*Article*

# Analysis of Heteronormativity and Gender Roles in EFL Textbooks

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the current representations of gender roles and heteronormativity in a corpus of textbooks used to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Spanish high schools. Several studies have documented the importance of recognizing problems of homophobic harassment and gender bias which may result in a significant number of students feeling excluded. It is notable that textbook publishers have failed to address this issue despite its relevance to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), raising the question of why this continues to go unnoticed by textbook publishers. The corpus selected comprises two sets of textbooks printed by leading publishers in the area of EFL. In order to gain insight into this issue, we have conducted a qualitative study analyzing the role of textbooks in perpetuating heteronormativity and stereotyped gender roles by exemplifying the naturalized heterosexual and male/female identities. Data were coded under two broad variables: heteronormativity and gender, which in turn were broken down into different units of analysis. The results suggested that heteronormativity still permeates the whole curriculum and that attempts to gender-balance need to be improved by reducing the number of male protagonists. Textbooks fell into some of the same clichés with regard to gender-related stereotypes, such as almost exclusively linking women with shopping and fashion. It is evidently clear from the findings that textbooks should be revised to ensure the right to quality education for all and to make students aware of SDGs, since 7 out of 17 are related to the target topics.

**Keywords:** heteronormativity; gender roles; EFL textbooks; LGBTIQ+

## 1. Introduction

The motto *No child left behind* in education is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations (UN) in 2015. Goal four ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all and this should be true for every person without exception. However, gender inequalities are still tangible in many educational contexts and this, in turn, affects students' future prospects. Dorey [1] contends that "[t]he impacts of this are felt by LGBT communities in all parts of the world—lower income, worse health, less education, among others. As a result, poverty as a whole will never truly be eradicated until this problem is directly addressed." Therefore this research aims to unravel the current situation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used in the Spanish education system to discover whether a more inclusive approach toward LGBTIQ+ material and the representation of less traditional or binary gender roles has been adopted, as well as the extent of these changes and potential avenues for improvement. On this account, it is vitally important to tackle this topic in order to stop what is widely recognized as a significant problem of homophobic harassment in the Spanish education system. There is a broad consensus amongst studies that LGBTIQ+ students are more exposed to bullying than heterosexual students, with serious consequences such as remarkably higher risks of suicide, self-harm, and mental illness, as well as impacts on LGBTIQ+ students' wellbeing and engagement with the school system. It is also extensively agreed that including LGBTIQ+ themes in

textbooks and lessons is an effective method of dealing with the latter problem, whilst incorporating examples of non-traditional gender roles in education from an early age is important in promoting gender equality over the long term. Strands of research prioritize a critical lens on these issues [2–7].

The idea that a couple is formed of a man and a woman, and that the "ideal family" (commonly presented in all media) is made up of a "mum", "dad", and possibly several children still often goes unchallenged in the Spanish education system. Teachers and students are rarely encouraged to stop and think about the heterosexual norms implicit in that relationship. This is reflected in society at large as heterosexuality has been naturalized as the main sexual orientation that a human being should have. This stereotyped idea—rooted in the Western binary gender system—is embedded in our innermost self since the vast majority of us have been born and raised in a largely heteronormative and patriarchal society, where the most commonly accepted possibility for men and women was to feel attracted to the opposite gender. This gender has a number of "roles" attached that are highly dependent on the male or female "nature" of the agent.

Undoubtedly, this social conception that concerns all individuals in society becomes part of our indoctrination from the very early stages of our lives. The education system is constructed by all agents of society: the family, the media, and the cultural and social values infusing the schooling structure. In the Spanish context, we can easily see examples of heteronormativity and stereotyped gender roles by just opening one of the many textbooks used by students in primary and secondary education on a daily basis. Pictures of stereotypical families made up of four or five members, statements such as "your parents are your mum and dad", "shopping" as a leisure activity for women, or deliberate avoidance of the presence of any LGBTIQ+ characters are just a few examples of what can be found in today's EFL textbooks.

Unfortunately, this does not represent the increased visibility and empowerment of the LGBTIQ+ movement, which for decades has been fighting for their rights, and the challenge to the traditional binary system of gender roles. Although some may term this as a jejune opinion, the truth is that the omission clouds the reality of many children and perpetuates a sense of non-belonging. Oftentimes they come up with the incorrect idea that what is not named does not exist. So, the thread running throughout this paper is the willingness to address deeply rooted social norms that discriminate against women or LGBTIQ+ people.

Arcane old-fashioned attitudes and misconceptions still dominate the teaching profession, which, along with children and teenagers' lack of pre-existing general knowledge about sexuality, distort the perception of sexuality and gender in modern society. This will hinder the achievement of up to seven SDGs: namely, the end of poverty in all its forms everywhere (goal one); to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (goal three); goal number four mentioned earlier; the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (goal five); the reduction of inequality within and among countries (goal 10); the fact of making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (goal 11); and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provision of access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (goal 16).

As English teachers and educators, we have the responsibility to come to grips with these issues, as the construction of identity through the learning of a new language has increasingly become more understood as being inseparable from the formation and transformation of identity [8].

### 1.1. Theoretical Underpinnings

The idea of heterosexuality as "natural" has been a topic of significant interest in academia. The study conducted by Blank [9] concluded that the nuances of meaning attached to the concept "heterosexuality" are context-bound. This means that it has not always existed and that human sexual behavior and sexuality have been subjected to

radical changes over time and between societies. 'Heterosexuality' was originally a term coined in the mid 19th century, which has undergone subtle alterations to its implicit and explicit meanings ever since. Far from being seen as the 'natural' or 'normal' sexuality broached above, it was defined as "an abnormal or perverted appetite towards the opposite sex" in Dorland's [10] medical dictionary of 1901, for example. By the 1930s, however, definitions had changed to reflect a more familiar view of heterosexuality and its role in society, with the origins of the word largely forgotten and obscured. It was not until the later part of the century that the rise of what is now known as queer theory began to investigate the phenomenon, making the distinction between sex and sexuality, which is a 'cultural production' and liable to change in line with societal attitudes [11].

Regarding the idea that a lack of knowledge in younger generations affects their potential tendency to discriminate, Guasch Andreu [12] claims that this is one of the central pillars of patriarchy and heterosexuality as it is a perfect way to configure sexuality. Thus, if sexuality is restricted to adulthood, the misconception that students in primary education are not ready to talk about sexuality will be widespread [7] (p. 201). So-called 'avoidance' predominates at this level of education, helping to internalize and naturalize heteronormativity and reject any behavior that goes against it (what may foster homo/transphobia).

López Sáez [13] interprets heteronormativity as "the political, social, philosophical and economical regime that generates violence towards people who do not stick to genders, sexualities, practices or desires related to heterosexuality" (p. 228, own translation). This definition is qualified by the overarching idea of the "heterosexual matrix" discussed by Butler [14]: "[a] grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalised . . . , a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality." (p. 151).

Guasch Andreu [12] pins down the pillars of heterosexuality:

- Defends marriage and/or stable relationships.
- Is coitus-focused and reproductive oriented.
- Defines the feminine as secondary and interprets it from a masculine perspective.
- Condemns, prosecutes, or ignores heterodox sexualities (pp. 115–117, own translation).

This has implications for teaching practice since, as Moreno–Sánchez [15] formulates, it entails the:

- Reproduction of a heteronormative and sexist hidden curriculum.
- Perpetuation of heteronormative roles and stereotypes.
- Acceptance of micro-chauvinist and homophobic attitudes as socially admissible practices (556–574, own translation).

### 1.1.1. Queer Theory and Pedagogy

Queer theory is an attempt "to bring the hetero/homo opposition to the point of collapse" [16] (p. 1). This means that queer studies not only aim to integrate LGBTIQ+ people, but moot the idea of problematizing heterosexuality as well. That is, to provide a new interpretation of sex, gender, and sexual identities which emphasizes the act of becoming rather than that of being. On this account, queer theory questions "the idea of fixed gender and sexual identities and challenges the basis for a unitary identity politics" [17] (p. 5). Piantato [18] surmises that "[t]hrough its emphasis on this interpretation of the notion of identity as fluid and in constant formation, this approach insists on the fact that individuals are constantly questioning the idea of fixed and stable identity in multiple ways." (p. 3).

When it comes to queer pedagogy, we could say that it is an educative approach emerging from poststructuralism. It seeks to uncover the hidden curricula of heteronormativity and tries to create a safe atmosphere for queer participants [19]. Britzman [20]

states that when queer theory is brought into education, it gives rise to a discussion of the possibilities of articulating pedagogies that argue and give importance to what she calls the "geography of normalcy." In her opinion, something beyond just an acknowledgment of the LGBTIQ+ community is required in educational studies. Luhmann [21] also suggests that a queer pedagogy goes beyond the incorporation of queer content and purposes to "make education part of a process of political empowerment and liberation of students." Despite the extant literature on this topic, Nelson [22] explains that for some colleagues the idea that LGBTIQ+ identities could have any relevance to language learning is perturbing; she adds that what they fail to take into account is that sexual identities are already an integral part of EFL. For example, we teach and learn terms such as husband, wife, wedding, boy/girlfriend, partner, etc. but they are not envisaged as allusions to sexual identities. However, were we to talk about the same aspects but applied to the LGBTIQ+ community, they would be pictured as references to sexual identities because there is a tendency to hypersexualized this community.

Notions of teaching and learning garnered from experience led Nelson [22] (p. 373) to affirm that "[q]ueer theory shifts the focus from gaining civil rights to analysing discursive and cultural practices, from affirming minority sexual identities to problematizing all sexual identities. Pedagogies of inclusion thus become pedagogies of inquiry." This is of the utmost importance since the aim of education is not only to provide inclusion and integration but to question all sexual identities and to understand that the way to eradicate homophobia would be to stop understanding the LGBTIQ+ community as the "other" and heterosexuality as the norm.

There are a number of differences between inclusion and inquiry: Nelson [22] explains that the latter focuses on how language and culture address all sexual identities rather than learning about or just learning to accept LGBTIQ+ people. From her point of view, an inquiry approach informed by queer theory might involve [22] (p. 377):

- Acknowledging that the domain of sexual identity may be important to a range of people for a range of reasons;
- Raising awareness of the fact that the sexual identity may be important to a range of people for many different reasons;
- Examining both the subordinate and the dominant sexual identities;
- Looking at different ways in which sexual identities are seen in various cultural contexts and discourses;
- Exploring both problematic and positive aspects of this identity domain;
- Considering sexual identity in relation to other aspects of identity and vice versa.

### 1.1.2. Spanish Legislation and EFL Textbooks

In Spain, the current education law, LOMCE (*Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa*) [23], was implemented in 2013. This law was defined in Royal Decree 1105/2014 [24], article 11 of which explicitly mentions sexual diversity: "to know and value the human dimension of sexuality in all its plurality" (own translation). This might not seem enough or relatively vague in comparison with the general guidelines that the Andalusian government [25] brought in later, in which there is a demand for greater attention to be paid to tolerance of sexual and gender diversity as well as recognition of LGBTIQ+ people. Thanks to this document, great strides have been made in emphasizing the fact that sexual and gender identities are a lifelong construction.

Either way, despite the attention that the educational law draws to this matter, the truth is that there is no subject in the Spanish education system covering themes of sexual diversity, LGBTIQ+ recognition, stereotyping or social discrimination. As a consequence, these are supposed to be taught in a cross-curricular way because they are not part of the explicit curriculum of any subject. Barozzi [26] observes that "teachers do not feel the pressure and the need to use them in their teaching activities" (p. 42). In addition, sexuality, gay, lesbian, or transgender issues are one of the most avoided topics in teaching materials and textbooks. This leaves professionals with few opportunities to address

these topics in class and empower students with tools to dispel stereotypes. As Paiz [27] states "[t]he texts/textbooks that are chosen for classroom use also present students with valued and often desired input about a target culture [...] identities and life ways that are available and/or acceptable in the target culture" (p. 79). Likewise, Shardakova and Pavlenko [28] claimed that textbooks are subject to the social, ideological, economic, and political environment of a determinate country. Therefore, they cannot be considered as neutral resources. As Spain is the country covered in this study, it is important to note that it has been, and in some aspects still is, an example of a patriarchal society, and that EFL textbooks may include a higher degree of heteronormativity and gender-role stereotyped materials for that reason.

Following this line of enquiry, recent research conducted by Litosseliti [29] and Erlman [30] shows that there has been an improvement and development of awareness amongst EFL textbook publishers about the need to change their out-of-date representation of women (albeit there are still examples of stereotyped gender roles in EFL textbooks). Notwithstanding this progress, mainstream publishers overwhelmingly continue to put forward heteronormative examples in their textbooks [31]: heterosexual relationships, traditional families, stereotyped gender roles, and avoidance of material which might have led to addressing sexuality or diverse sexual identities. In consequence, the absence of normalized queer elements in the textbooks makes it harder for queer students to confront their day to day problems. Paiz [27] asserts that "challenging heteronormativity by queering our practices is necessary not only because many students are ready, willing, and desiring to tackle LGBT issues, but also because it allows queer students access to a sexual identity that is legitimated when heteronormative views are challenged." (p. 82). In this statement, he pinpoints a very important issue: the desire on the students' behalf to tackle sexuality. As teachers we need to assume that "we have gay students in each of our classes. We don't need to know which of our students is or might be gay. Our gay students, as member of more than one minority group, are facing the daily confines of heterosexism in addition to linguistic and cultural barriers" [32] (p. 148). The English language, currently being a *lingua franca* and dominant language in some of the most important social fields (e.g.,: trade, research, technology, etc.) as it is shown in EFL textbooks, should encompass queer and gender-questioning topics as any other, rather than avoiding them. This parochial attitude engendered in the educational systems may promote discrimination and prejudices which students already receive from different sources throughout society.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Focus of the Work, Research Questions and Hypothesis

The objectives of this paper were: (a) to look for heteronormativity or inclusivity in EFL textbooks; (b) to analyze images, reading texts, lexical items, or activities and see if LGBTIQ+ characters are represented and how; (c) to find those parts where gender is relevant and see whether they have an inclusive approach or not.

Consequently, the research questions that anchor this study are:

RQ1: To what extent does heteronormativity pervade in the corpus of study?

RQ2: How are gender roles and structures of power portrayed in this corpus?

The hypothesis holds that textbooks display a strongly heteronormative approach and a fully equal approach to gender has not yet been achieved.

### 2.2. Corpus of Study

To develop this study, we have inspected two sets of textbooks (each comprising a student's book and a workbook):

- Heyderman, E.; Maucheline, F. *Interface 1, Student's Book*; Macmillan Education: Oxford, UK, 2013 [33].
- Heyderman, E.; Maucheline, F. *Interface 1, Workbook*; Macmillan Education: Oxford, UK, 2013 [34].
- Pelteret, C. Mosaic 1, Student's Book. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2014 [35].

- Pelteret, C. Mosaic 1, Workbook. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2014 [36].

This corpus was chosen according to three fundamental criteria: (1) they are up to date typical examples of EFL textbooks currently in use in Spain; (2) they are published by two of the most influential mainstream publishers in Spain; (3) they reflect the objectives and key competences laid out in the current Spanish Education Law for Secondary Education [23].

In addition, the scope of the analysis has been limited to the first year of Secondary Education (ages 12–13), as this is a very relevant year for the students given that it introduces them to studying English at secondary level, establishing their expectations at a crucial formative stage in their development, as well as being the level at which family-oriented themes and relationship topics are usually introduced. Krippendorff [37] suggests that sample size should be determined on the basis of informational needs but, according to Patton [38,39], there is no scholarly consensus on this matter. In our case, though the corpus is relatively small compared to the large number of EFL textbooks in circulation, it is sufficient to accomplish the objectives set for this research and inform the context of the study (namely, EFL educational settings). This allowed a deeper qualitative study of the texts rather than a less detailed but broader analysis of more textbooks. This limitation is balanced out by the fact that the textbooks analyzed are a representative sample taken from well-respected mainstream publishers. This study may serve as a foundation for further research on the issue, extending the analysis to other publishers or school subjects. Although this limitation should be considered before making broad generalizations, there is ample evidence in the analysis section to concur with the conclusions reached.

### 2.3. Method

In our study, we adhere to the tenets of qualitative methodology in order to understand the complexities and constraints of the gender and heteronormative choices made by EFL publishers. From our prior forays into qualitative research, we opted for content analysis since this has been envisaged as the most suitable to examine and describe the written artifacts of a society [40,41]. Content analysis has been defined by many authors since it rose to scholarly prominence in the 1950s in the United States. However, we focused on Weber's [42] and Cohen et al.'s [43] interpretation. The former notes that "content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" [42] (p. 117), while the latter expounds it is "a strict and systematic set of procedures for rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the contents of written data" [43] (p. 475). Several authors [38,44–46] emphasize two basic premises of content analysis already inherent in Weber's [42] and Cohen et al.'s [43] definitions: credibility and rigor. To achieve these, it is paramount that researchers stay true to the text and classify information systematically so that trustworthiness can be attained in the end. Some scholars have mooted that validity and reliability should be at the core of qualitative research. Morse and Richard [45] hold that validity is to put forward a comprehensible reflection of the phenomena studied while reliability signifies that the same results could be obtained should the investigation be replicated. Despite this, it is worth mentioning that a qualitative study entails some level of personal interpretation and it is the researchers' responsibility to minimize the impact of any of their own bias [47].

Although content analysis may be tackled from a qualitative and quantitative perspective, this study focused almost exclusively on the qualitative side as we sought to elucidate whether heteronormativity and gender roles permeated the syllabus of the corpus selected. Quantifications were limited to the number of occurrences of a certain trait in the textbook (for descriptive purposes only).

Planning is a pivotal step in any research in order to allow new information to be brought to bear on prevailing theories in the field. In doing so, we determine the structure of the study and delimit the thresholds based on the target objectives [44]. In the same vein, the analytical framework is crucial in subsequently decoding and correctly interpreting the data collected. Most researchers agree on the need to employ different distinguishing

stages [44,48] to conceptualize data. For our research, we utilized a multi-tiered procedure requiring several steps.

Firstly, we established the units of analysis [43]. Due to the multimodal nature of the textbook, both text and illustrations were considered. In order to familiarize ourselves with the corpus, we read through the four textbooks to obtain a sense of the whole before breaking them into smaller meaningful units related to the aims of the study [49]. We scanned the whole corpus and pinpointed any text or image where agents were human. Then, we tried to make sense comparatively of this welter of information and winnowed out the examples to those with and explicit focus on gender or heteronormativity.

Secondly, the units of analysis were coded [43,48] (meticulous attention was paid to detail since text and images were equally relevant to fulfil our goals). Codes were created inductively, meaning that they were subject to change where necessary as the inspection progressed. Moreover, following Downe–Wambolt's [44] comment, the coding process was performed repeatedly starting on different pages. It should be noted that this was done individually and in parallel by all the authors of this paper. Researchers scheduled a meeting to ensure the use of the same coding and define the scope of each code. This helped increase the stability and reliability of the study and minimize the subjective nature of data collection [37].

Next, we recontextualized the process as advocated by Miller and Crabtree [50] in order to check whether all aspects of the content had been covered in relation to the aims of the study (namely, heteronormativity, inclusivity, LGBTIQ+, and gender).

As for the establishment of categories [43,50], two broad categories were drawn: (1) heteronormativity (to evaluate heteronormativity and the absence and/or presence of LGBTIQ+ materials); and (2) gender roles (to assess gender-based disparities). The items were considered heteronormative if they presented heterosexuality as the only normal or acceptable sexual identity and LGBTIQ+ materials or characters were absent in the textbooks. Together with this, the study scrutinized visual and written gender depictions in search of stereotypes of female invisibility. These are standard metrics used throughout the relevant literature in the field [51–55].

The following stage concentrated on the ascription of codes and categories to each piece of data [43]. Text and illustrations were clustered against the categories defined in the previous stage. These were split into different subthemes labeled as follows to present information in a more digestible form: family, sexual-affective attraction, recreational activities, risk-taking, famous role-models, professions, appearances, and gender binary system. It is worth noting that we initially commenced with a larger number of key themes but these were collapsed into a smaller set to avoid over atomization.

We then proceeded with the data analysis [43] or compilation [56] to sift all the information gathered from previous stages. Data was vetted to prove their accuracy (it is highly advisable to see whether the results match prior findings in the extant literature and whether or not they are sensible and insightful [45]). Following this, we summarized and identified [43] the key features of the investigation. Thereafter, we moved to the next tier known as speculative inferences [43] and drew conclusions based on the summarized results of the research. The thread that ran throughout all our work was the willingness to take a critical stance as researchers.

## 3. Results

As mentioned above, this study aims to peruse heteronormativity and gender roles as depicted in the selected corpus. These conform the two main variables which will be explained in detail in this section. Table 1 summarizes the overall results.

**Table 1.** Summary of the results.

| Subthemes | Heteronormativity Variable | Subthemes | Gender Variable |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family patterns | Traditional families (vast majority) Single-male parenthood Absence of homosexual families | Recreational activities | Women are linked to shopping or fashion (leisure activity). Men complain about shopping or go to sports stores. Surprise when gender boundaries are questioned. |
| Sexual-affective attraction | Heterosexual love only One instance of ambiguity Feminized body language for girls | Risk-taking | Women are associated with unchallenging activities. (there is one exception but the girl's emotional response is emphasized). Men outnumber women in almost all sports (the only exception being ballet). Gendered sports. |
| | | Professions | *Lower-status jobs*: balanced *Higher-status jobs*: only men |
| | | Appearance | Gendered clothes Attempts to de-gender (only in [33,34]). |
| | | Gender binary system | Absence of non-binary models. |

(Own elaboration).

*3.1. Heteronormativity Variable*

The corpus contains a number of examples in which heteronormativity is presented. We will expand below the subthemes related to family models and sexual-affective attraction.

3.1.1. Family Patterns

The family model which predominates in our corpus of study is clearly heteronormatively-based, where the main agents are a mother, a father, and one or two children as it can be observed in Table 2. Going through the *Mosaic 1* [35,36] and *Interface 1* [33,34] sets, the lack of images, drawings, or videos of a non-heteronormative couple or relationship stands out, with the one exception of a single-parent model depicted in *Interface 1* [33] (p. 14). This may be interpreted as an attempt to break the heteronormative model, although it fails to showcase plurality (the protagonist is a man with two children despite the fact that the vast majority of single parent families are female-headed). Another interesting instance is a mixed-ethnic family [35] (p. 9) made up of a father, mother, and two sons which might be viewed as a soft effort to display intersectionality of two aspects of identity: family and geographical/cultural origin.

**Table 2.** Family patterns excerpted from the corpus [33–36].

| *Mosaic 1* | | *Interface 1* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Image: traditional family (man, woman, two children). Text: family and nationalities are explained (e.g., "What country is Adam's mum from?"). | [35] p. 5 | Image: genealogical tree of three traditional heterosexual families (mother-father-children) Text: "His grandparents' names are Jonathan and Ana." | [33] p. 12 |
| Family models: • Father-mother-son-daughter • Mother-father-daughter-son-grandmother-grandfather • Mother-father-son-grandfather-grandmother [Indian ethnic family] • Mother-father-daughter [Chinese ethnic family] • Father-mother-son-son [mixed-ethnic family] | [35] p. 9 | Image/text: a male protagonist talks about his family by introducing his dad and sister. | [33] p. 14 |
| Text: Do your mum and dad like tennis? | [35] p. 36 | Text: game in which students have to guess the word "parents" from the definition: "mum and dad are my p … " | [33] p. 42 |
| Image: family members are the father, the son and the mother. | [35] p. 120 | Text: "tell mum and dad that there are shops to visit." | [33] p. 52 |
| Text: My mum and dad are Alice and Mark. Anna's husband is my uncle; my aunt lives in Canada with my uncle. Your parents are your mum and your dad. | [36] pp. 1–14 | | |

(Own elaboration).

### 3.1.2. Sexual-Affective Attraction

When zeroing in on the subtheme "sexual-affective attraction", there are several occurrences in which heteronormativity is taken for granted (condensed in Table 3). One of them portrays two girls muttering with an attitude of gossip about the boys in the background, with exaggeratedly 'feminized' body language (features which are stereotypically related to women). This encapsulates the interplay of two controversial matters: heteronormativity and sexism.

**Table 3.** Examples of sexual-affective attraction excerpted from the corpus [35].

| *Mosaic 1* | |
| --- | --- |
| Image/text: two girls appear whispering about two other boys who are in the distance. The conversation goes: "Girl A: Who are those boys over there? Girl B: They are the new boys in our class! That's Nick . . . " | [35] p. 42 |
| Ambiguity. Text: "My uncles are musicians. They play the saxophone in a band". | [35] p. 65 |

(Own elaboration).

Moreover, there are also a number of more ambiguous cases in which heterosexuality is not made explicit or only one member of a relationship is mentioned. In one example, on page 29 [33], the speaker, who has no name or indications of gender, talks about "Matt", a boy that he or she likes, but at the same time, 'Matt' likes 'Kate'. Whilst 'Matt' is clearly presented as heterosexual, the speaker's gender and sexual orientation are left unknown (p. 29). A personal interpretation of this ambiguity could see it as allowing LGBTIQ+ students to draw their own conclusions to suit their personal circumstances. Nonetheless, the number of LGBTQI+ or ambiguous characters in textbooks is still in the single digits and there are no crystal-clear cues for students to read into this ambiguity.

### 3.2. Gender Variable

This variable was dissected into different subthemes, namely: recreational activities, risk-taking, professions, celebrities, appearance, and gender binary system. Although the degree of recursiveness differed from one topic to another, the evidence found raises intriguing questions regarding the focus of this study.

### 3.2.1. Recreational Activities

The first factor that has emerged is the representation of recreational activities in terms of gender. There is a great array of examples which use either the name, feminine article, or image of a woman in relation to fashion or shopping. The most egregious examples are illustrated in Table 4. These outline visual and written items showing women shopping, trying on clothes, talking about fashion, etc. This aspect does not mean that women are simply depicted "going shopping", but also that the vast majority of the language used when talking about this particular topic is associated with women. The exception is the inclusion of two shopping activities related to men (see Table 4). One is a reading text about Pierre Oswald, a male designer, and his story. This comes with some drawings showing his designs, in which one of the three models is a man wearing a baggy cardigan with a belt, as if it were a dress, and high heeled boots. The second features the male character in the *Sports Zone* which may however promote the stereotype of linking men to sports. These are therefore not enough to balance the more than ten examples in which women are pictured in shops, carrying shopping bags, or in many cases simply introducing that activity as part of their timetable or normal routine. Girls are positioned to align themselves with protagonists who embody stereotypical roles to keep them under control.

**Table 4.** Recreational activities excerpted from the corpus [33–36].

| *Mosaic 1* | | *Interface 1* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading text about Pierre Oswald, a male designer, and his story | [35] p. 96 | Text: [girl] "My sister and I go shopping. Our favourite shops are Mango and Zara." | [34] p. 28 |
| Text/image: "Daniel is at Sports Zone." | [35] p. 93 | Text: [girl] "We go shopping or we sit in a café with a drink". Ben's answer: "Really? Sounds boring!" (implying that shopping is not an in-built male activity) | [33] p. 39 |
| Text: A dialogue between the character called "mum" and "Rosie" in which they talk about fashion and how it has changed since the 1970's. | [35] p. 87 | Text: [girl] "My brother hates shopping." | [34] p. 29 |
| Text: "I'm Mila. I love wearing unusual clothes. I think it is important to look good." | [35] p. 41 | The phrases "go shopping"/"buy souvenirs" are illustrated with female characters. | [33] pp. 36, 41, 109 [34] p. 28 |
| A listening practice in which 'Ros' says that she likes fashion. | [35] p. 40 | Text: "Bob: we need a new guitarist. Have you got a friend with a guitar? Jack: Hmmm. My cousin's got a guitar. Bob: But does <u>he</u> want to be in a band? Jack: She. Her name is Molly." | [33] p. 44 |
| An activity in which students have to reply to a text message that their aunt has sent: "I'm at the shopping centre. Where are you?" | [35] p. 105 | | |

(Own elaboration).

Albeit rare, there are cases where men admit to not enjoying traditionally 'masculine' activities, as can be seen on Table 4. However, it is worth highlighting the preconceived idea male characters had about a guitarist being a man [33] (p. 44). This carries a heightened significance for students who are prompted to critique the gender bias embedded in society.

### 3.2.2. Risk-Taking

When it comes to the level of risk embedded in the recreational activity, female characters tend to engage in slightly less dangerous or softer activities or achievements. There are over a dozen examples of girls being shown as having succeeded at activities such as volunteering, blogging, photography, and music. There is a noteworthy exception, however, where a girl is attempting to become the youngest person to sail around the world solo, hardly a safe activity. The corresponding listening activity includes comments about her emotions and how she misses her family. The male counterparts, on the other hand, are frequently presented as adventurers or risk-takers (see Table 5 below). In none of the male-related examples are the characters' feelings alluded to (as happened with the female sailor).

**Table 5.** Risk-taking examples excerpted from the corpus [33–36].

| *Mosaic 1* | | *Interface 1* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Images: female characters | |
| | | 1 playing football | [33] p. 42 |
| | | 1 snowboarding | [33] p. 76 |
| Image/text: Jessica is interviewed because she wants to become the youngest person to sail around the world solo. | [35] pp. 62–63 | 1 swimming | [33] p. 70 |
| | | 1 training for a marathon | [33] p. 73 |
| | | 2 playing basketball | [33] p. 79 [34] p. 61 |
| | | 1 weightlifting | [33] p. 94 |
| | | Images: male characters | |
| | | 15 soccer | [33] pp. 37, 56, 57, 62, 79, 80, 82; [34] pp. 47, 55, 56, 58 |
| Text/image: [man] sitting in iced water and holding a lion. | [35] p. 70 | | |
| | | 1 American football | [34] p. 62 |
| | | 1 Gaelic football | [33] p. 75 |
| | | Images: male characters | |
| | | Rugby | [33] p. 62 |
| Text/image: "He swam with sharks." | [35] p. 70 | BMX biking | [33] p. 64 |
| | | Cricket | [33] p. 77 |
| | | Surfing | [33] p. 78 |
| | | Sport symbols: | |
| Text: travelling around the USA on a motorbike for a year. | [35] p. 100 | 5 male-based vs. 2 female-based | [34] p. 57 |
| | | 1 female-based vs. 5 male-based | [33] p. 79 |
| | | 1 female-based vs. 12 male-based | [33] p. 80 |
| | | Text: "my brother doesn't like playing football with his friends" | [33] p. 37 |

(Own elaboration).

Additionally, there are inconsistencies in the realm of sports, since the representation of sportsmen considerably outnumbers sportswomen. While there is only a single instance of a female football player, end-users will be exposed to seventeen male examples as itemized in Table 5. Other sports which are foreclosed to women are rugby, BMX biking, cricket, or surfing. Another striking gender imbalance is made visible in the sports symbols, 83% of which are embodied in male avatars [33] (p. 80).

All in all, we can say that female characters are indeed represented in this corpus, but some of their interests are still illustrated as conforming to traditional gender roles, whilst men are depicted doing more dangerous or scary activities.

### 3.2.3. Professions

The subtheme of professions includes a formidable scope of analysis. The selected corpus introduces renowned male inventors, marine biologists, artists, and astronauts in reading texts, images, and activities, with a total absence of female counterparts. Women, however, are still predominantly presented as teachers, receptionists or assistants, which could be interpreted as lower ranked or less prestigious jobs. The latter roles mentioned are portrayed in the textbooks analyzed as being occupied by men: therefore we could say that in the "lower-status" jobs there is a balance in male-female representation, but in the "higher-status" ones, the balance favors men (see Table 6 below). It can therefore be concluded that when looking at jobs and careers, gender-based stereotypes are still applied and perpetuated. An interesting example that renders male stereotypes is in *Mosaic I* [35] (p. 88). It presents a number of people in a police line-up in which students are asked to describe the suspects in the drawing, all of whom are men. This can be seen as doubly negative, as it both demonstrates female invisibility and also denigrates men as the only criminals.

**Table 6.** Professions examples excerpted from the corpus [35,36].

| *Mosaic 1* | |
|---|---|
| *Lower-status* jobs: (teachers) | |
| Mr Smith | [35] p. 5 |
| Miss González | [36] p. 7 |
| Miss Lloyd | [36] p. 33 |
| Mr Phillips | [35] p. 124 |
| Assistant | [35] p. 93 |
| *Higher-status* jobs: | |
| Text: "my uncle is a marine biologist." | [35] p. 83 |
| Text: "Gideon Cardozo, a British engineer, designed the Skycar." | [35] p. 99 |
| Text/Image: astronaut | [35] pp. 90–91 |
| | [36] p. 60 |
| Image: 6 men in a police line-up | [35] p. 88 |

(Own elaboration).

### 3.2.4. Appearance

'Appearance' was also coded as a subtheme. The greatest collection of examples is found in *Interface 1* [33,34] which has carefully chosen the material in order to not employ gender stereotypes in the most contentious areas, such as appearances, adjectives of physical description, families and relationships. The book makes use of superheroes and famous cartoon characters and programs (see Table 7 below) rather than real people to teach the possessive adjectives, present simple or nationalities. To approach the topic of appearances and physical descriptions, it resorts to images, activities and reading texts with animals as the protagonists to teach the parts of the body, adjectives, and grammar points. Then to work on human physical descriptions, it recreates an internet website in which the students can create their own *avatars*, so that they can easily detach from their personal appearance. The activity comes with a drawing showing two male and two

female avatars wearing similar clothes (trousers, jeans, and t-shirts) and a set of activities asking students to compare their *avatars* so that they use the third person singular neuter pronoun "*it*". In this instance, 'it' is utilized to refer to an object (the avatar), but the text fails to make clear that "it" is not grammatically accepted as a gender-neutral pronoun as it may be understood as offensive or derogatory, implying that the subject is non-human, animal, or other.

**Table 7.** Appearance-related examples excerpted from the corpus [33–36].

| Mosaic 1 | | Interface 1 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Text: [man] high platform shoes | [35] p. 87 | Cartoon characters and programs: Superman, Spiderman, Asterix, Astroboy, Dragonball Z, etc.) | [33] p. 8 |
| Text: "An item of clothing for a girl or a woman is … " (answer: "*a dress*"). | [35] p. 56 | Image: ungendered avatars | [33] p. 24 |

(Own elaboration).

However, there are instances of gendered items of clothing when the text discusses the history of high platform shoes and how these were "cool" for both women and men. In doing so, it is implicitly emphasized that nowadays they are no longer "cool" for men. This is an implicit heterosexual perspective on dressing codes. A further notable example is embedded in a conundrum where the expected answer is a dress as an archetypical item of clothing for women.

### 3.2.5. Gender Binary System

References to the subtheme gender binary system can be explored in a role-play dialogue included in *Mosaic 1* between the receptionist of a sports club and a customer trying to join the gym [35] (p. 17). The notable thing about this activity lies in the fact that the list of proper names the book provides for the students to choose from are classified according to common names for boys and girls. No option is given to transgender students who are required to pick a name according to their sex and not to their gender. It would have been more appropriate to merge all the names into a single box, rather than labeling them separately. Another set of items that implicitly includes a relationship between sexual identity and gender roles can be found on page 43 [36] where the relationship "mum" and "dad" are presented with associations to gender roles e.g.: "he carries his wife's shopping bags. He always carries them."

### 4. Discussion

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that current EFL textbooks are predominantly based on a heteronormative approach. Traditional families are almost the only option in both textbooks despite the fact that studies developed some twenty years ago already suggested that "fewer than one in four students come to US schools from a home occupied by both biological parents" [57] (p. 10). These examples clearly promote heteronormativity, and even if there are attempts to mask the omission by including single parent families where the sexual orientation is open to dispute, this is nothing more than a sugarcoated response which perpetuates LGBTIQ+ social ostracism. What is more, the allusions to one-parent families in this corpus of study (or at least families in which only one of the parents is shown) are always led by male figures, hence fostering female invisibility. Given that an average classroom will likely contain students from single parent families, and 83% of single parent families in Spain consist of a single mother according to the 2019 INE survey [58], this seems to be a major incoherent lacuna which requires explanation.

According to Paiz [59] the concept of family can be harnessed to dispel stereotypes and revisited through a lens of queer inquiry: "[l]ikewise, asking students to actively imagine nontraditional family structures and how they may be different from and similar to those represented in the text may be helpful in more fully introducing students to queer reading and inquiry. The instructor can then share various student perspectives and continue to

trouble them as well as to critique the origins of pre-existing perceptions of the family."
(p. 360).

Pichardo [60] states that when children are asked to sketch "a family" they always draw it with a mum, a dad, and children. Nevertheless, if the task is personalized to "their family" they will draw their family as it is, not necessarily with a mum and dad. That shows that there is a differentiation between the imaginary and the reality these children live. This traditional representation is concurrent both in the pictures and texts analyzed above, implying that other family models are out of the norm and, as a result, sidestepped. By exclusively presenting stereotypical "traditional" models made up of a father, a mother, and several brothers and sisters, publishers prevent students from gaining insight into real issues such as family, gender roles, identity, sexual orientation, etc. that might help learners align their beliefs and assumptions with reality. This outcome is contrary to that of Erlman [30] who argued that textbooks "aim to be sexually inclusive by not mentioning traditional families" (p. 13).

In addition, non-binary people are totally unrepresented in textbooks despite the fact that this could easily have been solved by using the singular *they*, which has a history of use as a third person pronoun. Balhorn [61] points out that the use of the singular *they* dates back to Old English when nouns could be masculine, feminine, or neuter. In the 14th century there is evidence of *they* in use as a third person singular pronoun. It was not until the 18th century that grammarians raised awareness of this phenomenon and *they* was limited to the plural. However, recent studies have revived the debate and defend the use of *they* as a non-binary third person pronoun [62–64]. The same reasoning applies to the honorific titles Mr, Ms, Mrs, and Miss, whose non-binary alternative is Mx (pronounced as "miks" or "muks") [61]. Teaching these options to students would make the reality of non-binary and trans people visible and students might benefit from understanding that there are different ways of experiencing gender.

As for the gender variable, even if both textbooks tend to preserve a rough gender balance in terms of topic representation, there is a greater number of male references, both visual and textual. The resulting implication is that students associate men with protagonists, and are "forced" to use the language in masculine terms. As Erlman [30] states: "When looking at male generic forms in textbooks, most researchers have counted the number of appearances of 'he' as a generic construction." (p. 8). Analysis of both textbooks shows more frequent use of the male pronoun 'he', mirroring the conclusions reached by Duque García [65] who observed a 67% of he-references vs. 33% of she.

With regards to the prominence of women, both textbooks fail to achieve a fair balance (roughly 39%, similar to the results obtained by Duque García [65] who found that women played passive roles in the 42% of cases). In some instances, the items analyzed included women in them, but they are not always presented as speakers or main characters, and, therefore, the social "relevance" attached to it diminishes (the only exception consisting of shopping-related activities). The argument could be made that this cements a negative stereotype of women as playing a less active or primary role [66]. This is bolstered up by the emphasis given to the female emotional side [53,67–69].

Finally, the consequences of omitting famous female or historical characters could be far reaching (particularly considering the importance of strong female role models for young generations). Women play a pivotal role in today's society and their underrepresentation is not justified at all. This is fundamentally unacceptable in agreement with Duque García [65].

## 5. Conclusions

The original hypothesis of this study stated that textbooks hold a strong heteronormative approach and gender bias remains prevalent in educational materials. This study has confirmed the initial hypothesis to a large extent, although there are minor exceptions. For example, the corpus presents a few positive examples of gender equality, such as a young woman sailing solo around the world. This is tarnished by the overwhelming association of

women with fashion and shopping across both publishers and the high levels of heteronormativity and avoidance mentioned earlier. This is especially true for *Mosaic 1* [35,36], and even though *Interface 1* [33,34] makes more of an effort to include ambiguous characters and inventive ways of avoiding sensitive areas, it is primarily heteronormative. Ambiguity might allow LGBTIQ+ and female students to interpret characters in non-heterosexual or unbiased ways, but this does not meet the criterion of quality education for all. Many are still compelled to remain invisible.

Regardless of the efforts of educational authorities and the United Nations' SDGs to promulgate campaigns for inclusive education, heteronormativity still permeates the whole curriculum. Therefore, both publishers' approaches to gender-balance need to be improved by reducing the number of male protagonists. Also, both textbooks fall into some of the same clichés when approaching gender related stereotypes, such as almost exclusively linking women with shopping and fashion.

It seems that once more heterosexuality is the only sexual identity represented in current EFL textbooks used in Spanish secondary education, in a country that could be considered "legally" one of the most open and liberal in the world, as the country's same-sex marriage bill was enacted as far back as 2005. Even if in this particular analysis there is a small number of examples of non-heteronormative references, we should bear in mind that "simply including representations and information on non-heterosexuals in materials does not necessarily provide affirmation of diversity, but can serve to reinforce the isolation of a social group by portraying them in a negative light" [70] (p. 64).

Despite the current educational law establishing the study of sexuality in a cross-curricular way [23], none of the textbooks included queer topics for discussion. Whilst both publishers claim to have designed them around the requirements of the Spanish current educational law (LOMCE) [23], this lack is clearly defined as a failure to meet this standard. It seems that LGBTIQ+ people and women are forced to follow a trail of breadcrumbs left by the pervasive heterosexual matrix. Omission of visible role models utterly disorients students on the margins.

All the examples gleaned from the corpus could be easily modified to introduce a more open perspective towards relationships and sexual identities, particularly in units discussing families matters. However, it might be adduced that, if the aim is to challenge heteronormativity and gender stereotypes, grouping LGBTIQ+ or gender issues in a unit of their own could be unproductive compared to incorporating them throughout the textbook, as treating them separately could reinforce perceptions of 'otherness'

The importance of schools in forming students' lifelong prejudices should not be underestimated. If we are to dismantle the taboos surrounding LGBTIQ+ issues, then the classroom and teaching materials are indispensable. The school, being the place where students spend most time during their childhood and adolescence, "becomes fundamental for confirming their prejudice or fighting against it" [26] (p. 48). Where some may object that it is inappropriate or confusing to discuss sex in classrooms, particularly in a cross-curricular manner, it can be argued that there is a need for students and teachers to address and normalize these issues. Besides, it is important to emphasize that talking about sexuality does not imply talking about sex, as well as to recognize that students will get the (mis)information from other sources in any case. Nelson [32] (p. 148) points out that there are likely LGBTIQ+ students in the vast majority of classrooms, and that this must be considered by teachers if they are to educate these students effectively and secure their well-being as it is a teacher's professional responsibility. Many students and teachers may not even be aware that they share the classroom with their non-heterosexual peers and that they are perpetuating gender roles. Pérez Fernández–Fígares [71] suggests that schools should address this straightforwardly as a means of preventing and lowering bullying. Regardless of the specific measures proposed, however, it is clear that there is a broad consensus amongst theorists and academics in this field. Greater LGBTIQ+ and unbiased gender roles representation in the classroom is the key to addressing these serious issues.

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