher Asa (Leya group), authored by Isabel Filipe, Maria Adelaide Rabaça and Paula Simões, linguistic review by Carolyn E.

Leslie, in accordance with the Curricular Goals defined for English language proficiency level B1/B1.1, in 2015 (1st Edition, 240 pages). The coursebook is organised into 6 units: Unit-0, 'Welcome Back', provides some previous learning content. The remaining five units are in line with the 9th grade curriculum and goals: Unit-1 'Walking the Red Carpet', Unit-2 'Ready, Steady, Fit'; Unit-3 'Life Changes', Unit-4 'A world of differences', and Unit-5 'Time to Move'.

Units are divided into three parts organised into headings that define themes and contents and how skills and competences will be carried out (reading, oral comprehension, oral and written production and interaction).

In accordance with Lei n° 47/2006 guidelines setting the "evaluation, certification and adoption of school textbooks for basic and secondary education", all coursebooks are oriented according to a balanced approach to skills, with a wide range of activities organised around subskills, presenting examples of important texts in written and speaking production categories appropriate to the age group, as well as language proficiency. Communicative and innovative approach to vocabulary and grammar is presented (use of language), promoting contact with authentic audio and video recordings and guaranteeing diverse support solutions for the teacher's work and planning, with materials that allow work in different contexts within and outside the classroom.

The main differences between the coursebooks in study stem from the degree of difficulty and more or less complex type of exercises and activities, the greater amount and text length, and the progressive autonomy required of students. Taking into account the spiralling nature of the subject, the 6th and 9th grade coursebooks present similarities addressing major themes such as health and well-being, life at school, professions, holidays, habits and customs, travel, food, cultural diversity, and English-speaking countries; with greater focus on personal identification and family in the 6th grade.

Regarding the 4th grade, there is clear simplification of content and thematic diversity, comparing to 6th grade or the 9th grade, where professional choices, environmental issues, as well as technological advances are themes significantly addressed to pupils' profile and needs. Another distinctive characteristic of *Let's Rock!4* is the use of educational comics<sup>92</sup> which have been frequent and particularly used in foreign language teaching (Tekin & Ilhan, 2021). Each unit is introduced by a whole page panel (Lefèvre, 2000) which presents and contextualises the topics and activities further addressed.

The connection between cartoons and education is related to the visual elements and movements of cartoons. Cartoon characters can be role models for children, they can change their behaviour even turn students' negative attitudes into positive ones. The fact that comics are interesting and entertaining, have visuality and allow for

concretisation make them effective material for cognitive learning but also for affective and behavioural learning (Sentürk & Simsek, 2021).

Data for this study will be extensively collected from the images, text and audio transcript contents of each rubric in all subunits of the three coursebooks. The texts/ audio available in teacher resources will be transcribed and examined in their entirety.

As a result, it is expected that the study of the selected coursebooks will reveal the global, institutional and editorial vision of gender roles.

### **3.2. Analytical procedures**

Issues surrounding language and gender have received special attention in academia and have been widely explored by prominent and seminal researchers: Holmes's review (1991) of gender and language remained somehow broader in range, while Sunderland (2000) focused on EFL specific issues. According to her (2015a), research needs still be done in this field, since a "series of characters frequently populate language coursebooks: "real" ones, who frequently appear in authentic reading texts and/or are often "famous people" and fictional ones, which often appear in a plot that extends throughout the book" (p.21). Despite character selection being made according to the target student, and the teaching/learning situation, there's no doubt that authors, editors and illustrators make a series of choices about who to include, how often, and how, from a wide range of possibilities. More recently, focus has been on learning materials, including texts that extend T/St classroom interactions (Afreen et al., 2022, Canale, 2021; Mustapha, 2013).

Foreign language coursebooks are particularly interesting for studying gender representation. On one hand they are full of represented human characters, (fictional and real) who carry out a series of social actions (van Leeuwen, 2008). On the other hand, they involve repetition: drills, dialogues to practice a grammatical feature, repeated phrases in written exercises. Dialogues, for instance, are of particular interest for classroom practice since teacher could ask female pupil to play male roles and vice-versa.

Gender representation will likely vary between reading comprehension exercises, listening exercises and dialogues. Yang (2014) found significantly more gender imbalance in terms of tokens<sup>93</sup> of male characters in the reading passages than in the dialogues. Its importance takes on greater weight if we consider that although it is a pedagogically motivated educational resource, learning takes place beyond the documented curricular intention.

Regarding gender bias in curriculum and coursebooks, some studies (Bachore, 2022; Levine & O' Sullivan, 2010) indicate it is not only limited to the general school system but it is part of hidden curriculum in university education as well.

Therefore using gender representation studies applied to EFL coursebooks as a reference, we adopted some of their criteria for quantitative content analysis, particularly Porreca's original criteria, combined with qualitative content analysis that gives depth to the analysis, as well as grasps the hidden meanings of prejudice on images, text and audio.

Content analysis constitutes a methodical approach to examining texts based on their content, focusing on what they convey rather than their structure or language. The data usually takes a qualitative form, while the analysis is predominantly quantitative. In its most straightforward, descriptive manifestation, content analysis entails the identification of specific categories related to content (different types of characters, male, female, adult, child), different social and occupational roles, and then counting occurrences of those categories, extending to visuals.

Content analysis described (Waitt, 2010) as "a process by which researchers structure and interpret qualitative data" (p. 231), is understood as a system for identifying terms, phrases or actions presented in a document, audio or video in a row by determining the frequency in which they appear in a given context (Cope, 2010). Its relevance in terms of discursive analysis is highlighted, as it allows the organisation of data according to an initial descriptive coding based on: context, practices, attitudes and experiences. The content analysis of discourse as the study of language in its everyday sense (Lune & Berg, 2017) is carried out "looking at patterns of the language used in this communication exchange" (p.192) as well as the social and cultural contexts in which they occur.

According to Cope (2010) Coding social data such as texts, images, and interactions helps manage large volumes of information by identifying key elements and simplifying classification. Through abstraction, data is reduced into smaller packages organised by topic, participant characteristics, or other features, allowing easier focus on content.

Coding also provides an organisational framework, acting as a data locator that simplifies handling minutiae and organises data by similarities or relationships. Maintaining backups of sources and dates is critical, as coding aids data categorisation and organisation. Although straightforward, developing a coding structure is essential for identifying patterns and relationships.

Miles and Huberman (apud Cope, 2010) would state at this regard:

The organizing part will entail some system for categorizing the various chunks [words, phrases, paragraphs], so the researcher can quickly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct, or theme (p. 284).

A core principle is the notion of manifest or hidden significance contained in text, image and audio. Messages always occur in specific situations, texts are read with specific intentions, and data are informative as regards specific problems. The apparent message generates manifest codes, for example 'sex worker' as manifest meaning, may also constitute a code or veiled meaning, an indicator of 'women status' In an investigation, choosing one or the other viewpoint is unnecessary, as both are traditionally considered. Studying the apparent physically and countable information is often the best start for understanding the object of study, progressively extending an interpretative reading of the symbolism underlying the surface, obvious, visible data.

Lune and Berg (2017) would explain the frequency a concept appears in a text provides information on the magnitude of that observation and should be read only as consistent and detailed evidence of a comprehensive analysis, rather than seen as 'final results' or conclusions "descriptive statistics, namely, proportions and frequency distributions, do not necessarily reflect the nature of the data or variables"(p.187).

The identification and development of classifications and categories may include (Lune & Berg, 2017) common or special classes. The first recognised as cultural classifications differentiate people by age, gender, social roles whether the latter categorize people by means of specific language reflecting in-group versus out-group designations, a jargon. Both are of interest in this study.

Categories can be predetermined through deductive reasoning (such as defining occupational roles for males and females) or determined inductively after becoming familiar with the text(s) in question; for example, recognising recurring references to specific 'objects,' 'features,' or 'physical traits' associated with boys and girls after reading. In either scenario, it is essential to develop a coding scheme that encompasses the various identified categories (see also Cohen et al., 2007; Mason, 2002; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Sunderland 2011; Taylor, 2003).

Furthermore, similarly to numerous categories, the distinction between content/ linguistic 'opposition' is not absolute (Sunderland, 2011); tallying the numbers of different "female and male characters falls under content analysis, however conducting a count of names placed into two lists is technically a form of linguistic analysis" (p.46).

Overall, content analysis consists of two interrelated processes: defining the key content characteristics under examination and implementing clear rules for their identification and documentation. The categories used for coding content items depend on the specific research focus and the nature of the data, whether they consist of detailed answers to open-ended questions, newspaper articles, personal letters, or television transcripts.

Regarding the comic art, which will be further dealt in the 4h grade coursebook analysis, it is considered (Spiggle, 1986) to provide useful stimuli for content analysis as

its format provides visual and verbal data for analysis as well as both a story line and character development.

The selection of the methodology based on content analysis was intended to respond to the objective of the study: to understand whether genders are equally represented in EFL coursebooks produced in Portugal for grade 4, 6 and 9. A research technique which draws from texts, conclusions that are replicable and valid in the context in which it is used, demonstrating objectivity, as it makes its replication possible, and validity, because it allows its systematic application. Understood (Berelson, 1952, p. 18, as cited in Bengtsson, 2016) as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 9) it proves to be a reliable replicable investigation process; a scientifically valid study method, as it largely nullifies the author's subjectivity, and (Almeida. & Freire, 2008) produces: “i) objective; ii) empirical; iii) rational; iv) replicable; v) systematic; vi) methodical; vii) communicable; viii) analytical; ix) cumulative” (p. 18) knowledge. In other words (Lune & Berg, 2017) a strategy applicable to investigation because it allows the collection and analysis of qualitative data through a coding scheme which “if correctly executed, is a precise, reliable, and reproducible” (p. 90).

The scientific nature of content analysis thus guarantees objectivity, possible not only through the adoption of a methodological procedure that can be replicated but also through an approach that allows the understanding of information in an integrated and iterative way, ensuring that all data is analysed according to the same system. It has significantly been proposed (Lune & Berg, 2017) that, regardless “the terms used to classify coding categories or how many are included [...] coding is the key to organizing data and interpreting what data say” (p. 193).

In short, coding ultimately implies reflexivity, critical self-evaluation of the research process. The systematic review of data and code relationships (Krippendorff, 2004) will lead the academic to observe probable formerly invisible elements of their own construction focusing “on the process of content analysis and does not ignore the contributions that analysts make to what counts as content” (p. 21). Hence, if the fieldwork or the data collection phase makes reflection more troublesome, the coding process, essentially more contemplative and analytical, facilitates the paramount critical introspection in all scientific study.

Even so, it is clear that the articulation of subjective aspects of a qualitative nature are not, to the fullest extent, covered in this type of approach.

In our study, an objective approach is carried out through the coding of quantitative data and simultaneously the subjective interpretation of qualitative data. As a qualitative approach, we stand for the use of a ‘conscious subjectivity’ (Klein, 1983), rather than claiming an orthodox total exemption which refuses any influence of individual values in the analysis as well as in subsequent conclusions. This recognition

should not constitute in itself an advantage or disadvantage in the scientific and academic approach, but merely the confirmation of its existence.

Drawing on quantitative content analysis to provide a strong framework and context for an research on EFL gender stereotypes, Sunderland's (2011) subsequent linguistic study was complemented by visual analyses; for instance, the number of times characters were shown performing some actions (images included) were tallied and then analysed the associated written text in detail from a linguistic perspective (p.150).

The present study will also apply similar approach, making use of some linguistic and visual aspects to content analysis.

In short, the reliance on quantitative content analysis does not offer complete understanding on gender balance in curriculum and coursebooks. Therefore, the combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Bachore, 2022; Neuendorf, 2011; Southworth et al., 2020) is a better approach to capture the nuances of gender representation so as to minimize imbalance and prejudice in educational resources.

Starting from the explanation relating to the description of content analysis in its quantitative and qualitative dimensions, we then focus on its application to the object of the present study.

The presence or absence of male and female gender representation will be assessed quantitatively, along with the extent of their depiction. Through an intersectional perspective of gender with ethnicity, age and ability the appearance or omission will be delved. Subsequently, once again applying a methodological procedure of a quantitative nature, the visibility of male and female characters in terms of AA & O will be measured. The extracted quantitative data will then undergo interpretation, integrating qualitative characteristics for a more subjective analysis (Lune & Berg, 2017; Pingel, 2010). Finally, by combining both approaches, conclusions will be drawn, ensuring credibility through the process of triangulation (Lune & Berg, 2017):

The use of multiple lines of sight [combined, allows] researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements (p. 14).

### **3.2.1. Quantitative analysis**

Different coursebooks may establish distinct gender systems depending on their purpose (Science, History, Maths, Foreign Languages), thus requiring an exploration through pictures, text, and language. When text and pictures are intertwined, their collaborative functioning becomes a focal point for investigation, acknowledging how the medium organises the knowledge to be learned, discerning pedagogical distinctions

between texts and pictures with varying aims (e.g., lessons and exercises), and evaluating whether questions about a text influence the reading process. Quantification allows such thorough examination and comprehensive data gathering while accounting for diverse coursebook features to be statistically analysed, avoiding selective biases within resources.

The coursebooks under study are intended for very heterogeneous groups of students, ranging from 9 to 15 years old and, therefore, a significantly diversified use of images, audio and texts, with regard to the quantity, typology, extent and degree of difficulty of the materials in question. For example, there is a greater quantity and more extensive texts present in the 9th grade coursebooks as opposed to a greater concentration and dominance of illustrations in coursebooks intended for the 4th grade.

Out of a children picture book analysis (Sunderland, 2011) female characters were found insignificant and greatly underrepresented in different ways, including in visuals and titles. Not only feminine visibility, social and occupational roles were reduced (see also Porreca, 1984; Otlowski, 2003; Thompson, 2006; Ghorbani, 2009; Lee & Collins, 2009) but also the prominence and status of 'she' roles (Thompson, 2006). Women were mostly identified as mothers, wives and homemakers (Otlowski, 2003; Ndura, 2004; Thompson, 2006) whereas men, occupied a wide range of jobs (Ghorbani, 2009), being depicted a lot more active and more often found outdoors as opposed to female counterpart. Overall, young learners' coursebooks are mostly illustrated which makes them multimodal (Sunderland, 2011), therefore "analysis needs to consider the written text and visuals as a totality, and the relationship between them" (p.3)

Processing and comparison of extensive datasets reveal elements not easily identifiable even through attentive and sensitised readings. Analysis allows us to deduce underlying mechanisms such as devaluation, marginalisation, exclusion, legitimisation which in turn, are inferred from omissions, repetitions and other patterns. Implementing a quantitative method involves selecting a comprehensive questionnaire that categorises all characters, gathering information from text, pictures, and audio transcripts, and specifying the document section. Applied to EFL coursebooks such observation framework facilitates exhaustive and quantitative capture, counting, and comparison of gender representations establishing variables and indicators for diverse analytical perspectives of what male/female roles are. Furthermore, to sum up, quantitative approach does still allow qualitative analysis to help to back it up.

Although such differences may condition, with more or less difficulty, the application of analytic techniques, the quantitative analysis methodology, which will be based on content analysis applied to images, text and audio, will be the same. Thus, aware of the different prevalence of each of them in different series, and following Sunderland (2011), "ideally, a study would take on board content, linguistic and visual analysis

(with different emphases) although content analysis likely constitutes some form of backdrop” (p. 18).

Frequency counts sometimes draw a distinction between types and tokens (Pierce, 1906 apud Sunderland, 2015b): distinct characters or individuals (types) and the instances or references to those characters (tokens). For instance, Susan Jones is a type, and if she appears six times in the coursebook, there are 6 tokens of Susan Jones, represented in various forms such as Susan, Susan Jones, Miss/Ms/Mrs Jones, or pronominal references (she, her, herself).

If images are part of the analysis, tokens also encompass images of the type. The type/token differentiation holds significance in quantitative analyses of gender representation; for example, it's possible to have an equal number of actual female and male characters (types) in a given coursebook or coursebook series but have fewer references to female characters (tokens) compared to male characters. Clarity regarding what is encompassed in a frequency count of tokens is crucial for the analyst. A study (Yang, 2014) of two primary coursebook series used in Hong Kong, found 75 males and 74 female ‘types’, but the male: female token ratio was 733: 522, meaning greater masculine visibility overall. Despite the highly significance of such analysis, our study does not make this kind of distinction criteria widely used in linguistic analysis.

Pictures are not necessarily tied to specific texts, rather they catch the pupil's attention independently of ongoing tasks, so defining a picture unit may be challenging. A boxed picture is considered a distinct unit, but when characters are integrated into the text, the picture unit becomes part of the text unit. For instance, characters illustrating the course material may form a collective picture unit. The treatment of information in cartoon-style speech and thought balloons is intertwined with the picture, therefore the balloon should be considered an integral part of the picture rather than as separate text (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009a).

Particularly regarding the 4th grade coursebook educational comics and following other studies (Chavez, 1985; Jacobs, 2007; Romero, 2020; McVicker, 2007) the same rule applies, considering each frame of the comic-strip page or panel separately. Similarly, when books feature diagrams with explanatory legends crucial for comprehension, the legend should be analysed in conjunction with the picture, not the text.

Following Brugeilles and Cromer (2009a), texts and pictures, whose purpose is to foster learners’ comprehension and engagement, convey distinct information: whereas character names are specific to text, scenes are unique to pictures. Thus, investigating characters requires considering medium, with separate analysis for text and images.

Connections between text and picture imply dual existence for characters, granting them more significance. Within the “Image” section, explicit identification of

characters, whether individual or group in both text and picture, is required, being specifically fundamental in the comic-strip page analysis.

After emphasising the structural components such as section/lesson, course material/exercise, and text/picture, the next step involves precisely identifying and situating each character within the coursebook determining the base unit – text or picture.

In order to quantitatively determine whether female and male characters are represented and what is the relative proportion of their visibility, all occurrences of female and male characters are counted in each 'activity block'<sup>94</sup> of the heading or subunit.

Analysis of illustrations and photographs reveals the frequency of representation/presence of female and male characters.

The presence of female and male characters represented in the images is determined, tallying the number of occurrences and determining the greater prevalence of one gender over the other.

The frequency of representation of female and male elements is determined not only through their occurrence in images but also through their presence in texts and audio transcripts.

The counting and calculation of the representations of female and male characters from the three coursebooks will be represented graphically in total terms and in percentage values, before being divided and partially analysed, making reference to the intersectional attributes of age, ethnicity and ability with regard to the gender. Ethnicity, age and ability occurrences in picture, text and audio were noted.

Characters represented in very small, unclear or neutral images (e.g. clip art), preventing gender identification, are not considered in the count. In cases where it is difficult to determine whether the character is female or male, a 'not clear' notation is used for images, or 'neutral' for text. Characters represented several times and involved in different actions or activities are counted by the number of occurrences in which they appear in their entirety. Repeated representation of the character, meaning a change in movement or a changing situation, is counted only once.

In addition to counting female and male characters present in images, all occurrences of 'speech' by female and male characters are recorded. With regard to gender equality in dialogues with male and female characters, the character who starts the conversation or who speaks first is recorded. Likewise, mixed-pair expressions with the male character firstly mentioned is recorded. Finally, quantitative data is collected regarding all the representations of male and female characters involved in different AA & O.

See Appendix 1 for data collection tool.

### 3.2.2. Qualitative analysis

Qualitative research involves a thorough exploration of particular experiences to describe and uncover meaning, through textual, narrative, or visual-based data. Thus, collecting and analysing non-numerical, descriptive data seek to comprehend individuals' social reality, attitudes, beliefs and motivations; complex phenomena, gaining insight into people's experiences, and understanding perspectives. Therefore, qualitative research is especially appropriate to unravel the meanings individuals assign to their experiences or look into the underlying reasons behind their behaviour. Sampieri et al (2006) had stressed "to describe is to collect data: for quantitative researchers, to measure; for qualitative researchers, to collect information (p. 101).

Lune and Berg (2017) emphasise that content analysis, while often regarded as a qualitative research method in its own right, functions more fundamentally as the "backbone" of investigations grounded primarily in qualitative analysis. They argue that "all qualitative data, from interviews to fieldwork, need to be coded and analysed in order to derive meaningful findings from them" (p. 181).

Krippendorff (2004) challenges the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analyses, asserting that "[u]ltimately all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers" (p. 16). He further notes that advocates of qualitative, or interpretive approaches to content analysis propose various strategies for systematically examining texts. These include discourse analysis,<sup>95</sup> social constructivist approaches,<sup>96</sup> conversational analysis, and ethnographic content analysis. Despite their methodological differences, these approaches share common features: they involve close readings of relatively small bodies of text, the reinterpretation of these texts into new analytical, deconstructive, or critical narratives, and an acknowledgment of the researcher's social and cultural positioning. This process is inherently iterative, reflecting a continuous cycle of analysis and interpretation.

Qualitative research, thus, involves concurrent documentation of data collection, a reflective record on the evolving process, and an analysis of personal transformation throughout the research. This ensures a comprehensive understanding (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), combining raw data with insights into the researcher's evolving perspective "Data collection, analysis, and writings are virtually inseparable in qualitative research, [...] not intended to be treated as mutually exclusive but their main purpose is to show the diversity of research experiences (p. 57). Qualitative researchers prioritise flexibility in data and the research process compared to quantitative researchers, yet both methodologies share common elements, as the quantitative approach follows the previously outlined steps as well.

In qualitative research, the coding process is pivotal, emphasising interpretative aspects. Coding generates concise words or phrases considered valuable abstractions from the data, facilitating their organisation into patterns for thematic analysis, forming the foundation for study findings. In the study of documents and communication artifacts, such as texts, pictures, audio, or video, social scientists employ content analysis to systematically examine replicable patterns in communication.

A notable advantage of content analysis in analysing social phenomena is its non-invasive nature, distinguishing it from simulating social experiences or collecting survey responses. Cross-referencing the information resulting from the data collected through quantification with a qualitative approach (Lune & Berg, 2017) will allow us to obtain deeper results regarding the object of study “Quantitative work leans toward ‘what’ questions, while qualitative trends toward the ‘why’ and ‘how’” (p. 12).

Overall, this explains our decision to complement the results of the information obtained from quantitative data by applying a qualitative analysis dimension, which, we believe, will lead to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the feminine and masculine character traits, capturing the presence and extent of the gender stereotype more objectively. The greater or lesser presence of gender biased representations, attributed to female or male, may become visible when the characters are involved in conventional, habitual or family activities, displaying typical physical characteristics, including clothing, accessories, or contexts (Women in EFL Materials, 1991; Sunderland, 2011). Our application of an intersectional approach naturally derives. Gender crossing attributes with such as the ones which globally define different ethnicities, main age groups, apparent or mentioned (dis)ability has widened the scope while providing deeper perception of stereotypical representations. Still, Sunderland (2011) underlines her concern “both with what is written and how: characters’ descriptors [...] actions, how characters’ speech and thoughts are narrated” (p. 5).

Taking the analysis of the aforementioned aspects as a starting point, we proceeded to study specific examples extracted from statistical observation, in order to present a better and broader understanding of probable and subtle aspects that involve gender representation in three EFL national produced coursebooks. Following Clark (2016) “forms of subliminal bias are difficult to discern unless one takes a holistic approach” (p. 5).

The results regarding the proportion of female and male representations were analysed to determine whether they appear uniformly in each ‘block’ of selected units.<sup>97</sup> He furthers, bias is not the outcome of the quantity of males and females presented but rather the “qualitative aspects of their lives as they enact their respective social worlds in words and pictures. They are seen to engage in differing activities, which present

them in ways suggesting biased social categorizations” (p. 4). For more see Fithriani, 2022; 2023; Tyarakanita et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022.

With regard to mix-gender dialogues, a qualitative analysis was also applied (Mineshima, 2008) to five dialogues in which female and male characters participate, in order to understand the authors/editors’ perception of gender representation. The present investigation also carried out a critical observation on the content of mix-gender dialogues, to which has subsequently been applied a qualitative assessment (Clark, 2016) on the information relating to the representation of female and male characters involved in various actions, social activities and professional occupations: “numerous examples of thematic bias, specifically themes of silence, compliance, subordination and the social status, occupational roles, and activities in general of women vis-à-vis those of males” (p. 4).

Defining ethnicity, age and ability through pictures was based on physical traits observed. When visible information was unclear or omitted we chose to use ‘no information or undefined’.

Defining the above intersections in text requested clear reference like ‘She met an Asian girl’ would be classified as one female and one female/asian. Another example regarding gender/age ‘My grandfather helps me with school project work’ would identify one male/old character. Regarding ability references such ‘He wears glasses; She used to stutter or Brenda suffers from bulimia’ we would have one male/visual, one female/speech and one female/mental disability. If there is no clear reference, context needs be looked into for clues. The absence of information would be noted as no information or undefined.

### **3.3. Specifications**

A character is not a person, but creates a referential illusion, that of  
a “living individual”

*Brugelles and Cromer, 2009a, p.27*

Comprehensive coursebook examination (more than a half-thousand pages on the whole) is a time-consuming process ranging from analysis of course materials, reading passages, to conversation scripts, exercises, and images. To collect evidence throughout an entire coursebook, content analysis was employed as it offers a systematic approach to scrutinising texts for their content, focusing on what they convey and the elements within, rather than the structure of language (Sunderland, 2011).

As the focus of this study revolves around gender, the appraisal encompasses all content within the coursebooks that pertains to gender issues. The identification process follows gender-related categories, with subsequent identification of occurrences within each category.

Brugeilles and Cromer's (2009a) methodological framework propose determining categories through characters and explanations of their gendered markers. To enrich the findings, discourse and some aspects of visual analysis is employed to explore how specific gendered characters are represented in various contexts, such as the domains of family, occupations, actions and activities.

The identification of human characters in texts involves recognising proper or common nouns and isolated personal pronouns (I, you, s/he, we, they). The consideration of isolated pronouns depends on the context; for example in grammar coursebooks, all personal pronouns are relevant. Thus, characters must be explicitly mentioned and actualised, representing real individuals rather than fantasy figures. In phrases, like 'James is as strong as Superman,' only the named character, James is acknowledged. In images, character presence is determined by the quantity and quality of representation, recognising characters from half a body or stylised human figures. Isolated hands or feet and representations through objects are not considered characters. The requirement for direct representation aligns with the concept of actualisation in texts.

The distinction among individual, collective (text), and group characters (image) guides diverse approaches to character identification and information capture.

A collective character, treated as a single unit, is analysed as a whole.

Characters in texts can be individual or part of a collective, representing a social network or group.

Individual characters are designated by proper or common nouns, while collective characters, expressed in plural terms or generic nouns, embody sociability and social inclusion.

Individual characters may have multiple designations but should be counted and analysed only once as for example: "Mary, Helen's mother works at the bank. She is working now." The first character is designated in turn by a forename (Mary), a parental function (mother) and a personal pronoun (she). For all that, this is one and the same character. The second character, on the other hand, is given only one name, Helen. A character, regardless of the number of ways he or she is designated, should be counted – and, therefore, analysed – only once in each unit block, specifying the different references.

Collective characters can be subdivided into more specific sub-collectives, with each specific sub-collective considered as a separate character. Much like collective characters in text, characters in images can be presented individually or in groups, to convey ideas of inclusion and interaction.

Within groups we considered female only 'sororities'; female dominant, male only 'fraternities', 'male dominant' and balanced indicating a group with exactly the same number of girls and boys.

When multiple characters are depicted together, initial impressions tend to highlight shared traits or, in the case of large groups, downplay individual distinctiveness, making personal attributes harder to discern. Noting numerous nearly identical figures may feel redundant, potentially overstating their significance. The hypothesis suggests that in images with several characters, the overall visual impression is more important than individual details. For practical analysis, groups of more than four characters are treated as a single unit rather than examining each separately, further this threshold is influenced by the usual space available in coursebook for illustrations.

In terms of gender intersectional analysis only individual characters were detailed in the present study. Conversely, groups with different ages, ethnicities or abilities counted as diverse in tables and diagrams were not considered in the intersectional table.

Counting characters can be complex, especially when the same figure appears multiple times. Following Brugeilles and Cromer (2009a), if repetition indicates movement or a changing situation, the character is counted once. However, if they appear in distinct contexts or poses, each instance is considered separately. To distinguish, the question is posed: could another character have been chosen? If yes, different characters are counted; if no, the character is counted only once.

Mineshima (2008) defines a character as one who makes at least one utterance of their own, whereas ‘utterance’ is “a sequence of words within a single person’s turn at talk including monologues; thus even a one-word reply like ‘Sure’ constitutes one utterance and so does a lengthy monologue lasting a whole paragraph” (p.7).

In order to respond to the objective of the study – to evaluate whether genders are equally represented in national EFL coursebooks in the 4th, 6th and 9th grade— we proceed to identify the male and female characters based on the selected corpus such as the main focus of the study. To obtain an overview of their representation, the data collection method relating to the representation of men and women was adapted (Brugeilles and Cromer, 2009a) based on their characteristics, their involvement or association with certain actions and activities, and the characters’ own interaction: “Our hypothesis is that gender representations are developed in a subtle and complex way, thanks to a combination of the particular features of each of the characters and their interactions” (p. 16).

According to the aforementioned work, the analysis of representation, more or less stereotypical of male and female, can be captured through the decomposition of the multiple actions in which they appear involved, the type and characteristics of the activities they carry out, as well as the reciprocity of interactions that occur between the characters, offering an insight into what it is like to be “man, woman, boy, girl” in a given sociocultural context (cfr. heading ‘Representing gender’). In essence, the design formulated for this study aims to unveil the broader themes related to gender issues in

coursebooks, identify the characters involved, elucidate how they are portrayed enriching the study by an intersectional perspective overlapping gender with ethnicity, age and ability of the individuals who populate the coursebooks.

Adapting Brugeilles and Cromer (2009a) coding framework, an observation checklist was used as an instrument to collect the data. Some adjustments were made on the composing coding framework to fit to the current study condition, since the original<sup>98</sup> framework is not specifically addressed for EFL coursebooks. There are deletion and limitation of each category in order to make it more appropriate and adequate enough to answer current research questions.

Different categories were recorded in the columns: the coursebook code; the specific 'block unit', as well as categories by which the characters were defined:

- i) appearance of characters: individual or group
- ii) representation in text, image, audio
- iii) gender of the identified individual characters; (sub-categories female, male, other)
- iv) gender of the identified group characters (sub-categories: female only, female dominant, male only, male dominant, balanced)
- v) gender of individual characters intersection
  - a) variable age (child, teen, adult, old)
  - b) variable ethnicity (white, latin, black, asian, brown, first nations)
  - c) variable ability (visual, speech, aural, mental or physical impairment...)
- vi) actions embedded in the characters
- vii) activities embedded in the characters
- viii) occupations embedded in the characters
- ix) attributes of priority:
  - a) Firstness in mixed paired dialogues
  - b) Firstness in mix-paired expressions
  - c) Firstness in images

Mixed paired dialogues were examined and the character who spoke first was recorded. Mix-paired expressions like 'brother and sister', 'husband and wife', 'him and her' were counted and the character who appeared mentioned first was noted.

The observation checklist was generated in an Excel worksheet (cf. Appendix 1, of data collected in Excel). As the main focus of this study is the character, each line of the Excel table stands for one character, recording simultaneously the order it appeared. The calculation of percentage of occurrences was also executed in Excel, a tool which facilitates calculations and data presentation through tables, graphs and presentations in different formats.

For the data analysis to avoid redundancy and text great length only some representative findings are displayed in the table. The findings from verbal texts and

audio transcripts are analysed based on linguistic components in each sentence structure. For visual texts, the interpretation is made according to observable display in the pictures (see findings).

Overall, once the key structural elements like sections, lessons, course material, and characters are identified in a coursebook, precise numbering is essential: i) to aid in data collection and verification; ii) to allow for positioning characters within the fictional realm, enabling a nuanced analysis of their traits and relationships; iii) to facilitate analyses at different scales, such as the coursebook, section, course material, exercises, and individual characters. The process involves numbering sections, lessons, exercises, and pictures, with character numbering based on their appearance sequence throughout the coursebook.

The following criteria will help to highlight the measure and extent of stereotype to answer the three specific research questions:

- 1) Visibility: occurrence of gender and equity, taking into account the idiomatic nature of each medium: text, image, audio.
- 2) Priority: how is gender made more prominent
- 3) Intersecting gender (ethnicity, age, ability): multidimensional lack of equity
- 4) Characters in action: discourse made durable by actions

### **3.3.1. Visibility**

Recording the occurrence of masculine and feminine gender is essential in analyzing the visibility attributed to gender representation in national EFL coursebooks. One extensively discussed aspect of gender inequality involves the phenomenon known as female invisibility. When women are less frequently featured in texts or illustrations it conveys the message that either the female accomplishments or women themselves are deemed unimportant or insignificant (Porreca, 1984). Several prior studies on coursebooks have identified the pervasive omission of women (e.g., Gupta & Yin, 1990; Hellinger, 1980; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009; Porreca, 1984; Wharton, 2005).

The presence and extent of male and female gender representation will therefore be evaluated by counting all instances of their appearance within each “activity block” of a heading or subunit.

Representation will be examined not only through visual elements but also in texts and audio transcripts. Similarly the visibility of male and female characters in terms of AA & O will be measured. Data will be gathered on all representations of male and female characters involved in actions, activities, and socio-professional roles to evaluate the quantity and variation of gender presence.

The analysis of illustrations and photographs identifies how frequently male and female characters are depicted. Their presence in images will be recorded by tallying occurrences and determining which gender is more prevalent and to what extent.

These findings will then be further examined in terms of intersectional attributes of ethnicity, age and ability in relation to gender to assess the presence and visibility of each and every category.

When gender determination is uncertain, a 'not clear' label is applied and are excluded from the count. Studies have identified problems in determining the gender of characters, due to the difficulty in sometimes 'deciphering' the gender in names in certain foreign languages.

Overall, national EFL coursebooks present mostly names and characters associated with Anglo-Saxon or Portuguese cultural background context. However, if an exception arises, the recommended procedure (Brugilles & Cromer 2009a) should not assume the individual intuition of the research author but take into account the context in determining the gender of the character in question. If doubt persists, a 'neutral' value should be recorded.

Likewise, we have also considered label 'not clear' when the intersecting of gender/ethnicity, gender/age and gender/ability were not evident as well as 'no information'.

The low presence or omission of certain groups in the intersecting categories of gender/ethnicity, gender/age and gender/ability becomes an invisibility that will have consequences on the self-image of individuals not seeing themselves represented in the coursebooks they use. Beyond visual representation, all instances of "speech" by male and female characters are recorded.

The collected data will then be analysed, incorporating qualitative aspects to provide a more nuanced, subjective interpretation (Lune & Berg, 2017; Pingel, 2010).

#### *The idiomatic nature of the medium: image, text, audio*

Texts and images convey distinct types of information; details such as a character's name are often exclusive to text or transcription, whereas the visual representation of a character within a scene is unique to the picture. However, certain information may be shared between them; actions, for instance, can be both described in the text and illustrated in the picture. Thus, character analysis needs consideration of the medium from which they emerge, text or image.

The categorisation of male and female characters according to the type of support on which they are visible is of particular importance, as it facilitates the decomposition of differences in representation between text, image and audio transcript. Therefore, the characters observed simultaneously in the images and in the text or audio should be registered twice in the table. When this fact arises during data collection, it may be of

particular importance (Brugelilles and Cromer, 2009a), given that, when appearing in more than one domain, they naturally acquire double meaning.

Characters from the texts and from the pictures can be studied separately, thanks to two distinct sections in the data collection tool: a “Text” section and an “Illustrations” section. It is important not to confuse these two information sources when gathering data. Links between text and picture can mean that characters enjoy a dual presence (in both texts and pictures), giving them a more important position by comparison with equivalent characters who are involved in only one fictional realm. (p.25)

Therefore, we count the characters if they are the object of a sentence or specifically identified in a text or dialogue; the character was also told more than once, if it appeared in different situations throughout the unit.

### **3.3.2. Priority**

According to methods and procedures carried out in previous studies (Porreca, 1984; Hartman & Judd, 1978; Ghorbani, 2009; Jones et al., 1997; Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee, 2014; Stockdale, 2006; Yonata, 2021), all the ‘utterances’ in text and audio were entered in the table, in order to determine and build up a complete record of the expressions of the characters represented.

Subsequently, the information collected made it possible to understand whether there was (im)balance of verbal expression between the male and female gender, as well as its greater or lesser extent; that is whether one gender had more opportunities for expression than the other.

Research indicates that male characters in many coursebooks are more dominant in terms of how frequently they speak and the discursive roles they assume. Men are more often depicted as providing information, instructing, advising, or making suggestions, whereas women are typically shown asking questions or making requests (Lee & Collins, 2009, 2010).

This gender disparity in speech is evident across various coursebook studies worldwide, with men generally given more speaking opportunities. The imbalance is especially pronounced in coursebooks from developing countries in Asia and Africa, where male characters outnumber and outtalk their female counterparts (Gupta & Yin, 1990; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008). However, some coursebooks, particularly those from British editors, show a more equitable distribution of speech between genders, suggesting progress toward greater gender balance in dialogue representation (Jones et al., 1997; Healy, 2009).

Although some modern coursebooks provide a more balanced portrayal of male and female characters, women often remain underrepresented or have less discursive influence. While improvements have been made, true gender equality in coursebook dialogues has yet to be fully realised. Following international trends and national research on Portuguese coursebooks (Gomes et al., 2007; Pires, 2014) we will examine how these global patterns are reflected in local materials, identifying both advancements and persistent, subtle forms of gender imbalance.

Regarding dialogues with the participation of male and female characters, multiple verbal interactions were collected (from text-audio source), as well as the order of priority, with the first character to speak noted.

Previous academic studies (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Ghorbani, 2009; Stockdale, 2006) evaluated the priority in 'mixed pair nouns' (e.g. 'Mr and Mrs', 'brother and sister', Romeo and Juliet), having concluded that the name representing the masculine gender systematically preceded the name representing the feminine gender, arguing (Hartman & Judd, 1978) that it shows the presence of prejudice and that sustains discrimination based on gender "reinforc[ing] the second-place status of women" (p. 390). Likewise, in this study, we carried out a careful and objective observation of all references in which the feminine and masculine gender were mentioned together, in the coursebooks for the 4th, 6th and 9th grades, proceeding to their registration together with the order of priority.

Criticism has been directed towards the practice of using masculine nouns and pronouns as the default reference for all individuals (Holmes, 1993; Miller & Swift, 1988; Mills, 2008; Schneider & Hacker, 1973; Spender, 1998; Swim et al. 2004), as it may contribute to female invisibility and career choice constraint. Gender-neutral or unmarked terms have been a growing trend (e.g., people, human being, businessperson, salesperson); the same happens with the use of paired pronouns (e.g., he or she, him or her) instead of gender-exclusive ones (Lee & Collins, 2008; Pauwels, 1998).

To determine image priority, instances where female characters appeared first were counted, following a left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order. However, due to the unique nature of 'media-images,' the order of appearance does not necessarily indicate greater prominence or visibility. This distinction, which requires qualitative/visual analysis, highlights that a character's 'firstness' does not always translate to higher visibility—especially if they appear in the background or on a more distant plane relative to others.

Research has shown (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010; Van Dijk, 2015) that visual prominence is often determined by factors such as foreground positioning, proximity to the viewer, direct eye contact, or dominant

postures (e.g., raised arms, superior angles). These elements naturally draw attention to the characters positioned at the centre or closest to the reader/viewer.

Alongside visuals, educational comics and cartoons are viewed to positively affect students' understanding and attitudes. They are envisaged as enjoyable to read, increasing interest, learning and fostering positive classroom atmosphere (Golding & Verrier, 2021; Ilhan et al., 2021). This accounts for a distinct characteristic of *Let's Rock!4* which introduces each unit with a whole page panel. Students' age and language proficiency require materials elaborated to facilitate work and address the profile of younger ones ...such materials do just that.

### **3.3.3. Intersecting gender: features/attributes**

As the analysis of Findings will further illustrate, gender stereotyping should not be examined in isolation but rather in conjunction with other factors that shape individual subjectivity. These factors, which also experience unequal recognition within socialisation and identity formation, must be considered to gain a more comprehensive understanding (Collins et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1991) of the problem under investigation.

By linking the omission of certain social and identity groups to the category of gender, which forms the foundation of our research, a clearer understanding of the intricate and interconnected mechanisms underlying gender discrimination will emerge.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore gender identity through a segmented approach, incorporating three intersecting variables that collectively contribute to and intensify experiences of discrimination: ethnicity, age and ability

*Ethnicity* – Applying an intersectional approach to EFL coursebook research allows you to think creatively and critically about “situated” knowledge; a springboard for examining the relationship between sociocultural categories and individual identities (Gåsvær, 2022; Tefera et al., 2018). Intercultural racism is often reinforced through EFL coursebooks and teachers' praxis, both of which put the ‘White’ intercultural racial realities at the centre of cross or intercultural learning (Blažević & Blažević, 2023; Kubota & Lin, 2006; R'boul & Saidi, 2024). That's why research needs to include perspectives of realities defined by other people (hooks, 1989) because “writing about cultures or experiences of ethnic groups different from one's own becomes most political when the issue is who will be regarded as the ‘authoritative’ voice” (p. 45).

Bowen and Hopper's (2022) study examined inclusivity in a substantial sample of ELT coursebook images, employing a combination of measures related to racial presence and interactive meanings; their analysis highlighted the role of coursebooks as spaces that shape racial discourse, particularly in response to increasing diversity within the ELT marketplace (see Kubota, 2021). Additionally, they advocate for a shift

in perspective—from idealistic to pragmatic—placing the responsibility for change on coursebook producers.

Ethnicity, as a concept, is tied to cultural identity rather than physical characteristics. For instance, individuals of the same race (e.g., White) may have distinct ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Irish vs. Italian). While race is recognised as a social construct, its visual markers remain prominent; therefore, in practical applications, physical traits often serve as key indicators of ethnicity.

In addition, although categories used to identify ethnic diversity often consider visual and textual elements that signify racial and ethnic identities such as clothing, artifacts, names and even activities we have focussed on physical appearance and considered the most frequently and easily identified types (Richmond, et al., 2018). Our choice was based on the most obvious external traits: hair, facial features, skin color, height, body type.

Building on Bowen's framework, the present study categorises male and female characters in relation to ethnicity based on physical features, aligning with previous research (e.g., Hilliard, 2015; Roohani & Molan, 2013 apud Bowen & Hopper, 2022). We considered white, latin which include the Mediterranean type (dark brown hair, dark eyes, medium height), black, asian, brown and first nations. When it was't possible to identify the gender/ethnicity pair we created item not clear / not indentifiable. 'Ethnic diversity' has been considered to account for group characters.

*Age* — Given that research has demonstrated that gender and race affect individual perception, it is important to examine whether intersecting identities also influence representations of older adults (Gans et al., 2023). In addition, intersectionality research studies including age as an intersecting identity with ethnicity, have focused mainly on male rather than female (Clarke & Korotchenko, 2016; Kang & Chasteen, 2009, Kang et al., 2014).

Ageism, or the systematic stereotyping or discrimination against people because they are old, encourages youth to perceive older people as fundamentally different, hindering their ability to identify with older adults as fellow human beings (Butler, 1975). Nevertheless, ageing is a universal human experience everyone is expected to undergo (Aronson, 2019) which lends ageism a uniqueness towards other 'isms', like sexism, racism or ableism (Loy-Ashe et al., 2024).

Though our study intends to analyse gender identity as an intersecting identity with ethnicity, ability as well as age, we mean to consider a broad range of intersectional studies on these grounds. As far as age identified individual characters are concerned, we have decided on four age categories corresponding to major life stages: infant, teen, adult and old (Macionis & Plummer, 2011). Context and visuals were used to help to classify presented characters. Likewise, we have also considered the possibilities 'not clear' when age is not evident as well as 'no information'.

*Ability* – Across all dimensions of inequality, disabled individuals remain among the most affected making up 15 to 20 percent of the world's poorest population. Women with disabilities, in particular, experience multiple layers of exclusion, facing barriers such as unemployment, abuse, and physical violence (Browne, 2021). Her intersectional approach highlights the importance of integrating disability considerations into all gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives (SDG 5), emphasising the urgent need to bridge data gaps on gender and disability.

Regarding the characterisation of the characters in terms of 'disability', mobility, wider health, mind, visual, speech and aural (Macionis & Plummer, 2011) were considered. When information or reference to more or less permanent physical disability or impairment was absent, 'no information' was chosen.

More and more, and across the world, there is a growing 'disability awareness' and a rejecting of the old discrimination. It is part of a more general trend towards rights and care. Disabilities are now increasingly seen as distinctive forms of social inequality, discrimination and social exclusion (Babik & Gardner, 2021) which require social changes in order to be rectified.

#### **3.3.4. Characters in action**

The record of the various AA & O presented in different columns, has made it possible to clarify the type of activity(ies) the female and male characters represented in the coursebooks were involved in. Subsequently, after detailed reading and substantial collection of data, they were interpreted according to a panoramic view, 'from afar, from above', in search of patterns that allowed the elaboration of a theory that explained these same patterns. Thus, when adopting an inductive approach to content analysis (Taylor, 2003), we start from a body of specific observations, filtered by the author's particular experiences and interpretations, to constitute a range of generalisations relevant to the study in question. The identification of important and significant themes for the present investigation was then constructed based on inductive reasoning that allowed us to understand the various themes generated in each coursebook and unit, around which the characters appeared associated in actions (talking on the phone, sitting, running, eating) and activities (water sports, painting, gardening, crafts).

The main actions and activities in which the characters appear involved were determined based on the context and information, collected from the image, text and audio, relating to each female and male character, being associated with an activity based on what was considered more prominent. Likewise, the characteristics of the characters were obtained from the context in which they appear, being the object of qualitative analysis. Regarding the 'occupation' section, it is understood as referring to

the character's profession, a factor of great importance as it will be an indicator of gender biased representations.

The distinction between actions and hobbies was not always evident. We classify as Action what in the image, audio or text is visible or capable of being described or referred to in text and its 'punctual realisation' and we use the form 'ing' to designate it. Whenever there was reference to the greater frequency of an action included in the character's routine, or understood as a pastime or habit or particular taste inferred by the context or explicitly referred to as such it was considered a hobby and therefore examined in the Activities table.

Another prevalent aspect of gender inequality frequently identified in coursebooks involves gender stereotyping. Scholars have posited that the continual exposure to stereotypical models contributes to the vicarious learning of traditional norms, potentially constraining children's role behaviour and narrowing their perspectives and expectations. Rigid gender role portraits were discovered (Weitzman & Rizzo, 1972) in a close examination of picture books: boys were portrayed as active leaders and rescuers, whereas girls were depicted as passive followers and servers; men were showcased in a diverse array of occupations, while women were primarily presented in the roles of wives and mothers. Later on, studies have found portrayals of women in a more limited range of social roles (Amare Zeleke, 2023; Evans & Davies, 2000; Lee & Collins, 2010) highlighted often as weaker and more passive than men. This evidence of insufficiency of role models for girls' personal and career aspirations has raised concerns among feminists, governments and international institutions.

Stereotyped gender roles were also evident in activity description: men were associated with physical strength, body size and reputation, and women with weakness, emotion, attractiveness and domestic roles.

### 3.4. Data and analysis

Inspections of the roles and personalities assigned to the female and male characters [...] provide clues as to how the textbook writers perceive each gender  
*Mineshima, 2008*

The information collected in the Excel table was worked on and analysed in order to answer the research questions: 1) How are male and female characters represented in coursebooks?; 2) How, in image, text and audio media, do representations of feminine and masculine characteristics reflect gender stereotypes?; 3) Which intersectional dimensions characterise feminine and masculine genders?

When establishing the gender frequency in the *Let's Rock-4!*, *High Five-6* and *Upgrade-9* coursebooks, the total value of male and female representations was deducted from the table and a chart was presented. The same process was replicated in

each of the coursebooks in order to reveal the frequency of female and male presence in each one in particular. The objective design of the charts highlighted the visibility of male and female representations in texts, audio and images.

The information regarding the number and order of ‘utterances’ was gathered and presented graphically, making it possible to read not only the total number of ‘utterances’ of the characters, but also the total number of instances in which the male or female character spoke in first place. The multiple actions, activities and occupations in which the characters are involved were also presented in tables and charts.

The adoption of this type of analysis is justified by the advantage of respecting the objectivity of the information. On the other hand, it allows easy and direct application, given the accessibility of materials available physically and online. In the context of understanding gender representation in EFL coursebooks (Krippendorff, 2004), content analysis is a particularly useful analysis method “content analysis has the additional qualities of being applicable to large numbers of data and being unobtrusive”. It allows its application to long series of documents, from a diachronic perspective; in parallel, and considering the specific procedure described in the previous title, content analysis has scientific objectivity in the sense that it allows the replication of procedures.

Carrying out a critical observation of the present study, certain limitations in the selected approach are foreseeable. A more robust understanding might have been possible if other research methods had been incorporated, e.g., through interviews with students or teachers. Content analysis proves to be effective in describing observable data (Krippendorff, 2004) “It makes sense of what is mediated between people — textual matter, symbols, messages, information, mass-media content, and technology-supported interaction — without perturbing”, however, it cannot fully contemplate understanding all the causes for a given phenomenon.

Before considering the 'Findings and Discussion' section, where the results taken from the current study will be presented, here we briefly list the procedures described in the 'Methodology' chapter, in a global view of the characteristics of the analysis, related to the list abovementioned:

**Character visibility**

Frequencies of occurrence by gender

Male/female ratio

Priority in text and image

**Characters in action**

Actions and activities

Professions and occupations

**Intersecting gender**

Ethnicity

Age

Ability

# Chapter 4

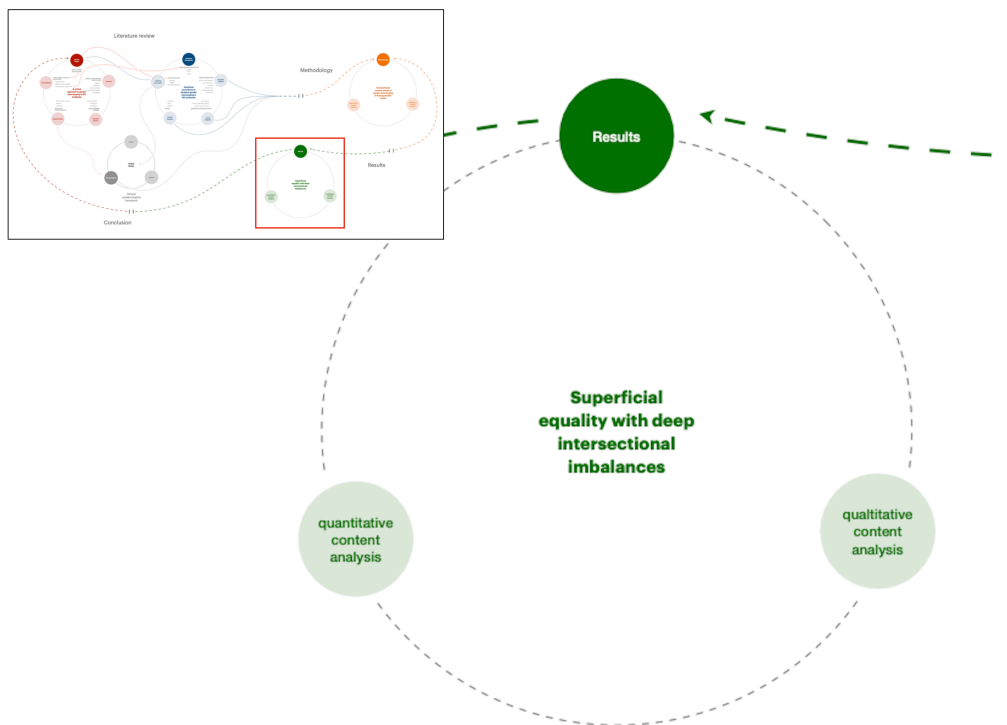
## Findings and discussion

The present section organises and reports the main findings of this study through the presentation of quantitative results in tables and charts, complemented with some comments on qualitative features.

The proportions are expressed in percentages to obtain an overall and clear view of the results. After the computation of quantitative results, qualitative and intersectional aspects are considered. It is expected that qualitative analysis and the cumulative association of qualities will lead to a deeper understanding of quantitative results through methodological triangulation. Representations of male and female characters involved in actions, activities and occupations are quantitatively considered.

In addition, the qualitative analysis explores the visibility and order of priority in male and female gender representation. Qualitative analysis attempts to develop quantitative results by discussing each of the above mentioned aspects.

**Fig. 6**  
*Findings and discussion*



Source: Ribeiro, A. M., Paixão, M. F., Guimarães, S. C. (2024, detail)

Taking all the aforementioned aspects we hope to address the objective of the study: understand whether genders are equally represented in national EFL coursebooks in the 4th, 6th and 9th grades.

## **4.1. Visibility**

Examining gender representation in quantitative terms is essential for identifying patterns and disparities which may not be immediately apparent through qualitative analysis alone. By systematically counting and categorising occurrences of male and female representation across texts, images, and audio<sup>99</sup> materials, we may provide objective evidence of potential imbalances. The extent of gender bias will be achieved through measurable comparisons, highlighting trends in visibility, dominance, and exclusion.

Therefore, tracking the presence of masculine and feminine genders is crucial for assessing the visibility of gender representation in 3 national EFL coursebooks. A widely debated aspect of gender inequality is female invisibility; appearing less frequently in texts or illustrations implies that girls' achievements or even themselves are unimportant or insignificant (Porreca, 1984). Numerous studies on coursebooks such as the ones we have been following (Gupta & Yin, 1990; Hellinger, 1980; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009; Porreca, 1984; Wharton, 2005) have highlighted such phenomenon: a persistent omission of women.

Data-driven understanding of representation follows and will hopefully ensure a supporting, more informed analysis and discussion on gender equity in the educational materials under study.

### **4.1.1. Individual characters**

Out of the total gender representations gathered — 2228 characters — in the selected coursebooks only 4,5 p.c. of the characters (85) were categorised as 'neutral', and 'not clear' (16). Regarding the proportion/majority of character presence in terms of gender, the findings reveal fair gender representation. The data indicate that male representation is marginally higher than female representation across images, texts, and audio in the coursebooks under study.

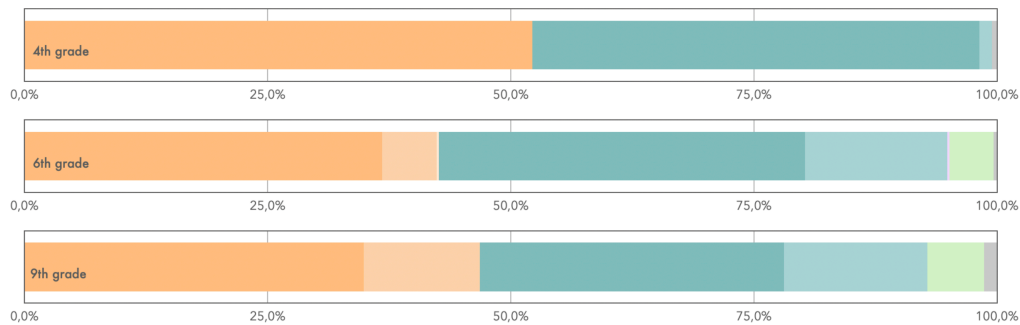
Table-chart 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the findings showing gender proportions per coursebook. Marginally less preference towards males is apparent in the gender ratios of *Let's Rock 4* coursebook and *Upgrade 9* meanwhile *High Five 6* demonstrates slight preference towards male characters. Closer analysis shows the numerical difference is about 67 characters (1029 females against 1096 males). Overall, they all maintain even distribution of characters.

**Table-chart 1**

Visibility (gender ratios). Individual characters (totals)

Visibility*	4th grd.	%	6th grd.	%	9th grd.	%
Individual characters (totals)						
female	282	52,5	374	36,8	234	34,9
female celebrity	0	0,0	57	5,6	80	11,9
female ideologue	0	0,0	2	0,2	0	0,0
male	248	45,9	383	37,7	210	31,3
male celebrity	7	1,3	149	14,7	99	14,8
male ideologue	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
other	0	0,0	2	0,2	0	0,0
neutral (text)	0	0,0	46	4,5	39	5,8
not clear (images)	3	0,6	4	0,4	9	1,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>		<b>1017</b>			
Female		52,5		42,6		46,8
Male		47,2		52,3		46,1
Not gendered/other		0,6		5,1		7,2
<i>ratio f/m</i>		<i>1,1</i>		<i>0,8</i>		<i>1,0</i>

\* Based on the discussion in the Theory and Methodology sections, the number of “counted characters” exceeds the number of unique characters. This is because the same characters may be counted more than once when they appear in different unit blocks.



*4th grade* – The table-chart displays total gender representations gathered from 537 individual identified characters in *Let’s Rock 4*. It is clear from the data that female representation is slightly higher than male representation in image, text and audio.<sup>100</sup>

As regards the proportion of characters presented in terms of gender, it was demonstrated that gender representation slightly favours the feminine (~52 vs. ~47 p.c.).

No characters were defined as ‘neutral’.

There is no reference to other, non-binary genders in this coursebook.

As opposed to *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* the presence of well-known characters is little, significantly they are all male celebrities (7).

*6th grade* – The above table-chart displays total gender representations gathered from 965 identified characters in *High Five 6*. Four characters depicted in visuals allowed no identification. Data shows slight higher male representation in image, text on the whole.

As regards gender proportion it was demonstrated that male characters surpass the representation of female ones by ~10p.c (52.3–42.6). Only 4.5 p.c. of the characters were defined as ‘neutral’ (student, teen, classmate, friend, parent...).

There is a clear difference regarding the presence of famous characters in the coursebook. Greater number of male celebrities, expressed in female imbalance of one to three, (57 female as opposed to 149 male).

The two single references to the ‘ideologue’, appear in this coursebook and both are feminine, the Statue of Liberty. We consider that this fact refers to the romantic use of female characters, seen as an abstraction.

Surprisingly, there is the presence of ‘other’, (2 occurrences), an androgynous character.

*9th grade* – The displayed characters in *Upgrade 9* total 671 individuals (623 gendered identified, 39 ‘neutral’ and 9 not identified characters). Data shows marginal difference favouring female with representation slightly higher than male counterpart in image, text on the whole.

As regards the proportion of characters presented in terms of gender, it was demonstrated that gender representation is alike (46.8–46.1). Only 1.3 p.c. of the characters were ‘not clear’ and 5.8 p.c. defined as ‘neutral’, such as ‘student’, ‘teen’, ‘classmate’, ‘friend’, ‘parent’...

There is slight difference regarding the presence of famous characters. Greater number of male celebrities (99 characters) as opposed to 80 female, expressing marginal female imbalance (14.8 p.cvs. 11.9 p.c).

In short, the analysis of gender representation in coursebooks reveals a nuanced picture of gender bias in terms of visibility. While some coursebooks maintain a relatively balanced distribution of male and female characters, others exhibit slight to moderate male dominance. *Let’s Rock 4* and *Upgrade 9* stand out with a marginally higher representation of female characters, whereas *High Five 6* demonstrate a subtle preference for male representation. Additionally, male celebrities are consistently overrepresented compared to female celebrities across all examined materials. The presence of one non-binary character representation is considered positive, nevertheless, it’s irrelevant and one may add, highlights the binary nature of gender depiction in these coursebooks.

To determine whether results are skewed by the number of characters in images compared to text these criteria are considered individually in the following table-charts.

#### **4.1.2. Text**

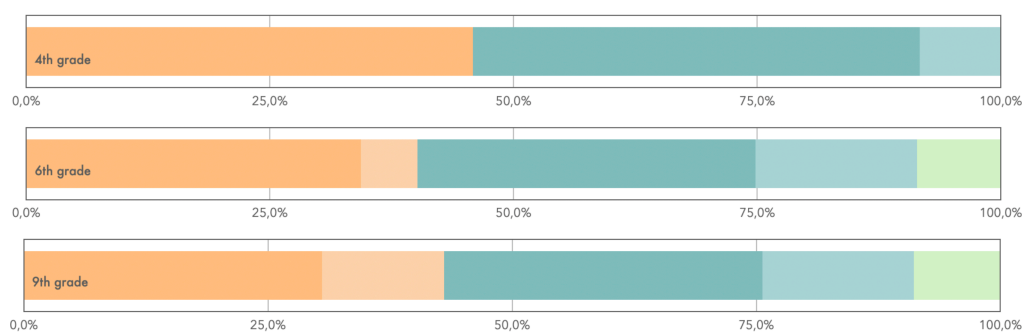
Categorising male and female characters based on their mode of appearance helps analyse representation difference as texts and visuals provide different types of information. While some modern coursebooks offer a more balanced portrayal, women

remain underrepresented, particularly in coursebooks from developing countries in Asia and Africa. We will determine if results are skewed by the number of characters in text compared to images. Therefore these categories will be considered individually (see Table-chart 2).

**Table-chart 2**

*Visibility (gender ratios). Individual characters (text)*

Visibility	4th grd.	%	6th grd.	%	9th grd.	%
Individual characters (text)						
female	22	45,8	184	34,4	134	30,5
female celebrity	0	0,0	31	5,8	55	12,5
female ideologue	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
male	22	45,8	186	34,7	143	32,6
male celebrity	4	8,3	89	16,6	68	15,5
male ideologue	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
other	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
neutral (text)	0	0,0	46	8,6	39	8,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>536</b>		<b>439</b>	
Female		45,8		40,1		43,1
Male		54,2		51,3		48,1
Not gendered/other		0,0		8,6		8,9
<i>ratio f/m</i>		<i>0,8</i>		<i>0,8</i>		<i>0,9</i>



Of the 2228 characters representations overall, the number of representation exclusively in media-text (1023) and exclusive media-images (685) favours text source; there are 520 text-and-image characters. In numerical terms, as highlighted further, male ratio is demonstrated as higher affording men greater visibility.

The table-chart 2 below presents the individual gender ratios found in media-text in *Let's Rock4!*, *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* as well as the character distribution. Closer analysis shows the more or less even distribution according to each coursebook.

*4th grade* – Taking into account the pupil profile target, 9-year-old EFL beginners, with little language proficiency, *Let's Rock 4* text data (48 characters) is reduced as compared to image source (see Table-chart 3, 217 characters). Image plays more important role, particularly the presentation of gender individual characters in both text/image (see Table-chart 4, 275 characters) where educational cartoons are

included. More and more the multimodality of resources and activities to address young learners provide greater scaffolding facilitating the learning process. Although text/image combination appears equally significant for 6th graders (178 characters) it is somehow gradually replaced in 9th grade by text/audio which is often provided to students as listening activity without any text support (67 characters in *Upgrade 9*).

Although not statistically significant, the 48-character-depiction (out of 540 in Table-chart 1) favours male, with a ratio expression of ~54 vs. ~45 p.c.

Imbalance is greater when examining famous characters in particular. The occurrence of 4 male celebrities only, might be seen as rather negative because such characters are usually presented as role models. In this sense, the omission of the feminine playing such parts can be harmful to the construction of girls' identity.

No gender neutral references to individual characters in text source were found. Neutral characters expressed in nouns such as teacher,<sup>101</sup> author,<sup>102</sup> presenter<sup>103</sup> were examined but became almost immediately gendered and identified in text and visuals. In addition, large part of text references, exercises, drills relate to the class mascot, Rocky the cat. Together with other domestic and wild animals that populate the coursebook they were not considered in the defined categories and as a result were not counted. An important observation might be the fact that Rocky is a 'He'.

*6th grade* – There is male superiority in text and audio sources. Although not statistically significant, the difference of 60 characters out of a total of 536, it is clear there are more male (275 vs. 215) than female characters (~51 p.c. versus ~40 p.c., the remaining part being noted 'neutral').

Imbalance is greater when analyzing famous characters in particular, though. The occurrence of 89 male celebrities compared to 31 female celebrities might be seen as negative particularly because such characters are usually presented as role models. In this sense, the lower number of female representation or presence playing such part can be discouraging to the construction of feminine identity.

As mentioned in the table chart, there is the presence of only one 'ideologue', feminine, which refers to the romantic use of female characters as abstractions – the 'Statue of Liberty'. There are frequent gender neutral references in text/audio source. This means that in linguistic terms, the abundant neutral markers which characterise the English language are evident.

*9th grade* – There is slight male superiority in text and audio source. Although not statistically significant, the 22-character-depiction difference favours male representation (211 vs. 189). Out of a total of 439 characters, the ratio expresses ~43 p.c. versus ~48 p.c. (the rest being noted 'neutral').

Imbalance is greater when analyzing famous characters in particular, though. The occurrence of 68 male celebrities compared to 55 female celebrities might be seen as

negative particularly because such characters are usually presented as role models and in this sense may hinder feminine identity.

There are frequent gender neutral references in text/audio source (about 10%). This means that in linguistic terms, the abundant neutral markers in English are made obvious. The same does not occur if we look at the data in the illustrations.

To conclude, the analysis of character representation across media-text exclusively shows greater prevalence of characters (1023) in this source as compared to media-image counterpart (685).

General male dominance is revealed in texts granting men greater visibility in this media particularly. While coursebooks exhibit a relatively balanced gender distribution, male superiority is evident in text and audio source, particularly in the portrayal of famous figures. The significant disparity in male versus female celebrity representation may have negative implications for the construction of feminine identity, as role models tend to be overwhelmingly male. However, the presence of frequent gender-neutral references in text and audio source highlights an attempt at inclusivity in language use.

#### **4.1.3. Image**

Pictures are a fundamental element in teaching coursebooks (Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010) as their communicational value goes beyond the expressive capacity of oral or written language (Giaschi, 2000), often more than a thousand words.

Much investigation has shown that, despite quantitative improvement towards fairness especially in modern EFL teaching materials, gender representation biases is still apparent showing the female character remained underrepresented compared to the male counterpart (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Lee & Collins, 2008; Samadikhah & Shahrokhi, 2015).

Therefore, it is our purpose to examine the presence of women in three local EFL coursebooks considering the careful observation of the frequency of representation of male/female characters in the images as well as the number of characters.

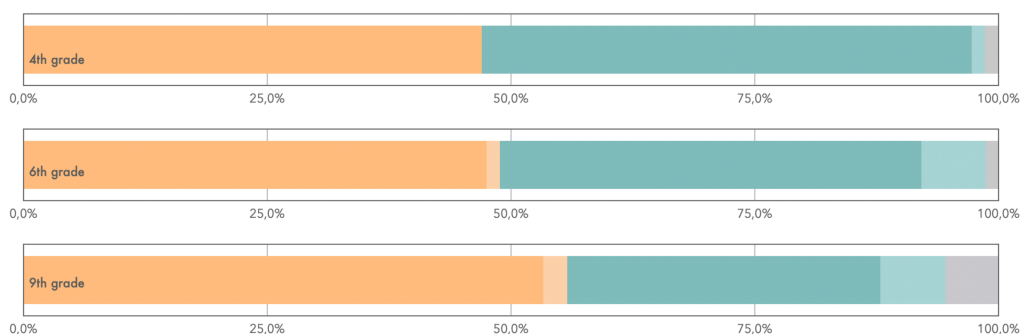
Regarding the distribution according to image-media, out of the 2228 character representations overall, the number (685 characters) of representations in media-image exclusively is lower comparing to text. Further, almost gender even representation with 342 females and 327 became evident.

In Table-chart 3, the partial gender representation of male and female in each coursebook is expressed.

**Table-chart 3**

Visibility (gender ratios). Individual characters (image)

Visibility Individual characters (image)	4th grd.	%	6th grd.	%	9th grd.	%
female	102	47,0	144	47,5	88	53,3
female celebrity	0	0,0	4	1,3	4	2,4
female ideologue	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
male	109	50,2	131	43,2	53	32,1
male celebrity	3	1,4	20	6,6	11	6,7
male ideologue	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
other	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
neutral (text)	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
not clear (images)	3	1,4	4	1,3	9	5,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>217</b>		<b>303</b>		<b>165</b>	
Female		47,0		47,5		53,3
Male		51,6		49,8		38,8
Not gendered/other		1,4		1,3		5,5
<i>ratio f/m</i>		<i>0,9</i>		<i>1,0</i>		<i>1,4</i>



*4th grade* – Out of the 540 (Table-chart 1) characters represented in *Let's Rock4!*, the number of male and female appearance in the image-media exclusively is four times those found in text exclusively (48 vs. 217 characters; see Table-chart 2). 112 male characters were depicted in the images, 102 female, showing gender balance regarding this *medium*. Images depict a marginal difference of ~5 p.c. favouring male.

As regarding famous people/role models depiction, unlike *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* findings (as it will shortly be seen below), the presence of female and male celebrities is all but fair with a 3:0 ratio. Similar to results found in text, the absence of female celebs in image amplified the prejudice towards women failing to represent women playing VIP parts in wide range of occupational areas.

It appears that greater care is possible on the part of the author/editor to have balanced gender representation. However, the omission of female depiction as well-succeeded personalities may be considered harmful for the future of such young learners (Gerdeman, 2019; Kızılaslan, 2010, Mihira et al., 2021).

Visuals in *Let's Rock 4* present both genders indoors and in outdoor activities sharing diverse settings: having lessons, organising healthy food campaigns, playing in the school yard, engaging in school environmental friendly projects, participating in song competition, visiting the zoo, going to the beach, having fun outside.

Several other visuals portray girl kneeling on the floor, smiling, playing with teddy bear, sitting in the sun, putting sunscreen and wearing hat in fancy body position, dressing up as princesses; whereas boy dresses up as pirate, indian, is seen shouting, arms open wide, playing football, with a pointing finger in self-assuring attitude. This could be described as reinforcing female stereotype of female sensitive, calm, dainty, wearing pink clothes and accessories (ribbon in the hair, pink glasses, nice hand bags...) in rather feminine attitudes, meanwhile male characters are reinforced as active, cheerful, self-reliant and aggressive (Koenig, 2018).

Another comparable example to Clark's (2016) as well as Rohmawati and Putra's (2022), depicts a girl sitting by the water, kneeling, lovely in pink clothes, side by side with boy fishing, legs crossed. This is a particular powerful source of representations as visuals can make meanings appear natural and pre-given being easily converted into fixed and oversimplified concepts and stereotypes (Roberts, 2016).

*6th grade* – Out of the total 1017 characters represented in *High Five 6*, the number of male and female appearance in the image-media is lower (303) than those found in the texts (536 characters), text-and-image (178). 151 male characters were depicted in the images, whereas female are 148; showing gender balance in this medium, 48.8 p.c. compared to 49.8 p.c. Although female presence is greater than male, difference is marginal, 1 p.c.

As regards famous people/role models depiction, imbalance reveals itself favouring famous male characters, visible in the images five times more, 20 against 4, of all 303 characters represented.

Overall, greater care on the part of the author or editor is likely. Yet, greater presence of women in visuals only, may indicate aestheticisation of femininity. Similar to Clark's (2016), a girl sitting at a desk in the classroom writing, eyes down, very neat and tidy whereas the boy next to her is seen looking at her work cheating in a funny and clever way underlines same bias.

*9th grade* – Out of the 671 characters represented in *Upgrade 9* (Table-chart 1), the number of male and female appearance in the image-media exclusively is half than those found in the texts exclusively (156 gender identified vs. 439). 64 male characters were depicted in the visuals as opposed to 92 female showing gender imbalance in this medium. Images exhibit 17 p.c. more female.

Similar to 6th grade coursebook findings regarding role models depiction the presence of female and male celebrities is far from balanced.

In short, concurring with aforementioned coursebook findings, if on the one hand it appears greater care exists on the part of the author/ editor, on the other hand, greater women depiction in media-source particularly may be inferred as feminine body aestheticisation pointing to a western gaze or ‘spectacled’ body (Richardson, 2021).

Several visuals portray girls in carefully posed, elegant positions, while boys in both *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* are often shown in more casual, dynamic settings—such as sitting with legs crossed or leaning against a wall, wearing a cap in a relaxed manner, sitting on the floor. This portrayal reinforces the stereotype of girls as delicate, reserved, and adorned in pink clothing with elaborate hairstyles, whereas boys are depicted as energetic, confident, and independent (Koenig, 2018).

The analysis of gender representation in media-image across the coursebooks reveals a generally balanced distribution of male and female characters, with slight variations. While the overall number of representations in images exclusively is lower than in text counterpart, gender balance is largely maintained, with minor differences favouring male on the 4th and 6th grade as opposed to 9th grade where female characters express slight higher percentage overall suggesting a shift towards greater fairness in visual representation.

However, a significant imbalance is observed in the depiction of famous figures, as male celebrities consistently outnumber female ones, reinforcing gender bias in role model representation.

#### **4.1.4. Image & Text**

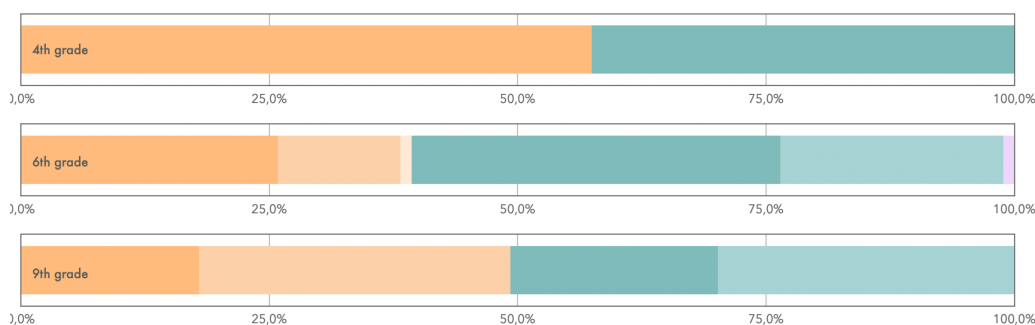
According to Brugeilles and Cromer (2009a), texts and images serve to enhance learners’ understanding and engagement, each conveying different types of information. While character names are exclusive to text, scenes are depicted solely through images implying examining each medium separately.

When the same character occurs in text-and-image simultaneously, the relationship between text and image creates a dual presence, affording the characters greater significance. Within the text-and-image corpus, explicit identification of characters, whether individual or group in both text and picture, is required, being specifically fundamental in the comic-strip page analysis. Therefore, a comprehensive and systematic analysis of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ representations has been conducted to identify gender bias particularly through the frequency of occurrence of female and male in both text and image. Table-chart 4 expresses gender ratios of individual characters in text and image.

**Table-chart 4**

Visibility (gender ratios). Individual characters (text & image)

Visibility Individual characters (text & image)	4th grd.	%	6th grd.	%	9th grd.	%
female	158	57,5	46	25,8	12	17,9
female celebrity	0	0,0	22	12,4	21	31,3
female ideologue	0	0,0	2	1,1	0	0,0
male	117	42,5	66	37,1	14	20,9
male celebrity	0	0,0	40	22,5	20	29,9
male ideologue	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
other	0	0,0	2	1,1	0	0,0
neutral (text)	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
not clear (images)	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>275</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>67</b>	
Female		57,5		39,3		49,3
Male		42,5		59,6		50,7
Not gendered/other		0,0		1,1		0,0
<i>ratio f/m</i>		<i>1,4</i>		<i>0,7</i>		<i>1,0</i>



4th grade – *Let’s Rock 4* exhibits prevalence of the feminine with ~58 p.c. representation out of 275 characters (Table-chart 4; out of 540 overall in Table-chart 1). This fact highlights the clear concern on part of authors and editors to create unbiased quality coursebooks portraying both masculine and feminine equally in text and image.

Alongside visuals, educational comics and cartoons are viewed to positively affect students’ understanding and attitudes. Each Unit of *Let’s Rock 4* is introduced with a whole page panel. They are envisaged as enjoyable to read, increasing interest, learning and fostering positive classroom atmosphere (Golding & Verrier, 2021; Ilhan et al., 2021) particularly young learners.

Proportions of male female characters in images are fairly distributed somehow not consistent with above table and chart showing female and male unequal visibility. The difference favouring female is a positive sign towards greater fairness.

6th grade – *High Five 6* exhibits marked prevalence of the masculine with ~60 p.c. representation out of 178 characters (Table-chart 4, out of 965 overall gendered [2

noted 'other'; 4 noted 'unclear'; 46 noted 'neutral']; Table-chart 1). This fact highlights lack of concern on part of authors and editors to create unbiased quality coursebooks portraying both masculine and feminine equally in text and image. Masculine and feminine are not equally represented in text-image as they are not when referred to text-exclusive and image-exclusive; proportion of male female and neutral characters in images are consistent with table and chart showing female less visible than male.

*9th grade – Upgrade 9* exhibits balanced masculine-feminine representation of 67 character occurrences (Table-chart 4, out of 623 gendered overall [9 noted 'unclear'; 39 noted 'neutral'] in Table-chart 1). This fact highlights the clear concern on part of authors and editors to create an unbiased quality coursebook depicting both masculine and feminine equally in text-image. Proportions of male female and neutral characters in images and text exclusively are not firmly consistent with above table and chart showing female and male equal visibility.

One wonders what other findings may come up when overlapping gender identity with other character features we here intend to critically examine.

The analysis of gender representation in both text and image simultaneously reveals varying degrees of balance across the coursebooks. *Let's Rock 4* demonstrates prevalence of feminine representation, though overall visibility remains fairly distributed, suggesting a generally fair gender perception. *High Five 6*, however, shows a clear masculine dominance, with female characters appearing less frequently in both text and image. In contrast, *Upgrade 9* achieves a balanced representation, indicating a deliberate effort by authors and editors to ensure gender equity. These findings highlight inconsistencies across different coursebooks, with some maintaining gender fairness while others still favour masculine representation.

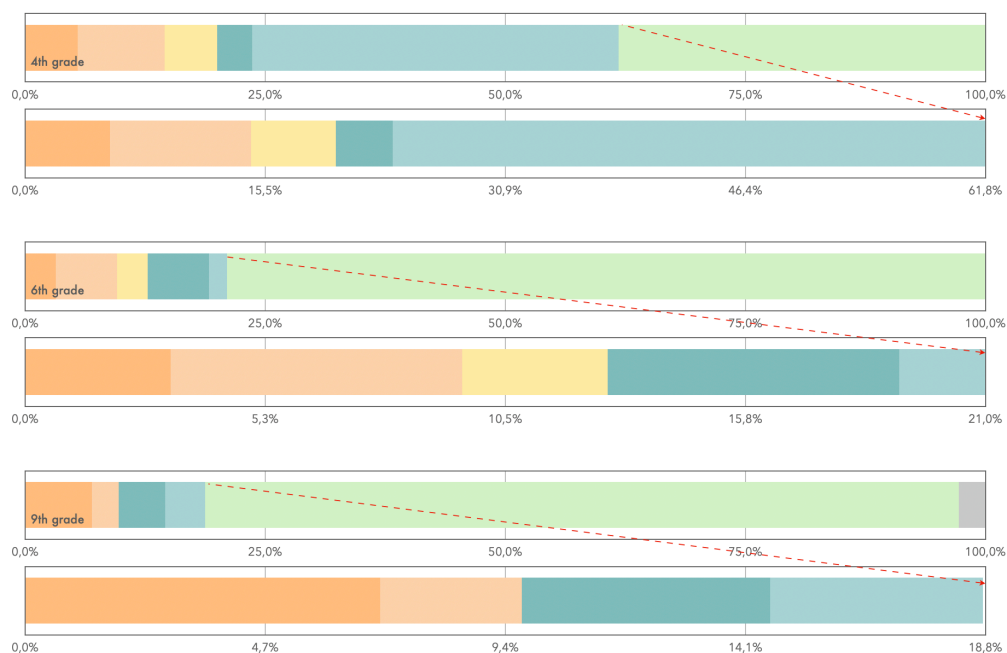
#### **4.1.5. Group characters**

Beyond analyzing individual male and female characters, it is crucial to examine dominant, balanced, or underrepresented gender groups within EFL coursebooks. This broader perspective provides insight into whether gender representation skews toward male-dominated narratives, female-dominated contexts, or a balanced distribution. Analyzing groups rather than isolated characters helps reveal systemic trends in how genders interact, collaborate, or are positioned in learning materials. It also highlights whether one gender is consistently portrayed as more active, authoritative, or central, influencing learners' perceptions of social roles. By assessing group dynamics quantitatively as expressed in Figure 5 we may better understand structural gender biases and their potential impact on language learning and socialisation.

**Table-chart 5**

Visibility (gender ratios). Group characters (totals)

Visibility Groups characters	4th grd.	%	6th grd.	%	9th grd.	%
female only	3	5,5	5	3,2	10	6,9
female dominant	5	9,1	10	6,4	4	2,8
balanced	3	5,5	5	3,2		0,0
male only	2	3,6	10	6,4	7	4,9
male dominant	21	38,2	3	1,9	6	4,2
other	0	0,0	0	0,0		0,0
neutral (text)	21	38,2	122	77,7	113	78,5
not clear (images)	0	0,0	2	1,3	4	2,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>		<b>157</b>		<b>144</b>	
Female biased		14,5		9,6		9,7
Balanced		5,5		3,2		0,0
Male biased		41,8		8,3		9,0
Not gendered/other		38,2		79,0		81,3
Gendered		61,8		21,0		18,8
Biased		56,4		17,8		18,8
<i>Biased/Gendered</i>		<i>91,2</i>		<i>84,8</i>		<i>100,0</i>



4th grade – There are 55 group character instances in *Let's Rock 4*. About 42 p.c. of group characters are sole male or male dominant. Sororities refer to 5.5 p.c of all groups, together with 9 p.c of female dominant groups revealing imbalance gender representation in groups favouring male depiction. About 38 p.c of group characters are neutral or 'ungendered'.

About 6 p.c. of the groups have exactly the same number of boys and girls, which shows that it is possible to have an 'unbiased' approach. Evenness regarding groups could have greater visibility, though.

As opposed to individual characters, *Let's Rock 4* shows a large proportion/ratio of neutral or 'ungendered' group characters such as 'children', 'students', 'characters', 'friends', 'they', 'class'.

There should be more care to represent gendered group as well as individual characters (data collected mainly from text/images, where we also found female greater visibility).

*6th grade* – There are 157 group character instances in *High Five 6* revealing overall balance of female and male presence. Group characters are mostly neutral or 'ungendered' (79 p.c.).

There are more phratries than sororities (10 to 5). Conversely predominantly female mixed groups are shown - 10 'female dominant' versus 3 'male dominant' group characters. There are more women in mixed gender groups which might represent higher femininity presence. The least represented group is the one that reveals an even number or equal presence of female and male individuals, which could have been provided with greater visibility.

Collective 'neutral' character greatly outweighs all other group categories summing up 122 occurrences (~78 p.c.). We realize that the use of neutral 'they', 'teens', 'people', 'classmates', 'volunteers', 'kids', 'colleagues' replacing the collective flattens grammatical gender use, favouring not only gender balanced representation but also preparing the way for the wider inclusion of 'other' diverse gender identities in EFL materials.

*9th grade* – *Upgrade 9* exhibits 144 group character occurrences, 27 of them gender marked. In spite of this statistical underrepresentation, gender balance presence is maintained showing awareness at addressing imbalance gender representation as well as promoting femininity in groups.

Group characters are mostly neutral or 'ungendered' (~81 p.c.), proving 'unbiased' coursebook edition is possible.

*Upgrade 9* shows more sororities than phratries (10 to 7 but male mixed groups outnumber female counterpart - 6 'male dominant' versus 4 'female dominant' group characters, an almost even ratio. Balanced mixed gender groups are absent.

Collective 'neutral' character greatly outweighs all other group categories summing up 113 occurrences (more than 75 p.c., a dimension also present in *High Five 6*). One may consider there is fair representation of female and male group characters. Equal representation may prove that unbiased depiction regarding gender is possible.

The percentage of group occurrences in the total number of character occurrences (group and individual) is higher in *Upgrade 9* than in *HighFive 6*, and in both more

than *Let's Rock 4*, suggesting groups are depicted a lot more when the coursebook targets 15-year-old learners whose major influence and care is no longer family but peers.

In short, the analysis of group dynamics in coursebooks highlights varying degrees of gender balance and neutrality. *Let's Rock4!* shows a male-dominant trend, with fewer female-led groups and a significant proportion of neutral groups. While balanced gender groups exist, their visibility remains low. *High Five 6* presents a more even gender distribution, with a majority of groups classified as neutral, supporting a shift toward inclusivity. *Upgrade 9* achieves the highest level of gender balance, with most groups being neutral or ungendered, demonstrating that an unbiased approach to gender representation is possible. The prevalence of neutral group characters across all coursebooks might suggest on the one hand a move toward inclusivity and the potential for broader gender representation in EFL materials but on the other hand it might be seen as the reflection of ungendered language which defines the English system. Additionally, the increasing depiction of groups in higher-grade coursebooks reflects the growing importance of peer influence in adolescent socialisation.

The quantitative analysis of gender representation in three national EFL coursebooks has provided measurable evidence of patterns in visibility and exclusion. While some coursebooks maintain a relatively balanced distribution of male and female characters, others exhibit slight to moderate male dominance, particularly in text and audio sources. Male characters, especially celebrities, consistently receive greater representation, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies and potentially influencing students' perception of gender roles. The near lack of non-binary representation further highlights the binary nature of gender depiction in these educational materials.

A more balanced representation is observed in media images, with minor variations across coursebooks. Although the overall presence of characters in images is lower than in texts, gender balance is largely maintained, with *Let's Rock 4* and *High Five 6* slightly favouring male representation and *Upgrade 9* showing female prevalence cooccurring with the gazing social perception of the feminine.

Notably, the depiction of famous figures remains male-dominated, though as the coursebook grade level increases, visual representation of celebrities appears to shift toward greater fairness.

Examining gender representation in both text and image simultaneously reveals inconsistencies across coursebooks. *Let's Rock 4* demonstrates feminine prevalence, whereas *High Five 6* is clearly male-dominant. *Upgrade 9*, however, achieves a balanced portrayal, indicating that an equitable approach to gender representation is possible with intentional editorial choices.

Group dynamics further reflect these patterns. While *Let's Rock 4* leans toward male-dominant groups, *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* incorporate more neutral or ungendered

groups, suggesting a trend toward inclusivity. The prominence of neutral characters may reflect a linguistic shift in English toward ungendered language rather than a conscious attempt at gender balance. Moreover, the increasing depiction of groups in higher-grade coursebooks aligns with the growing social significance of peer interactions in adolescence.

Overall, while some progress toward gender equity is evident, persistent disparities—particularly in the visibility of female role models—underscore the need for a more intentional and consistent approach to gender representation in educational materials. A greater effort to include diverse gender identities, balanced role models, and equal visibility in both text and images could foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

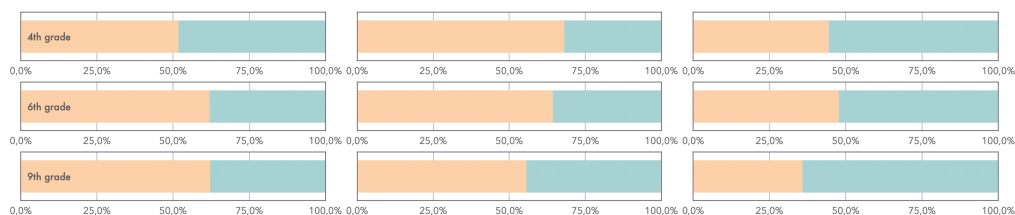
## 4.2. Priority

Research indicates that male characters in many coursebooks are more dominant in terms of how frequently they speak and the discursive roles they assume. This gender disparity in speech evident across coursebook studies worldwide is especially pronounced in coursebooks from developing and more traditional asian countries where frequently male characters outnumber and outtalk their female counterparts. Nevertheless, globally there is progress toward greater gender balance in dialogue representation with equitable distribution of speech between genders (Table-chart 6).

**Table-chart 6**

*Priority: images, dialogues, mixed pairs*

Priority	Images						Dialogues						Mixed pairs					
	4 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	6 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	9 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	4 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	6 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	9 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	4 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	6 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%	9 <sup>th</sup> gd.	%
female	58	51,8	44	62,0	23	62,2	47	68,1	9	64,3	5	55,6	4	44,4	21	47,7	14	35,9
male	54	48,2	27	38,0	14	37,8	22	31,9	5	35,7	4	44,4	5	55,6	23	52,3	25	64,1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>112</b>		<b>71</b>		<b>37</b>		<b>69</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>44</b>		<b>39</b>	



More or less biased representation of gender stereotypes may also manifest through the order of ‘priority’ assigned to female and male, classified as ‘male firstness’ (Porreca, 1984). Regarding ESL, studies analysed both who speaks first in ‘mixed gender dialogues’ as well as the priority applied to ‘mixed pair nouns’ (Hartman & Judd, 1978) revealing the systematic secondary position of the female individual, claiming that “automatic” ordering reinforces female second-place status.

To determine image priority, instances where female characters appeared first were counted, following a left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order. However, due to the unique nature of 'media-images,' the order of appearance does not necessarily indicate greater prominence or visibility. This distinction, which requires qualitative/visual analysis (Kress G. & Van Leeuwen, 2006), highlights that a character's 'firstness' in visuals does not always translate to higher visibility –especially if they appear in the background or on a more distant plane relative to others.

This study has assessed priority in a threefold way: a) in mixed gender dialogues; b) in mixed pair expressions and c) in images.

*4th grade* – Assessing priority in images where male and female characters are portrayed together, slight female depiction in the first place comes up (58 vs. 54 instances). Concurring with prevalence of feminine in text-image once again this may be considered as a positive sign towards balanced representation (~52 vs. ~48 p.c.).

The gender who appeared first in images was counted, considering the reading from left to right, top to bottom. Nevertheless, given the specificity of the 'media-source', it was subject to a qualitative visual analysis. If the character appeared fore-standing, closest to the reader, establishing 'eye contact' with the reader or presenting a position of 'dominance' (arms in the air, facing a character from a superior angle/position), this 'setting' would direct our attention to that individual(s), so a note would be made. For instance on page 62, a female character, Liu appears first but loses priority to boy who appears more in the foreground, closer to viewer, with livelier expression, eyes and hand moving as if speaking to someone. Our attention is immediately drawn to the male character depicted.

Concerning the priority in dialogues and in mixed pair expressions in *Let's Rock 4*, a detailed analysis was carried out of all instances in which men and women are represented or appear together, having identified which gender 'speaks' or is represented first or to which is given priority. Despite the large sample (69 occurrences), 'mixed pair' dialogues are usually short (3, 4 turns maximum) due to the target pupil addressed. Yet, one might consider there is significant data collection. There is evident uneven representation of mix-gendered dialogues with a 2:1 favouring female.

Female superiority in initiating the conversation (68 p.c. vs. 32 p.c.), corroborates recent trends towards more balanced representation and the clear effort of publishers and authors showing minimal gender gap in speech, suggesting a move toward greater gender equality in dialogue representation (see Jones et al., 1997; Pihlaja, 2008). The same occurs as regards *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* which show female characters are given more first speaking turn in dialogues.

It will be interesting to understand the situation in which such dialogues arise as the initiative of the conversation does not always equate to more speaking time or

discourse prominence. In any case, being given the initiative to women is a positive indicator demonstrating lack of bias towards either gender.

In *Let's Rock 4* most dialogues occur between female teacher and a class made up of diverse characters, boys and girls whose appearance is recurrent all along the coursebook. As a result, female speech is dominant and prominent: giving instructions, suggestions, monitoring, organising activities, orienting pupil's work, at school, at the Fair or the Zoo in school visits.

The reduced data gathered from mixed-paired expressions (9 instances) demonstrates marginal difference favouring male (5 vs. 4 instances) showing insignificant gender bias ratio.

*High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* show significant number of mixed pair expressions. Although the masculine mentioned first represents higher ratio, as in *Let's Rock 4*, the authors' effort to use expressions inverting the usual masculine first, is successfully stressed and appears in the regular use of *girls and boys*, *her and him*, *Lucy and Ricardo*. Great care is evidently being carried out, nevertheless the recurrent appearance of the formal *Ladies and Gentleman* expression although attributing firstness to female it is a mere social formality rather than empowering.

Gendered language runs deeper in our subconscious. It is clear the difficulty in changing or inverting the order of formal expressions like the aforementioned or *Mr and Mrs*. However, teachers always have the chance to explain it is possible to use the reverse or a more balanced classroom language, giving examples of neutral or gender friendly expressions like *s/he*, *sister and brother* instead (Lee & Collins, 2009; Sunderland, 2000).

Although our research focus solely in the coursebook, a quick look through supporting materials (in all the three coursebooks under analysis) reveals extra materials such as tests, workbook, grammar and vocabulary summaries present a larger amount of unfair gender representation and depiction showing not so greater care on part of authors and editors. Also, at this issue, Sunderland (2015a) notes the distinction between coursebook sub-genres is an important one, as gender representation will likely vary between reading comprehension exercises, listening exercises and dialogues. Moreover, quoting Yang (2014) more gender imbalance was found in the reading passages than in the dialogues which reveal of particular interest, for classroom practice for example exchanging gender roles.

Regarding gender proportions in *Let's Rock 4*, quantitative analysis demonstrated fair representation. Nevertheless, examining its distribution in image medium throughout the coursebook, there are 6 pages representing a single gender exclusively, 4 pages representing only the male character and 2 only the female counterpart. This may be considered an omission of female characters as the odds favour male in a 1:2 ratio. Concurring with findings in year 6 and 9 coursebooks, it might be significant that

the female is depicted solely in the 2 pages (out of 6) both part of Unit 4 'Let's eat healthy food!' which deal with health, balanced diet routines, food and well-being. Other 4 pages (out of 6) illustrate male appearing in Unit 5 'Let's go around our city' which deals with public buildings, house description and countries around the world; in Unit 2 'Let's visit the Zoo!' presenting all sorts of animals at the Zoo and as a happy cheerful farmer. Lastly, the presence of male appears solely depicted once in Unit 1 'Let's protect the planet' giving tips to make greener houses, saving, recycling, reusing and reducing. The aforementioned findings may be considered meaningful (as well as biased), since female character continues to appear more related to health, and well-being whereas male alone appear traditionally related to the world of work presenting practical topics such as buildings in the city, or more interesting adventurous themes like wild life (Lee & Collins, 2009; 2010).

Although such imbalance is noted as regards the exclusive presence of women in certain pages of the coursebook, image and text analysis as a whole demonstrates that male and female characters are not omitted in general.

Following previous studies (Forbes, 2018; Hartman & Judd, 1978; Lee, 2014; Porreca, 1984; Yonata, 2021) text and audio 'utterances' were entered in the table to understand whether there was gender (im)balance of verbal expression as well as determine whether one gender had more opportunities for expression than the other.

Unlike balance speech evident in 6th and 9th grade coursebooks (around 70 utterances each), *Let's Rock 4* evidences female greater speech amount and more frequent utterances concurring with previous results. Speech favours the feminine, which is a positive indicator of unbiased representation. However, this is mostly due to the fact that the dominant character is a female teacher.

In terms of priority, quantitative analysis of dialogues with both genders highlighted males and females opportunity to speak first, ratio clearly favouring female. However it does not reveal extent to which content of speech reflects gender stereotypes. In contrast to previous studies the dialogues in *Let's Rock 4* give male and female characters similar opportunities to ask and answer, sharing diverse discourse roles. However, when considering detail of mixed-gender dialogues, stereotype becomes more apparent and content shows underlying gender prejudice.

Both genders ask and give information, make requests and express opinion on the overall range of coursebook themes: school celebration calendar, song competition, healthy food and green campaigns, having fun outside.

There are several dialogues where the female character asks questions to girl, boy, both or to a group. Most are used as model for pupil speaking/writing practice.

Having the first and the last speaking turn female leads the conversation,<sup>104</sup> in this sense she plays an empowering role:

Mrs Smith [MS]: What can we put in our healthy sandwiches?

Lucy: This lettuce.

Ricardo: These tomatoes.

MS: Good idea. Those tomatoes make you big and strong.

A similar example.<sup>105</sup>

Mrs Smith [MS]: Whose mascot is this?

Steve: It's Ricardo's.

MS: Good job, Ricardo. Congratulations!

Likewise, in Unit 1,<sup>106</sup> discussing possible themes for the song competition in class, female have dominant discourse role, initiating and leading the conversation quite bluntly.

Liu: What can we say about our planet?

Rocky: We can say that we can help the planet.

Mrs Smith [MS]: Rocky, Liu, forget the song competition and pay attention!

We are speaking about recycling at school!!

So, class, what can we do to protect the planet?

Wilson: We can pick up litter in the playground.

Conversely, in the introductory unit, 'Let's get organised',<sup>107</sup> a dialogue presented as a model for speaking and recalling weekdays and routines;

Boy: On Saturday I play computer games.

And you?

What do you do on Saturday?

Girl: On Saturday I swim.

Clear male dominance discourse role is evident. Boy initiates the conversation, presenting personal habit, asks twice, and presents longer speech whereas the girl replies in a short statement.

In Unit 3,<sup>108</sup> a dialogue presented as a drill on verb to be and physical description patterns, is part of the speaking activities for this topic.

Boy: Who am I? I've got black hair.

Girl: Are you Mary?.

Boy: No, I'm not.

Girl: Are you Sam?

Boy: Yes, I am.

Both have similar opportunities to speak, nevertheless girl asks questions to check information expressing doubt or uncertainty. On the contrary, the boy asks the question as a challenge and twice expresses statements assuringly. This portrayal highlights traditional female gender stereotype usually more insecure as regards assertive challenging male character (Macionis & Plummer, 2011).

Another dialogue<sup>109</sup> where the female and male ask and answer:

Girl: Do you like apples?

Boy: Yes, I do. And you. Do you like soup?

Girl: No, I don't.

Both have similar opportunities to speak, girl expresses dislike for soup and boy likes apples. Dealing with topic healthy food, it is somehow significant that boy gets to have the positive habit of eating healthy food and not the girl, contradicting traditional portrayal of female gender stereotype of being responsible and sensible versus the rebel irresponsible gender male stereotype (Macionis & Plummer, 2011).

Female teacher and male headmaster share school activity organisation and decision taking. Mr Brown is clearly the dominant character in the two-page opening cartoon - 'A new challenge for a new year'. He appears in more text/image instances, has more speaking utterances, visual prominence in most frames occupying more space in foreground, with open arms, looking cheerful, confident, smiling, addressing the audience on a stage.

The remaining units, which make up the large part of the coursebook, are a lot more female teacher focussed, be it in the classroom, in the schoolyard, at the canteen, going with pupils on school visits, etc.

*6th grade* — When it comes to assess priority in *High Five 6*, once again, greater female representation appears particularly in the image. Clear superiority of the feminine depiction in the first place appears in the images where male and female characters are portrayed.

We use the designation of 'priority' following Porreca's (1984) concept of 'firstness', referring to 'the number of times that men or women [are] presented first in exercises, examples or sentences'. Also, in a study still referred to today related to the

representation of gender in teaching coursebooks (Hartman & Judd, 1978), the occurrence or phenomenon of 'firstness' was explored in the analysis of the order of mention or priority of pair nouns (e.g. Mr and Mrs, 'boys and girls' 'brother and sister', 'Romeo and Juliet') claiming that systematic representation of the masculine noun preceding the one representing the feminine indicates prejudice which sustains discrimination based on gender reinforcing the second-place status of women. Building on these original works, other studies exist that continue to analyse 'firstness' in cases or examples in which male and female characters appear in interaction to establish which gender has the opportunity to speak first (see Bataineh et al., 2024; Forbes, 2018; Jones et al., 1997; Suwastini et al., 2023; Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2022; Yonata, 2021).

In this sense, our work deepened this topic, carrying out a detailed analysis of all instances or examples in which men and women are represented or appear together, in *High Five 6* having identified which gender 'speaks' or is represented first or to which is given priority.

The number of dialogues in text and audio with characters of both genders (14 dialogues) made it possible to determine female superiority in initiating the conversation. In dialogues in which female and male characters participate, it is the female character who most often initiates the conversation (64.3 p.c. versus 35.7 p.c.), corroborating the idea that women speak more than men. It will be interesting to understand later on, the situation in which such dialogues arise (stores? on the telephone?). On the other hand, the initiative of the conversation does not always equate to more speaking time or discourse prominence. In any case, being given the initiative to women is a positive indicator demonstrating lack of bias towards either gender.

Considering mixed-paired expressions typical in everyday language, data gathered from dialogues in *High Five 6* demonstrates lack of bias towards either gender. There is balance regarding the number of expressions with the feminine (23 instances) and masculine mentioned first (21 instances) with a difference of only 2. It is evident the effort of publishers and authors to use expressions inverting the usual masculine first. However, the difficulty arises in changing or inverting the order in more formal expressions with Mr and Mrs; Mister or Mistress some such as the latter connoted very negatively in Western tradition found in gendered languages.

In short, from the quantitative analysis of gender proportions throughout the coursebook, difference was demonstrated favouring the male character. Regarding its distribution in image medium, there are fourteen pages representing a single gender exclusively; ten pages represent only the male and four only the female character, which will likely indicate omission of female characters. The fact that two out of these

female exclusive four pages is also rather meaningful, since the sub-unit is about shopping and fashion, evident in 'Let's get dressed' sub-unit.

Although such an imbalance is noted as regards the presence of the women in certain pages of the coursebook, image, audio and text analysis as a whole demonstrates that male and female characters are not omitted in general.

Following previous studies (Porreca, 1984, Hartman & Judd, 1978; Forbes, 2018; Yonata, 2021) text and audio 'utterances' were entered in the table showing gender balance of verbal expression as well as equitable opportunities for expression (68 vs. 67).

Quantitative analysis of mixed-dialogues highlighted males and females equal opportunity speak first showing parity, however it does not reveal the extent to which content of speech reflects gender stereotypes. Concurring with recent trends and previous research (Dang, 2020; Jones et al., 1997; Poulou, 1997) the dialogues in this coursebook give male and female characters same opportunities to ask and answer. However this is a surface level assessment.

In Unit 2 – 'School is cool',<sup>110</sup> a listening exercise is part of the warm-up activities for this topic, familiar to foreign language pupils. The text is about first school day, a girl meets boy and asks for help:

Allison: This is my first day at this school. Can you help me?

Spencer: Of course!

Allison: What classes do we have today?

Spencer: Today is Thursday, so ... in the morning, we have Maths and English.

This portrayal highlights traditional female gender stereotype of females usually asking for help asking for information versus helpful, assertive, secure male character (Macionis & Plummer, 2011).

Similarly, in Unit 3 we have a conversation<sup>111</sup> about traits and character. Julian and Mel are talking about Mel's sister:

Julian: Hi, Mel.

Mel: Hello, Julian.

[...]

Julian: But you both have got oval faces. Is she nice?

Mel: Yes, she's really kind and smart, too.

Julian: You're also very intelligent, Mel.

Mel: Thanks, Julian! You're a true friend.

After short physical comparison between both sisters, one is blonde (in a country like Portugal usually associated to being more beautiful) the other one [Mel] is brunette, the female character shows somewhat a sense of lack of self-esteem highlighted by the male character's comment/compliment saying she too is very intelligent, not just her sister. Female character is presented as if she needed encouragement and approval by male counterpart.

In another example comparable to Clark's (2016) study, female character takes subordinate role. A dialogue<sup>112</sup> at the train station one boy and one girl talking about schedules, train departures and destination presents an insecure, hesitant, nervous/stressed out girl against informed, relaxed and self-assertive boy who reprimands the girl.

Both have similar opportunities to speak, nevertheless girl asks for help, needs to check for information, apologises, on the contrary, the boy provides information, corrects girl and has a rather assertive attitude. This example could be a demonstration of male superiority reinforcing the stereotype of males as intelligent and dominant (Koenig, 2018):

[...]

Sienna: this announcement was about our train! Does it arrive at 10:30?

Ethan: No, it is delayed, it arrives at 10:50.

Sienna: Ok, We should go to platform 5, right?

Ethan: Please, pay attention, Sienna. It's not platform 5, it's platform 7!

Sienna: Oh, Ok...Sorry, I'm a bit nervous because it's a long journey!

[...]

This portrayal highlights traditional female gender stereotype of nervous, insecure feminine versus confident self-assured masculine. Male character demonstrates using dominance commanding language 'pay attention, Sienna...!' it could be argued that this example reflects gender male stereotype assertiveness (Evans & Davies, 2000; Lawson et al., 2022).

Conversely, in dialogue 'Emily's new neighbour'<sup>113</sup> two girls talk with the new boy in class.

[...]

Emily: Come with us! Let's go to the park!

Louie: Sorry, girls! Today I can't because I have football practice!

Emily /Paula: No problem! See you tomorrow.

Emily: Oh, Paula, Isn't he gorgeous? His blonde hair, And he's so athletic! I think I'm in love...

Paula (laughing): Do you think so? Is he more handsome than Jack, the basketball team star?

Emily: Yes, he is...And he is taller, too.

[...]

Females have greater opportunities to speak, are assertive and take the initiative to invite boy to go for a walk. This is an example of females taking on a dominant discursive role, where such a role would shift the focus and power towards a female character. Nevertheless, it could be argued that boy shows being responsible and sporty not missing football training whereas girls are represented in a sort of 'light' way, this example reflects gender female superficial stereotype, 'chit-chat talking'/ gossiping about boys.

In addition, it is not only conversations between males and females that highlight gender stereotype but also single gender dialogues.

In Unit 3, 'What do you look like?'<sup>114</sup> female characters at clothes shop (shop-assistant and buyer) decide on which item to buy, colour, size, tastes and likes choosing a birthday present. This focus is stressed by representation of two girls discussing clothing and accessories to wear for a party on the previous page highlight the idea of female associated to shopping, fashion and clothing suggesting that girls care more about appearance, are superficial and consumers. There's no male character in these two pages.

The exclusive male equivalent appears on double page in Unit 4 - 'City Life',<sup>115</sup> we have a single gender dialogue between grandfather and grandson talking about past life in the city, facilities, shops, museums, and habits. Grandfather refers to past habit of playing football in the park. Once again the idea of active masculine stereotype and the companionship established by both characters.

*9th grade* — In the context of EFL/ESL coursebooks, the use of images plays a crucial role in conveying gender representations, alongside the linguistic content. According to Goffman (1987), any scene can be an opportunity to depict gender differences, and images have significant communicative value, often more powerful than words. Visuals in coursebooks, when biased, can contribute to maintaining gender inequalities and stereotypes, reinforcing less equitable societal norms (Fatemi et al., 2011; Giaschi, 2000; Paivandi, 2008). They not only reflect cultural attitudes but also help construct knowledge and identity, with images acting as texts that can be decoded in the same way written language is (Roberts, 2016).

Regarding *Upgrade 9* when it comes to assess priority in images where male and female characters are portrayed together, greater female representation appears particularly in the image, reinforcing the idea of the 'woman-object' presence. Clear superiority (23 vs. 14 instances) of the feminine depiction in the first place in the images. This may be considered as positive sign towards balanced representation.

Our work examined all instances in which men and women appear together, having identified which gender 'speaks' or is represented first. *Upgrade 9* dialogues (9) have contributed to a relative significant data collection.

Single gendered dialogues (5 instances) may be considered relevant to refer to, though, as there is evident uneven representation of single gendered dialogues with 4:1 favouring female corroborating the idea that women speak more. Furthermore, the topics they engage in deal with stereotypical ideas: girls talking about school, about the husband and family holidays, criticising a friend's worn out jacket, reflecting gender female superficial stereotype, 'chit-chat talking'/ gossiping. In another dialogue two girls discuss a welcoming plan for foreign students coming to their school which concurs with the idea that girls get involved in Human Rights issues, take active roles standing for immigrants and the underprivileged, volunteering, helpful. The single conversation between two boys, a British and an Egyptian friend, occurs via Skype is about getting to know the capital, main traditions, the language and some geographical features. It seems evident the different kind of contexts girls and boys have been set in. Our work does not analyse single gender dialogues but we believe it might be further addressed.

Regardless the few occurrences of mix-gendered, it is possible to determine slight female superiority in initiating the conversation (~56 p.c. vs. ~44 p.c.), corroborating recent trends towards more balanced representation and the clear effort of publishers and authors.

Data gathered from mixed-paired expressions in *Upgrade 9* demonstrates bias towards female gender (~64 p.c. male vs. ~36 p.c. female). Unevenness regarding the number of expressions with the feminine and masculine mentioned first (25 vs. 14 instances). Male priority although consciously flattened in the dialogues is evident particularly in personal pronouns (he/she; him/her) and possessive adjectives (his/her) so often used in the instructions and in mixed pairs such as 'actor(s)'/ 'actress(es)' mentioned 6 times (in a two-page sub-unit practice/activities). The effort of publishers and authors to use expressions inverting the usual masculine first has been evident in the occasional use of 'she/he' and 'her/his-him' and Brenda and Steven. Great care is being carried out, though somehow still ineffective in a balanced representation.

Inverting the order of formal expressions like 'Mr' and 'Mrs' is evidently rather difficult. In the context of ESL classroom, teachers may enhance pupils' awareness explaining it is possible to use more neutral or gender friendly expressions like 's/he',

'actress/actor' instead. In addition, as previously noted, although our research focus solely in the coursebook a quick look to other supporting materials where not so greater care is put, shows clear and greater biased gender representation.

Regarding gender proportions throughout *Upgrade 9*, quantitative analysis demonstrated fair representation. Nevertheless, examining its distribution in image medium there are twenty-five pages representing a single gender exclusively, 9 pages representing only the male character and 16 only the female counterpart. This could be considered an omission of male characters as the odds favour female in a 2:1 ratio. Nevertheless, it may be significant that 5 pages out of 16 appear in Unit 2 'Ready Steady Fit' which deal with Health and Looks; addiction, body image, food and well-being where female appear closely linked to unhealthy dieting, actresses suffering too much pressure to fit into strict beauty standards. Other 5 pages out of 16 illustrate Unit 4 'A World of Differences' dealing with multiculturalism, respect for differences, diversity awareness, school experiences of foreign female in European and Western Countries. The latter is a relevant aspect to consider when examining representation of overlapping identities, especially gender/ethnicity.

Regarding the distribution in images of the male sole depiction, 9 pages out of 25, it becomes evident they concentrate in Unit 1 'Walking the red carpet' showing male celebrities, well-known music bands, famous entrepreneurs and in Unit 3 'Life Changes', particularly sub unit Jobs and Work where they appear as writers, surfers, playing risky and manual jobs. This fact may be considered meaningful since female character continues to appear more related to health, social issues, appearance and mental problems: for example Chantelle Brown Young discussing skin disorders; Tyra Banks discussing the way media influence feelings on ourselves; Jennifer Lawrence presenting the problems female stars face while stressing the importance of strong characters like Katniss the *Hunger Games* star and their positive role influencing teen girls; Shailene Woodley with a powerful discourse: actress, activist, loves eating with friends and doing sports; Michelle Obama starting *Let's Move*, a fighting obesity program, whereas male alone appear traditionally related to the world of work and successful careers (Lee & Collins, 2009; 2010).

Although such imbalance is noted as regards the presence of the women in certain pages of the coursebook, image and text analysis as a whole demonstrates that male and female characters are not omitted in general.

Text and audio 'utterances' recorded showed gender balance and even speaking opportunities (71 vs. 69).

Mixed dialogues quantitatively analysed, highlighted males and females equal opportunity to speak first. Despite evident parity, the extent to which content of speech reflects gender stereotypes is not demonstrated. In contrast to previous studies, the dialogues in this coursebook give male and female characters same opportunities to ask

and answer. However, after close examination, underlying gender prejudice content becomes apparent.

There are two dialogues where female character acts as interviewer of male celebrities (Gordon Ramsay and Ed Sheeran). Having the first speaking turn along with multiple speech occasions asking the questions, female leads the interview and, in this sense, she plays an empowering role. Conversely, one might consider her role 'serves' the purpose of presenting the male character who clearly occupies most discourse time. In Unit 1:<sup>116</sup>

Interview with Gordon Ramsay:

Sarah Horrock (SH): Why do you think British food has such a bad reputation?

Gordon Ramsay (GR): Because for a long time in the UK we didn't do much about trying to change it. But over the last 15-20 years there's been a group of young chefs that have gone and lived in France, Spain and Italy and come back with some exciting ideas. We're getting there as a country, definitely.

[...]

SH: What's your next project?

GR: We're launching our first boutique hotel in London, The York and Albany. It's a 12-bedroom unique hotel on Regent's park, very British and traditional. It's got an amazing restaurant and this beautiful modern-day deli.

[...]

In the same unit there is another dialogue<sup>117</sup> where the female plays the box office assistant.

Mark: Are there any seats available for the musical All that Glitters?

Assistant: Are you interested in the matinee at 2 pm or the evening performance at 8 pm?

Mark: I'd like the matinee, if possible.

[...]

In Unit 4,<sup>118</sup> a dialogue presented as a drill on verb patterns, is part of the language stuff activities for this topic. The text is about deciding whether to go abroad to study. Two mates meet and discuss a scholarship offer.

John: Did you decide to accept the scholarship you were offered?

Alexis: Well, at first it really seemed to be a good offer, and I considered taking it. But ultimately I chose to refuse the offer because I don't want to live so far away from home.

John: I would have accepted it. I wouldn't mind travelling abroad.

Alexis: Well, I still want to take a new course and I hope to find something by the end of this year.

This portrayal highlights traditional female gender stereotype usually more attached to family and home, less adventurous, avoiding possible risks, perhaps afraid of being alone versus assertive, secure male character (see Lawson et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2024).

In Unit 2 we have a conversation about Jack's smoking habit.<sup>119</sup> Jane tells him to stop smoking because it's very bad for his health.

Jack: Hey, Jane. How are you doing?

Jane: Hi, Jack. I'm great.

Jack: I hope you haven't been waiting too long?

Jane: No, I just got here a few minutes ago.

[...]

Jane: Why don't you quit?

Jack: I've never thought about it. All my friends smoke, and we hang out a lot.

[...]

Jane: You'd better start thinking about it now. You might not feel the difference now, but after 10 years of smoking you might, and then it'll be too late.

Jack: Good point. I'll try to quit.

Jane: Good. And if you need any support, I'll always be here for you.

Jack: Thanks.

Both have similar opportunities to speak. Nevertheless, girl arrives on time, shows being tolerant, demonstrates concern for her friend, suggests some ways to avoid the habit and offers to help. On the contrary, the boy arrives late, shows certain peer negative influence, smokes when he's bored expressing some addictive issues, in short, not a positive attitude.

This portrayal highlights traditional female gender stereotype of being friendly, caring, responsible and sensible (Evans & Davies, 2000) versus the rebel irresponsible gender male stereotype.

The analysis of priority in images, dialogues, mixed-pair expressions, and speech occurrences across the three coursebooks reveals notable patterns in gender representation. While efforts toward balanced representation are evident, underlying gender biases persist in subtle ways.

In terms of priority in images, female characters are slightly more likely to be depicted first in *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9*, signalling an attempt to challenge traditional male-first representation. However, concerns remain regarding the potential reinforcement of the 'woman-object' stereotype, particularly in visual media.

The examination of priority in dialogues highlights a consistent trend of female characters initiating conversations. *Let's Rock 4* and *High Five 6* both exhibit female dominance in initiating dialogues, with *Upgrade 9* showing a more balanced distribution. While this suggests a positive shift toward gender equality, a deeper analysis of discourse roles reveals persistent stereotypes. Male characters are still more likely to take on authoritative roles—giving instructions, providing information, and making suggestions—whereas female characters tend to ask questions or make requests, reinforcing traditional gender dynamics.

The distribution of mixed-pair expressions shows varied patterns. While *Let's Rock 4* and *High Five 6* demonstrate near-equal representation, *Upgrade 9* exhibits a bias toward female-first expressions. Despite conscious editorial efforts to invert the traditional masculine-first order, male priority remains embedded in pronoun use and other linguistic structures.

Regarding speech occurrences, *Let's Rock 4* displays a significant female advantage in the number of utterances, while *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* show a nearly equal distribution. These findings indicate that opportunities for verbal expression are largely balanced, yet deeper discourse analysis uncovers lingering gender stereotypes in conversational roles.

Finally, the analysis of gender proportions in image distribution raises concerns about the thematic placement of female representation. In all three coursebooks, female characters appear disproportionately in topics related to health, well-being, and fashion, whereas male characters dominate pages discussing work, adventure, and practical themes. This pattern reinforces traditional gender associations and subtly influences learners' perceptions of gender roles.

Corroborating previous findings, the themes that characters are associated with also reveal gendered patterns, with men more frequently involved in topics related to success, politics, and crime, while women are often tied to themes such as friendship,

illness, and physical appearance (Lee & Collins, 2009, 2010). Recent research has shown that while some coursebooks offer more balanced portrayals of male and female characters, there is still a tendency for women to be underrepresented or to have less discursive power. Despite these advances, full gender equity in coursebook dialogues has not yet been achieved, though progress is evident.

Overall, while the coursebooks display efforts toward gender-balanced representation, particularly in initiating speech and mixed-pair expressions, entrenched stereotypes persist in discourse roles and thematic placement. Further refinements in content design and editorial decisions are necessary to ensure a more equitable portrayal of gender across all dimensions of coursebook representation.

### **4.3. Intersecting gender**

Understanding gender representation requires a multidimensional approach that acknowledges the complexity of human identities and experiences. The intersectional perspective has gained increasing prominence in social sciences, particularly in gender studies, as it provides a more socially comprehensive framework for analyzing representations, inequalities, and opportunities. Rather than isolating gender as a singular category, intersectionality considers the interplay of multiple social variables—such as age, ethnicity, and ability we here intend to examine—which together shape an individual’s lived experiences. These interrelated identities mutually reinforce and naturalize one another, often compounding discrimination or, conversely, facilitating access to privileges.

From an intersectional standpoint, gender identity is not an isolated construct but rather one that gains meaning through its connection to other identity categories in a dynamic and fluid process. The ways in which individuals perceive themselves as part of a group—and how their personal traits become visible or socially relevant—are deeply influenced by these overlapping identities. Thus, systems of privilege and oppression do not function independently but exist as interconnected structures that either empower or hinder individuals based on their social location. Recognising this complexity is essential to understanding how educational materials, such as EFL coursebooks, contribute to shaping students’ perceptions of themselves and others.

Criticism of single-axis approaches to identity has led scholars and activists to advocate for a broader, more nuanced perspective that moves beyond formal categorisations of discrimination. Rather than focusing solely on the rationale behind unequal treatment, an intersectional approach seeks to examine its substantive impact on individuals and groups. In educational contexts, this means addressing not only explicit gender biases but also the ways in which different intersections of identity are represented—or omitted—from learning materials. Developing students’ awareness of

these dynamics is crucial to fostering a deeper understanding of social equity, privilege, and systemic bias.

By analyzing *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* sanctioned by the Ministry of Education this research investigates how these materials reflect and reinforce prevailing notions of gender identity in Portuguese society.

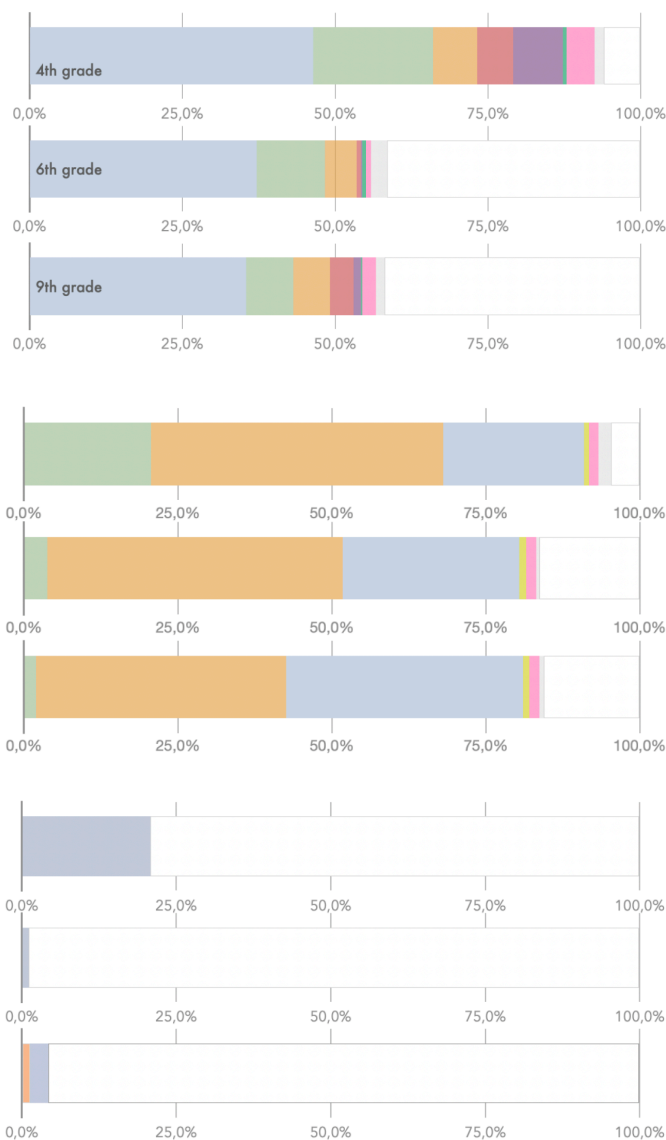
Within this framework, the present heading examines individual and group character occurrences through an intersectional lens, overlapping gender with ethnicity, age and ability essential to identifying patterns and disparities which may not be immediately apparent through qualitative analysis alone.

After having systematically counted occurrences of male and female representation across texts, images, and audio materials, individuals and groups have been categorised to provide objective evidence of potential imbalances. The extent of gender bias will be achieved through measurable comparisons, highlighting trends in visibility, power, and omission.

**Table-chart 7**

*Intersectionality [individual and group characters]*

<b>Intersectionality</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> gd.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> gd.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup> gd.</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
White	276	46,4	436	37,1	289	35,5
Latin	117	19,7	132	11,2	63	7,7
Black	43	7,2	60	5,1	49	6,0
Brown	35	5,9	9	0,8	31	3,8
Asian	48	8,1	2	0,2	10	1,2
First N.	4	0,7	7	0,6	2	0,2
ethn. diverse	27	4,5	10	0,9	18	2,2
(not cl. / not. id.)	9	1,5	31	2,6	12	1,5
(no inform.)	36	6,1	487	41,5	341	41,8
<i>Totals</i>	<i>595</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>1174</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>815</i>	<i>100,0</i>
<i>Age</i>						
Infant	123	20,7	44	3,7	16	2,0
Teen	282	47,4	564	48,0	331	40,6
Adult	136	22,9	336	28,6	313	38,4
Old	5	0,8	13	1,1	9	1,1
age diverse	9	1,5	19	1,6	13	1,6
(not cl. / not. id.)	12	2,0	6	0,5	6	0,7
(no inform.)	28	4,7	192	16,4	127	15,6
<i>Totals</i>	<i>595</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>1174</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>815</i>	<i>100,0</i>
<i>Ability</i>						
Hear. imp.	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	0,1
Phys. dis.	0	0,0	0	0,0	10	1,2
Vis. imp. (spect.)	124	20,8	13	1,1	24	2,9
(no inform.)	471	79,2	1161	98,9	780	95,7
<i>Totals</i>	<i>595</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>1174</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>815</i>	<i>100,0</i>



*4th grade* — With regard to ethnicity, we have considered the most frequently or easily identified types. Our choice was based on the most obvious external traits: hair, facial features, skin color. Unsurprisingly, out of the 550 identified characters (groups included) in *Let's Rock 4*, the majority (276) are White, exceeding the set of all remaining ethnicities found in the coursebook, with 46.4 p.c..

Secondly, the presence of 117 Latin (~20 p.c.) is evident. One may easily understand this greater number as the coursebook is aimed at Portuguese schools, with an audience mostly included in the Mediterranean type (dark brown hair, dark eyes, medium height). Asian and Black follow, representing about 8 and 7 p.c. of the whole characters. Brown appears with about 6 p.c. Taking into account that Brown and Asian represent the majority of the world population this invisibility is relevant particularly

because large part of Brown are from English-speaking countries and Commonwealth members.

The lower presence of First Nations complete the list of observed ethnicities. Their reduced visibility is significant being considered as merely ornamental.

Ethnic diversity apparent in group characters sums up 27 occurrences (4.5 p.c.) on the whole, and is visible in pictures only. Despite having a higher representation as compared to year 6 and 9 coursebooks, due to its particular characteristic (most group character appearance regard the class whose main depicted characters are white, latin, asian, brown and black) ethnic diversity will not be accounted for in Table-chart 8– Intersecting Gender and Ethnicity.

The fact that the group in *Let's Rock 4* is mostly depicted with the diverse ethnicities (two or three white girls and boys, one asian girl, one latin, black and brown boy) lends it an artificial atmosphere where ethnic diversity depiction somehow sounds theatrical as the group appears all along the coursebook. It is clear from the start the effort of publishers to make up a 'proper' group which of course needs be seen as rather positive but is in itself stereotypical as politically suitable/correct. Thus, concurring with the other two coursebooks insignificant data on ethnic diversity in groups, it will not be further examined.

It was not possible to identify about 1.5 p.c. of the characters. Only 36 occurrences out of 595 mainly found in text source are classified with 'no information' or clues.

As far as age identified individual characters are concerned, 4 major groups were considered: 'child, teen, adult, old'. Likewise, we have also considered the possibilities 'not clear' when age is not evident as well as 'no information'.

Around 47 p.c. of the characters in *Let's Rock 4* are included in the young teenagers or 'tweenies' group. Adults represent 136 out of 546 age defined characters, mostly teachers, some characters representing diverse working areas, parents... The third largest group depicts children (123 individuals) which might resemble the target pupil addressed at this stage (20.7 p.c.).

Age diverse groups (teachers, school staff and pupils, large families), sum up 9 occurrences (1,5 p.c.) on the whole and appear mostly in pictures. Due to the low representation regarding the characters as a whole (9 out of 595), also highlighted when comparing to the 34 gendered group-character occurrences, it will not be considered in the table - Intersecting Gender and Age (see Table-chart 9).

Concurring with *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* findings the elderly are ignored, with only 5 elements (less than 1 p.c.).

Regarding the characterisation of the characters in terms of 'ability', there are 471 occurrences without information or any reference to more or less permanent physical disabilities. There are 124 characters whose impairment is visual, evident in the use of glasses, a 'disability' without any social objection, almost transparent. The higher

presence of such characteristic is due to the use of glasses by the dominant character of the female teacher, the school headmaster who occasionally appears wearing them and one 'permanent' class student who also wears this accessory.

*6th grade* — The unsurprising majority of the 646 identified characters that populate High Five 6 are 'White' (436). The figure exceeds the set of all remaining ethnicities found in the coursebook, with 37.1 p.c..

The presence of 132 'Latin' (11.2 p.c.) comes second followed by 60 occurrences of characters identified as 'Black' (5.1 p.c). The lower representation of 'Asian', 'First Nations' and 'Brown' complete the list of observed ethnicities. The non-presence or reduced visibility of the latter ones is significant, particularly because 'Brown' and 'Asian' represent the majority of the world population.

Ethnic diversity sums up ten occurrences (~1 p.c.) on the whole, visible in both pictures and group characters only. Due to its extremely low representation in terms of characters as a whole (10 out of 33 gendered group-character occurrences), and also highlighted when comparing to group characters only (total of 157 group characters) it will not be considered in the table - Intersecting Gender and Ethnicity (Table-chart 8).

About 3 p.c. of the characters were 'not clear'. 487 'no information' occurrences out of 1174, referring mainly to characters presented in the text and audio source with no information or clues.

As far as age is concerned, 48 p.c. of the characters are included in the 'tweenies' group similar to target pupils.

The group represented in second place is the one of adults with 336 occurrences, in a total of 957 age identified characters (parents, teachers, artists...). Age diverse groups sum up nineteen occurrences (1,6 p.c.) on the whole and appear mostly in pictures. Due to the low representation regarding the characters as a whole (19 out of 1174), the number of occurrences it is not relevant and therefore will not be examined in the table Table-chart 9—Intersecting Gender and Age. The group of elders is ignored, with only 13 elements (1 p.c.). Age was not evident 'not clear' counts 6 occurrences and 'no information' sum up 192 instances.

Regarding the characterisation of the characters in terms of 'ability', 98.9 p.c. have no information. There are only 13 characters (1.1 p.c) whose impairment is visual, evident in the use of glasses, a 'transparent disability'.

We consider relevant the fact that any other 'disabilities' are totally absent in coursebooks since the national educational system advocates inclusion of special educational needs pupils. Therefore the non-inclusion of such group becomes an invisibility likely to harm individuals' self-image even resulting in self-stereotyping.

*9th grade* — The majority of the 650 identified characters (groups included) that populate *Upgrade 9* are 'White' (289) exceeding the set of all remaining ethnicities

found in the coursebook, with about 36 p.c. Latin characters come second with 63 occurrences (~8 p.c.) followed by 49 characters identified as 'Black' (6 p.c.).

'Asian' and 'Brown' complete the list of observed ethnicities. Concurring with previous findings in the study, their non-presence or reduced visibility is significantly negative. 'First Nations' appear twice in Unit 4 'A World of Differences' only in group characters, thus, one might consider them as merely ornamental.

Ethnic diversity apparent in group characters sums up 18 occurrences (2,2 p.c.) on the whole, and it was exclusively visible in pictures. Due to its extremely low representation in terms of characters as a whole (18 out of 815) it will not be considered in the table - Intersecting Gender and Ethnicity (Table-chart 8).

It was not possible to identify about 1.5 p.c. of the characters ('not clear'). 341 out of 815 occurrences present 'no information' or clues.

As far as age identified characters are concerned 40.6 p.c. of the characters are included in the teenagers group. Adults is the second largest represented group (313 out of 669 gender identified individual characters), mostly celebs, businesspeople, characters representing diverse working areas, parents... Age diverse groups (demonstrators, activists, large families), sum up 13 occurrences (1,6 p.c.). Due to the low representation regarding the characters as a whole, it will not be considered in the - Intersecting Gender and Age table-chart (Table-chart 9). The elderly are ignored, with only 9 elements (1.1 p.c.). The importance of intergenerational relationships, family proximity, inclusion and respect for elders could be more widely suggested through greater presence and visibility. There were 6 'not clear' occurrences when age was not evident and 127 'no information' instances.

Regarding the characterisation of the characters in terms of 'ability', 95.7 p.c. appear with 'no information' or any kind of reference. There are 24 characters (2.9 p.c.) whose impairment is visual considering the use of glasses. Unlike *High Five 6* and *Let's Rock 4* we found: 1 instance of hearing and 10 instances showing permanent or long disease (dwarfism, cancer, skin problems, eating disorders, addictions). The remaining groups considered (wider health, mind and mobility) were omitted.

Although mental and physical conditions appear more widely than in 4th and 6th grade coursebooks, which might be explained by the higher grade target pupil and curriculum topics (include Human Rights, Citizenship issues...), 'disabilities' are absent on the whole. The non-inclusion of such group becomes an invisibility that will have consequences on the self-image of so many impaired individuals, not seeing themselves in the coursebooks they use. Although students with disabilities are raised in general classroom settings, representation of disabled characters are rare and not all available depict their characters in a strength-based way (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023; Hayden & Prince, 2024).

If we associate the omission of certain groups in the categories of age, ethnicity, ability with the gender category, which make up the basis of our research, recognition of the complex interconnection of deeper mechanisms of gender discrimination will emerge, as confirmed in more detail in the analysis of the following tables.

### 4.3.1. Ethnicity

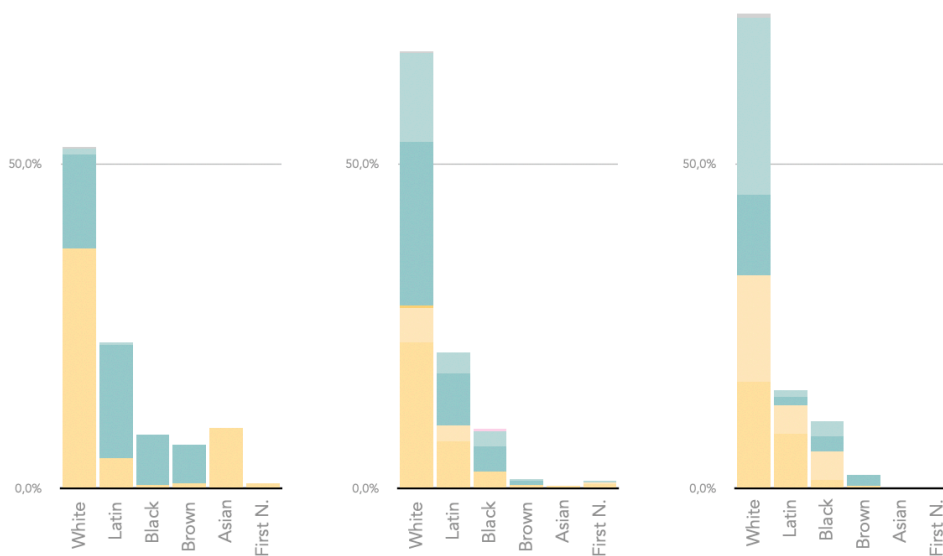
Analyzing the occurrence of masculine and feminine individuals overlapped by ethnicity is essential for understanding representation and the extent of diverse ethnic group visibility in *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9*.

The experiences of women of color result from intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, which are often overlooked in both feminist and antiracist discourses (Crenshaw, 1989) have since then served as a crucial reference point for broader discussions on visibility across different gender and ethnic groups.

**Table-chart 8**

*Intersectionality. Gender and ethnicity [individual characters]*

<b>Intersectionality</b>																					
<i>Gender and Ethnicity</i>																					
female		f. celeb.		f. ideol.		male		m. celeb.		m. ideol.		other		neutral (text)		not clear (image)		Totals			
Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot
<i>4th grade</i>																					
White	192	36,9	0	0,0	0	0,0	75	14,4	5	1,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	0,2	273	52,5	
Latin	24	4,6	0	0,0	0	0,0	91	17,5	2	0,4	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	117	22,5	
Black	3	0,6	0	0,0	0	0,0	40	7,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	43	8,3	
Brown	4	0,8	0	0,0	0	0,0	31	6,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	35	6,7	
Asian	48	9,2	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	48	9,2	
Frst. N.	4	0,8	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	4	0,8	
	275		0		0		237		7		0		0		0		1		520	100,0	
<i>6th grade</i>																					
White	140	22,4	33	5,3	2	0,3	157	25,2	85	13,6		0,0		0,0		0,0	2	0,3	419	67,1	
Latin	45	7,2	15	2,4		0,0	50	8,0	20	3,2		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0	130	20,8	
Black	16	2,6		0,0		0,0	24	3,8	15	2,4		0,0	2	0,3		0,0		0,0	57	9,1	
Brown	3	0,5		0,0		0,0	4	0,6	2	0,3		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0	9	1,4	
Asian	2	0,3		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0	2	0,3	
Frst. N.	4	0,6	2	0,3		0,0		0,0	1	0,2		0,0		0,0		0,0		0,0	7	1,1	
	210		50		2		235		123		0		2		0		2		624	100,0	
<i>9th grade</i>																					
White	49	16,3	49	16,3	0	0,0	37	12,3	81	27,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	2	0,7	218	72,7	
Latin	25	8,3	13	4,3	0	0,0	4	1,3	3	1,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	45	15,0	
Black	4	1,3	13	4,3	0	0,0	7	2,3	7	2,3	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	31	10,3	
Brown	1	0,3	0	0,0	0	0,0	5	1,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	6	2,0	
Asian	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	
Frst. N.	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	
	79		75		0		53		91		0		0		0		2		300	100,0	



This study examines both visibility and priority by analyzing a substantial sample of images, text, and audio transcripts. Racial presence and interactive meanings were employed, considering visual and textual elements such as clothing, artifacts, names, and activities to identify ethnic identities. For practical reasons and considering the coursebooks' pupil profile (9, 11, 15 year-olds), we have focused mostly on physical appearance, relying on observable traits like skin color, facial features, hair type, height, and body structure. The following tables provide insight into how gender and ethnicity intersect in these educational materials.

We have considered the crossing of 'female', 'female celebrity', 'female ideologue' together with 'white', 'latin', 'asian', 'black', 'brown', 'first nations' as well as all the male counterparts. 'Other', 'neutral' and 'not clear' overlapping with the referred ethnicities have been included in the table count.

Data in Table-chart 8 below consider the intersection of gender and ethnicity of individual characters in *Let's Rock 4*; *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9*.

*4th grade* — Out of 519 characters analysed intersectionally, the 'White' domain became visible, 273 identified characters, (~52 p.c) followed by 117 'Latin' characters (~23 p.c). 'Asian', 'Black' and 'Brown' have 48 (~9 p.c.), 43 (~8 p.c.) and 35 (~7 p.c.) instances each. 'First Nations' individuals seldom appear, counting 4 out of 519 instances, almost totally absent.

Visible predominance of female white individuals versus male counterpart individuals (192 vs. 80 out of 273). 5 out of the male white depict personalities, originating mainly from the literary and sport world. Significantly, there are no female white celebrities, corroborating 6 and 9 year coursebook findings.

There is significantly greater representation of female/white compared to all other masculine ethnicity counterparts. Also male/white has greater visibility in relation to all other male ethnicities except, also unexpectedly surprising, for the male /latin (93 vs. 80 white counterpart) presenting 2 famous personalities as well. Most occurrences of male/latin are due to the male headmaster frequent presence and one of the most apparent/ 'permanent' student.

Similar picture regarding the pair female/asian (48 instances, 9.2 p.c) whose presence is quantitatively higher than all other female non-white ethnicities, and overrepresented comparing to male/black (40 instances, 7.7 p.c) and male/brown (6 p.c). Overall, this is a rather positive sign following the trend to gender balanced representation.

There are no Asian nor First-nation male characters.

The indisputable truth, though, is the prominence of female-male/white regarding all other gender diverse ethnicities.

An unexpected finding, in contrast to 6th and 9th grade coursebooks, is the female/white domain over all male counterparts and the visibility of female/asian regarding other remaining female ethnicities. On the one hand, this intersection acquires physicality in the female white teacher, the main recurrent character together with other female white students who populate the coursebook. On the other hand, the female Asian is depicted as recurrent student, seen as attractive to western public.

At this point, one would negatively highlight the reduced presence of female/latin (as opposed to 9th grade coursebook), the almost invisibility of the intersection female/black, brown, first-nations and complete absence of male/asian and first nations.

*6th grade* — Out of 622 characters analysed intersectionally, the 'White' domain became visible, (419 characters, ~67 p.c.) followed by 130 'Latin' characters (~21 p.c.). Then come 'Black', 'Brown', 'First Nations' and 'Asian', the latter with 2 female characters only.

Visible predominance of male/white characters with 157 characters to which are added 85 male/white personalities (242 characters on the whole), the latter originating mainly from the world of sport, cinema and music. The difference (69 characters) between male-white and female/white —which makes up 173 female and female celebrity— although not very large is still relevant, especially reiterating the fact that the number of celebrities in the female/white category is less than half of male/white (33 female celebrities and 85 male celebrities).

There is greater representation of female/white compared to masculine/latin and masculine/black. Also female celebrity/white has greater visibility in relation to male/latin and male/black celebrities.

Male/black domain over female/black with 39 instances, 15 of which are celebrities mainly related to music, rappers and DJs. There are only 16 elements in total in

feminine/black and the omission of personalities in this intersection. At this point, I would negatively highlight the almost invisibility of the feminine/black, and the lower still of the female/brown and female/asian intersections in coursebooks.

Similar picture regarding the pair female/latin and female celebrity/latin whose presence, although in greater numbers than female/black, appears in a situation of relative balanced representation compared to the male pair (50 female/latin vs. 70 male/latin out of which 15 female celebrity/latin and 20 male celebrity/latin).

The remaining intersections for the feminine gender 'Asian', 'Brown', 'First Nations' versus the same intersections for the masculine gender are almost or completely omitted.

*9th grade* — Out of 298 characters analysed intersectionally, the 'White' domain became visible, (218 characters, (~73 p.c) followed by 45 'Latin' characters (~15 p.c). 'Black' and 'Brown' have 31 (~10 p.c) and 6 (2 p.c) instances each. 'First Nations' and 'Asian' characters are excluded.

Visible predominance of male/white characters count 118 characters (notably 81 male/white personalities, ~30 p.c), originating mainly from the entertainment and business world. This difference in relation to the female/white, which makes up 98 female and female celebrity, although not very large (20 characters) is still relevant and corroborates the fact that the number of celebrities in the female/white category is significantly shorter than male/white (49 female celebrities and 81 male celebrities).

There is significantly greater representation of female/white compared to masculine/latin and masculine/black counterparts. Also female/white celebrity has greater visibility in relation to male/latin and male/black celebrities.

Similar picture regarding the pair female/latin (38 instances, 12.8 p.c) whose presence, is quantitatively higher than female/black (5.3 p.c), and overrepresented comparing to male/black (14 instances, 4.8 p.c) and male/latin (2.3 p.c). Overall, this is a positive sign following the trend to gender balanced representation.

The indisputable truth, though, is the prominence of male-female/white regarding all other gender diverse ethnicities.

An unexpected finding, in contrast to 6th grade coursebook, is the female/latin and black domain over male counterparts whose celebrities mainly relate to music, fashion and cinema. On the one hand, Latin culture has become more and more fashionable in the USA and the UK particularly in the entertainment showbiz celebs and EFL coursebooks show that. Latin women are seen as attractive (such as Shakira, Demi Lovato), warm and caring (Demi's mother, Mia, Izzy Rigden, Esther Crain). On the other hand these coursebooks are addressed to Portuguese pupils who feature similar traits promoting identification with idols and role models.

There are 5 male/brown versus 1 female/brown and no personalities in these intersections. At this point, one would negatively highlight the invisibility of the

intersection female/brown and complete absence of male-female/asian and male-female/first nations the latter ones conveniently apparent in group characters in Unit 4 'A World of Differences'. The remaining intersections for the feminine gender 'Asian', 'Brown', 'First Nations' versus the same intersections for the masculine gender are almost or completely omitted.

Concurring with *Let's Rock 4* and *High Five 6* findings, this is all the more relevant given the numerical superiority of both ethnicities in the global picture. The world population is made up of a greater number of female/brown and female/asian than all other intersections combined and yet, coursebooks fail to highlight the fact. We are aware of the fact that there are more and more female and male students in schools from ethnicities other than 'White' and 'Latin' who cannot find themselves represented in the coursebooks they learn from, in the schools that welcome them as well as in the intercultural celebrations with increasing prominence in the Portuguese educational community.

Sociologist and political theorist Leslie McCall (2005) notes that intersectional studies illustrate "the complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis" (p. 1772). If English as Foreign Language [EFL] teachers ignore the variety of race when discussing gender discrimination and stereotype they contribute to reinforcing and maintaining unfair identity and social representations in schools and in the society. It is time to ask critical questions as to whether the situated knowledge embedded in these coursebooks provides understandings of the complexity of crossing identities and issues to future and diverse generations of students.

The analysis of gender-ethnicity intersections across the three coursebooks reveals a persistent dominance of White representation, with White characters—particularly male—appearing most frequently. However, an interesting trend emerges with a notable presence of female/White characters, often surpassing their male counterparts, except in the portrayal of public figures and celebrities, where male/White personalities remain predominant.

Latin characters consistently form the second-largest group, with a relatively balanced male-female distribution, particularly in *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9*. Notably, female/Latin characters occasionally surpass their male counterparts, a trend distinct from earlier findings. Black and Brown characters are significantly underrepresented, with male/Black individuals appearing more frequently than female/Black, particularly in celebrity roles related to music and entertainment. The representation of Asian, Brown, and First Nations characters—especially female—is minimal or entirely absent, reinforcing their invisibility within these learning materials.

While some progress is observed in gender-balanced representation within dominant ethnic groups, the erasure of certain ethnic-gender intersections remains concerning.

The near-complete omission of female/Brown, female/Asian, and First Nations individuals highlights systemic biases in representation, indicating a need for more inclusive and equitable portrayals in EFL coursebooks.

#### **4.3.2. Age**

Having explored the intersection of gender and ethnicity, we now turn to the overlapping dimensions of gender and age, which serve as critical grounds for multiple forms of discrimination. Despite the extensive literature on ageism, relatively few studies have examined how age-based discrimination affects older adults, particularly those with diverse racial and gender identities. Moreover, much of the existing research has primarily focused on men, overlooking the compounded marginalisation experienced by older women due to both age and gender biases.

Given that primary, preparatory, and high school students are in formative stages of socialisation, the representation of older male and female individuals in coursebooks holds significant importance. Studies have shown that older people are not only underrepresented but also depicted within a narrow range of roles. When they do appear, they are often portrayed as passive figures, lacking agency, vitality, and influence. However, some research exceptions have highlighted more positive portrayals of older individuals, depicting them as kind, affectionate, and cooperative, which challenges prevailing stereotypes.

The underrepresentation and stereotypical depiction of older adults in coursebooks have far-reaching consequences. These portrayals shape young people's perceptions of aging, reinforce ageist attitudes, and can negatively affect the self-esteem and identity of older individuals. The way aging is perceived has a profound impact on psychological development, physical health, and even longevity. However, ignoring or denying aging in educational materials can inadvertently reinforce the notion that old age is solely a period of decline. Therefore, it is crucial to construct positive identities of older age within learning materials (Loy-Ashe et al., 2024).

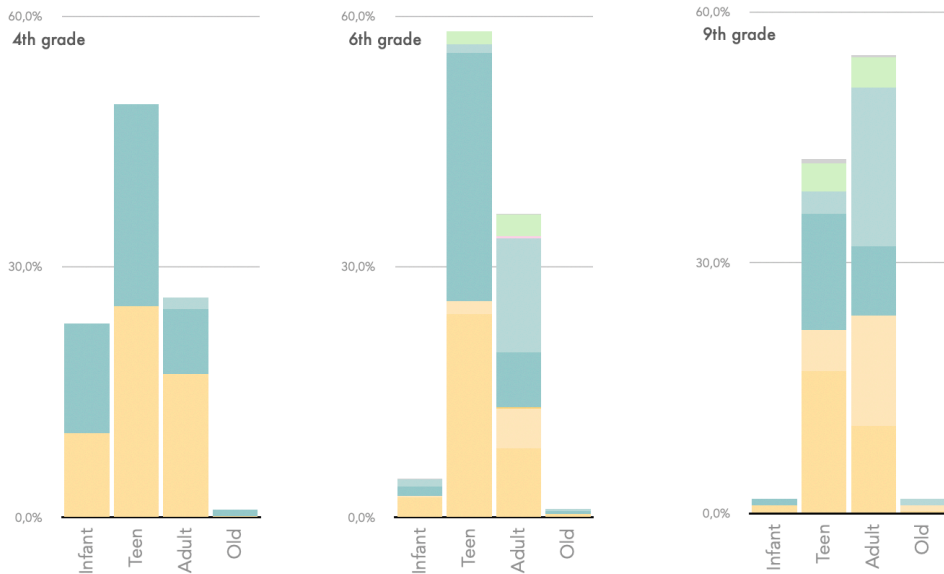
In analyzing age-identified individual characters, context and visuals were used to classify them according to major life stages—infant, teen, adult, and old—while considering intersections with gender and roles such as 'female celebrity' or 'female ideologue'.

The table below (Table-chart 9) presents the intersection of gender and age among individual characters across *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9*.

**Table-chart 9**

*Intersectionality. Gender and age [individual characters]*

<b>Intersectionality</b>																					
<i>Gender and Age</i>																					
female		f. celeb.		f. ideol.		male		m. celeb.		m. ideol.		other		neutral (text)		not clear (image)		<b>Totals</b>			
Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot
<i>4th grade</i>																					
Infant	52	10,1	0	0,0	0	0,0	68	13,2	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	120	23,2	
Teen	131	25,3	0	0,0	0	0,0	125	24,2	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	256	49,5	
Adults	89	17,2	0	0,0	0	0,0	40	7,7	7	1,4	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	136	26,3	
Old	1	0,2	0	0,0	0	0,0	4	0,8	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	5	1,0	
	273		0		0		237		7		0		0		0		0		517	100,0	
<i>6th grade</i>																					
Infant	21	2,4	1	0,1	0	0,0	10	1,2	7	0,8	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	39	4,5	
Teen	210	24,4	13	1,5	0	0,0	256	29,7	9	1,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	13	1,5	0	0,0	501	58,2	
Adults	71	8,2	41	4,8	2	0,2	56	6,5	118	13,7	0	0,0	2	0,2	22	2,6	0	0,0	312	36,2	
Old	4	0,5	0	0,0	0	0,0	3	0,3	2	0,2	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	9	1,0	
	306		55		2		325		136		0		2		35		0		861	100,0	
<i>9th grade</i>																					
Infant	4	1,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	3	0,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	7	1,7	
Teen	70	16,9	20	4,8	0	0,0	57	13,8	11	2,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	14	3,4	2	0,5	174	42,1	
Adults	43	10,4	54	13,1	0	0,0	34	8,2	78	18,9	0	0,0	0	0,0	15	3,6	1	0,2	225	54,5	
Old	1	0,2	3	0,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	3	0,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	7	1,7	
	118		77		0		94		92		0		0		29		3		413	100,0	



*4th grade* — Dominance of tweenies (49.5 p.c) over other ages, 256 out of 517 characters is evident in *Let's Rock 4*. The male/teen intersection (125 characters) is slightly less visible than the female equivalent (131 mostly students, children). Adulthood second superiority rate might be explained by the representation of characters related to the presence of teachers mostly. The superiority of the occurrence

of female/adult stands out with 89 instances versus 47 male/counterpart (~17 p.c vs. ~9 p.c).

Concurring with previous gender/ethnicity data in this coursebook, we find slight superiority of male celebrity/adult (7 occurrences) as opposed to the female counterpart invisibility.

Infant play about 23 p.c. of the whole population very close to adults. Male infant represents a higher ratio regarding female counterpart (68 vs. 52 occurrences).

With only 5 characters (1 p.c), senior figures are clearly invisible. Furthermore, unfair gender representation is apparent concerning gender/old intersection. Despite the little significance, there is one female/old and 4 male/old. Similarly to High Five 6, seniors of male gender have been given roles as 'grandfathers', a farmer and old man fixing a car in the garage which presents the elderly somehow playing an active role. Single female individual appears in a shop, apparently a bookstore. One might consider senior reduced visibility associated to stereotypical roles indicates prejudice concerning such large social group. The remaining intersections divided into text and image representing neutral or not clear characters do not appear.

*6th grade – High Five 6* reveals dominance of the tweenie or teen over other ages, 501 elements out of 861 characters.

The female/teen intersection (223 characters) is slightly less visible than the male equivalent (265).

Slight superiority of personality female celebrity/teen 13 occurrences (youtuber famous girl, famous TV actress) as opposed to the male famous personality, male celebrity/teen (9).

Out of 313 adults, the superiority of the occurrence of famous male/adult personalities stands out (118 actors, professional athletes, entrepreneurs, heads of state...) against 41 female /adult personalities.

Balance between gender intersected with age - infant (young children from TV series and cinema), in a not very significant number, though.

With only 9 characters, the male/senior and female/senior figures are clearly invisible in the universe in question.

There is balanced representation in the male/old and female/old category. However, although not very relevant, there are two male/old personalities, a famous American Indian Chief and a famous University Professor. The remaining characters are divided into text and image in equivalent numbers and represent grandfathers and grandmothers.

Ungendered age falls into the 'adult' and 'teen' age categories present in the texts (parent, teen, student...).

*9th grade –* The prevalence of adults (55 p.c) over other ages, 225 out of 413 characters is evident in *Upgrade 9*. The female/adult intersection (97 characters) is

slightly less visible than the male equivalent (112 actors, singers, entrepreneurs, scientists, heads of state). Adulthood superiority might be explained by the representation of characters related to social human rights issues, organisations, professional careers, future choices, preparing teens for the world of work together with the presence of famous celebs, idols who play as role models.

Concurring with previous gender/ethnicity data in this coursebook, we find slight superiority of male celebrity/adult (78 occurrences) as opposed to the female counterpart (54).

Conversely, out of 174 (~42 p.c) teenagers, the superiority of the occurrence of female/teen stands out with 90 instances versus 68 male/teens (~22 p.c vs. ~17 p.c). Feminine appears as teen actresses playing parts in soap operas and TV series, such as Katniss in *Hunger Games*, Hazel in *The Fault is in the Stars*; Anne Frank, the main character.

Balance between gender intersected with age - infant (young children from TV series and cinema), comes up in a not very significant number, though.

With only 7 characters each (1.7 p.c), infant and senior figures are clearly invisible in the universe in question. Fair gender representation is apparent concerning both intersections. Despite the little significance, there are three female/old personalities, a famous scientist, Jane Godall, a head of state, Queen Elisabeth, and Simon's mother. Regarding male/old we find businessmen and a writer, J. R. Tolkien. If we compare to *High Five 6*, seniors of both genders have been given roles other than grandfathers and grandmothers which indicates improvement and lack of prejudice concerning such large social group, the elderly. The remaining characters are divided into text and image in equivalent numbers and represent neutral characters or not clear. Similar to previous findings in grade 6 coursebook, ungendered age falls into the 'adult' and 'teen' age categories present in the texts (they, one, parent, teacher, business person, teenager, student...).

The analysis of gender and age intersections across the three coursebooks reveals a consistent dominance of younger characters, particularly teenagers, reinforcing a youth-centric narrative. *Let's Rock 4* and *High Five 6* show a strong presence of tweeny and teen characters, with a relatively balanced distribution between male and female intersections. In contrast, *Upgrade 9* shifts towards adulthood, reflecting a focus on career development, professional aspirations, and societal roles. Across all coursebooks, infants and older adults remain largely invisible, highlighting a gap in representation for both the youngest and oldest age groups.

Despite some balance in gender representation within specific age groups, certain disparities persist. Male figures tend to dominate celebrity and professional adult roles, particularly in *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9*, where male/adult personalities far outnumber their female counterparts. Conversely, female/teen characters slightly

surpass male/teens in representation in *High Five 6* and higher in *Upgrade 9*, potentially reflecting changing gender dynamics in adolescence. However, senior figures, when present, are often relegated to traditional roles—grandparents, farmers, or passive individuals—although *Upgrade 9* shows some progress by depicting older individuals in professional and leadership positions.

The persistent underrepresentation and stereotyping of older adults in educational materials contribute to the reinforcement of ageist attitudes among young learners. The portrayal of aging individuals as passive or insignificant limits students' ability to relate to older generations as active members of society. Given that aging is a universal experience, it is essential to challenge these biases and provide more diverse, realistic, and empowering representations of older adults. The findings suggest that while gender representation has seen some improvement, the intersection of gender and age, particularly in older age groups, still requires greater attention to ensure inclusivity and balance in educational content.

#### **4.3.3. Ability**

The intersection of gender and ability is a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of representation in educational materials. Disability, much like age, is frequently framed in ways that emphasize limitation rather than possibility, reinforcing societal narratives that position disabled individuals—especially women—as passive or dependent. Gender and disability together form a complex web of marginalisation, where disabled women face both gendered and ableist barriers that shape their experiences and opportunities. As Erevelles (2011) argues, disabled women are often rendered invisible within both disability and gender discourses, as social institutions fail to support their full participation while simultaneously upholding traditional gender roles.

Research has consistently shown that disabled individuals, particularly women, are underrepresented in coursebooks, and when they do appear, they are often depicted through a medicalised lens that highlights deficits rather than strengths (Connor et al., 2008). This lack of positive representation can significantly impact the self-esteem and identity formation of disabled students, reinforcing the idea that their experiences are peripheral to mainstream society. While recent findings (Deckman et al., 2020; Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023) suggest an increase in disability representation in educational materials, it is still apparent that these texts primarily address normatively-abled readers, with disabled individuals depicted as “different” rather than integral to diverse social realities. Moreover, disabled girls are often provided with less support and encouragement than their male counterparts, limiting their educational and professional opportunities (Shah, 2007).

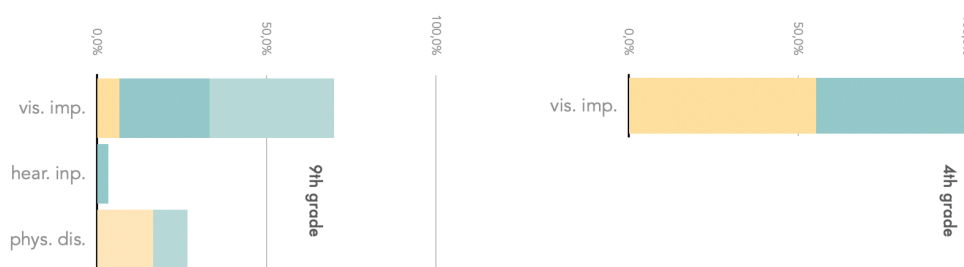
In examining ability-identified individual characters, both contextual references and visual cues were used to classify them according to categories such as mobility, health, cognitive, visual, speech, and aural impairments. Additionally, the analysis considers

intersections with gender and roles such as “female celebrity” or “female ideologue.” Table-chart 10 presents the intersection of gender and ability across *Let’s Rock 4* and *Upgrade 9* (values not relevant in *High Five 6*). When no clear reference to a permanent disability or impairment was found, the category “no information” was applied.

**Table-chart 10**

*Intersectionality. Gender and ability* [individual characters]

<b>Intersectionality</b>																						
<i>Gender and Ability</i>																						
	female		f. celeb.		f. ideol.		male		m. celeb.		m. ideol.		other		neutral (text)		not clear (image)		Totals			
	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot	Nº	%Tot		
<i>4th grade</i>																						
Vs. imp.	67	55,4	0	0,0	0	0,0	54	44,6	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	121	100,0
<i>6th grade</i> – Statistically not relevant; but see fig 7																						
<i>9th grade</i>																						
Visual	2	6,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	8	26,7	11	36,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	21	70,0
Hearing	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	3,3	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	3,3
Phys. d.	0	0,0	5	16,7	0	0,0	0	0,0	3	10,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	8	26,7
	2		5		0		9		14		0		0		0		0		0		30	100,0



*4th grade* – Although data collected in *Let’s Rock 4* might be considered reduced to justify presenting a table there’s slight representation improvement regarding 6th grade coursebook as greater visibility was given to people who lack some kind of ability. 121 instances of visual disability - the use of spectacles - have been noted. No other impairment was found.

Concurring with previous intersecting identities data we find slight superiority of female/visual (67 instances vs. 54) occurrences as opposed to the male counterpart. We have found female adult teacher, recurrent character wearing glasses. Male counterparts wearing glasses are a recurrent pupil together with the headmaster.

Nevertheless, the almost absence of 'disabilities' in the coursebook is noteworthy, especially considering that the national educational system is governed by legislation promoting the inclusion of students with special educational needs, including those with physical and mental impairments.

*6th grade* — Data collected is manifestedly insufficient to justify presenting a table. (but see table number 7). Despite the presence of students with disabilities in general classroom settings, representations of characters with disabilities are rare and often fail to portray them in a strength-based manner.

This omission results in an invisibility that affects how a large number of individuals, particularly children and teens, perceive themselves, as they do not see their experiences reflected in their learning materials.

*9th grade* — Although data collected might be considered insufficient to justify presenting a table there's slight representation improvement regarding 6th grade coursebook as some (very little) visibility was given to people who lack some kind of ability. Despite the quantitative little significance of the information, disabilities other than visual (21 instances, 70 p.c of the whole of disabilities) have not been omitted. Hearing impairment was found in a male character and 8 individuals were found with some kind of permanent or long disease.

Concurring with previous intersecting identities data we find slight superiority of male/visual (19 instances mostly male celebrities) occurrences as opposed to the female counterpart (2). There's is one male/hearing disability, no female counterpart was noticed. Slight superiority of female/disease (5 instances all female celebrities) occurrences as opposed to three male counterpart, also celebrities. We have found famous model with Vitiligo, a skin disease, two famous actresses suffering from addictions and eating disorders, an actress suffering from cancer and a famous dwarf. Male counterparts also represent addictions, skin disease and dwarfism.

Nevertheless, the almost absence of 'disabilities' in the coursebook is noteworthy.

Globally, there is a rising awareness of disability and a growing rejection of past discriminatory attitudes. This shift aligns with a broader movement toward rights and social care. Disabilities are now increasingly recognised as specific forms of social inequality, discrimination, and exclusion, highlighting the need for societal changes to address and rectify these injustices (Babik & Gardner, 2021).

The findings across the coursebooks reveal a persistent underrepresentation of disabled individuals, particularly beyond visual impairments such as the use of glasses. While *Let's Rock 4* shows slight improvement over the 6th-grade coursebook with 121 instances of visual disability, no other impairments were recorded. A small gender discrepancy was noted, with female characters slightly more represented in this category than males. However, the almost complete absence of diverse disabilities remains significant, especially given national educational policies promoting inclusion. The visibility of disability in *High Five 6* was insufficient to justify a detailed table, further reinforcing the limited presence of disabled individuals in educational materials.

In *Upgrade 9*, although representation remains minimal, there is a slight improvement over earlier coursebooks. While visual impairment still dominates (21 instances), hearing disabilities and chronic illnesses are also represented, albeit in very small numbers. Male characters appear slightly more often in the visual impairment category, while female characters are more associated with chronic illnesses, particularly famous figures with conditions such as vitiligo, addiction, and cancer. Despite this marginal progress, disabilities continue to be underrepresented and often confined to well-known personalities rather than ordinary individuals, failing to reflect the realities of many students with disabilities.

Overall, while there is an increasing societal awareness of disability and a rejection of past discriminatory attitudes, the findings suggest that educational materials still largely overlook disabled individuals. The continued lack of representation highlights the need for further efforts to integrate disability into coursebooks in a meaningful way, moving beyond tokenism toward a more inclusive portrayal of ability and diversity. As disabilities are now more widely recognised as a dimension of social inequality and discrimination, it is crucial for educational content to reflect this shift, ensuring that all students see themselves represented in their learning materials.

In conclusion, the intersectional analysis of gender, ethnicity, age, and ability within the three coursebooks —*Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9*— reveals both persistent patterns and areas of progress in the representation of diverse identities. While some improvements are observed, particularly in the visibility of female characters in certain ethnic and age categories, significant gaps remain, underscoring the need for more inclusive educational content. The dominance of White characters—particularly male—across the coursebooks is notable, with gendered patterns of representation contributing to a gender imbalance, particularly in adult and celebrity roles. Despite occasional strides toward balancing gender representation, ethnic diversity remains strikingly underrepresented, especially among non-white female characters. The near-erasure of female/Brown, Asian, and First Nations characters highlights a systemic neglect of intersectional identities, particularly in educational materials that shape young learners' perceptions of gender and ethnicity.

The representation of age also reveals a youth-centric focus, with the overwhelming presence of tween/teen, and adult characters, while infants and older adults remain largely absent. Although some coursebooks exhibit a more balanced gender representation among teens and adults, stereotypes persist, particularly in the depiction of older individuals as passive or relegated to traditional roles. The lack of visibility for older adults, especially in professional and active roles, reinforces ageist attitudes and limits young students' ability to relate to aging as a natural and dynamic process. Similarly, while there is some progress in including older adults in non-traditional roles in *Upgrade 9*, more diverse, positive, and empowering representations

of older generations are necessary to challenge ageist stereotypes and promote inclusivity.

Finally, the representation of disability in the coursebooks remains insufficient, with visual disabilities (e.g., the use of glasses) being the most visible but other impairments largely absent. While there is marginal improvement in the visibility of disabilities across the coursebooks, they remain tokenised, often confined to famous personalities, and fail to reflect the lived experiences of disabled students. Despite societal progress in recognising disability as a form of social inequality and discrimination, the continued underrepresentation and lack of nuanced portrayals of disability in educational materials reflect the need for a broader, more inclusive approach to representing ability and diversity. Overall, the findings suggest that while there is some improvement in the visibility of diverse identities, significant efforts are required to ensure that educational materials truly reflect the full spectrum of human experiences, providing all students with the opportunity to see themselves represented in meaningful and empowering ways.

#### **4.4. Actions, activities and occupations**

This study seeks to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the representations of male and female characters engaged in a diverse range of actions, activities, and occupations (AA & O) across three EFL coursebooks published by national publishers.

It is widely accepted in the academy that patterns of co-occurrences foster stereotypical associations (e.g. between women and housework) illustrating how language exposes social representations that connect groups (women/men) with attributes and contexts (home/work), even without explicit reference (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022). In essence, social representations are deeply embedded in language and intertwined with collective memory, preventing them from being clearly evident which makes it essential to carefully analyse beyond the surface level of language to examine the deeper, often concealed, context of words and their meanings.

This inherently reflexive process required continuous evaluation of the researcher's social and cultural position. By engaging in a progressive cycle of analysis, our study on AA & O maintained a critical perspective, making visible underlying trends and potential biases in gender representation. Following an inductive approach, data collated from image, text and audio was inferred and reduced into smaller, organised categories based on topics, themes, participant characteristics, and other relevant features, allowing for a more focused examination of the diverse activities and roles associated to female and male gender. This structured coding framework provided the scope for the identification of relevant patterns and relationships within the texts and images in the present corpus, we believe will ensure a comprehensive, objective

approach in order to address the objective of the study: understand whether genders are equally represented in national EFL coursebooks in the 4th, 6th and 9th grades.

Representations associated with gender stereotypes will be further critically examined, drawing on data collected to determine the frequencies, correlations and variations in terms of AA & O. Taking into account critical literature and the researcher analysis, the samples observed by careful systematic reading will hopefully have allowed to derive meaningful findings and answer the research questions.

The presentation of the study's main findings on the tables and charts presented in Table-charts 11, 12 and 13 reflects this structured methodology, offering a clear and systematic overview. Proportions are expressed in percentages, giving a clear overview of results. The image, text and audio examined in the coursebooks describe characters involved in a wide range of actions, activities and occupations.

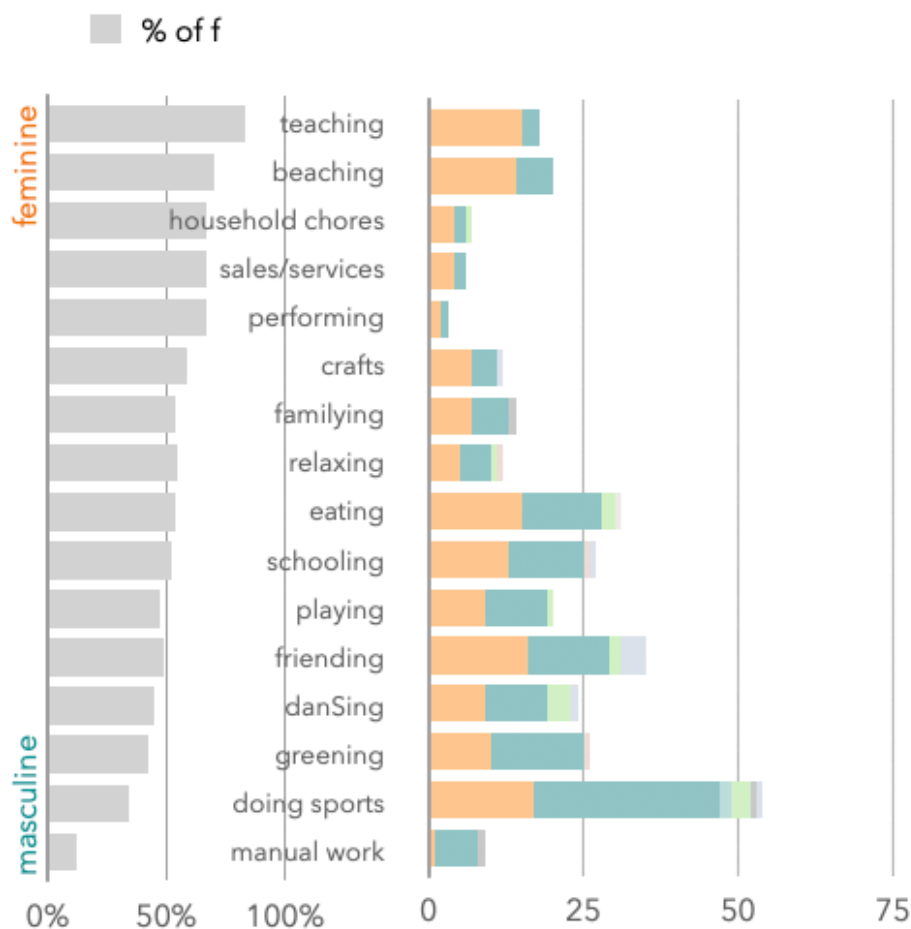
Data collected will contribute to a deeper understanding of gender bias in educational materials, deepen the body of knowledge on stereotypes in EFL and ESL coursebooks, and ultimately help mitigate their impact in the classroom, on young learners, and in society as a whole.

#### **4.4.1. Actions**

The following Table-chart 11 shows the number and type of observed actions in which male and female characters are involved. In qualitative terms, the specific 'doings' in which the male and female characters engage are described.

**Table-chart 11-a**  
 Actions and gender (4th Grade)

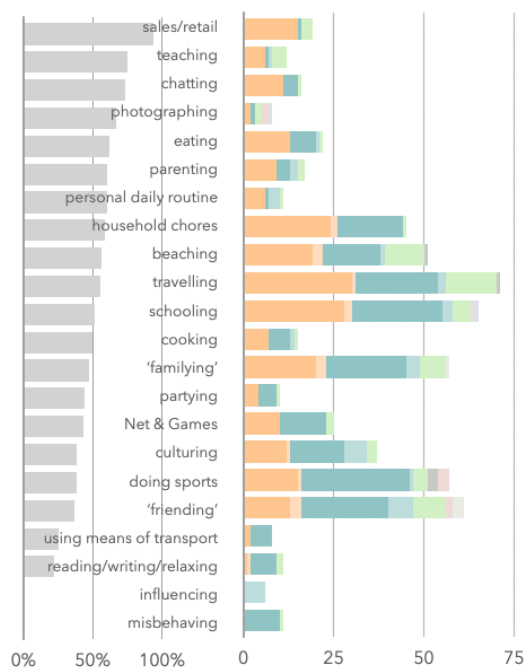
Actions and Gender												Total	%	%f
f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	gfd	gbc	gmd					
Teaching	15	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	5,7	83,3	
Beaching	14	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	6,3	70,0	
Hous. ch.	4	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	7	2,2	66,7	
Sal./Serv.	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1,9	66,7	
Perform.	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,9	66,7	
Crafts	7	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12	3,8	63,6	
Familiyng	7	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	14	4,4	53,8	
Relaxing	5	0	5	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	12	3,8	50,0	
Eating	15	0	13	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	31	9,8	53,6	
Schooling	13	0	12	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	27	8,5	52,0	
Playing	9	0	10	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	20	6,3	47,4	
Friending	16	0	13	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	35	11,0	55,2	
Dancing	9	0	10	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	24	7,6	47,4	
Greening	10	0	15	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	26	8,2	40,0	
Sporting	17	0	30	2	0	3	1	0	0	1	54	17,0	34,7	
Man. work	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	2,5	12,5	
	148	0	139	2	0	14	2	3	1	8	317	100,0		



**Table-chart 11-b**

*Actions and gender (6th Grade)*

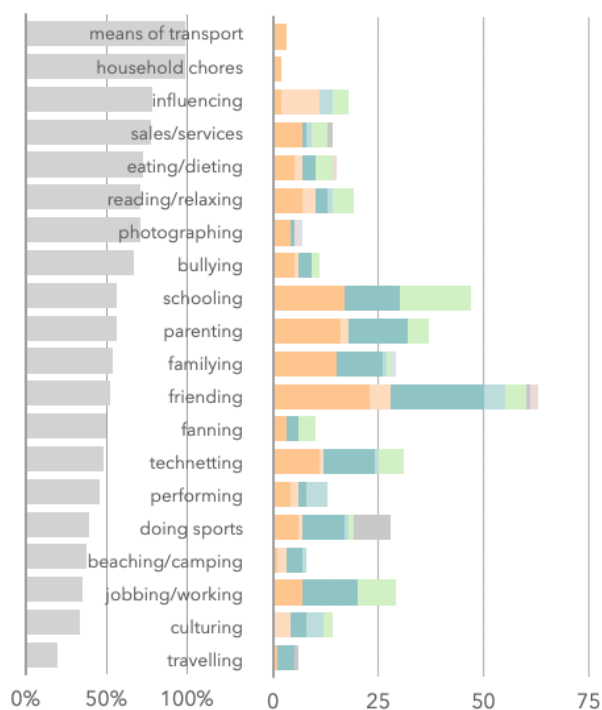
<b>Actions and Gender</b>												Total	%	%f
<i>f</i>	<i>fc</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>mc</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>nt</i>	<i>nc</i>	<i>gfd</i>	<i>gbc</i>	<i>gmd</i>					
Sal./Ret.	15	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	19	3,0	93,8	
Teaching	6	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	12	1,9	75,0	
Chatt.	11	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	16	2,5	73,3	
Photog.	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	8	1,3	66,7	
Eating	13	0	7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	22	3,5	61,9	
Parent.	9	0	4	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	17	2,7	60,0	
Dail. rout.	6	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	11	1,7	60,0	
Hous. ch.	24	2	18	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	45	7,1	59,1	
Beaching	19	3	16	1	0	11	1	0	0	0	51	8,0	56,4	
Travell.	30	1	23	2	0	14	1	0	0	0	71	11,2	55,4	
School.	28	2	25	3	0	5	0	1	0	1	65	10,2	51,7	
Cooking	7	0	6	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	15	2,4	50,0	
'Familying'	20	3	22	4	0	7	0	0	1	0	57	9,0	46,9	
Partying	4	0	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	10	1,6	44,4	
Net/Gam.	10	0	13	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	25	3,9	43,5	
Culturing	12	1	15	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	37	5,8	38,2	
Sporting	15	1	30	1	0	4	3	3	0	0	57	9,0	34,0	
'Friending'	13	3	24	7	0	9	0	2	3	0	61	9,6	34,0	
Transp.	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	1,3	25,0	
Read./Writ.	1	1	7	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	11	1,7	22,2	
Influencing	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0,9	0,0	
'Misbehav.'	0	0	10	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	11	1,7	0,0	
	<b>247</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>100,0</b>		



**Table-chart 11-c**

Actions and gender (9th Grade)

Actions and Gender												Total	%	%f
	<i>f</i>	<i>fc</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>mc</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>nt</i>	<i>nc</i>	<i>gfd</i>	<i>gbc</i>	<i>gmd</i>				
Transp.	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,7	100,0	
Hous. ch.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,5	100,0	
Influencing	2	9	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	18	4,5	78,6	
Sal./Serv.	7	0	1	1	0	4	1	0	0	0	14	3,5	77,8	
Eat./Diet.	5	2	3	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	15	3,7	70,0	
Read./Writ.	7	3	3	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	19	4,7	71,4	
Photog.	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	7	1,7	80,0	
Bull.	5	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	11	2,7	66,7	
School.	17	0	13	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	47	11,6	56,7	
Parent.	16	2	14	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	37	9,2	56,3	
'Familying'	15	0	11	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	29	7,2	55,6	
'Friending'	23	5	22	5	0	5	1	2	0	0	63	15,6	50,9	
'Fanning'	3	0	3	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	10	2,5	50,0	
'Techenett.'	11	1	12	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	31	7,7	48,0	
Perform.	4	2	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	3,2	46,2	
Sporting	6	1	10	1	0	1	9	0	0	0	28	6,9	38,9	
Beach./Camp	1	2	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	2,0	37,5	
Jobb./Work.	7	0	13	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	29	7,2	35,0	
Culturing	0	4	4	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	14	3,5	33,3	
Travell.	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	1,5	20,0	
	139	32	123	23	0	69	12	4	0	2	404	100,0		



The distinction between actions and hobbies was not always evident. We classify as action what in the image, audio or text is visible or capable of being described or referred to in text and its punctual 'realisation' and we use the form 'ing' to designate it. Whenever there was reference to the greater frequency of an action included in the character's routine, understood as a pastime, habit, particular taste inferred by the context or explicitly referred to as such, it was considered a hobby and therefore examined ahead in table Activities - Table-chart 12.

Each character's primary action was determined based on contextual cues, with relevant information drawn from text, images, and audio. Characters were assigned a single action that appeared most dominant.

Table below outlines the number and the actions that males and females engage in. A closer examination of individual character portrayals will demonstrate the extent of gender stereotyping across the *Let's Rock 4*; *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* coursebooks.

*4th grade* – There are 318 actions being performed either in text, audio and image [Table-chart 11]. Although there is some variation in occurrences the number of actions carried out by individuals of both genders in *Let's Rock 4* is not very high.

The quantity of actions performed by female and male characters is approximate. Both perform or participate in an identical and varied number of actions grouped around: **teaching; beaching; household chores; performing; sales/services; crafts; familying; relaxing; eating; schooling; playing; friending; danSing; greening; doings sports; manual work.**

*Let's Rock 4* depicts most often actions that are fun, active, and easy for 9-year-old pupils to relate to, showing frequent active characters enjoying physical movement. The coursebook highlights '**sports**' (54 instances), where characters are seen running, playing with a ball, riding bikes, surfing, fishing, skipping rope, swimming, canoeing, using Pilates balls.

Actions reflecting tweenies/teens spending time with their friends and expressing kindness were grouped under '**friending**' (35 instances): characters are hanging out together in the park, chatting while going to school, and having fun with their friends, hugging, showing affection, and sharing special moments during school events and celebrations.

'**Eating**' together is another important theme, with 31 instances where characters are seen eating in the school canteen, having ice cream in the park, enjoying healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, and having fun during picnics or breakfast at home.

'**Schooling**' (27 instances) focuses on actions like organising schoolwork, having lessons, visiting the school library, and working in pairs or groups. Characters are seen taking notes and listening to their teachers. '**Greening**' actions, with 26 instances, encourage children to care for the environment. Characters are shown recycling, picking up litter, planting trees, and saving water and electricity. Regarding '**danSing**'

actions (24 instances), children are seen dancing at school events, learning new dance steps, singing songs, and having fun during contests.

Characters enjoying the beach, lying in the sun, playing in the sand, looking at the sea, putting on sunscreen, and playing games with dolls, animals, or puppets are included around 'Beaching' and 'Playing' both with 20 instances. Regarding the eighteen (18) 'teaching' actions presented, characters are depicted organising school work and calendar, monitoring pupils in class, in the park, going on school visits, giving instructions, informing, rebuking pupils. 'Familying' actions (14 instances) highlight family routines, such as talking about home and pets, playing with animals.

There are 'relaxing' moments where characters are sitting outside, looking at animals and plants, or strolling around calmly, taking breaks and enjoying the world around them.

'Manual activities' is shown doing crafts, drawing and designing mascots, planting trees, fixing cars, and cleaning up.

'Household chores' (7 instances) show characters cleaning, dusting, washing dishes, and cooking. Finally, 'sales and services' (6 instances) are represented by school attendants serving meals at the school canteen, selling popcorn, or working as newsagents.

'Crafts', 'familying', 'relaxing', 'eating', 'schooling', 'playing', 'friending', 'danSing', and 'greening' are fairly represented by male and female characters. Nevertheless, closer analysis show more girls kneeling, playing in bedroom with teddy bear and doll whereas male is seen playing in the attic with blocks and lego. Both play puppets, board and guessing games, play tongue twisters but boy is seen winning with arms opened high up or pointing up a finger with authoritative attitude. Regarding 'performing', there is marginal difference favouring female representation (2:1). However, female play granny and little girl whereas boy plays a tricky menacing wolf. The same ratio is visible for 'sales/services' but close examination reveals female shop assistant, customer as well as school canteen attendants serving meals whereas male is depicted outside as Zoo keeper and selling pop corn in the Adventure Park. One may consider this is an example of biased representation. On the one hand, the idea that women are more active consumers than male. On the other hand traditional stereotypical representation is highlighted with female inside, more routinely actions, taking care of children versus male in outside setting depiction, more active, engaged in more 'risky' and interesting behaviour whether as wardens, police officers or detectives. This corroborates similar findings showing traditional actions played by women such as cleaning, dusting, serving children breakfast visible in 'household chores' or having great personal care leaving/having a shower whereas male collaborates in the kitchen.

Most female appearance lying in the sun, putting sunscreen up, wearing hats whereas male are seen more standing, wearing sunglasses in more prominent attitudes, with

ball, doing water sports like surfing, fishing and rowing/canoeing. Checking the **'sporting'** ratio (32 vs. 17) it is evident the prevalence of male depiction. Both are seen swimming but male appears more involved in diverse water sports, riding bike, playing with ball against female skipping rope and doing gymnastics.

Greatest difference favouring female regards **'teaching'** with 15 female vs. 3 male instances which, concurring with previous data and 6th and 9th grade findings, is traditionally viewed as feminine. Conversely, but still drawing on previous findings, performing **'manual work'** appears as male's (7 vs. 1).

One might infer there is stereotypical representation based on gender as regards the representation of male and female performing or engaged in actions.

In short, overall, the coursebook is successful in terms of representation of male and female gender involved doing a wide variety of actions. Although the relative balance between the two was statistically demonstrated, as well as the representation of both genders involved in a wide range of actions, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of the gender stereotype in the coursebook.

*6th grade* — There are 635 actions being performed either in text, audio and image.

There is variation in the number of occurrences, and both female and male characters perform a high number of actions.

The amount of actions carried out by individuals of both genders is approximate, performing identical and varied number of actions: **'household chores'**; **'beaching'**; **'travelling'**; **'schooling'**; **'cooking'**; **'familying'**; **'doings sports'**; **'friending'**; **'culturing'**; using the Internet and playing online games.

Actions with greater relevance in *High Five 6* are **'travelling'** (71), mostly with family, to know different cultures, visit relatives, sometimes work and study abroad; 65 **'schooling'** instances (having lessons, doing schoolwork, studying); **'familying'**, being with family in and outdoor, spending time together with unit and large family, sharing some family meals (57); **'friending'** (61) in the school yard, in the park, at friends', in the bedroom or the living room; **'sporting'** (57), **'beaching'** (51) and doing **'household chores'** (45).

Travelling and schooling are fairly represented by male and female characters. One might notice slight prevalence of male celebrities both in travelling as well as in schooling which reflects earlier prevalence of male character appearance in the coursebook as a whole. There's also high number of neutral characters (teenager, student, youngster, parent, friend, tourist) collected in the texts which are referred to as being in class, having lessons, going abroad, travelling, visiting places, countries.

Fair representation of female and male members **'familying'**: children being with parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, at home, in the park, spending time together, visiting relatives, engaging in family celebrations, around family table, playing board

games, parent giving advice, helping with problems or worries, characters showing signs of affection and care. There's fair age representation also related to the topic of this unit; family ties and relationships, where large family members appear more visible. Affection signs and cuddling by grandma to grandchildren have been visible, grandfather helps with a research for school. Also surprisingly, Dracula character is seen singing affectionately to daughter.

As regards **'parenting'**, although not great a difference, women are more visible taking care of family affairs: looking after sick child, instructing on household chores, telling son to make bed, teaching him how to set table whereas father tells to wash the car and gets angry at son.

One may consider there's been greater **'household chores'** being shared between young couples. Nevertheless, Portuguese typical families are mostly seen performing clear separate roles with female as working mother, wife, and still looking after household whereas men are spared from these chores. This is apparent in the difference (26 female to 18 male) which shows greater female appearance in the topics - 'Daily Routine and Household Chores' - Unit 1. Male are mostly seen in the living room, in the garage, repairing, in doing-yourself actions... One may notice careful edition by authors in this kind of topic representation; yet, relative bias is evident. Female characters are more attached to actions such as cleaning bathroom, making bed, vacuuming, dusting, tidying, whereas male are seen taking rubbish out, washing dishes and washing the car. One might infer there is clearly stereotypical representation based on gender as regards the representation of male and female performing or engaged in actions.

**'Cooking'** is performed in balanced way, a household task shared by both. In fact, there's currently been a trend in this kind of activity, traditionally associated to famous chefs which has been massified through TV and Media. Great care for healthy meals, increase of single parent families leads to 'popular' male representation in the kitchen. One may conclude that this is still a margin of femininity allowed to men.

Female and male are visible going to the beach with friends, by the sea included in item **'beaching'**. At the beach, slight more female are seen (22:17): walking, sitting, sunbathing, going to the sea, playing together with friends, playing games with friends or family. Most references are collected from images. Neutral characters (friend, student, kid, child, teen, parent) are greatly mentioned proving that it's possible not to favour/omit genders.

Shopping, selling and buying, references to fashion and clothing are mostly female gendered (15:1); there is very little male visibility regarding this item, a couple of neutral references may also be found. One may consider this is an example of biased representation as there is such short reference to male shopping which contributes to the idea that women are more active consumers than male, more concerned about

appearance, looks and fashion. The idea of being more superficial is stressed out by other actions such as photographing. Individual girls and female dominant groups are attached to selfies and photographs twice as much as boys. This may lead us to conclude appearance and looks are seen more of female concerns and characteristics. The same when it comes to daily personal care: shower, hair care. Nevertheless, repeated reference to male celeb's daily routine (Mr Bean) gives male greater visibility in this item, adding humor which is markedly positive as Bean is a rather popular star. Somehow ridiculing male figure as clumsy, properly taking care of daily basics is seen as a joke matter.

Girls occupy most 'unimportant, informal' talk; **'chatting'** reveals females are seen talking three times more than male.

Female are seen **'teaching'**, instructing children and teens. Performing caring activities such as monitoring children in summer camps, helping with schoolwork; education and children upbringing are mostly female. Some neutral references mainly from texts come second place.

Greater female dominance whether having breakfast or lunch at home and at the school canteen, having ice-cream, trying traditional foods such as sushi or 'pastel de nata'. Do girls like eating more?

Fair representation of female and male going to birthday parties, dancing and having fun. Item 'culturing' shows male overrepresentation going to concert, theatre, museum, cinema. 'Djaying' is exclusive male, though.

Male character overrepresentation is apparent **'sporting'** or involved in physical activity. Males are more visible skateboarding, doing paddle, surfing, but mostly playing with a ball; whereas girls are rather seen playing beach volley, tennis, doing gymnastics, in a swing. Both are seen running and swimming.

There's gender balanced representation as regards using mobile phones, iPads, text messaging and playing games, with marginal difference of three instances favouring male as users of Internet and technological devices.

There's female underrepresentation when it comes to **'friending'**: meaning socialising, being with friends in informal setting and in relaxed mood, sitting together in circle or line with arms around each other which supports the idea that male are more 'socialisers'. Surprisingly, male character appears more often alone reading and sitting relaxed on the floor in the street or against a wall.

More male characters are seen using, driving or inside means of transport: car, plane, train which is supported by the idea that female are not very good drivers. We have female representation as motorbike rider in the table, though, pointing to more and more unbiased gender representations.

Celebrities giving autographs, attending fans, interacting with audience or public grouped here as 'influencing' is male only. The omission of female characters 'doing' or

'said to be doing' such actions may be considered to have negative impact on young female characters. One may highlight the presence of a young female celebrity in Table-chart 13 showing the table and chart 'Occupations'; Jazzy Girl, a famous Youtuber. Nevertheless, she significantly appears doing the household chores in sub-unit 1.3 'Household Chores'.

Female characters are also omitted in category '**misbehaving**'. Male characters are represented playing pranks on girls, cheating in tests, being lazy, arriving late at school. From a teacher's point of view, which is where I situate myself, this kind of attitude is disapproved. This fact may not necessarily be envisaged as negative as such attitudes highlight strong active personalities who, as adults, become entrepreneurs, activists, and successful citizens and stars like famous Steve Jobs, Jay Z, Simon Cowell; Eminem, but also Cheryl, Rhianna, Cameron Diaz to name a few.

In short, overall, *High Five 6* is successful in terms of representation of male and female gender involved doing a wide variety of actions. Although the relative balance between the two was statistically demonstrated, as well as the representation of both genders involved in a wide range of actions, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of the gender stereotype in the coursebook.

*9th grade* – There are 404 actions being performed either in text, audio and image.

The most prominent actions in *Upgrade 9* include social activities such as '**friending**' (63 instances), with a notable presence of teenagers in the park, hanging out with friends, making arrangements to go out, and engaging in romantic behaviours, such as couples showing affection and tenderness through hugging. These interactions reflect the target age group of the coursebook readers, primarily 14-15 year-olds.

The next most frequent coding involves '**schooling**', with 47 instances of characters studying, discussing school subjects, sharing opinions on exchange programs, and recounting experiences of studying abroad. Parenting is also represented with 37 instances, typically featuring supportive parents helping their children navigate life's challenges, coping with problems, or hosting foreign volunteer students. The depiction of generational gaps in these family dynamics highlights the relevance of this theme.

Technological engagement is another prominent aspect, with 31 instances categorised under '**tech-netting**', where characters are shown using mobile phones, iPads, computers, and the internet.

The same number of instances depict families ('**familiying**') engaging in online meetings or sitting at tables, making plans and discussing family issues. The concept of family celebrations is integrated here as well, such as weddings, along with job-seeking activities, both represented by 29 instances.

Physical actions, such as doing sports ('**sporting**') counts 28 instances, together with leisure, such as reading and relaxing with 19 instances, also play significant roles in the

portrayal of characters. Celebrity figures are represented in 18 instances, utilising their fame to support health care causes, offer teen advice, promote books and films, and influence the public. In the context of dieting and eating habits, 15 instances depict characters engaged in crash dieting, binge eating, and dining out.

Cultural related actions are also well-represented, with 14 instances of characters going to museums, theatres, and musicals, which were coded under **'culturizing'**, suggesting an emphasis on exposure to the arts. Additionally, 13 instances depict characters performing in gigs, playing instruments, or acting, highlighting the importance of the arts in the lives of the most teens.

**'Bullying'** is another theme explored in 11 instances, with characters either suffering from bullying or expressing racist comments. Fanning (10 instances) reflects the global phenomenon of teenagers following their idols, such as actors, singers, and writers, often seeking autographs or admiring philanthropist entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs.

Other actions, such as **'beaching and camping'** (8 instances), **'photographing'** (7 instances), and **'travelling'** (6 instances), represent common leisure and recreational activities. Additionally, transportation is depicted with only 3 instances involving females using means of transport, and household chores are portrayed in just 2 instances.

**'Schooling', 'parenting', 'familying', 'friending', 'fanning', 'tech-netting' and 'performing'** are fairly represented by male and female characters. Nevertheless, regarding **'familying'** there is slight greater female representation (15 vs. 12) but little difference is apparent. Closer visual analysis show more girls on sofa watching phone/Ipad, on video call, as bride getting married whereas male celebs Simon Cowell and Gordon Ramsay's, appear as dominant character in a group character, are depicted in family celebrations, spending time with children highlighting current male fatherhood trend. As regards **'tech-netting'** there's also balanced representation of characters using mobile phones, Ipads, computers and the Internet. Both are seen text messaging and are technology users. Nevertheless, careful analysis shows only female chat on the phone (3 female) occupying most 'unimportant, informal' talk. Also more male engage in playing games (7:2) and in producing video games (2:0). Balanced representation regarding **'performing'** but there is slight prevalence of male celebrities who are seen as vocals in gigs or playing the guitar whereas girls play the cello, are seen acting at theatre and rehearsing for movie. Surprisingly, one female is depicted playing drums in a traditional celebration: Summer Carnival in London - Notting Hill Festival.

As regards **'parenting'**, both genders are supportive, helping teens navigate life's challenges; sharing parenthood and upbringing activities. Despite little difference, greater representation is female's and concerns mostly traditional motherhood role: mother serving meal, telling son to wear suit for Awards, not wanting son to look scruffy, giving advice on body image, telling son to be responsible, clean and caring;

telling daughter to love everyone regardless of colour, race, religion; telling daughter to behave, feeling reluctant, not happy about daughter going abroad to study. Whereas father talks to school director and supports daughter in her decision to study abroad; father tells son to be responsible and behave; father is strong and twice outgoing and mother is amusing. Some characters are depicted facing/experiencing generation gap problems: 4 instances dealing with teenage male teens who either refuse help or defy adults in a generational gap attitude which will be referred to further ahead when overlapping gender and age prejudice (young adults/older people particularly male white). A significant aspect is the fact that on the one hand there are two female celebs (Mila Kunis and Demi Moore) playing mothers stressing a more humanised star feature. On the other hand, Demi is told to refuse to talk to daughter until her complete addiction recovery treatment, a strict attitude not usual stuck to female softer personality.

A significant number of characters are depicted engaging in physical actions, with a total of 28 instances recorded. Both genders are seen skating, cycling, and surfing. However, playing football, open-sea swimming, skiing, and competing in various events, are exclusively male. Notably, there is a female character portrayed playing basketball. Some extreme sports are represented without a clear gender association or are ambiguously depicted. Despite the male overrepresentation, the gender disparity is relatively marginal, with 7 female and 11 male characters involved, against a backdrop of 28, gender-neutral (1) and unclear (9) characters.

Similar figure (29 instances) of job-related actions are observed. Male characters are depicted involving manual labor, such as fixing machines, plugging devices, working in the garden, or planting trees. Some male characters also experience job-related struggles, such as losing employment or failing to secure promotions. In contrast, female characters are portrayed primarily in more traditionally feminine roles, conducting interviews or as nurses in hospitals. When it comes to recreational type of actions, male characters are shown setting up tents for camping, enduring bear attacks, and engaging in various adventurous outdoor scenarios, while female characters are more commonly depicted in passive beach-related activities, such as sunbathing.

An analysis of cultural engagement highlights further gender disparities. Both characters visit museums, attend musicals, and go to the theatre (with a ratio of 4:8), revealing a notable underrepresentation of female characters. Despite the editors' efforts to broaden the portrayal of cultural interests beyond cinema and television, male characters dominate the cultural engagement landscape. In terms of travel, female characters are underrepresented in this domain (1:4), though this number is not statistically significant. Qualitative analysis reveals that one female character embarks on a backpacking holiday, signalling an empowering representation of women as global citizens, while male characters are shown traveling to large cities and distant sites.

In the domains of reading and relaxing (19 instances), female characters are predominantly depicted reading magazines and engaging in leisure activities, such as enjoying nature, with some celebrity figures also portrayed as taking time off. In contrast, in the area of eating and dieting (15 instances), female characters are more likely to be shown engaging in crash dieting or binge eating, while both male and female characters exhibit a fondness for fast food, with a slight female overrepresentation.

Instances of **'bullying'** (11) predominantly involve female characters, with males depicted as expressing racist comments and displaying a lack of tolerance. The sales and service sector (14 instances) sees a marked female overrepresentation (7:2), with women portrayed as ticket sellers, carrying bags, distributing seating plans, and handing out wristbands or fliers. This trend reinforces a biased gender representation in the service industry, suggesting that women are more often associated with roles that involve consumption, appearance, and fashion, further emphasised by their portrayal as more superficial figures, such as in the context of photography.

**'Photography'** (7 instances) is another domain where female characters dominate: taking photographs or selfies (4:1), reinforcing a trend of female-centric representation in this area. Interestingly, among male-dominated celebrity portrayals, there is one instance of a male character taking a selfie at the Oscars. When it comes to **'influencing'**, female celebrities are depicted in various influential roles, with 9 out of 18 instances involving women using their fame to promote health causes, offer teen advice (e.g., Jennifer Lawrence), or promote books and films (e.g., J.K. Rowling, Emma Watson). Conversely, only one male celebrity is shown using his influence for political purposes, as represented by John F. Kennedy.

Female references to means of transport use are somehow biased: female mentions the car broke down when she was driving; female is depicted fastening seat belt supporting the idea that female are not very 'lucky' drivers and are more careful and one illustration of plane travelling.

Finally, regarding household chores biased representation is evident as it is female single gendered: there's one girl washing hands after taking rubbish out and one mum washing up.

One might infer there is stereotypical representation based on gender as regards the representation of male and female performing or engaged in actions.

In short, overall, the coursebook is successful in terms of representation of male and female gender involved doing a wide variety of actions. Although the relative balance between the two was statistically demonstrated, as well as the representation of both genders involved in a wide range of actions, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of the gender stereotype in the coursebook.

Overall, as regards balance and gender representation across all three coursebooks, there is an effort to include a wide variety of actions for both genders, and for the most

part, male and female characters are depicted equally across many categories. However, a closer examination reveals persistent gender stereotypes. Females are more often shown in caregiving, household, and appearance-related roles, while males are more frequently depicted in physical, adventurous, or authoritative ways.

In terms of stereotypical portrayals key themes like sports, parenting, and cultural activities show clear gender divides, with males often engaging in more competitive or ‘risky’ actions, and females depicted in nurturing or passive roles. While the coursebooks do offer opportunities for both genders to participate in diverse actions, traditional gender expectations still shape the way certain gestures and movements are portrayed.

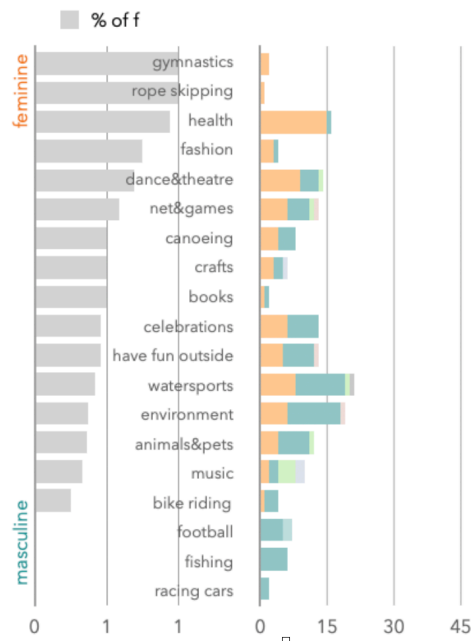
Therefore while there are positive strides in some coursebooks to portray both genders in a broader range of ‘doings’ (e.g., females engaging with technology, males in household chores), these changes are not always consistent across the books. More nuanced, non-stereotypical portrayals of both genders could provide a more progressive and realistic representation of their diverse capabilities and interests.

#### 4.4.2. Activities

Table ‘Activities’ (Table-chart 12) shows the number and type of observed activities in which male and female characters are involved. In qualitative terms, the hobbies in which the male and female characters engage are described.

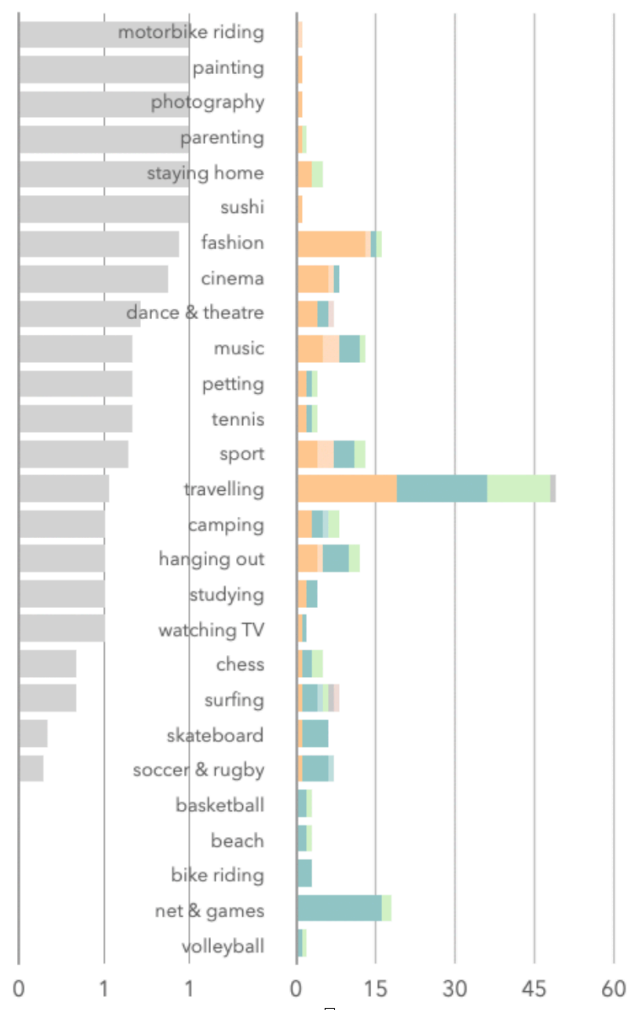
**Table-chart 12-a**  
Activities and gender (4th Grade)

Activities and Gender												Total	%	%f
f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	gfd	gbc	gmd					
gymn.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1,2	100,0	
rope sk.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,6	100,0	
health	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	9,2	93,8	
fashion	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2,3	75,0	
d. & theatr.	9	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	14	8,1	69,2	
net & gam.	6	0	5	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	13	7,5	54,5	
canoeing	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	4,6	50,0	
crafts	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6	3,5	60,0	
books	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1,2	50,0	
celebration:	6	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	7,5	46,2	
‘fun outs.’	5	0	7	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	13	7,5	41,7	
watersp.	8	0	11	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	21	12,1	42,1	
environm.	6	0	12	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	19	11,0	33,3	
an. & pets	4	0	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	12	6,9	36,4	
music	2	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	2	0	10	5,8	50,0	
bike riding	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2,3	25,0	
football	0	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	4,0	0,0	
fishing	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	3,5	0,0	
racing cars	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1,2	0,0	
	76	0	80	2	0	8	1	3	3	0	173	100,0		



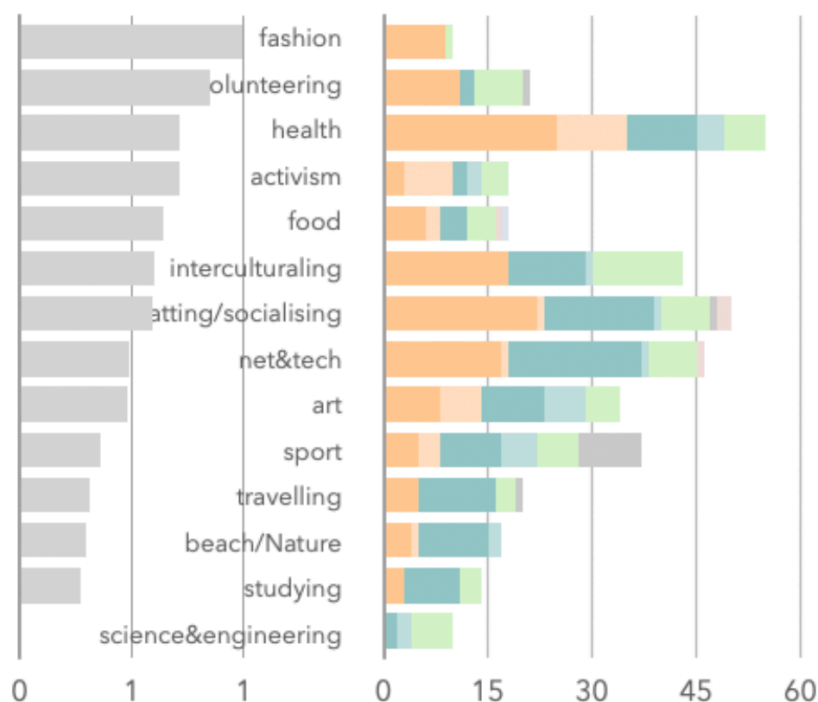
**Table-chart 12-b**  
Activities and gender (6th Grade)

Activities and Gender												Total	%	%f
f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	gfd	gbc	gmd					
mbike rid.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,5	100,0	
painting	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,5	100,0	
photogr.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,5	100,0	
parenting	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1,0	100,0	
st. home	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	2,4	100,0	
sushi	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,5	100,0	
fashion	13	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	16	7,8	93,3	
cinema	6	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3,9	87,5	
dnc & thtr	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	7	3,4	66,7	
music	5	3	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	13	6,3	66,7	
petting	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	1,9	66,7	
tennis	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	1,9	66,7	
sport	4	3	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	13	6,3	63,6	
travelling	19	0	17	0	0	12	1	0	0	0	49	23,8	52,8	
camping	3	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	8	3,9	50,0	
hang. out	4	1	5	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	12	5,8	50,0	
studying	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1,9	50,0	
watch.TV	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1,0	50,0	
chess	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	2,4	33,3	
surfing	1	0	3	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	8	3,9	20,0	
skateboard	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2,9	16,7	
socc., rugb.	1	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	3,4	14,3	
basketball	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1,5	0,0	
beach	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1,5	0,0	
bike riding	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1,5	0,0	
net & game.	0	0	16	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	18	8,7	0,0	
volleyball	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1,0	0,0	
	76	10	80	3	0	33	2	2	0	0	206	100,0		



**Table-chart 12-c**  
Activities and gender (9th Grade)

Activities and Gender											Total	%	%f
	f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	gfd	gbc	gmd			
fashion	9	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	10	2,5	100,0
volunteering	11	0	2	0	0	7	1	0	0	0	21	5,3	84,6
health	25	10	10	4	0	6	0	0	0	0	55	14,0	71,4
activism	3	7	2	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	18	4,6	71,4
food	6	2	4	0	0	4	0	1	0	1	18	4,6	66,7
interculturating	18	0	11	1	0	13	0	0	0	0	43	10,9	60,0
chatting/socialising	22	1	16	1	0	7	1	2	0	0	50	12,7	57,5
net&tech	17	1	19	1	0	7	0	1	0	0	46	11,7	47,4
art	8	6	9	6	0	5	0	0	0	0	34	8,7	48,3
sport	5	3	9	5	0	6	9	0	0	0	37	9,4	36,4
travelling	5	0	11	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	20	5,1	31,3
beach/Nature	4	1	10	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	4,3	29,4
studying	3	0	8	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	14	3,6	27,3
science&engineering	0	0	2	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	10	2,5	0,0
	136	31	113	24	0	72	12	4	0	1	393	100,0	



Each character’s primary pastime was determined based on contextual cues, with relevant information drawn from text, images, and audio. Characters were assigned a single activity that appeared most dominant.

Table below outlines the number and the activities that males and females engage in. It appears that the female character is associated with the ‘practice’ of free time activities, and there is evidence that they enjoy a variety of hobbies. Therefore, a closer examination of individual character portrayals will demonstrate whether there is gender stereotyping across the *Let’s Rock 4*; *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* coursebooks as well as the extent of such bias.

*4th grade* – The images, audio and text presented in *Let’s Rock 4*, describe characters involved in a set of nineteen (19) pastimes. The table above shows the number and type of leisure activities in which the male and female characters are involved.

There is balance in the representation of both genders enjoying or involved in different types of hobbies: **‘water sports’** (21 instances); **‘environment’** (19); **‘health’** (16); **‘dance and theatre’** (14); **‘net and games’, ‘celebrations’, ‘having fun outside’** (13); **‘animals and pets’** (12); **‘music’** (10); **‘canoeing’** (8); **‘football’** (7); **‘crafts and fishing’** (6); **‘fashion and bike riding’** (4); **‘gymnastics’, ‘books’, ‘racing cars’** (2) and **‘rope skipping’** (1).

Women are completely absent in the representation of certain sport activities such as **‘football’** (7:0) **‘fishing’** (6:0) and **‘car racing’** (2:0) traditionally seen as more masculine.

Also regarding bike riding female is almost absent with unfair 3:1 ratio. The invisibility of the female gender in the above activities reaffirms common stereotypes: football 'is a man's game'. Another important remark at this point is the fact that the single celebrity instances are both male. However, we are witnessing the increasing stardom of women in football, perhaps because in economic terms it is highly profitable. There are signs of change that we believe will reveal themselves in the representations of more recent coursebooks.

**'Fishing'** is markedly masculine and far from the adrenaline type of sport, it requires great patient and quiet. One may describe this hobby as a total association of man to nature, introspection and thought, being traditionally associated to male as house provider as well. If on the one hand women are typically seen as more impatient and nervous, on the other hand female is associated to looking after the children at home having no time left for such kind of leisure activity. This kind of biased representation may hinder female identity development as incapable of introspective thinking being denied the right to a precious factor: time.

Women are invisible regarding **'car racing'**. Conversely, there's total omission of male characters regarding **'gymnastics'** and **'rope skipping'**. These single gendered references may be considered biased depictions. Female is depicted as active which is positive but it is represented more doing indoor physical activity. Also the invisibility of girls regarding the use of vehicles concurs with the stereotypical view of women as bad drivers and lacking the ability to use machines in general and similar technical devices. Overall from early age students are exposed to biased representations which harm girls' development, hindering their self-esteem and self-image.

Although these examples illustrate a problem, this conclusion alone does not guarantee a concrete assessment and, in our opinion, further investigation is necessary.

In agreement with 6th and 9th year findings, female character is mostly portrayed in health related activities, (often applying sun protection, wearing hat, sunglasses, careful and worried about well-being), also feeling tired and confused. Male asks girls to apply sunscreen on their back, though.

Similarly girls are associated more to clothing and care about looks with particular reference to the school uniform, loving to wear 'pink' accessories'.

Both genders act and dance. However greater female representation (9 vs. 4) is noticeable as far as **'dance and theatre'** is concerned, activities girls are frequently associated with (playing puppets, Red Ridding Hood), female appear teaching dance steps, both genders also appear dancing on stage at the welcoming party showing gender parity regarding body/physical expression. Regarding **'Music'** there's also fair representation (2:2), 4 neutral references and 2 male dominant group characters regularly singing rhymes in class, on school trips, rehearsing for song contest, also listening to music.

**'Net and Games'** shows fair representation (6 female vs. 5 male). The single reference to computer games is male only. All others are board and guessing games. This lack of technology references regards not only the coursebook edition year (2017) when not many pupils owned mobiles and computers but also due to pupils' age.

Boys and girls love **'having fun outside'**, get involved with the preparation of celebrations and school projects, reading books, crafts and canoeing.

Regarding **'water sports'** both genders are fond of swimming and swim inside and outside, yet surfing is male only.

Unequal male/female ratio (2:1), regarding **'environment protection'** activities and projects that involve saving energy, planting trees, setting up the recycling boxes at school. Girls hand out fliers to save energy and water and help picking up litter.

Regarding **'animals and pets'** both girls and boys love animals, have pets, help to look after them, present and talk about favourite animals although male ratio is slightly higher.

In short, overall, the coursebook reveals success in terms of representation of the male and female gender involved in the practice of a wide variety of activities. Although such relative balance is statistically demonstrated, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of gender stereotypes in the coursebook.

*6th grade* — The images, audio and text presented in *High Five 6* describe characters involved in a set of twenty (27) activities or hobbies. The table and chart in Table-chart 12 shows the number and type of activities in which the male and female characters are involved.

There is balance in the representation of both genders enjoying or involved in different types of hobbies: **'going to theatre'** or **'movies'**, **'dancing'**, **'playing the guitar'**, **'listening to music'**, **'petting'**, **'playing tennis'**, **'camping'**, **'chess'**, **'surfing'**, **'hanging out with friends'**.

Female character is absent in the representation of certain sport activities: **'bike riding'**, **'net and games'**, **'volleyball'**, **'basketball'**, and practically invisible regarding **'soccer or rugby'** and **'skateboarding'**, traditionally seen as more masculine. The invisibility of the female gender in the above activities demonstrates presence of common stereotypes.

Female character is portrayed **'painting'**, **'doing photography'**, **'staying home'**, as fashion follower and regularly or obsessively associated to shopping for trends, activities where male is absent. We may consider this as biased representation of the consuming and futile woman.

Unexpected finding, as previously mentioned, is a female celebrity (Ellie Goulding) related to Royals, who loves **'riding motorcycle'**, also here male is not represented in an area usually regarded as male gendered. This may be considered quite positively as

there is usually the stereotype that girls are careless and not very good drivers (Hellinger, 1980) and may indicate a change of biased representation.

In short, overall, the coursebook reveals success in terms of representation of the male and female gender involved in the practice of a wide variety of activities. Although such relative balance is statistically demonstrated, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of gender stereotypes in the coursebook.

*9th grade* – The images, audio and text presented in *Upgrade 9* describe characters involved in a set of fourteen (14) activities or hobbies. Table-chart 12 shows the number and type of activities in which the male and female characters are involved.

There is balance in the representation of both genders enjoying or involved in different types of hobbies: **'health care'** and issues (55 instances); **'chatting and socialising'** (50); **'using the internet'** and digital devices (46); **'inter-culturing'** (43) which include reading books, mags, playing music and instruments, hosting and welcoming foreign pals and families...; **'sport'** (37); Art (34), **'volunteering'** (21); **'travelling'** (20); fighting and campaigning against prejudice, promoting tolerance and humanitarian activities coded as **'activism'** (18) food (18); **'beach/nature'** (17); **'studying'** (14); finally both with ten (10) instances come items **'fashion'** and **'science and engineering'**.

Both genders are surfing athletes, go swimming, train at the gym and do gymnastics regularly. Nevertheless woman is omitted in bike riding, video games, volleyball, basketball, soccer and rugby, traditionally seen as more masculine. Concurring with aforementioned *High Five 6* findings, female invisibility in such activities reaffirms common stereotypes: football 'is a man's game'; basketball female players do not fit the body type 'suitable' for women, being notably invisible in the media as well; mountain biking is markedly masculine and full of adrenaline.

Female character is mostly portrayed **'volunteering'** offering help to foreign immigrants; in cleaning campaigns, packing up equipment; maintaining displays, being happier by improving the quality of life of individuals around the world; appearing twice as female dominant group working in music festival, carrying bags, giving out wristbands, volunteering abroad, teaching English, making new friends. Lots of activities are related to health, attending cancer support group, hooked on chocolate, alcoholic who goes on rehab, suffering a lot of pressure to stay thin, going on crash diets, struggling against eating disorder. Female model appears raising awareness for Vitiligo, a skin disease. Not the single case of famous women using their influence to stand for humanitarian and environmental friendly causes. Male is more related to drug, internet and video games addiction, but there is also role model, famous Leonardo DiCaprio who presents a testimony of having resisted to using drugs. Both genders are addicted to cigarettes. Female appears as being obsessed with body image

and looking good, but also fighting it, taking a mirror fastening challenge. Unexpected finding, it is a 'he' who is totally hooked on plastic surgeries. A while-viewing questionnaire on a video on a character obsessed with looking 'like a doll' which shows editor's concern to present unbiased gender representation. Body care is usually associated to female character. This shows a change of mindset in gender representation. This might be the single reference to 'other' gender apparent only in the video.

It would be worthwhile to deepen this topic and widen the source of research nevertheless this character appeared in a video; our work includes only text, image and audio.

Girls are fashion related, followers and compulsive shoppers, activities where male is absent. We may consider this as biased representation of the consuming and futile woman. Conversely, only masculine are depicted related with science and technology. Omission of female might be considered significant particularly in this field which involves future choices and careers in a society where women do, in fact, play a relevant part.

Overall, the coursebook reveals success in terms of gender representation of characters involved in the practice of a variety of activities. Although such relative balance is statistically demonstrated, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of gender stereotypes in the coursebook.

As previously mentioned, female, particularly female celebrities (singers, actresses, a writer) appear campaigning against racism, supporting and donating money to charities; supporting health and humanitarian foundations, for eg. a mixed-race bullied actress stands against prejudice campaigning against racism; promoting tolerance. Yet, Humanitarian foundation founders are male only.

Boys and girls love eating out, get involved with the preparation, eating cooking traditional typical or vegan food, teens around table eating hamburgers and fast food, experiences particularly connected to exchanging student programs.

Balanced representation regarding '**chatting/socialising**' also 2 female dominant groups stressing the positive view of both genders as socialising characters. Technological devices, games or the Internet are used for fun, for communicating with family abroad/away as well as for school and work. Both genders are bloggers but male appear filming and producing media. Technology is used obsessively by both (1:1). Male is also depicted playing video games, looking bored, spending much time on internet and TV and having poor marks which might also be considered as biased representation of boys as less fond of schoolwork, irresponsible and lazy. Corroborating female activity, playing active roles towards social issues, celeb Emma Watson alerts for safety issues and Media disinformation.

Regarding **'Art'**, both genders are keen on listening to music, acting, attending theatre, visiting museums, singing in choirs, attending music school club and going to the cinema.

As far as **'Sport'** is concerned more male (14 vs. 8) presence is apparent. Masculine appears as Marathon runner, control freak; playing football, boxing, taking part of the school football as team captain, parachute jumping also playing tennis, stressing the importance of being active; going to gym to get fit; taking time off from daily routine, fond of team and water sports, swimming in the open sea. Interestingly, famous successful male character appears underlining not having image problems, showing positive attitude regarding appearance while girls appear the reverse; seen more related to having negative attitudes as well as suffering social pressure to look according to strict standards. This kind of prejudice in coursebooks is worsened by media, advertising and social network representations and it is difficult to reduce, although slowly positive views regarding acceptance of non-biased representations are taking place.

Unexpected unbalanced depiction (5 female vs. 11 male travelling) but both appear as tourists, talking about going abroad, deciding on holidays, preparing for travelling, visiting foreign countries. Interestingly, female taking a gap year in Australia is seen backpacking and gets severely hurt in rafting trip.

Regarding **'beach and nature'** females are seen more relaxing in park while males are shown more active in relation to nature and landscape (camping, exploring, setting up tents; working in the garden, even suffering bear attack); both genders are depicted at the beach, wearing snorkelling equipment. The traditional idea that boys are more connected to outdoor activities is conveyed in the ratio of 12 male vs. 5 female.

**'Studying'** as a hobby or habitual activity appears as summer camps studying abroad and student, school dropout, unemployed for long periods.

Finally **'science and technology'** is male only, also appearing loving and working with electronics and engineering (eg. drones) an entrepreneur student who became famous as Apple founder, famous actor who is keen on chemistry. This biased representation is quite negative as girls are usually portrayed as 'less scientific' and 'more literary'.

The analysis of *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9* demonstrates a relatively balanced gender representation in terms of participation in various hobbies and activities. However, despite this apparent numerical equilibrium, a more in-depth examination reveals the persistence of gender stereotypes that shape the portrayal of male and female characters.

Both male and female characters engage in a wide range of activities, including sports, arts, social interactions, volunteering, and environmental initiatives. Hobbies related to music, theatre, dance, and health-related concerns feature representation of both genders, suggesting an effort toward inclusivity. However, a closer examination

reveals that science, technology, competitive sports, and outdoor adventure activities remain predominantly male-dominated.

Gender stereotypes in sports and physical activities is apparent in the representation of female characters associated to activities such as swimming, gymnastics, and surfing, which are often depicted in ways that align with traditional femininity. In contrast, female characters are notably absent from football, basketball, rugby, and mountain biking—sports traditionally associated with masculinity. This absence reinforces gender stereotypes, including the notion that sports like football are “male-dominated” and that certain physical activities require typical male-body features.

Concurring with previous studies fashion, shopping, volunteering, and caregiving, appear frequently associated to women reinforcing traditional gender expectations. Additionally, the portrayal of women often emphasises concerns with body image, dieting, and beauty standards, reflecting societal pressures related to female appearance. In *Upgrade 9*, for instance, the inclusion of a female celebrity advocating for vitiligo awareness represents a noteworthy deviation from conventional gender portrayals by shifting the focus from aesthetics to activism which might be seen as rather positive.

The stereotypical representation of masculinity also manifests, though. Male characters are disproportionately associated with science, engineering, and technology-related activities, reinforcing the stereotype that STEM fields are predominantly male domains. Furthermore, male characters are more frequently depicted as engaging in video games, drug use, and internet addiction, whereas female characters’ struggles are often linked to body image and self-esteem issues.

While traditional gender roles remain prevalent, certain instances challenge these conventions. Notably, in *High Five 6*, the depiction of Ellie Goulding riding a motorcycle challenges the stereotype that women are not interested in or skilled at driving. Similarly, *Upgrade 9* presents a male character obsessed with plastic surgery, subverting the commonly held belief that body image concerns are exclusive to women. Additionally, a video segment in *Upgrade 9* introduces references to non-binary gender identities, although such representations are absent from the coursebook’s primary textual and visual content.

In conclusion, despite efforts to ensure gender inclusivity in the depiction of hobbies and activities, the three coursebooks analysed continue to reinforce deep-seated gender stereotypes. As in previous academic studies, male characters are overrepresented in sports, technology, and high-risk or competitive activities, whereas female characters are predominantly depicted in fashion, caregiving, and appearance-related concerns. Although there are notable instances of gender stereotype subversion, these remain exceptions rather than the norm. A more deliberate and systematic approach to gender-neutral representation in educational materials is necessary to prevent the

reinforcement of traditional gender roles and to foster equitable opportunities across all fields.

#### 4.4.3. Occupations

An influential study (Porreca 1984) that continues to be cited or referred to in the literature on gender stereotypes in EFL coursebooks (see: Women in EFL Materials, 1991; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009; Foroutan, 2012; Lee, 2014; Forbes, 2018) highlights the need or importance of analyzing professional roles, gender discrimination and prejudice transmitted to pupils and young people.

They also indicate that the portrayal of women in stereotypical roles within coursebooks may reinforce gender inequality and discrimination. By predominantly depicting women in domestic or caregiving roles, such materials may inadvertently convey the impression that women's contributions are less important or significant compared to those of men (Mihira et al., 2021). This may strengthen societal biases and attitudes that sustain gender-based discrimination, restricting girls' opportunities for equal participation and achievement in different areas of life (Donzelli, 2024).

The deeper understanding in terms of the representation of the characters' professional occupation is demonstrated in table below which reveals the extent to which editors consciously or unconsciously reinforce gender stereotyping. Although the stereotype is visible, it appears indirectly. It becomes evident that the authors thought about equalising the representation of masculine and feminine, particularly in the proportion of 'speech', however, discrepancies regarding gender persist in subliminal messages.

Examining occupational activities, discrimination based on gender and the 'gendered cliché' conveyed to EFL learners on local coursebooks will further explore how these trends manifest in Portuguese context considering both the visible progress and subtle forms of gender imbalance that may persist (see also Gomes et al., 2007; Pires, 2014). Table-chart 13 illustrates not only professional activities but also the role played by both genders in the coursebooks under study.

*4th grade* – It appears that in *Let's Rock 4* the number of occupations associated with the male figure slightly exceeds those carried out by the female character.

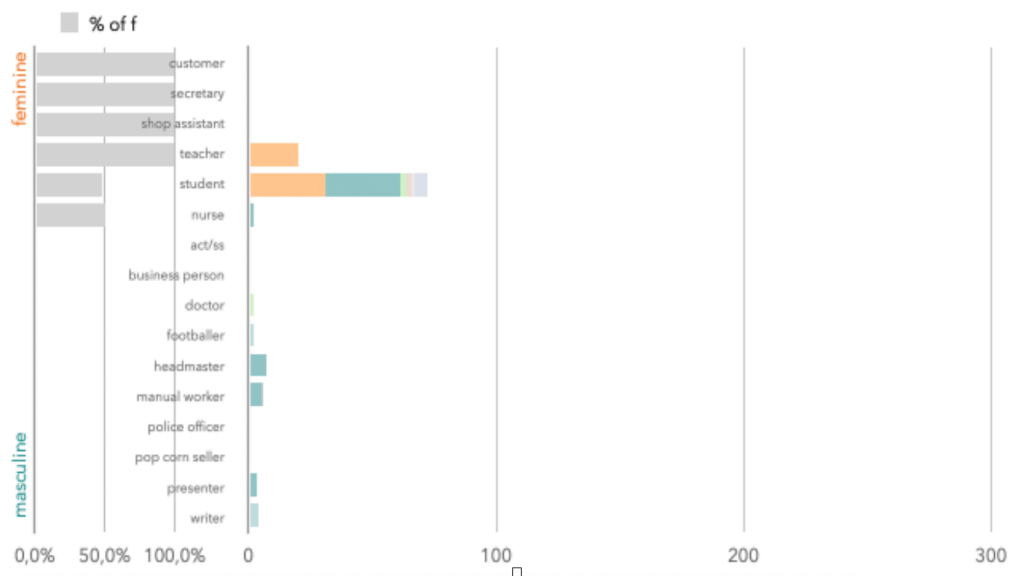
Unlike *Upgrade 9* and *High Five 6*, coursebooks, not many jobs and occupations have been found in *Let's Rock 4*. Pupil's age and profile might account for the amount of information extracted. Nevertheless, there's enough data to justify drawing significant conclusions.

Overall, male figure appears associated with more diverse jobs (12 vs. 6 out of 16). Both share (2 out of 16) only two professions fairly: '**student**' (31 vs. 30) and '**nurse**' (1 vs. 1). If on the one hand the sharing piece is poor on the other balanced representation is envisaged rather positively.

**Table-chart 13-a**

Occupations and gender (4th Grade)

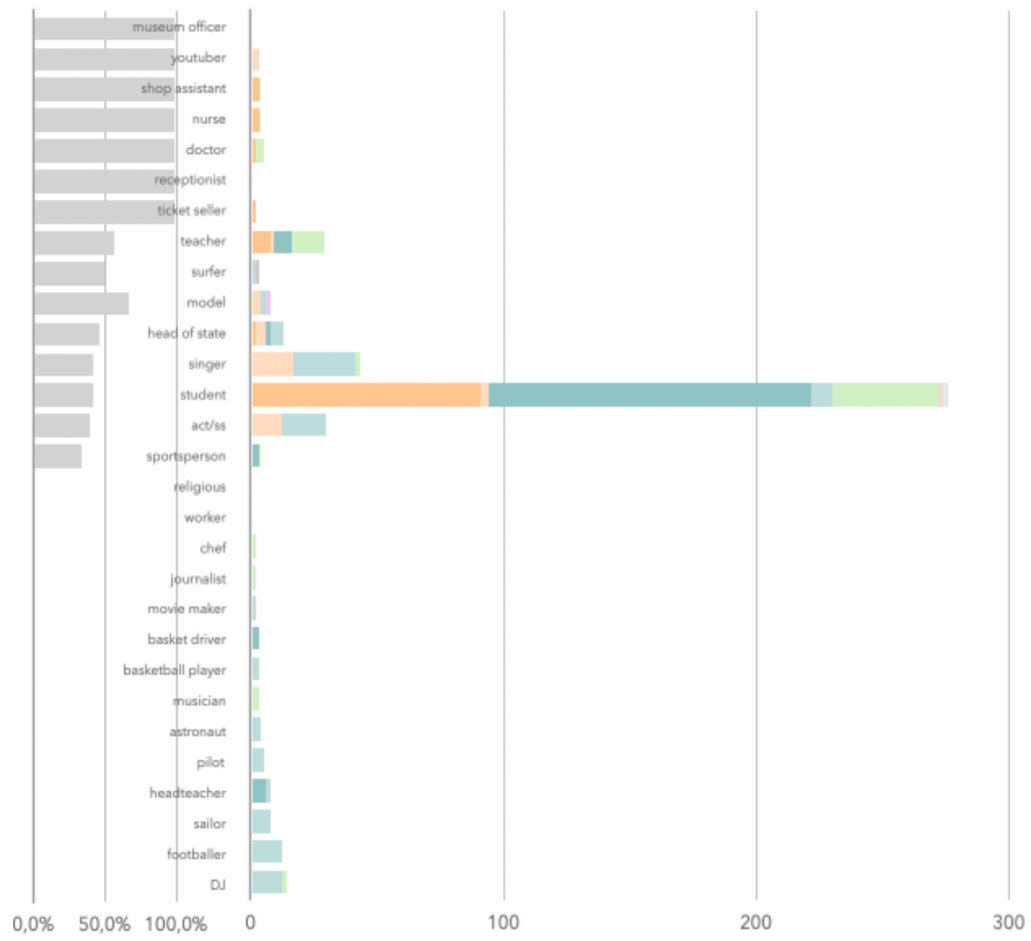
Occupations and Gender													Total	%	%f	
	f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	afd	gbc	gmd						
customer	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	100,0			
secretary	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	100,0			
shop assistant	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	100,0			
teacher	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	16,0	100,0			
student	31	0	30	0	0	3	0	2	1	5	72	57,6	50,8			
nurse	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1,6	50,0			
act/or-ress	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	0,0			
business person	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	0,0			
doctor	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1,6	0,0			
footballer	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1,6	0,0			
headmaster	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	5,6	0,0			
manual worker	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	4,8	0,0			
police officer	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	0,0			
pop corn seller	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,8	0,0			
presenter	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2,4	0,0			
writer	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3,2	0,0			
	55	0	50	7	0	4	1	2	1	5	125	100,0				



**Table-chart 13-b**

Occupations and gender (6th Grade)

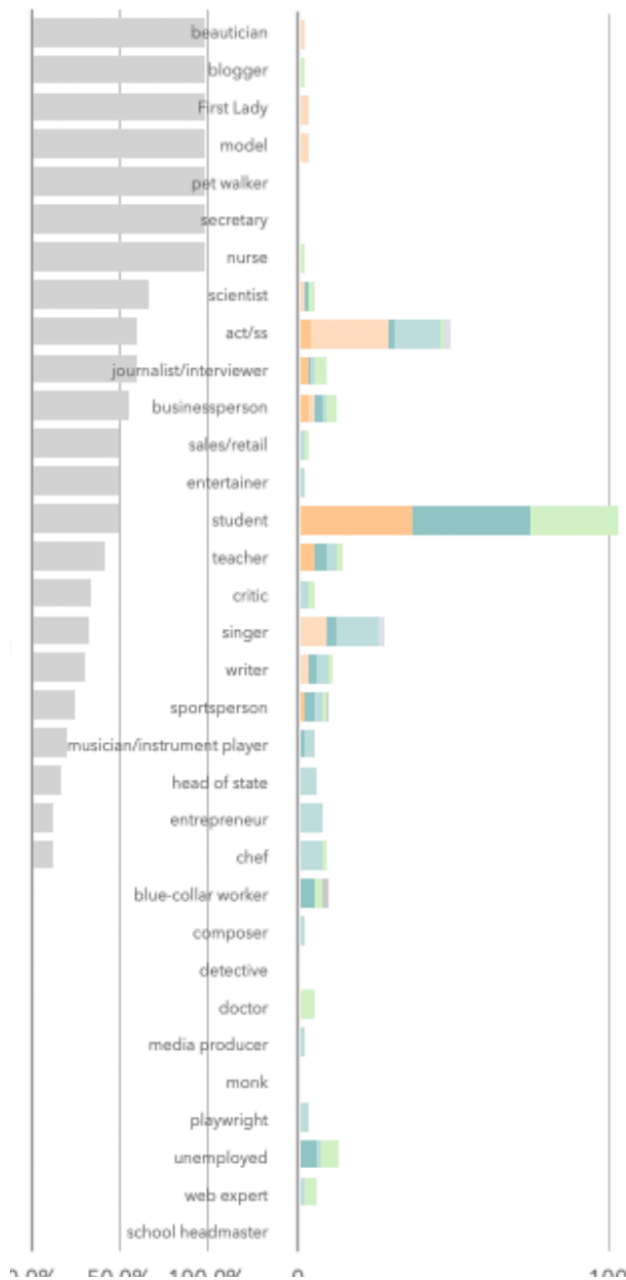
Occupations and Gender												Total	%	%f
	f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	gfd	gbc	gmd				
museum officer	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	100,0	
youtuber	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,6	100,0	
shop assistant	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	0,8	100,0	
nurse	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	0,8	100,0	
doctor	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	1,0	100,0	
receptionist	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	100,0	
ticket seller	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,4	100,0	
teacher	8	1	7	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	29	5,8	56,3	
surfer	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0,6	50,0	
model	0	4	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	1,6	66,7	
head of state	2	4	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	2,6	46,2	
singer	0	17	0	24	0	2	0	0	0	0	43	8,6	41,5	
student	91	3	128	8	0	42	0	2	1	1	276	55,3	40,9	
act/or-ress	0	12	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	6,0	40,0	
sportsperson	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	0,8	33,3	
religious	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	0,0	
worker	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	0,0	
chef	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0,4	0,0	
journalist	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0,4	0,0	
movie maker	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,4	0,0	
basket driver	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,6	0,0	
basketball player	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,6	0,0	
musician	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	0,6	0,0	
astronaut	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0,8	0,0	
pilot	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1,0	0,0	
headteacher	0	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	1,6	0,0	
sailor	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	1,6	0,0	
footballer	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	2,4	0,0	
DJ	0	0	0	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	14	2,8	0,0	
scientist	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	not g.	
customer	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	not g.	
mechanic	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	not g.	
firefighter	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0,4	not g.	
	114	45	151	108	2	74	1	2	1	1	499	100,0		



**Table-chart 13-c**

Occupations and gender (9th Grade)

Occupations and Gender												Total	%	%f
f	fc	m	mc	o	nt	nc	gfd	gbc	gmd					
beautician	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,6	100,0	
blogger	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0,6	100,0	
First Lady	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,9	100,0	
model	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,9	100,0	
pet walker	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	100,0	
secretary	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	100,0	
nurse	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0,6	100,0	
scientist	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	1,5	66,7	
act/or-ress	4	25	2	15	0	1	0	0	0	2	49	14,5	63,0	
journ./interv.	3	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	9	2,7	60,0	
businesspers.	3	2	3	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	12	3,6	55,6	
sales/retail	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0,9	50,0	
entertainer	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,6	50,0	
student	37	0	38	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	103	30,5	49,3	
teacher	5	0	4	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	14	4,1	41,7	
critic	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	1,5	33,3	
singer	0	9	3	14	0	0	0	0	0	2	28	8,3	34,6	
writer	0	3	3	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	11	3,3	30,0	
sportsperson	2	0	3	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	10	3,0	25,0	
music./inst. player	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1,5	20,0	
head of state	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1,8	16,7	
entrepreneur	0	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	2,4	12,5	
chef	1	0	0	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	2,7	12,5	
bl.-coll. worker	0	0	5	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	10	3,0	0,0	
composer	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,6	0,0	
detective	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	0,0	
doctor	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	5	1,5	0,0	
media prod.	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,6	0,0	
monk	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	0,0	
playwright	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,9	0,0	
unemployed	0	0	6	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	13	3,8	0,0	
web expert	0	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	6	1,8	0,0	
sch. headm.	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	0,0	
pro sleeper	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	not g.	
	<b>62</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100,0</b>		



Engaging in more and wider range of occupations than female attaches male character greater visibility and prominence. Male are exclusively found in five **'manual occupations'** (farmer; oil spill cleaner, manual worker, zoo keeper), also **'actor'**, **'businessperson'**, **'doctor'**, **'headmaster'**, **'police officer'**, **'pop-corn seller'**, **'presenter'**, well-known **'footballers'** (2) and famous **'writers'** (4).

Female play exclusively as **secretary, shop-assistant, customer** and **teacher** which not only show unbalanced representation but also fail to reflect social reality and political trends.

Regarding status, female is omitted in high rated jobs representation where **doctor, businessperson, writer** and **footballer** are male exclusive.

On the one hand, male character appears in high-status professions but he is also associated with **manual technical professions**: zoo keeper (1), manual worker (1), oil cleaner expert (1) farmer (2). On the other hand, female is assigned a smaller variety of occupational domains, if we consider that nurse, **teacher** are **caregiving** jobs typically attributed to women; **shop assistant, secretary** encompass service and desk occupations; customer reflects the stereotypical image of female as superficial consumer.

Summing up, greater gender roles variety greatly favours male and greater prominence regarding the masculine is demonstrated. In addition, evident bias is examined in the complete omission of girls in 10 jobs.

There are 4 instances of ungendered occupation and one not clear whether male or female.

With regard to occupational visibility, the coursebook is filled out mainly by teenagers, whose 'occupation' is that of 'student' (~58 p.c).

In short, overall, the coursebook is not successful in terms of representation of male and female gender involved in wide variety of occupations. Although fair representation was statistically demonstrated, as well as the representation of both genders involved in a wide range of actions and activities, a more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of the gender stereotype in the coursebook.

Girls are secretaries, shop assistants and teachers. They skip rope and male plays with racing cars. Girls do gymnastics, activity where male is absent. We may consider this as biased representation of the nurturing roles played by women associated to the 'idealised feminine' (Durrani et al., 2022) of beautiful women or lovely girl with pink ribbon and fancy hand bags of futile woman. Conversely, only masculine are depicted related with successful careers in sport, literature, science and technology. Omission of female might be considered significant particularly with such young learners which grow up believing stereotypical representations failing to represent a society where women do, in fact, play a relevant part.

*6th grade* — The number of occupations associated with the male figure exceeds those carried out by the female character by double. In this sense, discrepancies based on gender are drawn special attention to in *High Five 6*.

The male figure appears associated with more diverse jobs: **religious, manual worker, headteacher, journalist, movie maker, musician, astronaut, footballer, DJ, chef, basketball player; basket driver, pilot, sailor** are exclusively male.

Regarding status, the male character becomes visible in high-status professions but also associated with manual professions: manual worker, sailor, basket driver, a typical job in Ilha da Madeira.

The reduced diversity of roles played by women is evident: they are exclusively represented as '**museum officer, youtuber, shop assistant, nurse, doctor**'. They are assigned a smaller variety of occupational domains if we consider that '**nurse, teacher, doctor**' are caring jobs typically attributed to women, whereas '**museum officer, shop assistant, receptionist**' all encompass public service services. Both the exclusively female role of store-assistant and that of nurse reinforce common stereotypes; it also portrays men in stereotypical gender roles with unique images of **pilot** and **sailor**.

There is presence and balanced representation of both genders in professions such as **head of state, teacher, model, surfer, singer** and **actor**. Overall, greater variety and greater prominence regarding the masculine was demonstrated.

There are 5 totally 'ungendered' occupations with no female or male equivalent: **scientist, customer, mechanic, receptionist, firefighter, ticket seller**.

As regards occupational visibility, the coursebook is filled out mainly by '**students**', equivalent to more than half (55.3 p.c.) in a universe of 499 occupations. Such prevalence of characters results from the coursebook target audience, however, we consider that there is a significant representation of characters involved in professional occupations. There are obvious references to characters whose profession is known, all of them are real historical figures.

*9th grade – Upgrade 9* shows the number of occupations associated with the male figure slightly exceeds those carried out by the female character.

Overall, male figure appears associated with more diverse jobs (26 vs. 23 out of 34). Both genders share (16 out of 34) the majority of professions: **student, teacher, entertainer, scientist, act/or-ress, journalist/interviewer, businessperson, shop-assistant** (sales), **critic, singer, writer, sportsperson, musician/instrument player, head of state, entrepreneur**, and **chef**, which shows a step forward towards balanced representation reflecting social reality and political trends. **Blue-collar, composer, detective, doctor, media producer, monk, playwright, web expert, school headmaster**, are exclusively male whereas **beautician, blogger, First Lady, model, pet walker, secretary, nurse** are exclusively female gendered. Female **teachers** are kindergarten, prep or not specified whereas male are university teachers. Conversely, female **scientists** are 2:1. Concerning the unemployed item, women are unfairly omitted as they are probably the greatest victims of job/working field, firstly due to being the main

children caretaker and secondly because forced displacements as consequence of war and natural catastrophes.

Regarding status, both appear in high rated jobs such as scientists, business people, writer, musician, head of state.

On the one hand, male character is noticeable in high-status professions such **composer, doctor, playwright, web-expert, monk** and **headmaster** but he also associated with manual technical professions (**blue collar** workers): **island caretaker** (1), **factory worker** (2), **skyscraper window cleaner** (2) and significant 7 instances of unemployment problems.

On the other hand, despite appearing in high-status professions such as the aforementioned, the female character is assigned a smaller variety of occupational domains, if we consider that **nurse, teacher** are caring jobs typically attributed to women, **box-office assistant, pet walker, secretary** encompass service and desk occupations; **beautician, model, blogger** relate to fashion and looks and **First Lady** as stereotypical image of female as 'beauty object'. Nevertheless, the diversity of roles played by women is marginally shorter (23 vs. 26).

Female are exclusively represented as **nurse, secretary, beautician** versus the male exclusive **doctor, composer, playwright, headmaster** and **monk**. The exclusively female roles of secretary, model, beautician and nurse reinforce common stereotypes; Social and grammar gendered language is apparent in First Lady, a strongly gender role marked expression.

*Upgrade 9* also portrays men in stereotypical gender roles with unique images of jobs such as doctor, headmaster and risky jobs as detective and skyscraper cleaner.

Summing up, greater gender roles variety favours male and greater prominence regarding the masculine is demonstrated.

There is 1 single instance of 'ungendered' occupation with no female or male equivalent. It is not clear whether male or female play the pro-sleeper part.

With regard to occupational visibility, the coursebook is filled out mainly by teenagers, with the main 'occupation' being that of the '**student**', followed by 49 **act/or-ress**, and 28 **singers** in a universe of 338 occupation references. Such job prevalence results from coursebook target audience, their interests and profile as well as reflecting dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. There are obvious references to characters whose profession is known, all of them are real historical figures.

In short, overall, the coursebook is successful in terms of representation of male and female gender involved in wide variety of occupations. Although fair representation was statistically demonstrated, as well as the representation of both genders involved in a wide range of jobs, the more detailed examination of the representations of individual characters made evident the extent of the presence of the gender stereotype in *Upgrade 9* coursebook.

The deeper understanding in terms of the representation of the characters' professional occupation was demonstrated in table Occupations (Table-chart 13) revealing the extent to which editors consciously or unconsciously reinforced gender stereotyping.

Despite the visibility, bias appears not directly. The authors' effort to equalising gender representation became evident particularly in the proportion of 'speech', however, discrepancies regarding gender persist in subliminal messages.

The analysis of occupational representation in *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9* revealed persistent gender imbalances in the depiction of professional roles. While statistical gender representation appeared balanced in some areas, a closer examination highlighted significant disparities in professional diversity and status between male and female characters.

Across all three coursebooks, male individuals have been associated with a broader range of occupations, including high-status roles (doctor, businessperson, writer, headteacher, scientist) and traditionally masculine or technical professions (manual worker, pilot, sailor, web expert, skyscraper cleaner). In contrast, female representation remained largely confined to caregiving (nurse, teacher), service-oriented (shop assistant, secretary, receptionist), and appearance-based roles (beautician, model, First Lady). The exclusion of women from leadership positions and STEM-related careers, particularly evident in *Let's Rock 4* and *High Five 6* might reinforce traditional gender norms, limiting the scope of professional aspirations for young learners. While some progress is evident—such as the presence of shared professions and gender-neutral occupations—the coursebooks continue to perpetuate stereotypes by disproportionately associating men with success, authority, and technical expertise, while portraying women in supportive or consumer-oriented roles. The overwhelming depiction of students, given the target audience, further restricts exposure to diverse career paths.

In sum, despite partial improvements in gender representation, all three coursebooks fail to fully reflect contemporary social and professional realities. The continued reinforcement of traditional gender roles may influence young learners' perceptions of career possibilities, underscoring the need for more equitable and diverse portrayals of professional opportunities.

An inductive approach to content analysis enabled the identification of key themes which allowed the emergence of broad categories, reflecting the actions and activities characters engaged in. Character traits were also analysed within context as part of the qualitative assessment. The occupation section recorded each character's job, serving as a crucial indicator of potential gender stereotypes.

The analysis of *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9* has revealed both progress and persistent gender stereotypes in the representation of actions, activities, and occupations. While efforts have been made to depict both male and female characters

engaging in a variety of roles, traditional gender norms continue to shape their portrayal.

In terms of actions and activities, both genders participate in diverse areas, including sports, arts, and social interactions. However, males are more frequently associated with competitive, high-risk, and technical activities, while females are depicted in caregiving, household, and appearance-related roles. Sports like football and basketball remain male-dominated, whereas women are more commonly shown in swimming or gymnastics, reinforcing traditional gender expectations. Additionally, while some representations challenge stereotypes—such as female figures in motorcycling or activism and male characters concerned with body image—these remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Similarly, occupational representation showed a persistent imbalance. Males dominate high-status and technical professions, including doctors, scientists, businesspeople, and pilots, while females are disproportionately represented in caregiving (nurse, teacher) and service-oriented roles (shop assistant, secretary). The absence of women from leadership and STEM-related fields further reinforces traditional gender norms. Despite some gender-neutral roles and shared professions, the coursebooks still largely depicted men in positions of authority and expertise while limiting women to supportive roles.

Overall, while there are signs of progress, all three coursebooks continue to reinforce deep-seated gender stereotypes. A more systematic effort toward gender-neutral and diverse representation is necessary to ensure young learners are exposed to a broader and more equitable range of possibilities for both personal and professional aspirations.

In conclusion, the analysis of gender representation in the three national EFL coursebooks —*Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6*, and *Upgrade 9*— reveals both progress and persistent gender biases in the portrayal of characters, actions, activities, and occupations. While efforts have been made to balance gender visibility, male characters continue to dominate in several key areas, including high-status professions, competitive activities, and technical fields. Female characters, on the other hand, are more frequently depicted in caregiving, household, and appearance-related roles, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.

Despite these ongoing imbalances, some positive shifts have emerged, particularly in the representation of both genders engaging in a broader range of activities, such as females in motorcycling or activism, and males expressing body image concerns. However, these instances remain exceptions rather than the norm. The analysis also highlighted the underrepresentation of non-binary characters and a lack of diverse ethnic, age, and disability representations, which further limits the coursebooks' inclusivity and relevance to all students.

The findings underscore the need for a more intentional and consistent approach to gender and diversity in educational materials. While there is some improvement in terms of priority, speech parity, the visibility of female characters, their roles and opportunities are still largely shaped by traditional gender norms. To foster an equitable learning environment, future revisions should aim to provide more diverse, empowering, and realistic portrayals of all gender identities, occupations, and abilities, ensuring that all students see themselves represented in meaningful ways.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Further briefing the summaries of the previous sections may hold a more panoramic view of the conclusions to draw on this work. The quantitative analysis of gender representation in three national EFL coursebooks 'has provided measurable evidence of a relatively balanced distribution of male and female characters', but 'male characters, especially celebrities, consistently receive greater representation', potentially influencing students' perception of gender roles, and even slightly female prevalence cooccurring in images my count for 'the gazing social perception of the feminine'.

The analysis of priority in images, dialogues, mixed-pair expressions, and speech occurrences across the three coursebooks also reveals a balanced representation of male and female genders, while this suggests a 'positive shift toward gender equality', a 'deeper analysis of discourse roles reveals persistent stereotypes'. Overall, 'while the coursebooks display efforts toward gender-balanced representation', entrenched stereotypes 'persist in discourse roles and thematic placement'.

Understanding gender representation requires a multidimensional approach. The intersectional perspective 'provides a more socially comprehensive framework' for analyzing 'representations, inequalities, and opportunities'. Within this framework, the present study 'examines individual and group character occurrences through an intersectional lens', of gender and ethnicity, gender and age, and gender and ability: the dominance of 'White characters—particularly male—across the coursebooks is notable'. Ethnic diversity 'remains strikingly underrepresented', and the 'near-erasure of female/Brown, Asian, and First Nations characters highlights a systemic neglect of intersectional identities'. The representation of age also reveals a 'youth-centric focus, with the overwhelming presence of tween/teen, and adult characters, while infants and older adults remain largely absent'. Finally, representation of disability 'remains insufficient', with impairments other than "'use of glasses" largely absent'.

In terms of actions and activities, even if 'both genders participate in diverse areas', it is significantly relevant that 'males are more frequently associated with competitive, high-risk, and technical activities, while females are depicted in caregiving, household, and appearance-related roles', or more 'concerned with body image'. Similarly, occupational representation 'showed a persistent imbalance', portraying males as holding 'high-status and technical professions', while females are 'disproportionately represented in caregiving and service-oriented roles' as well as absent 'from leadership

and STEM-related fields'. Overall, 'while there are signs of progress, all three coursebooks continue to reinforce' deep-seated gender stereotypes.

Despite these ongoing imbalances, some positive shifts have emerged, particularly in the 'representation of both genders engaging in a broader range of activities', such as females in motorcycling or activism, and males 'expressing body image concerns' — however, 'these instances remain exceptions rather than the norm'.

## 5.1. Achievements

This study is important in terms of (1) providing data and methodology for researchers interested in the studies of gender equality, (2) intending to establish the culture of democracy and equality in the society through dissemination those values, and (3) raising an awareness of these critical issues for different societal groups including educational policy makers, parents, teachers, students, coursebook writers, program designers and other forms of relevant agency.

This study insights representations of male and female in three local EFL coursebooks. It represents a contribution to an area of research where despite the wide literature in global terms, there's somehow limited literature in locally produced currently available and updated EFL materials. The study has found evidence of gender awareness on the part of coursebook authors/editors. Counter to previous studies the present study discovered more even gender ratios.

Further contrast with previous studies which uncovered gender-biased male-firstness, current study's findings demonstrated male and female have the same opportunity to speak and to speak first. That said, qualitative analysis revealed content of male and female speech differed significantly. It seems that despite publishers' efforts to be more egalitarian unintentional biases may be interfering.

It is clear that, however still ongoing, progress towards male-female equality has been made. There is evidence in this study's findings of marginal female under-representation as well as common gender stereotype. It is also worth noting that while coursebook authors seem to be aware of the need to avoid depicting male and female in stereotypical roles, *there is a tendency to depict traditional gender stereotypes in a more subtle and unconscious manner*. This suggests that while presenting females in a diverse range of actions and activities, publishers of the coursebooks under analysis do not challenge stereotypical actions activities and careers. Careers, in each particular coursebook, presented significantly gendered roles for male and female characters: continued presentation of male characters as pilots, astronauts and football players versus female as beauticians, teachers and shop assistants, which is not a full reflection of society.

Additionally the scope of this study included ethnicity, age and ability adding an *intersectional perspective* to the discussion of gender in EFL materials which provided better insights to gender studies.

Intersectional perspective has significant implications for the study of gender in EFL coursebooks, as it offers a richer conceptual framework for understanding not only the representation of gender but also how it relates with other characteristics. Intersectionality facilitates the deconstruction of dominant narratives, challenging stereotypes and reductive representations of the individual, normally based on binary categorisations and structures of oppression and power, as described in the 2023 conference on ‘Human Rights and the role of Intersectionality’. Overall, a shift — towards a multidimensional understanding of discrimination issues in order to adopt the specific measures necessary to erase it— is being encouraged. Despite partially foreseen in European jurisprudence there continues to be resistance from the legislative and criminal system, justifying difficulties in fair application.

The perspective of intersectionality is particularly essential for education researchers; incorporating multiple identity and social dimensions, moving beyond one-dimensional analyses to explore the gaps and interactions between categories, enhances the understanding of structural inequalities. Currently, the idea that intersecting relationships create and exist as space of oppression is consensual. Nevertheless, it may facilitate access to benefits, status and opportunities to different intersections. Thus, depending on our “social location”, being privileged is more than avoiding disadvantages or not suffering oppression, it is a means of opportunities and empowerment. That’s why developing students’ understanding of themselves either as privileged or as discriminated individuals requires nuance with a major focus on a broader perspective.

The risk that focusing on too many intersecting factors may simultaneously dilute the impact of each factor and hinder addressing specific issues as the unique influence of each dimension might be overshadowed by the broader analysis. Additionally, there are still few studies on several dimensions. Generally, quantitative studies have faced problems using intersectional analysis by examining several dimensions at the same time, since this approach has led to very small sample sizes (e.g., older male black individuals versus older female black individuals), which made statistical analysis less powerful, requiring the adoption of qualitative analysis methods as more appropriate.

It has been within the scope of a comprehensive research program, and with these ‘critical’ interests in mind, that we have wished to include this study on gender representation in EFL coursebooks in Portugal. It is our belief the analysis of gender biased representations, deepened by an intersectional approach to such materials, has provided more accurate understandings of the existing framework and may also have pointed to new/meaningful perspectives to the problem, as well as possible ways it

might be addressed in the future. Curriculum and educational materials play a crucial role in upholding and perpetuating structural inequalities, particularly those relating to intersections of gender with other social factors, such as ethnicity, age and ability. Over the past few decades, research has consistently shown they have been used to reinforce patriarchy by promoting male superiority, while marginalising women in societal roles. This pattern persists across different countries, regardless of geographical and cultural variations.

This has explicitly been a critical objective of our research, abiding to Unesco's guidelines, that 'all people engaged in educational action must have adequate teaching materials and resources at their disposal being necessary to make the necessary revisions of coursebooks to remove negative stereotypes and distorted views of 'the other'.

EFL coursebooks represent powerful vehicles of relay. As part of the cultural capital of a society, they become a threefold agent for reporting, disseminating and transmitting it which, used by educational and governmental institutions, may reinforce conventions, sometimes strongly biased: uneven gender identity, unfair men and women labour division. Through the discourses conveyed, as well as the way they portray everyday life, EFL coursebooks play a role in an ongoing process of classification that ultimately shapes a gendered social division of identities, roles, and statuses.

The context of the analysis of local EFL coursebooks for grades 4,6 and 9, draws on particular significance, due to the fact that, being sanctioned by the ME, and ratified by schools and community, they express the 'democratic' representation of Portuguese society on the topic of gender identity regarded as the most appropriate for citizenship education of its youngest members.

Concerning the promotion of educational policies and practices that respect human rights on the whole and gender equality in particular as well as the subsequent quality of coursebooks production, the UN highlights the quality, availability and inclusion of Human Rights as fundamental while supporting the core principles of peace and sustainability stated in the Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, as means to facilitate a process that enables learners to take charge of their lives, make substantial and meaningful contributions to their communities, participate in creating cultures of peace, and become knowledgeable citizens of the world.

Naturally, the presence of gender stereotypes consistently found in teaching coursebooks does not constitute an isolated phenomenon but a component —not the least important— of a more global phenomenon that, under different manifestations, structures the entire society, each of its culturally significant communities, and of each of their active socialisation groups.

If we consider the context of language teaching, we have not only ‘space’ for the development of linguistic and intercultural skills but also for the socialisation of norms in a kind of social microcosm. Necessarily, educational materials resulting from discriminatory educational policies will reflect such values, assuming a central role in their implementation/maintenance. Language learning may, therefore, be inferred as implicitly playing a role in the process of implementing gender discrimination reform. Thus, quality teaching materials and coursebooks are fundamental as major sources of influence in the instillation of positive values and attitudes.

Such attitude underlies the idea of impartiality, one of the core principles in the UN Guidelines for Educational Materials (2024) which declare that quality coursebooks must evidence no prejudice in the content, such as excessive generalisation and stereotypes and content and illustrations not involve any form of discrimination based on gender, class, ability, ethnicity, and not suggest exclusion.

Overall, as coursebooks represent the main learning resource in classroom interaction, one expects that social values and human rights are adequately transmitted. Global advancement has made us global citizens, implicating justice for all from a sociocultural perspective.

Teachers’ undeniable fundamental role played in their students’ personal development may have a profound effect on both its self-confidence and personal achievements. Their behaviour and practices, often carried out unconsciously, obviously can and do contribute to the maintenance –or eradication– of representations and stereotypical gender construction. Schools reproduce not only cognitive results, but also cultural, ideological and emotional ones. Therefore initiatives must be undertaken to help them in this process of raising awareness, take action and reduce gender stereotypes. Although most recent educational materials produced in countries with a sound tradition in this matter are considered to be qualified materials, duly verified and institutionally validated, ‘third generation’ studies highlight the current need to study the use of ‘text’ by teachers. As learning facilitators, teachers may condition or guide interpretation, transforming situations of imbalance that are evident in the coursebook into opportunities for debate and empowerment of young people.

The study’s findings highlight the *benefits of integrating quantitative and qualitative methods* of content analysis. Qualitative analysis of characters’ utterances together with actions activities occupations allowed deeper investigations of individual character portrayals that revealed more complete picture how male and female were portrayed in three local EFL coursebooks.

As discussed in Introduction, it is part of the Portuguese government's efforts to promote gender equality in education. The Gender and Citizenship Education Guidelines (2008–2009) were introduced to integrate gender issues into teaching practices and school culture, particularly within the cross-curricular area of Citizenship

Education. This initiative formed part of a broader national strategy to reduce gender discrimination, culminating in the adoption of the National Strategy for Citizenship Education in 2017–2018. Implemented in coordination with the Curricular Autonomy Plan, the Students' Profile Competences and Citizenship the ME aims to prepare students to be democratic, tolerant, and socially engaged citizens, countering discrimination and violent radicalism. This effort must be pursued.

Formal gender equality code of practice helps publishers to create balanced materials and foster gender equity. The publishers of *Let's Rock 4*, *High Five 6* and *Upgrade 9* seem to follow the ministry ratifications and acknowledge the need of improved balance of male and female portrayal. Nevertheless, it seems to occur at a superficial level. They seem to neglect the importance of also presenting women and girls in a range of activities actions and careers that challenge common gender stereotype.

There is probably the need for the Ministry of Education to issue more specific guidelines for publishers on the promotion of gender equality as they define current English Language curriculum and sanction its materials. These guidelines might incorporate accurate representations of men and women in society and equal visibility of male and female characters in a range of actions activities and occupations. It is hoped that through growing body of research, educational materials will begin to emerge which reflect societal norms and treat male and female and eventually the entire spectrum of genders equally. Such materials have the potential to serve as a catalyst for change helping to build a more gender equitable society.

It is true that Portugal has been part of the most advanced countries in terms of politics and governmental guidelines to promote civil rights and gender equity, but we remain a traditional Mediterranean country where women remain significantly attached to family care and household affairs in most part of the country. Both genders have equal rights but female continue to face gender discrimination in society as a whole: gender bias is hidden but it remains. In addition, Portuguese school has witnessed the problem of many immigrant students. Many male students, particularly Asian and African origin, are reported to have opened biased attitudes towards their female counterparts which brings about new challenges for teachers to deal with.

The subject of gender representation and stereotype in coursebooks has acquired recent and more acute importance in our country and worldwide.

## **5.2. Limitations and recommendations**

The opinion gathered through literature review is unanimous, highlighting the need for systematic and updated research, in order to allow the elaboration of a global, objective and relevant framework.

The trend towards the reduction of gender stereotype representation in the field is evident, particularly since the first and influential studies which came across profound

inequalities. However, the great significance of continuing a systematic study is reiterated, as essential for a better and more complete understanding of the phenomenon in question. Continued collection of empirical data and regular academic research are necessary to clarify the extent of (in)equality of gender representation in ELT coursebooks.

In addition to this point it is worth stressing the importance of a longitudinal investigation perspective as fundamental for perceiving how gender relationship changes taking place in the real-world are being addressed/kept up with in ESL materials.

Despite having applied an intersectional approach in the present study, we feel it is necessary to broaden and deepen research in the area, particularly crossing gender with other social identities in order to contribute to a more complete and critical perspective of discrimination based on gender.

Since education in developing countries has been acquiring prominence, the academy has increasingly turned its attention to the portrayal of gender equality in ESL/EFL coursebooks. In this line, the same would be regarded as highly positive in the Portuguese context where studies on gender representation on ESL and EFL coursebooks seem, to my knowledge, not to exist and would surely benefit from this kind of critical viewpoint.

The focus on gender issues and their representation, more or less biased, in coursebooks has until now been the representation of the white heterosexual female in comparison to male counterpart. Other objectives to address might be to queer the issue of gender representation in addition to normative heterosexuality, and to consider the way in which ethnicity and class are represented, calling for a reassessment of the normative aspect of rationalisation and class representation in coursebooks. On the whole we all should be considering the reduction of the presence of gender bias in school coursebooks and learning materials, as a useful indicator for measuring gender equity in society, more and more significative in the Portuguese context, where the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality found, in 2022, predominance of ‘women in high academic degrees but that is not translated into their participation in power, economic, political and academic decision-making, where they clearly remain a minority; the ‘pay gap’ is 25 p.c to the detriment of women; a country where out of ‘10 people identified as “injured/offended” in crimes against freedom and sexual self-determination, 9 are women and 1 is a man’.

Portugal –ranked in the Global Gender Gap Report (2022), 29th place among 146 countries– cannot be described as a sexist country; however, considering that gender stereotypes still prevail in fundamental areas, standing against gender discrimination needs continue to be part of the fundamental social and political action agenda in a systematic and consistent way.

Present proximal-scale study included selection of three coursebooks officially sanctioned by ME. This facilitates research potential stereotypes but it is a limitation as

findings from this study may not be generalisable across other coursebooks. Wider studies, including coursebooks and ESL materials of various spaces and times, would broaden understanding of stereotype and change. It is true that the corpus includes coursebooks created or revised between 2014 and 2018, covering the same pupils' educational 'path'. It would be important to understand whether older edited coursebooks might show more unbalanced representation (which seems to occur), nevertheless the addressed coursebooks might be considered as not totally flattened or controlled. Once again having enlarged the corpus would have provided larger amount of data and therefore would have widened perspectives and deepened insights.

Our study would have been enriched if we had extended the analysis to include coursebook cover or the extra or supporting materials such as workbooks, tests and worksheets. Another suggestion would be to include videos and multimodal materials such as content digital presentations, interactive games, drills and activities which have been replacing written support more and more often.

Additionally, description of gender-benders and gender-blenders as representing recent gender developments in the political sphere has not been incorporated. This perspective may provide alternative reading results to gender stereotyping in EFL materials and these studies would likely give better insights into the gaps which need be bridged for the purposes of future research.

Further limitation might be the fact that researcher's Western-Southern Europe cultural embedding may have had some effect in the interpretation of data. This raises questions regarding 'objectivity' when applying such lens to content but it could be complemented by other perspectives in order to determine if this is the case. Data and findings of present study need to be corroborated by other analyses by researchers of different cultural embeddings.

Teachers play an important role leading change for more equitable societies. Based on this study, a future recommendation would be to adapt teacher training courses in order to include consciousness awareness activities where training teachers would be guided to identify and address biases in materials. Acknowledgment of parity in teacher training could lead teachers to being better able to employ strategies in order to rectify disparities in materials they use and by which they lead students to deal with difference, respect others, and raise awareness of discrimination. That being said the extent to which students are exposed to gender diversity would have to be measured.

A final recommendation for future research in the field—that we believe is shown in present study— refers to the *subtler ways by which gender stereotype persists*. Taking this into account future research should complement traditional focus of quantitative lines of enquiry with the deciphering of the qualitative aspects that seem to reveal traditional gender stereotypes.

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### Corpus (coursebooks)

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Figures for 1970 from INE: PorData, quoted in an article in the 'Expresso' newspaper of 13.07.2013, pp.20-21.
- <sup>2</sup> *Sociologie de la famille et du mariage*, 1982
- <sup>3</sup> Para mais informação relativa ao problema da sub-escolaridade no feminino associado às questões da disponibilidade e do conteúdo dos livros escolares sobre os papéis de género nos países em vias de desenvolvimento ver Djangone et al., 2001; Pearce & Pingel, 1999; Seguin, 1991 apud Bruggeilles & Crommer, 2005, p. 14).
- <sup>4</sup> Agenda para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável 2030 - <https://globalcompact.pt/index.php/pt/agenda-2030>
- <sup>5</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX: 52020DC0152 & from=PT#footnote2](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=PT#footnote2)
- <sup>6</sup> EIGE defines "masculinity" as "different notions of what it means to be a man, including patterns of conduct associated with a man's place in a given set of relationships and gender-based roles". <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1285?lang=pt>
- <sup>7</sup> A vast series of measures envisaged within the scope of combating gender discrimination, which culminated in the current reference document National Strategy for Education for Citizenship [ENEC] (cf. Despacho n.º 6173/2016, 10 de maio), adopted in 2017-2018 and applied in convergence with PASEO (Despacho n.º 6478/2017, de 9 de julho) and with the Essential Learnings. ['Aprendizagens Essenciais']
- <sup>8</sup> A rights-based approach implies that all programs of cooperation, policies and technical assistance should further the realisation of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments (UNESCO 2005).
- <sup>9</sup> By 'unknown artist' (Jastrow, 2007), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1874385>
- <sup>10</sup> Although not completely consensual, the term we consider here follows the designation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, according to which intersex people are individuals born with any of several sexual characteristics, including chromosomal patterns, gonads or genitals that "do not fit into typical binary notions of male or female bodies."
- <sup>11</sup> According to Marchbank and Letherby (2014) Functionalist sociology argues men and women are particularly suited for certain roles and tasks in society due to natural differences: this became known as the sex role theory (p. 30)
- <sup>12</sup> In this sense, the discussion of the influence of elements associated, on the one hand, with 'nature' on human behavior (heredity, biology, genetics) and, on the other, with 'nurture' (environment, culture) is done through a Darwinian perspective. of evolution, in which sexual differences (sexuality, cognitive ability, ancestry) and gender differences (preferences for toys, academic and professional choices) present adaptive advantages for the survival of the species (Cf. Lindsey, 2015, p. 29).
- <sup>13</sup> "It is because the human personality is not 'born' but must be 'made' through the socialisation process that in the first instance families are necessary" (Parson & Bales, 1956, p. 16).
- <sup>14</sup> "'Nature' theorists believe biology shapes individuals who then shape society. In contrast, 'nurture' types see role of sexes in reproduction as shaping societal institutions which then shape personality" (Hesselbart, 1981).
- <sup>15</sup> We can remember, for example, the famous case of Canadian twins Bruce and Brian (1970-80). The (re)emergence of 'David' as a boy who supports the view of gender identity as a natural and innate process, undermining the role of socialisation and culture in the process of identity construction in terms of gender. *The Guardian*, 12th May 2004 accessed 08-08-2023 (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/12/scienceandnature.gender>).
- <sup>16</sup> "If those temperamental attitudes which we have traditionally regarded as feminine - such as passivity, responsiveness, and a willingness to cherish children - can so easily be set up as the masculine pattern in one tribe, and in another be outlawed for the majority of women as well as for the majority of men, we have no longer have any basis for regarding such aspects of behaviour as sex-linked." (Mead, 1962, p. 279).
- <sup>17</sup> "When we consider the behaviour of the typical Mundugumor man or woman, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the strength of social conditioning. In no other way can we account for the almost complete uniformity with which Arapesh children develop into contented, passive, secure persons, while Mundugumor children develop as characteristically into violent, aggressive, insecure persons" (Mead, 1935, p. 280)
- <sup>18</sup> "The analytic power of marxism with respect to capital has obscured its limitations with respect to sexism. We will argue here that while marxist analysis provides essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital in particular, the categories of marxism are sex-blind. Yet feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist. Both marxist analysis, particularly its historical and materialist method, and feminist analysis, especially the identification of patriarchy as a social and historical structure, must be drawn upon if we are to understand the development of western capitalist societies and the predicament of women within them" (Hartmann, 1979, p. 1).

- <sup>19</sup> “The important truth encapsulated in the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ should not lead us to suppose that the politicisation of our personal lives will of itself eradicate women’s oppression. The ideology of masculinity and femininity, of heterosexual familism, is too deeply embedded in the division of labour and capitalist relations production to crumble under cultural and ideological offensive alone” (Barrett, 2004, p. 61)
- <sup>20</sup> Critical study on primary coursebooks of the Estado Novo created as a means of spreading dictatorial ideologies and conveying messages regarding the distinction between being a man and being a woman trying to understand how it shaped the Portuguese society (Basto, 2015).
- <sup>21</sup> Crenshaw makes a penetrating critique of the limits of research based on a specific “single-axis” approach that has been dominant in discussing issues around equality and non-discrimination since the 1960s.
- <sup>22</sup> Shields (2008) refers to the case of the contemporary U.S., where “racial categories are construed as containing two genders [which] suggests that gender categories are always and everywhere similarly understood and employed, thus “natural” and without other possibilities (e.g., multiple genders; “temporary” gender categories) (p. 302)
- <sup>23</sup> Collins (1990) referring to the contributions of Black feminist thought [BFT] adds “By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, BFT reconceptualises the social relations of domination and resistance” empowers other subordinate groups but mostly reveals ways to define their reality. (p.541).
- <sup>24</sup> From the first perspective, the intersectional gives rise to social systems/cultures of oppression. Study on the feminised racialisation of Filipinos in the US military employed as cooks and cleaners (Lee, 2014).
- <sup>25</sup> “To explain poverty, racial and class oppression must be considered along with gender” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 151)
- <sup>26</sup> “When I speak Chinese, I feel very formal. I feel like I should be sitting with my back straight. It seems that when I speak Chinese, I am trying to fit the stereotype of what I am supposed to be in Chinese culture [...] My voice when I speak English isn’t extremely high pitched” (Pratt, 2004, pp. 134-6)
- <sup>27</sup> Intersectionality can function as a form of “critical praxis” challenging the way in which interconnected “vectors of oppression” perpetuate situations of inequality (Collins, 2015).
- <sup>28</sup> “Le sexe et l’âge sont les deux premiers critères classiques d’identité” (Brugilles & Cromer, 2005, p. 18)
- <sup>29</sup> We follow Unicef 2021 description of disabilities described as “difficulties across several domains of functioning, as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression.” (accessed 5 agosto 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/nearly-240-million-children-disabilities-around-world-unicefs-most-comprehensive>)
- <sup>30</sup> Article 14 of the European Court of Human Rights currently reflects, employs and adopts aspects of intersectional criticism by prohibiting discrimination based on the overlap of two protected grounds, recognising that this may have a particularly negative impact on specific groups (European Court of Human Rights, 2022, pp. 24-67).
- <sup>31</sup> “Although they [men of color, poor, immigrant, gay] are oppressed by class, race, and/or sexual systems of power, they also commonly construct and display forms of masculinity as ways of resisting other men’s power over them, as well as asserting power and privilege over women...so it is crucial to keep women’s experience of gender oppression close to analysis [which] might inform the type of progressive coalition building necessary if today’s changing masculinities are to contribute to the building of a more egalitarian and democratic world (Brod & Kaufman, 1994, p. 215).
- <sup>32</sup> Referring to Portuguese Language Textbooks critical analysis
- <sup>33</sup> The use of ‘noun’ and ‘name’ designation is indistinct.
- <sup>34</sup> Most of the nouns related to the professions Ambassador, Minister, Poet, Judge were used only in the masculine until recently, and it can be said that they are still valued in certain circles. There are others, President, Commander, Chief, which continue to designate both, only applied with the masculine article “o” or feminine “a”. The UN and EU guidelines are clear in terms of adopting feminine or masculine forms, or without sexist connotations, contradicting the discrimination of functions and social roles based on gender.
- <sup>35</sup> The first step towards a healthy and inclusive workplace is the use of inclusive language and visual content that acknowledges and reflects diversity and is free from unconscious bias (p. 3) In Portuguese, the general rule continues to be the use of the masculine plural as generic. There are, however, alternative strategies that can be used to make language gender-sensitive: 1. Neutralisation or abstraction 2. Specification. (Inclusive Communication at SGC, 2018)
- <sup>36</sup> When comparing Indo-European languages with Semitic, Chinese, the native languages of the Indians in the Americas or African languages, we realize that they analyse and describe the world in divergent ways and that between the Old and New Worlds they developed independently over millennia. Hence, it can be concluded that conceptual systems are relative insofar as they depend directly and intimately on language.
- <sup>37</sup> “English unmarked gender is more rational, closer to natural fact, than the marked genders of Latin or German” (Whorf, 1956, p. 80)
- <sup>38</sup> “The formal systematisation of ideas in English, German, French, or Italian seems poor in dealing with certain classes of phenomena, when contrasted with the flexibility and directness of Amerindian languages” Stuart Chase, foreword to B. L. Whorf’s *Language, Thought and Reality*.
- <sup>39</sup> This fact can only be proven by carrying out tests in languages with a grammatical category of gender, which is not possible in English.

- <sup>40</sup> In English address terms as Mrs., Miss, or Ms function as social category labels, identifying women, but not men, as married or not. A woman using Ms. as part of her address term is indicating that her social categorisation is not based on her marital status
- <sup>41</sup> We call close friends, for example, without family ties, 'aunt' ou 'uncle'. In English 'brother' is used similarly among many groups for someone who is not a family member. (Yule, 2017, p. 759)
- <sup>42</sup> The sexual division of labour places women in low-paying jobs, and in tasks thought to be appropriate to women's role. Women are teachers, welfare workers, and the great majority of workers in the health fields [...]it is not feminism, but sexism. Hartmann & Judd, 1978, p. 22
- <sup>43</sup> Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice (Hall, 1997, p. 6).
- <sup>44</sup> "As practitioners of language, individuals can shift or undermine its meanings [...] to speak is to take part in culture, but individuals can put linguistic forms to novel and subversive uses. [...] Relations of power are negotiated through the medium of language" (Crawford, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, language is an activity with practical, material consequences (Marecek et al., 2004, p. 197).
- <sup>45</sup> The distinction that Karen Risager proposes between language and culture is: "linguistically formed culture and non-linguistically formed culture". The former calls for the presence of verbal-language text, spoken and/or written (text) and systemic functional linguistics (Risager, 2006, p. 5).
- <sup>46</sup> "Consider the different 'identities' involved in different occasions, such as attending a job interview, a parents' evening or a football match [...] we may feel like the same person, but we are differently positioned by the social expectations and constraints and we represent ourselves to others differently [...] we are positioned - and we position ourselves according to the 'fields' (Bourdieu) in which we are acting" (Woodward 1997, Chapter 1, p22).
- <sup>47</sup> "Language is said to act, which involves a tropological understanding of language as performing and performative. [...] the doctrine of construction implies that the body is not only made by language, but made of language" (Butler, 1997, p. 3)
- <sup>48</sup> "Rather than seeing language as simply expressive, as transparent, as a vehicle of communication, as a form of representation, structuralist theories and in turn post-structuralists saw language as a system with its own rules and constraints, and with its own determining effect on the way that individuals think and express themselves. Hence, the use of the term discourse, perhaps more than any other term, signals this break with past views of language" (Mills, 2004, p. 7).
- <sup>49</sup> Butler (2011) uses the expression 'author-subject' (p. xxxiv) as opposed to reader, who is seen not as a mere consumer of content (text and image) but involved in the production of meaning (Mustapha & Mills, 2015): this conception is fundamental in the analysis we carry out regarding gender representations.
- <sup>50</sup> "The uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as 'just', saying something" (Austin, 1962, p. 5).
- <sup>51</sup> "Performing masculinity or femininity 'appropriately' cannot mean exactly the same performance regardless of the circumstances. It may involve different strategies in mixed and single-sex company, in private and in public settings, in the various social positions (parent, lover, professional, friend) that someone might regularly occupy in the course of everyday life" (Cameron, 1997a, p. 334).
- <sup>52</sup> "To be a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto. (The unthinking ease with which the performers consistently carry off such standard-maintaining routines does not deny that a performance has occurred, merely that the participants have been aware of it.) A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized." (Goffman, 1959, p. 49)
- <sup>53</sup> In 2 studies of 25 children's books with same-sex parents, mothers were more likely to be shown in equal parental roles than fathers, which makes the intersectional gender definition of sexuality clear (Sunderland, 2012)
- <sup>54</sup> We understand 'informal curriculum' as the set of norms and values transmitted through the roles that male and female staff play in school, the way teachers treat male and female students, and the way adults interact with each other (Mustapha and Mills, 2015b, p. 12). Stromquist et al (1998) argue that the school coursebook also participates in an 'informal curriculum': in addition to transmitting content and knowledge provided for in the formal curriculum, they play a fundamental role in transmitting gender representations through the ways in which men and women are portrayed in stories and illustrations.
- <sup>55</sup> Although the use of information technology in schools can provide students with opportunities to improve their learning experiences and establish networks with peers from other countries, the possible negative influences of social media have been highlighted; these include the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and cyberbullying (EU, 2014).
- <sup>56</sup> This message is brought to evidence in a number of studies (e.g. Briere & Lanktree, 1983; Crawford & English, 1984; Peterson & Lach, 1990; Richmond & Dyba, 1982; Schau & Scott, 1984; Whiteley, 1996) and more recently in a new upsurge of interest (e.g. Clark et al., 2004; Clark et al., 2005; Elgar, 2004; Hunter & Chick, 2005; Law & Chan, 2004; Thomson & Otsuji, 2003). All reaffirm gender portrayal in coursebooks and educational materials affects social values, behaviour and influence the development of young students' self-esteem and their attitudes towards gender. (apud Lee & Collins, 2009, pp. 355-356)

- <sup>57</sup> “Sexism is [an] attitude which demeans, excludes, under-represents and stereotypes people on the basis of gender” (Michel, 1986, p. 10)
- <sup>58</sup> Analysis of the discursive roles in Greek coursebook dialogues in terms of gender differences revealed that such materials can be sexist in several ways. Imbalances were observed in the three main research categories, namely: amount of speech, beginning and end of dialogues, and language functions. Furthermore, this analysis was not carried out only for linguistic purposes, but to verify whether the roles of sexist discourse in school coursebooks can be a negative factor in achieving the pedagogical objectives of the dialogues, some of which provide knowledge about the form and use of language in a particular context. The opinion was expressed that sexism can be a negative factor in many aspects, which should alert all agents involved in language teaching to address the problem of sexism in their work (EU, 2014)
- <sup>59</sup> “Female characters are numerically fewer in coursebooks and have more limited occupational and discourse roles than males. Thus, it can be concluded that an impact of this reality also affects classroom practices and restricts female students’ language learning opportunities” (Renner, 1997, p. 10).
- <sup>60</sup> “My paper focuses on one field of education, namely textbooks in general, and five Hungarian grammar textbooks in particular, and addresses the question of equality/inequality of genders concerning the knowledge produced in them” (Kereszty, 2009, p. 1)
- <sup>61</sup> The system of representations is itself a system of values that “shows’ a shaping, even ordering, of reality, aiming not only to explain an established social order but also to legitimize it” (Brugailles e Cromer, 2005, p. 15).
- <sup>62</sup> Recent studies relating to Eastern Europe demonstrate how different cultures balance both stereotypes and equitable perceptions of typical gender roles differently (Weziak-Bialowolska, 2015).
- <sup>63</sup> “Guidelines presented inclusive and to all involved in the production of textbooks and supplementary learning materials. Guidelines for eliminating gender stereotyping giving a wide variety of examples in each of the aspects of gender stereotypes that have been analysed. Since textbooks are only a part of students’ experience [...] suggestions for teachers and teacher educators in developing strategies to ensure students achieve full potential irrespective of their gender” (Davies, 1995, p. 15).
- <sup>64</sup> Blumberg bases her study on two essential arguments: (1) stereotypical representation in coursebooks is an important fact, and (2) it will eventually be one of the best camouflaged and most difficult obstacles to remove from the path to gender equality in education (Blumberg, 2008, p. 4)
- <sup>65</sup> We are aware that the name ‘mother tongue’ can also contain a gender stereotype.
- <sup>66</sup> Sexism in EFL coursebook language (Renner, 1997); Mills (1995, p. 95 apud Mustapha & Mills, 2015, p. 12) argues that the use of gender-free language contributes to the acceptance of each human being, without foregrounding gender and without privileging males as the norm against which women are judged. Similarly, Stromquist et al. (1998, and see Mustapha & Mills, 2015, p. 12); note that the creation of a new social identity by means of school interventions requires the courage to discard traditional elements that lead to the oppression of women, whether in the name of culture or religion.
- <sup>67</sup> The review of texts that reveal the presence of gender stereotypes, the production of guidelines to guarantee gender justice/gender fairness in school manuals, as well as the increase in research in the area are directly related to the indications and programs of UN human rights (gender parity but also in the quality of education offered to girls and boys) but also with feminist work that called for combined “praxis” to transform social injustice through the analysis of pedagogical practices. (Mustapha & Mills, 2015, p. 9).
- <sup>68</sup> Branch of linguistics dealing with language in use and the contexts in which it is used, (how they contribute to meaning), including such matters as deixis, the taking of turns in conversation, text organisation, presupposition, and implicature. It evaluates how human language is used in social interactions, as well as the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted.
- <sup>69</sup> “Different languages differ, of course, as regards what, and how much, is demanded of them; this is a manifestation of the variety of human culture. But all languages have the potential to meet any demands that their speakers may contrive to make of them” (Halliday, M., & Webster, J., 2003, p. 29)
- <sup>70</sup> Pioneers such as Lakoff (1975), Miller and Swift (1976), and Kramer, Thorne, and Henley (1978) transformed the issue of the representation of women and men in language into a topic of broad public interest (e.g., Bodine 1975; Martyna 1978; Spender 1980; Jochnowitz 1982; Pauwels 1991; Lee & Collins, 2009).
- <sup>71</sup> “Evidence for distortion, then, was found in that women are portrayed as passive (they either do not participate at all or frequently react to male partners), unintellectual, and, in some instances, emotional. (Hellinger, 1980, p. 273)
- <sup>72</sup> “Verbs of movement such as *board the bus, descend the stairs, join the queue, set off down the corridor*, etc. Interestingly, the semantic characterisation of these verbs does not only include the feature [+ Movement of Agent], but in most cases also [- Technical Aid]. In other words, women neither *drive a car nor do they travel by boat or plane, while men make voyages, cross oceans, explore countries, cover distances*, etc. Again, this group falls into the category of passivity if female and male activities are compared. (Hellinger, 1980, p. 272)
- <sup>73</sup> Male activity represents a broad spectrum of educational and occupational options as opposed to female activity; ex. car builders, bankers, engineers, scientists, explorers, while women almost never perform demanding, interesting and successful jobs: waitress, office worker, nurse, maid, housewife. In the 131 texts, there are only six women with presumably higher education. Of these four belong to the upper class (e.g. Queen Elizabeth I), where inherited social status does not necessarily correlate with high intellectual or other personal achievements (Hellinger, 1980, p. 272).

- <sup>74</sup> Carroll and Kowitz (1994) show how it is possible for some words to look neutral, yet how their implicit connotations can be unearthed after some scrutiny in their shades of meaning. They provide two examples, the first of which is related to the words *busy* and *work*. They assert while *busy* “has no denotation of reward or payment, and can therefore refer to paid or unpaid activity - including the use of excessive energy or (possibly wasted) effort,” the word *work* conveys the meaning of productivity and payment (p.80). They, then, apply the Concordance software to analyse *Welcome to English* (Book 1) and to show the number of the instances of the occurrence of *busy* with women and *work* with men, concluding this suggests gender-bias (Mukundan and Nimehchisalem, 2008, p. 160)
- <sup>75</sup> Jasmani et al (2011) followed Bahiyah and Basil’s (1998) categories of action verbs.
- <sup>76</sup> The collocational analysis [of verbs] also reveals that men are more likely to be engaged in physically demanding activities and to be valued in terms of their wealth, achievement, wisdom and courage, whereas women are more likely to be associated with family care, indoor activities and emotional fragility. (Lee, 2014, p. 51)
- <sup>77</sup> In *Top Notch*, the use of titles showed that “Mr” was used 65% of the time, compared to “Mrs” (25%), “Miss” (8%), and “Ms” (2%). In *Summit*, “Mr” was used 60% of the time, “Mrs” 36%, and “Miss” 4%, with no use of “Ms.”
- <sup>78</sup> Content and linguistic analyses disclosed the predictable patterns of sexism and stereotypes in the coursebooks clearly indicate there is an absolute gender bias with males outnumbering females (Mukundan and Nimehchisalem, 2008).
- <sup>79</sup> Cf. Cunningham, 2008; del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Erden, 2009; Ladegaard, 2010 apud Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat, 2010, p. 54
- <sup>80</sup> Chanzanagh & Haghpor, 2010; del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Goffman, 1987; Isanović, 2006; Ohara & Saft, 2003 apud Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat 2010, p. 54
- <sup>81</sup> Illustrations designed to enhance students’ understanding and learning interests, were also examined in this study. The focus of the picture investigation was on: (1) the number and proportion of men and women in the pictures; and (2) the kind of activity undertaken by the main female/male character(s) in each picture. (Lee & Collins, 2009:359)
- <sup>82</sup> Findings also made clear that women were depicted in a more limited and stereotyped set of activities and careers, range of social roles, and stereotyped images The visual representations also reinforced traditional gendered roles, with women operating primarily within domestic domains. (Lee & Collins, 2008:133)
- <sup>83</sup> Rifkin (1998, p. 218) argues that “the problem is not the depiction of women as mothers, but rather in the depiction of women only as mothers”.(Barton and Sakwa, 2012: 182)
- <sup>84</sup> Both quantitative and qualitative analyses [...] focused on finding the active participant, gaze direction, visual techniques, body display, and space in which the participants were shown.(Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat 2010, p. 51)
- <sup>85</sup> Objects are designed to structure the environment immediately around them: “they leave an imprint, they impress a part picture of themselves, a portrait” (Goffman, 1987, p. 74)
- <sup>86</sup> “Gender, in close connection with age-grade, lays down more, perhaps, than class and other social divisions an understanding of what our ultimate nature ought to be and how and where this nature ought to be exhibited. And we acquire a vast corpus of accounts to be used as a source of good, self-sufficient reasons for many of our acts (particularly as these determine the allocation of minor indulgences and deprivations), just as others acquire a sovereign means of accounting for our own behavior” Goffman, 1987, p. 76)
- <sup>87</sup> Research examined the effects of stereotypic and counter-stereotypic coursebook images on high school students’ science comprehension and state anxiety.(Good et al., 2010, p. 137)
- <sup>88</sup> Each photo was coded independently by two people for twenty-two characteristics, many of which will be described and analysed in the following chapters.’ Although at first blush it might appear counterproductive to reduce the rich material in any photograph to a small number of codes, quantification does not preclude or substitute for qualitative analysis of the pictures. It does allow, however, discovery of patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection and protection against an unconscious search through the magazine for only those which confirm one’s initial sense of what the photos say or do (Lutz & Collins).
- <sup>89</sup> Descriptive statistics show that male representation was identified mostly in roles such as profession or employment (80.75), political role (74%), traditional role (74%), and religious practice (73.7%). Female representation was mostly in roles, such as childcare (95.7%), eldercare (75%), education (63.9%), healthcare (62.5%), sport activities (60%), and family roles (57.4%) Košir & Lakshminarayanan (2022).
- <sup>90</sup> This study is important [for] (1) providing data and its methodology for the researchers interested in the studies of gender equality, (2) intending to establish the culture of democracy and equality in the society through dissemination, and (3) raising an awareness of these critical issues for different societal groups including educational policy makers, parents, teachers, students, coursebook writers, program designers’ (Demir & Yavuz, 2017, p. 118)
- <sup>91</sup> TESOL - Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
- <sup>92</sup> Karagoz (2018 apud Sentürk, & Simsek, 2021) states that comics have taken their place in the field of education by adding educational and informative elements to their purpose and content in the development process and that these comics are accepted as a new genre and are named educational comics.

- <sup>93</sup> The type–token distinction refers to the difference between a class of objects (type) and the specific instances (tokens) of that class. Because a single type can have multiple tokens representing it, there are usually more tokens than types for any given object. See Quantitative Analysis.
- <sup>94</sup> We understand by ‘activity block’ all the exercises that form a group, for example, a text will be understood in a single block with questions and exercises directly related to its interpretation, be it an introduction to the text, an opinion question or a small warm-up, or interpretation with ‘fill in the gaps,’ ‘ordering sentences,’ ‘vocabulary definitions’ or ‘sentence completing’ exercises.
- <sup>95</sup> In global terms, *discourse* is defined as text above the level of sentences [...] usually discourse analysis focus on how particular phenomena are represented. In Krippendorff (2004) some examples are presented: Van Dijk (1988) studied manifestations of racism in the press: how minorities appear, how ethnic conflicts are described; Wonsek analysed how stereotypes permeate given accounts in ads during sports events; Jensen studied how TV programs in USA manifest ideological vision of economy; Harwood & Giles studied the components of ‘age markers’ in TV series (p: 22).
- <sup>96</sup> According to Krippendorff (2004) social constructivist analyses “focus on discourse as well, less to criticise (mis)representations than to understand how reality comes to be constituted in human interactions and in language, including written text. Such analysts address how emotions are conceptualised, facts constructed or explored changing notions of self or of sexuality” (p. 16)
- <sup>97</sup> “There are 315 illustrations of males and 303 of females (3.9% more males). However, it is worth noting that some pages do feature males only, while this is never the case for females. For example, there are 11 male images on page 80 and 23 on page 105, yet there are no females. The closest corresponding page is page 81 where only two of the 12 images are of males” (Clark, 2016, p. 4).
- <sup>98</sup> More comprehensive studies (Brugelies & Cromer, 2009a) have also included distinctions between exercises and teaching materials, examined the attitudes of the depicted characters, analysed the coursebook cover and the teacher’s guide—none of which are covered in the present research.
- <sup>99</sup> From now on when discussing/presenting audio as media source it will be dealt with as text since for the present study audio always refers to the transcripts.
- <sup>100</sup> From now on when discussing/presenting audio as media source it will be referred to as text since for the present study audio always refers to the transcripts. Therefore if audio source is not clearly mentioned it is implied and analysed in text.
- <sup>101</sup> Unit 3, ‘Let’s Learn to boogie’, p. 53: the gym teacher’s name is Miss Vicky.
- <sup>102</sup> Unit 6, p. 100: three different male authors together with book covers.
- <sup>103</sup> Unit 6, The MSA competition ...page 95: the presenter is a man.
- <sup>104</sup> Unit 4, ‘Let’s eat healthy food’, p. 67
- <sup>105</sup> Unit 3, ‘Let’s protect the planet’, p.58
- <sup>106</sup> Unit 3, ‘Let’s protect the planet’, p.25
- <sup>107</sup> Unit 3, ‘Let’s boogie’, p.54
- <sup>108</sup> Unit 3, ‘Let’s boogie’, p.54
- <sup>109</sup> Unit 4, ‘Let’s eat healthy food’, p. 68
- <sup>110</sup> Unit 2, ‘School is cool’, p.33
- <sup>111</sup> Unit 3, ‘What do you look like?, p.53
- <sup>112</sup> Unit 5.2., ‘Around the world’, p.102
- <sup>113</sup> Unit 3.1., ‘What do you look like?’, p. 54
- <sup>114</sup> Unit 3, ‘What do you look like?’, p. 65
- <sup>115</sup> Unit 4, ‘City Life’, p.75
- <sup>116</sup> Unit 1, ‘Walking the Red Carpet’, p. 21, track 8
- <sup>117</sup> Unit 1, ‘Walking the Red carpet’, p. 33, track 11
- <sup>118</sup> Unit 4, - ‘A world of differences’, p.115
- <sup>119</sup> Unit 2, ‘Ready Steady Fit’, p. 53, track 19