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Shattering or Supporting Stereotypes? Examining Gender In/equality in English Language Textbooks in Brunei

By Rommel Curaming¹, Sharifah Nurul Huda Alkaff²

Abstract

This paper examines the representation of gender relations in textbooks used to teach the English language in public secondary schools in Brunei. The country is currently ranked 95th in the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s 2020 Global Gender Gap Index among 153 countries analysed. This fact seems to suggest that there is a significant gender gap existing in the country. As textbooks used in schools are considered among the most potent tools for promoting gender in/equality, they deserve to be examined in detail. Using Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as methods of analysis, this paper seeks to address the following questions: (i) in what ways and to what extent, is gender inequality manifested in textbooks used to teach the English language in Brunei and (ii) what are the implications and pedagogical measures which may be taken to address the persistence of gender inequality? The findings of the study show that the portrayal of gender relations in the textbook is fairly balanced, which is rather surprising considering the pervasive perception of conservatism and patriarchy in many Muslim societies, including Brunei. This suggests the need for a nuanced discussion of the nation's social, cultural, economic, and political milieu in order to obtain a true picture of gender relations in the country.

Keywords: Gender Relations, Gender Equality, Educational Systems, Representation of Gender, Muslim Societies

Introduction

The importance of gender equality cannot be underestimated if societies wish to provide a better quality of life for its citizens. According to a UNESCO report in 2007, "Gender equality is

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a means to combat underdevelopment and ensure sustainable development, as girls' and women's education has a positive influence in all areas of social activity: health, demography, the economy, children's education and community welfare" (UNESCO, 2007 p. 18). Many studies indicate correlational or causal connection between gender equality and poverty reduction, economic growth and equity, among others (e.g. Kabeer, 2015; Mitra et al., 2015).

The school system is among the most important agents of socialization. It plays a crucial role in transmitting knowledge, in perpetuating ideas, social norms, and values, as well as in promoting advocacies such as gender equality (Myers et al., 2007; Skelton & Francis, 2009). With estimates of 70-90% of classroom time in schools in various parts of the world devoted to the use of textbooks, textbooks play a significant, sometimes even central, role in the educational processes (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1992; Sadker et al., 2009). In the words of Michael Apple "(i)t is the textbook which establishes so much of the material conditions for teaching and learning in classrooms in many countries throughout the world, and...it is the textbook that often defines what is elite and legitimate culture to pass on" (1986, p. 81). Textbooks, in other words, may be a form of "official knowledge" (Apple, 1993), authorized by the dominant groups in a society. The existence of internationally renowned institutes like the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research indicates the importance attached to the examination of textbooks and other educational media. The contents of textbooks are being examined worldwide for various reasons including the need to determine if, and to what extent, various type of inequality or power differential is being reflected and promoted in textbooks, what they imply, and what can be done to address the situation.

In this study, we seek to examine gender hierarchy as a type of power relations. This hierarchy is often taken as a natural by-product of biological or sexual differences between males and females, whereas it may in fact have emanated from socially and culturally conditioned understandings of the differentiation between them (Wodak, 1997). By sex, it refers to "biological or anatomical differences between men and women" (Wodak, 1997, p. 2). Gender, on the other hand, refers to the socially, culturally, or psychologically constructed differentiation between them (Giddens, 1989, p. 158, as cited in Wodak, 1997, p. 3). Sexual difference, in other words, may not be equated to gender differentiation, let alone be the basis for gender hierarchy. As Simone de Beauvoir's (1953) oft-quoted claim states : "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (as cited in UNESCO, 2007, p. 24).

This paper examines the representation of gender relations in a textbook used to teach the English language in public secondary schools in Brunei. It operates on the assumption that textbooks may be used as a tool for social conditioning and reinforcing gender differences and hierarchies or their opposites. At the moment, there is very little published study on gender representation in textbooks in Brunei (e.g. Elgar, 2004). Ranked 95th among 153 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Gender Gap Index 2020, Brunei is at the bottom half of the rankings. This suggests the existence of a considerable gender gap and it raises the question of whether such a gap is reflected in the portrayal of gender relations in textbooks. Against the backdrop of the common understanding of textbooks and education systems, in general, as indicators or reproducers of the dominant power relations in society (Apple, 1995; Apple & Christian-Smith, 2017), one may hypothesize that textbooks in Brunei should also reflect such a gap in gender relations. Also, with Islam as the official religion, Brunei may be easily lumped together with other Muslim-majority countries which happen to rank invariably low in gender gap index. A report summarizing the ranking of Muslim countries in WEF's Gender Gap Index 2016 indicates that "out of the 144 countries ranked in 2016, not even a single Muslim majority country

makes it into the top 50. Kazakhstan is the top among Muslim countries (51st), and out of the 30 Islamic countries which have been ranked, 25 are in the last 50 (90-144). In fact, the last 15 countries (130-144) are all Muslim majority countries” (Raja, 2017). For the updated ranking which changed only a little, see Table 1 below. Some observers are quick to link this gender gap to Islamic teachings, but there are also others who claim otherwise (Ahmed, 1992; Barlas & Finn, 2019; Charrad, 2009; Raja, 2017; Ross, 2008). Supposing the purported link between Islam and gender inequality, as well as the official status of Islam in Brunei (more discussion on this below), outside observers might readily assume that textbooks in Brunei would be significantly gender-biased. If textbooks in Brunei do not turn out to be, then it implies the need to focus on a more complex constellation of factors. The analysis of textbooks in Brunei, in other words, potentially offers an interesting case to help test, revise, or refine some of the commonly held ideas at the intersection of textbooks, educational politics, and Islam.

Specifically, this study seeks to address the following questions: (i) in what ways and to what extent is gender in/equality manifested in textbooks used to teach the English language in Brunei, and (ii) what are the implications, particularly on power relations in Brunei, and what pedagogical measures may be taken to address the persistence of gender inequality, if that is the case?

Background of Brunei Darussalam

Brunei Darussalam is a small country located on the northern shores of Borneo Island in South East Asia. It is a Malay Muslim Sultanate with a population of around 440,000 and land area of 5,270 square km. For almost a century since the late 19th century, it was a British protectorate, and it gained independence in 1984. The country’s national philosophy, *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Muslim Monarchy), henceforth known as MIB, establishes the primacy of Malay language and culture as a way of life, (Sunni) Islam as official religion, and absolute monarchy as the official form of government. All facets of life in the Sultanate are expected to conform to MIB. It sets the parameters within which political ideas and practices, individual aspirations, and social transformation may be pursued (Müller, 2018). While it was officially promulgated only in 1984 upon Brunei’s independence, and the 1959 Constitution stipulated the official status of its individual components—Malay, Islam, and monarchy—MIB’s origin is customarily traced to the deepest known past, to the officially acknowledged founding of Brunei in the 14th century (Asbol bin Mail et al., 2019). The official injunction to conform to MIB is a very important factor that shapes social life, practices, and policies in Brunei, including those in education. When the philosophy of education was formulated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2004, for instance, it specifically stipulated that “Brunei Darussalam’s Education Philosophy is founded on the National Philosophy of a Malay Islamic Monarchy” (Muhammad & Bakar, 2013, p.103).

In 2009, Brunei’s Ministry of Education (MOE) unveiled the National Education System for the 21st century, popularly termed the SPN21, to replace the 1984 bilingual education system (the *Dwibahasa*). Under the SPN21, there is an apparent heavier emphasis placed on English over the official language, *Bahasa Melayu*, with English being introduced much earlier in the curriculum. The education system in Brunei is controlled by the Ministry of Education who oversees all facets of education from elementary to tertiary level. Private schools are allowed to operate, but they are still subjected to the purview of the MOE. At the end of the upper secondary level, students in Brunei sit for the Brunei Cambridge General Certificate of Examination (GCE) Ordinary and Advanced Levels examinations, conducted by UK’s Cambridge University

international examination syndicate. This marks Brunei as one of the few countries in the region that rely on an external body to conduct public examinations at upper secondary level. The reliance on foreign expertise is also evident in the provision of English language teaching specialists in public schools in the country by the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT), a private entity. However, unlike the early days of education in Brunei several decades ago where the vast majority of teachers were expatriate staff, Bruneian educators now form the bulk of the teaching staff in all public schools thanks to the country's emphasis on uplifting the educational attainment of its citizens.

With regard to the position of women in Brunei, it would be pertinent to discuss this in comparison to other Muslim societies in order to examine the extent of gender parity or imparity in the country. Table 1 below shows women's development indicators in several Muslim majority countries in the Asia Pacific region, South Asia, and the Middle East:

Table 1: Women's development indicators in selected Muslim majority countries

Indicators	Brunei		Malaysia		Indonesia		Pakistan		Bangladesh		Egypt		UAE	
Global gap index & score	95	0.686	104	0.677	85	0.700	151	0.564	50	0.726	134	0.629	120	0.655
Economic participation & opportunity	28	0.752	97	0.639	68	0.685	150	0.327	141	0.438	140	0.438	137	0.472
Educational attainment	72	0.992	86	0.989	105	0.970	143	0.823	120	0.951	102	0.973	89	0.987
Health & survival	115	0.969	84	0.974	79	0.974	149	0.946	119	0.969	85	0.974	94	0.972
Political empowerment	148	0.031	117	0.108	82	0.172	93	0.159	7	0.545	103	0.133	75	0.191

Source: World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2020

*Global gap index (rank out of 153 countries)

**Global gap score (0.00=imparity, 1.00= parity)

Brunei's ranking in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Gender Gap Index 2020 (95th out of 153 countries) places it behind countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia in overall ranking but ahead of other Muslim countries in Table 1. However, if one were to examine the four sub-indexes (economic participation & opportunity, educational attainment, health & survival, and political empowerment), Brunei scores the highest in the first two categories among the several Muslim countries surveyed. Indeed, Brunei's position in these two sub-indexes places the country among the top half of the 153 countries examined in the report. Brunei's female citizens are given equal opportunities in education and employment. The civil service and judiciary, for example, are dominated by women who have managed to enter among the highest echelons in these sectors. However, when it comes to political empowerment, Brunei has been singled out in the 2020 report as among several countries in the world where there is a total absence of women in ministerial positions. Thus, a 'glass ceiling' seems to exist in the country where women are given equal opportunities in all fields of employment but are denied the very top leadership positions. No woman in Brunei has attained a full ministerial position since the country's independence in 1984 when a Council of Ministers was established to govern the country under the leadership of the country's absolute monarch. Despite this, women in Brunei enjoy relative personal freedom as

many scholars (Hussein, 2009; Schroeter, 2013) attest that South East Asia Muslim societies are traditionally less patriarchal than Muslim societies in South Asia and the Middle East.

About the Textbooks

The books selected for this study are the *Gateway to English* (Books 1-3) for lower secondary students (12-14 years old) in Government secondary schools, first published in 2005. The series of books were written and illustrated by a panel of experts from Macmillan Education in the UK in consultation with Bruneian experts from the Lower Secondary English Language Committee of the Curriculum Development Department in Brunei's Ministry of Education. Thus, unlike other countries in the region in which textbooks are produced solely by local experts, Brunei's English language textbooks are produced in collaboration with foreign experts. As stated earlier, Brunei has traditionally relied on foreign expertise in educational matters due to the lack of skilled manpower in the country's small workforce.

In particular, we investigated Book 3 [See Appendix 1.A], which is comprised of 10 units. Each unit consists of a variety of text types ranging from excerpts, dialogues, short stories, and comics to illustrate specific language skills. The contents of the book range from the natural world (e.g., marine life and weather patterns) to the social world (e.g., stories of young people and their activities). Most of the materials focus on Bruneian characters in presumably typical settings although some feature people from other cultures. We focus on Book 3, which is meant for 14–15-year-olds as we believe this is the age when they start making crucial decisions about future careers and opportunities beyond their school education. Thus, it would be pertinent to investigate gender relations depicted in this book as these aspects may have a profound impact on how these young people view the world, in general, and their attitudes towards gender relations in particular. As pointed out by Phillipson (1992), English learning and culture are inseparable, and the imposition of Western ways of thinking (e.g., 'modernization') are 'a logical process of ELT'. Although this 'imposition' has been vigorously opposed by Philipson as a form of modern-day colonialism, it does point to the notion that language, society, and culture are inextricably linked. At the very least, it is expected that the purported 'modernizing' impact of the English language may have a positive effect on how gender relations are depicted in these textbooks, despite the fact that Brunei's culture is steeped in traditional values and conformist norms.

Previous Studies

Islam and Asadullah (2018) state that two theories of gender stereotypes are applicable within an educational institution. The Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes three types of environmental structures in schools: imposed, selected, and constructed. In imposed environmental settings, teachers, curricula, textbook content, and the class environment are all forced upon a child regardless of his/her personal preference. In such a setting, they develop gender perceptions based on what they learn through the curriculum, teachers, and other mechanisms at school (Bussey & Bandura, cited in Islam & Asadullah). The Hidden Curriculum Theory helps us understand how gender stereotyped attitudes are reproduced in an imposed environment in schools. It maintains that the school curriculum teaches something beyond the scope of the existing (formal) curriculum which is often implied and delivered through textbooks, teachers, and other instruments (Kelly & Nihlen, cited in Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Motivated by the social cognitive and hidden curriculum theories of gender stereotypes, numerous studies in different contexts have examined

teaching and learning materials to analyze the extent of gender stereotyping in textbooks. Among the earliest studies is Czaplinski's (1972) research which found substantial imbalance in favor of males (63% to 37%) in gender representation in textbooks in the US from 1940-1971. A similar study conducted by Davis and McDaniel in 1999 found little change in the male-female proportion (61% to 39%) for textbooks that appeared between 1972-1997. Indeed, a review of studies on gender representation in textbooks from various countries by Blumberg in 2007 reveal that the "second generation of studies" from the early ones more than three decades ago show "a near glacial change of pace" (p.33) in terms of the persistence of gender bias in textbooks in both developing and developed countries.

A considerable amount of research has also been conducted on gender representation in textbooks in various Muslim majority societies from the 1980s onwards (Alrabaa, 1985; Zeenatunissa, 1989; Hamid, Yasin, Bakar, Keong & Jalaludin, 2008; Hall, 2014; Hameed, 2014, Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016; Sulaimani, 2017; Sulaimani & Elyas, 2018; Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Sultan, Shah, & Fazal, 2020; Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020). Islam and Asadullah (2018) compared textbooks in four Muslim societies (Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). They found that the Malaysian and Indonesian textbooks display "a more egalitarian representation of females than their South Asian counterparts, Pakistan and Bangladesh" (p.17), thus highlighting the diversity that exists in the Muslim world in terms of gender relations. Nevertheless, despite the differences that are inherent in each Muslim society due to varying cultural and social norms, the findings of these studies, irrespective of time and context, are generally similar. They can be summarized as:

- (i) Relative underrepresentation as well as poor quality of representation of females.
- (ii) Over-representation of males in all categories, especially in the category of professional occupations.
- (iii) Activities of females were service-oriented whereas men were in power-oriented activities.
- (iv) Female attributes were mostly passive (e.g., *modest, kind, etc.*) while attributes for males portray them as active agents of society (*brave, truthful, etc.*).
- (v) Males were often referred to first, thus suggesting the secondary status of females.

The findings of studies on gender representation in textbooks in Muslim societies and elsewhere thus suggest that the imbalance and stereotyping of females and males are consistent across the world, and over time, as stated earlier by Blumberg (2007). A recent longitudinal study by Koster (2020) on textbooks in the Netherlands from 1974-2009 and 2011-2017 also confirm the existence of this stubborn persistence of gender imbalance in textbooks, even in a mainly egalitarian society. She found that although there was a balanced representation of gender overall, women were still backgrounded over male firstness, and female professional names appeared less frequently than male names, even in the recent materials (2011–2017).

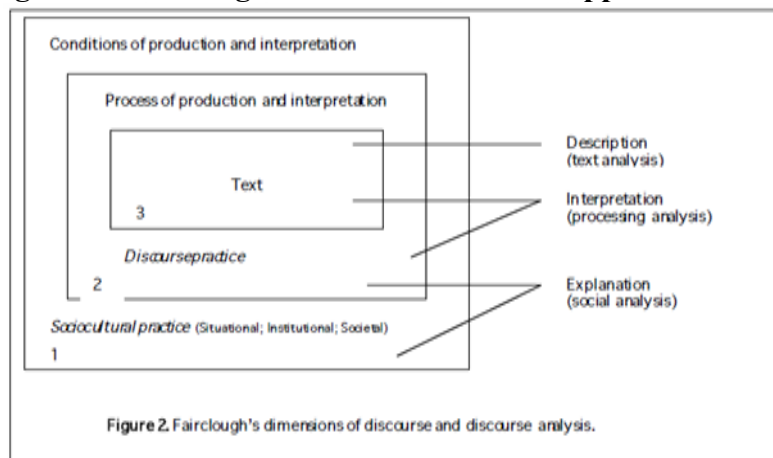
However, Wharton (2005) revealed that that have also been recent efforts to uplift the status of females in textbooks which have resulted in an increase of depiction of negative attributes for males. Boys are often described as *rude, mean, rough, sick, wicked, and deceitful* etc. A recent study by Curaming and Curaming (2020) in the Philippines also found the presence of a greater number of negative characteristics for boys, thus accumulating an impression on the reader that girls are "decidedly more likeable than boys". Rather than promoting gender equality, a reverse gender disparity in favor of girls may be an outcome of this biased representation which may

adversely affect boys' self-esteem and their school performance. Gender-biased representation is therefore greatly damaging, especially on impressionable young minds, and educators should strive to eradicate any instances of gender bias in learning materials.

Methodology

Discerning the patterns of gender relations in these textbooks calls for the use of a two-pronged approach that entails analyzing the contents of textbooks. First, we do a quantitative content analysis, which the *Sage Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* defines as “a quantitative process for analyzing communicative messages (to) ...determine the frequency of specific ideas, concepts, terms, and other message characteristics...in order to describe or explain communicative behavior” (Allen, 2017, n.p.). Secondly, we undertake a qualitative approach using discourse analysis. We borrow from Norman Fairclough's multi-dimensional approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which combines the micro, meso, and macro-levels of analyses (Fairclough, 2001; 1989). On the micro level, the focus is on analysis of “patterns of texts” (Hoey, 2001); at meso-level, the analysis of the discursive practice (interpretation); and at the macro-level, the analysis of social practice (socio-historical analysis). See Fig. 1 below:

Figure 1: Fairclough's Multi-dimensional Approach to CDA



Source: Fairclough (1995, p. 98)

Patterns of text refer to “ways in which the different parts of a text fit together” and form a “network of relations” by aggregation and reiteration (Scott & Thompson, 2001, p. 5). It parallels the assumption that social behavior and interactions are patterned, not random. In CDA the coherent patterns of images discernible in a particular “text world” (Gavins, 2007) are not accidental; they are an outcome of social processes that operate within and reflect existing power relations. The analytic task entails uncovering the sources or agents of power and the dynamics of power relations that enable particular patterns of behavior or characteristics. Illuminating the socio-historical context is essential to decode the overall meanings and implications of the patterns. It is along this line that this study traverses.

Textbook is taken here not just as means to transmit knowledge, but also as a social practice, or as explicitly stated by Klerides (2010) and Shaver (2011) in the title of their respective works, they take “textbook as discourse”. Our main concern here is the macro-level analysis of the text patterns generated by micro-level analysis, which is accomplished through the quantitative

content analysis. The meso-level analysis of discursive practice cannot be covered here as it entails the readers' (students') understanding and engagement with the texts. This is beyond the scope of our present study.

In our study, we first identify and count pictorial and textual references relevant to gender relations in each of the ten units or chapters in the textbook. Then we classify them into male and female. This is to determine the proportion of visibility accorded in the textbook to male and female characters (See Table 2 below for the results). Next, we code for the activities or work done by each of the male and female characters. This is to find out the patterns of roles played by male and female characters (See Table 3 for the results). The third step entails coding for the words and phrases and overall context that describe the personalities, behavior, and abilities of all male and female characters to create a composite character sketch (See Table 4 below for results). This is to ascertain the overall attributes readers are exposed to, and by implication, that which serve as model to emulate or avoid.

The final step involves CDA. It corresponds to Fairclough's interpretation and explanation stages (refer to Figure 1 above). This is where we put in contexts—historical and institutional—and offer our interpretations of the possible meaning and implications of the patterns identified in the first three steps above.

Findings and Discussion

Table 2 below shows the quantity of pictorial and textual representations of male and female characters in the textbook. Pictorial texts are those that are visually perceptible as male or female, whereas textual texts refer to references in names, words, phrases, and characteristics attributable to male and female. According to *On Balance: Guidelines for the Representation of Women and Men in English Language Teaching Materials*, the visibility of women in textbooks is important because "(t)he images and language which are used in teaching, and the extent to which learners can identify with them, have an important effect on how well people learn" about gender relations (Florent et al., 1994, pp. 112–113). Our findings show that 57% of over 150 gendered pictures in the textbook are male and 43% are female. Of the ten study units in the textbook, six are male-dominated [See Appendix 1.B for an example], two are female-dominated and the other two are balanced overall. In terms of textual representations, it is almost balanced with 52% of references are for male, while 48% are for female. It is notable that of the 10 study units in the textbooks, there are six that are male-dominated, two female-dominated [See Appendix 1.C for example] and two that are almost equal overall. But if we isolate the textual references from pictorial, there are more units that are female-dominated with six, while there are only 3 male-dominated and one balanced one [See Appendix 1.D for example]. This means that while males are clearly dominant visually, textual references are more balanced between male and female characters [See Appendix 1.E]. Noting that pictorials or visuals were added by illustrators and the written texts were chosen or written by the authors themselves, we can infer possible intent among authors to achieve a more balanced rendering of male and female representations. But given the greater visibility of the pictures vis-à-vis the textual references, it may give off an impression, as suggested by the notion of "hidden curriculum", of male's greater importance that trumps the weight of the more balance male-female textual references.

Table 2: Pictorial & Textual Representations of Gendered Characters

UNIT	MALE		FEMALE		OVERALL ASSESSMENT
	Pictorial	Textual	Pictorial	Textual	
1	11 (32%)	1 (33%)	23 (68%)	2 (67%)	Female-dominated pictorial Female-dominated textual Female-dominated overall
2	18 (62%)	4 (36%)	11 (38%)	7 (64%)	Male-dominated pictorial Female dominated textual Male-dominated overall
3	24 (59%)	2 (40%)	17 (41%)	3 (60%)	Male-dominated pictorial Female-dominated textual Male-dominated overall
4	12 (57%)	2 (33%)	9 (43%)	4 (67%)	Male-dominated pictorial Female-dominated textual Balanced overall
5	10 (59%)	9 (90%)	7 (41%)	1 (10%)	Male-dominated pictorial Male-dominated textual Male-dominated overall
6	22 (92%)	4 (44%)	2 (8%)	5 (56%)	Male-dominated pictorial Female-dominated textual Male-dominated overall
7	7 (70%)	3 (100%)	3 (30%)	0	Male-dominated pictorial Male-dominated textual Male-dominated overall
8	18 (56%)	0	8 (44%)	3 (100%)	Male-dominated pictorial Female-dominated textual Male-dominated overall
9	2 (40%)	2 (100%)	3 (60%)	0	Female dominated pictorial Male-dominated textual Almost Balanced overall
10	19 (43%)	1 (50%)	25 (57%)	1 (50%)	Female-dominated pictorial Balanced textual Female-dominated overall
TOTAL	143 (57%)	28 (52%)	108 (43%)	26 (48%)	Male-dominated pictorial Balanced textual Male-dominated overall

Table 3 below compares the activities of male and female characters. It is important to examine what they do or what roles they play in the “text world”, for it indicates the measure of importance accorded to males and females. They also send aspirational, subliminal messages which students may pick up. Gender biases may be reinforced by what students can more readily see in the textbooks. A number of points are notable in this table. First, five of the study units are balanced, showing equally active, favorable, or stereotypical roles for male and female characters. The other five units favor males, with wider-range, more active and higher-status roles ascribed to them. Second, assigned roles for men and women mostly conform to traditional expectations; females generally do the service work, household chores, etc., whereas males do leadership and proactive roles such as businessmen, money lenders, etc. However, there are also some notable female characters who break gender stereotypes by being a radio broadcaster, environmentalist, and reporter. [See appendix 1.F]

Table 3: Activities of Male and Female Characters

Unit	Assessment of Activities Active/Passive; Capable & Productive?	Overall Assessment
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both male and female activities are stereotypical male/female roles; ▪ wider range of activities for male but no notable accomplishment for both male and female 	Stereotyped, but balanced
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both male and female characters are active, there are more female characters who do productive activities. ▪ Activities of both male and female characters are equally typical and gender-stereotyped 	Stereotyped, but almost balanced; leaning a little towards female dominance
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wider range of activities among males than for female. ▪ Male are portrayed as more capable: businessman, money lender, labour advocates. ▪ Females are doing household chores and talking about shopping. 	Stereotyped; Male-dominated
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are more male characters that do capable things like reading, playing instrument and singing ▪ It is notable that the main featured character who is a well-known public figure, a newscaster, is a woman. 	Balanced
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both male and female characters are doing very notable things. 	Male-dominated but females are also shown capable
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whatever males do, also females do, including fighting. 	Balanced and non-stereotypical role
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Only man is portrayed as capable; ▪ no female character 	Male-dominated
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balanced, both male and female characters are shown capable 	Balanced
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More males are portrayed active and capable; ▪ one female character is also shown capable 	Male-dominated, but simply because of number; female character is also shown capable
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male is shown active & capable; female passive 	Male-dominated

Table 4 below shows the composite characterization of male and female characters. Looking at the patterns of attributes given to male and female characters allows us to see the big picture of how gender relations are portrayed in the textbook. We may infer from such patterns the gender-related tendencies or preferences of the authors of the textbook. It is noteworthy that six of the ten study units in the textbooks show balanced characterizations of males and females, both in positive and negative attributes. Three units favour males, while one favors females. Given the prevailing patriarchy that enables the preponderance of texts that favor males, which could have been chosen for inclusion in the textbooks, this finding suggests the authors' deliberate efforts to achieve a balanced portrayal of gender-relations. It is unlikely to be accidental. The negative attributes are also fairly equal for male and female. Being violent, hot-tempered, bossy, and authoritarian, qualities that are normally associated with males, also characterize some female characters in the textbook. This raises the question of whether being balanced is enough for the cause of gender equality. It may be a step in the right direction, but it seems this is not enough. The existing default locates females at a much lower position. Anyone who is in a deeper rut requires more positive energy to get out than one who is closer to the surface. Just as a similar

amount of negative characterization would push females deeper in the perception abyss than it would male counterparts, females would also need a greater amount of positive characterization than males to attain a similar level of uplift.

Table 4: Composite Attributes of Male and Female Characters

Unit	Male	Female	Assessment
1	<p>(positive attributes) responsible, savvy in budgeting, inquisitive, works hard in school, friendly, careful with money, calm, decisive, patient, polite</p> <p>(negative attributes) careless, can be tardy, sells counterfeit products</p>	<p>(positive attributes) responsible, savvy in budgeting, supportive of family members, punctual</p> <p>(negative attributes) rather vain, spendthrift, dependent on others when caught in a prickly situation, indifferent attitude</p>	<p>Overall equal but female characters stereotyped as ‘supportive of family’ (positive) or ‘vain’, ‘spendthrift’, and ‘dependent on others’ (negative).</p>
2	<p>(positive attributes) seems fond of granddad, suggests new things to him, concerned about keeping fit</p> <p>(negative attributes) resistant to change, lazy, has no motivation to keep fit</p>	<p>(positive attributes) seems fond of grandma, suggests new ideas, appreciates her grandmother’s cooking, respects her views</p> <p>(negative attributes) resistant to change</p>	<p>Overall equal.</p>
3	<p>(positive attributes) hardworking, reflective, responsible, a selfless character, helps exploited children, a role model, charitable, does charity works, compassion, helpful, a responsible citizen, interested in science</p> <p>(negative attributes) a heartless character, runs an illegal business, forces underage children to work, irresponsible business owner, ruthless, runs a ‘sweatshop’</p>	<p>(positive attributes) hardworking, shows sense of responsibility towards younger siblings, grateful, resilient, reflective, strong-willed</p> <p>(negative attributes) appears to be interested only in superficial things e.g. shopping for clothes</p>	<p>Overall favours males</p> <p>Females again stereotyped as ‘interested only in superficial things’ (negative).</p>
4	<p>(positive attributes) confident, has a good memory and good concentration skills</p> <p>(negative attributes) somewhat rebellious, defies mother’s command, rude (to some extent)</p>	<p>(positive attributes) friendly, she always come prepared, very professional</p> <p>(negative attributes) none detected</p>	<p>Overall favours female</p> <p>Male character has more negative attributes.</p>
5	<p>(positive attributes) patient, willing to compromise</p> <p>(negative attributes) troublemaker, mischievous, passive</p>	<p>(positive attributes) friendly, hardworking, very professional, inquisitive</p> <p>(negative attributes) authoritarian, violent</p>	<p>Overall equal but negative attributes of ‘authoritarian’ and ‘violent’ given to female character.</p>
6	<p>(positive attributes) patient, ‘fun’ teacher; Friendly, inquisitive</p> <p>(negative attributes) unable to control his students, lacks discipline himself (e.g. puts feet on desk in class), lacks discipline, is rude to Mr. Teacher, hot-tempered, reacts to violence</p>	<p>(positive attributes) friendly, inquisitive</p> <p>(negative attributes) lacks discipline, rude, hot-tempered, bossy, prone to violence</p>	<p>Overall equal</p> <p>Negative attributes given to all the male and one female character.</p> <p>Female character given attributes traditionally associated with males (lacks discipline,</p>

			violent, bossy, hot-tempered.
7	(positive attributes) hardworking, resourceful, reflective, realist, self-sacrificing (negative attributes) lacks ability to adapt to new surroundings, blames “other countries” fatalistic about the nation’s future		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Favours males ▪ Only males depicted.
8	(positive attributes) pro-active, hardworking, polite, appears to be receptive to listen to fishermen’s plight, concerned about the pollution problem (negative attributes) denies there is a pollution problem, appears to be untrustworthy	(positive attributes) concerned about family’s & community’s health due to pollution, hardworking, good listener, shows empathy towards Hiyoshi & the Minimata community (negative attributes) none detected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall equal but female characters given traditionally female attributes (‘shows empathy’, ‘cares for family’).
9	(positive attributes) concerned about marine life & sea pollution, hardworking and leader	(positive attributes) concerned about marine life especially turtles, shows empathy, hardworking (helps out at turtle conservation centre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall equal but again female character given female attributes (‘shows empathy’).
10	(positive attributes) family man, loves his immediate & extended family, courageous (dares to defy white supremacist rules) (negative attributes) shows impulsive behaviour (buys Cadillac without consulting his wife)	(positive attributes) well-behaved, observant about what is going on with the family due to father’s act of buying Cadillac (negative attributes) none detected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Favours male; Male character has wider-range of attributes (positive & negative).

Table 4 also shows the persistence of stereotyped perceptions of both men and women emanating from traditional expectations. Examples for females include being caring, resilient, hardworking, family-oriented, responsible, well-behaved, respectful to elders, vain, superficial, and dependent. Naila Kabeer reminds that gender stereotyping is onerous as it “reinforces traditional gender roles in society, and acts to limit the kinds of futures that girls are able to imagine for themselves.” (2005, p. 17). There are limited female characters who break gender stereotypes in this textbook—very professional, inquisitive, authoritarian, violent, bossy. On the whole, the textbook aspires to be balanced in treating males and females, and the findings indicate it succeeds in that endeavour, but the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes that describe female characters indicate the limits of the efforts to attain gender equality in the textbook. With the baseline or existing gender relation highly skewed in favor of males in Brunei, as in many other countries, it requires more than balanced treatment of male and female characters. Textbooks should contain more stereotype-breaking female characters to tilt the scale and attain a more balanced relation.

Discourse Analysis

According to Annis Shaver’s *The Textbook as Discourse*, “(i)nterpreted in the flow of history, textbooks can provide important insights into the nature and meaning of a culture and the social and political discourses in which it is engaged” (Shaver, 2011, blurb). As discourse, textbooks simultaneously reflect and help create reality. Being educational tools, they are expected to portray and transmit reality, both past and present. At the same time, they are designed to realize or achieve certain goals. Textbooks, in short, are past-, present- and future-oriented all at the same

time. It is within this frame and following Fairclough's approach explained above that we critically analyze the contents and implications of this textbook.

The content analysis above reveals that, notwithstanding the persistence of the gender-stereotyped or traditional roles accorded to male and female characters in the textbooks, the gender relations are mostly balanced. This key finding raises the question of whether enduring gender-stereotypes can co-exist well with a fairly balanced treatment of gender relations. Doesn't one contradict or cancel out the other? This seemingly paradoxical situation calls for explanation and teasing out of its implications. The continuing predominance of stereotyped-gender roles in the textbooks may be easily explained as a mere reflection of reality on the ground. That is, gender stereotypes remain pervasive in many countries, including Brunei. According to established measures of gender inequality, despite the significant gains it is still a long way to go to close the gender gap. WEF's Gender Gap Report 2020, for instance, approximates that at the current rate of progress, it will take countries in Western Europe, the world's best ranked region, an average of 54 years and those in East Asia and the Pacific 161 years to attain gender parity. Globally, the figure stands at 99.5 years (World Economic Forum, 2020). What is rather surprising, at first glance, is the fairly evenhanded treatment of males and females in the textbook analyzed here considering Brunei's rather low ranking at 95th among 153 countries in the WEF's Gender Gap Index. Also, against the prevailing perceptions of gender inequality among Muslim-majority countries (Doğan, 2016; Gouda & Potrafke, 2016; Raja, 2017) and being known internationally as an orthodox or conservative Islamic state (Müller, 2018), Brunei is easily grouped with other Muslim-majority countries where women are perceived to be unequally, even badly, treated. The negative international media coverage of Brunei in the past decade on account of the implementation of Shari'a, among other things, exacerbates outsiders' perception of Brunei as a retrogressive country and as one which is viewed as oppressive to women and the LGBT community (Khan, 2019).

The dissonance between the fairly balanced gender relations in the textbook analyzed here and Brunei's ranking in the WEF's Global Gender Gap Report may be explained by the very low ranking (148 out of 153) Brunei obtained in political empowerment. This offsets Brunei's creditable ranking in two other key indicators: educational attainment and economic participation and opportunity. As noted earlier, women in Brunei have comparable, even more favorable, accomplishments in education, business, and employment in civil service than men. However, women are notably absent in the political spheres, particularly at the highest level. In other words, practice and expectations of women's participation within the socio-economic sphere is long-standing. No such thing can be said in the political domain.

For the purpose of explaining the socio-historical contexts, what holds a significant role is Brunei's neocolonial relations with the UK as the latter's former protectorate for a century. This explains the continuing stranglehold of the British influence on Brunei in various areas including education. This point is evident in the long-standing practice of the MOE to engage educators from the UK to write or prepare English language textbooks, including the one analyzed here. The fairly balanced gender relations in the textbook are likely a product of deliberate efforts by the British authors who have long been exposed to the issues and guidelines on gender equality in teaching materials. As scholars observed, the persistence of the neo- or postcolonial ties and tensions in educational practices is common among former colonies and protectorates, particularly against the backdrop of the globalization-driven calls for educational reforms (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Nguyen et al., 2009; Rizvi, 2007).

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that local educators authoring the textbooks would have precluded the possibility of a fairly balanced treatment of gender relations. Women in Brunei have had a long history of accomplishments and active involvement in various areas, even before independence in 1984. Unlike in many Muslim societies where women are often secluded or segregated and confined largely to domestic roles, women in Brunei, as in the rest of Southeast Asia, have played a wider range of roles in the public and private spheres. Under the British, schools were established that accommodated both boys and girls. The roots of the impressive proportion of women in the civil service and their notable accomplishments in education may be traced to decades before the independence. Despite the glaring absence of women in the political sphere and at the top-most level of bureaucracy, the socially conditioned expectations of respectable roles for women are widely shared. We surmise that this could translate into the treatment of balanced gender relations in writing textbooks had local authors with comparable educational training been given the chance.

Furthermore, as Brunei shares with the broader “Malay World” much of its socio-cultural attributes, it may also be relevant to note the long and deep historical contexts of the more egalitarian gender relation in the region. Historians attest that women in Southeast Asia have had a generally more favorable status than their counterparts in other parts of the world, such as South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East. It is claimed that such favorable treatment of women remains evident despite the coming of world religions such as Christianity and Islam, which tend to be compatible with and even supportive of patriarchy (Andaya, 2006; Reid, 1988a, 1988b).

The century-long colonial ties with Britain, however, have had a more profound impact than what is evident in the contemporary educational, socio-economic, bureaucratic, and political practices. As a vehicle for experiencing and imagining ‘modernity’, the colonial experience was a key component in shaping an ambivalent mindset or attitude towards both the “modern” and the “traditional”. Like many Muslim societies that have had a fraught relation with Western modernity, Brunei has navigated through its colonial experience by swinging between the pull of Islamic orthodoxy and the allure of the “West”. This ambivalence may be seen, for example, in the stipulation of Malay as official language and Islam as official religion in the 1959 Constitution, as well as in the promulgation of MIB as the national philosophy in 1984 amid the enduring elite preference for English, the continuing use of the British-inspired legal system and sending young Bruneians to the UK for education. While official declaration is explicit that Brunei is an Islamic and non-secular state, everyday life leaves ample spaces for secular and non-Islamic thoughts and activities, including those that are patently “Western”. The distinction AB Shamsul (1996) makes between “authority-defined” and “everyday-defined” to refer to the gap between what is officially prescribed and what ordinary people actually do or believe in seems to capture the logic of the ambivalent situation in Brunei. In relation to the textbook, the persistence of the stereotyped gender roles may be reflective of the “everyday-defined” reality on the ground, while the fairly balanced gender relations coincide with the “authority-defined”. Or perhaps the situation in Brunei is more complex for a clear-cut categorization to hold. It is even possible that the notion of “ambivalence” operates only in the mind of observers whose preconceived categories allow them to see opposites or contradictions in what many local Bruneians see as dialectical complementarity of differences. This raises intriguing questions and opens up an opportunity to complicate the otherwise static and predictable matrix of “authority” in Brunei that supposedly defines or influences textbooks as a site of knowledge production.

As noted earlier, the MIB as the official national philosophy clearly encapsulates what and who the authorities are in Brunei. Malay language and traditions are upheld as model for socio-

cultural behavior, including gender relations; Islam and the bureaucracy that represents it are the definitive authorities in the religious sphere; and the Sultan is the absolute ruler of Brunei. The three components are very closely entwined. While it is not the same in Malaysia where the constitution conflates being Malay and being Muslim, a huge part of being Malay in Brunei also means being a Muslim. Further, the Sultan as Allah's *khalifah* (vice regent), was declared by the 1959 Constitution as "head of the official religion" (as cited in Müller, 2018a, pp. 148, 155) and serves as protector and promoter of Islam. The primacy of MIB as an "authority-defined" or official philosophy appears to have long seeped through the social or public sphere since its promulgation in 1984 (Müller 2018a; 2018b). However, it remains an open question to what extent MIB has actually permeated the "everyday-defined" in Brunei. As Dominik Müller observes, "the pathways to state-enforced orthodoxy and its social realization can be remarkably flexible and culturally hybrid" (2018a, p. 144). Also, while MIB promotes or envisions "an exclusive, fixed, and cohesive narrative of Malayness,... (w)ithin society...an inclusive, changing, and hybrid discourse of Malayness becomes evident through its broader use and application" (Ho, 2019, p. 148).

The long history of association of Malay identity in the Malaysian peninsula with the upkeep of 'tradition' seems to apply in Brunei as well. This 'tradition' includes hierarchical social relations, patriarchy, and conventional gender roles for men and women (Martin, 2014). It also includes injunction to wear outfits such as, for women, *tudung* (head scarf) and *baju kurung* (flowing or loose, as opposed to body-hugging, dress) in compliance with Islamic teachings to cover the shape and intimate parts of the body. As Islam is not just a religion, as it is in a sense understood in the "West", but a complete way of life; the distinction between "Malay" and "Islamic" cultural practices is often blurred, if considered at all. All these and the seemingly monolithic and pervasive power of the state apparatuses in Brunei gives rise to the impression or expectations of conformity to the "authority-defined" policies and practices, including those involved in education such as textbook writing. We should not forget, however, that everyday life may operate in a more complex manner depending on resources and the shifting or fluid power relations on the ground. The fairly balanced portrayal of males and females in the textbook analyzed here goes against the expectations set forth by the common understanding by outside observers of what Brunei is. It suggests the existence of open spaces in a state-controlled school system that accommodates efforts and progressive aspirations of the authors and the committee of local educators who vetted its contents for a more equitable representation of gender relations.

Conclusion

These findings reveal that male-female relations in the textbook are fairly evenhanded in the depiction of what male and female characters do and how they are characterized as a group. In the latter, the female characters are even portrayed a little more favorably. It is in visibility where male characters have a slight but clear advantage. In addition, the stereotyped or traditional roles ascribed to male and female characters persist in the textbook analyzed, which is favorable to male. Overall, however, the portrayal of gender relations in the textbook is fairly balanced, which is rather surprising considering the pervasive perception of conservatism and patriarchy in many Muslim societies, including Brunei.

The persistence in the textbook of stereotyped or traditional gender roles for males and females, notwithstanding efforts of the authors to attain more equal gender relation, means there is a need for classroom teachers to take a proactive role and have awareness and carefulness when

it comes to their use of such a textbook. Teachers must be taught to be aware of the extent of the gender bias that persists in these textbooks and identify those texts that depicts this bias. They must also teach the students to analyze and detect the discrepancy in gender relations portrayed in the texts. As front liners, classroom teachers have the best position to employ techniques that can minimize the impact of the persistent problems of gender bias in textbooks. The onus is also on textbook writers to engage in more vigorous and conscious efforts to lessen, if not totally eliminate, gender roles stereotypes.

In conclusion, we maintain that examining gender relations in textbooks in cultural contexts like Brunei requires a more nuanced discussion of the social, cultural, economic, and political milieu surrounding a small but multifaceted nation. The findings of this study suggest a more complex role played by the hegemonic power of the Bruneian government as embodied in the MIB in knowledge production about gender relations. Whereas MIB protects and promotes Malay traditions and Islamic orthodoxy, which seem to be both favorable to patriarchy, the fairly equal gender relations in the textbook implies multiple, rather than monolithic, sources of power that shape the knowledge production processes in Brunei. This point may be further explored and tested by examining other issues or areas of knowledge production in Brunei that impacts gender relations in future studies.

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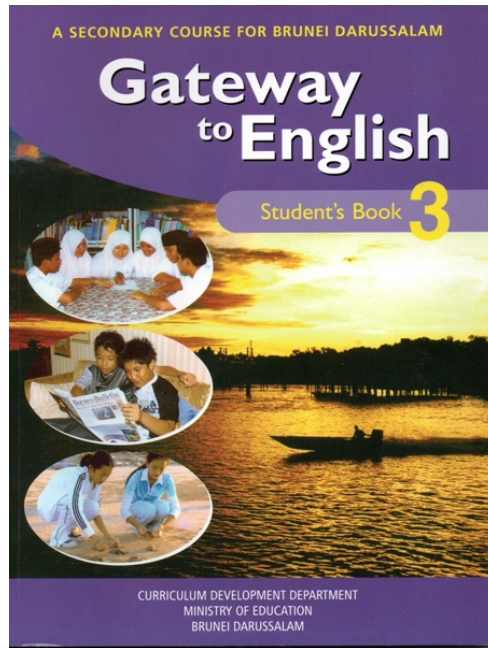
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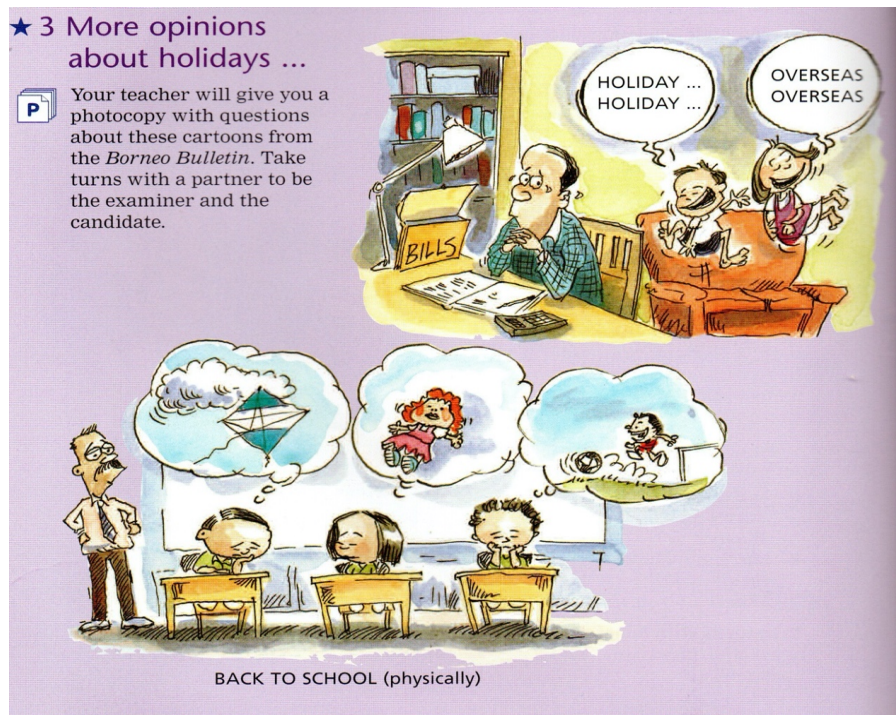
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Appendix 1
1.A Cover of the Book 3 [p. 9]



Source: Gateway to English Student's Book 3. London: Macmillan, 2005
1.B Male-dominated Visually [refer p. 15]



Source: p. 60 Gateway to English Student's Book 3. London: Macmillan, 2005

1.C Female-dominated both Visually and Textually [refer p. 15]

B The dancing cats disease


The fishermen couldn't do anything about the pollution in the sea and it became even more difficult to catch fish. Then some strange things began to happen. My grandmother, Hiyoshi, kept a diary during these years. I have chosen some entries for you to read.

WB Add Hiyoshi's name to the family tree in **Exercise 2, Workbook page 89**. Then read her diary.

1 Hiyoshi Sakagami's diary

10th August, 1952
I was collecting shellfish with my brother (Sakurai) today. We noticed some dead fish lying on the shore. When we got home I told Father (Heizo) about it. He got very angry. He said that years ago, Minamata Bay was famous for its delicious fish, but the pollution from the Chisso factory had spoilt the sea.

18th April, 1953
It's difficult for Father to catch enough fish to sell. Sometimes the sea looks white because of the floating bodies of dead fish. The seaweed is also dead and oyster shells are often empty.



Source: p. 88 Gateway to English Student's Book 3. London: Macmillan, 2005
1.D Female-dominated Visually but Balanced Textually [refer p. 15]

A The Wilson family

1 Eloise's project


Many years ago, Eloise was a young girl living in the United States of America. In 1954, she wrote this description of her family for a school project.

11th July, 1954


My name is Eloise Wilson. I'm ten years old. I live with my family in Bell Street, Toledo, in the state of Ohio, USA. I have lived in Toledo since I was two years old. Before that my family lived with my grandparents in Clarksdale, but I can't remember living there. This is about my family and their dreams for the future.

The family of Eloise Wilson


Wilbert Wilson
This is my dad. He's 36 years old. He's an engineer and he's mad about cars. My father's very funny and he loves to joke around.
His dreams: 1 'To live in a world where there is no prejudice.'
2 'To own a luxurious car.'




Dee Wilson
This is my mum. She's 34. Mum is a housewife. She loves cooking and is the BEST cook in the world.
Her dream: 'To buy a nice house in a good district.'



Wilma Wilson
This is my sister. She's 12 and goes to Toledo School, like me.
Her dream: 'To go to university one day.'



Eloise Wilson
This is ME! My real name is Eloise but everyone calls me 'lois. I like playing with my friends and writing stories.
My dream: 'To fly in an aeroplane.'



Source: p. 110 Gateway to English Student's Book 3. London: Macmillan, 2005

1.E Male-dominated Visually, but Female-dominated Textually

UNIT 8 Michiko's story

A Minamata, Japan

1 'Konichiwa'



Konichiwa. My name is Michiko Sakagami and I live in a small coastal town in Japan called Minamata. Once, our town had a big problem. I'm going to tell you what happened ...

Find out more about where Michiko comes from in **Exercise 1, Workbook pages 88–89.**

2 In 1908

Let's go to Minamata in 1908 when my great-great-grandfather Sugimoto and his son Heizo were fishermen. At that time it was a small fishing village and most people were poor, but there was always plenty of fish to eat. In fact, people said that the best fish in Japan came from Minamata Bay.

Around this time, the traditional way of life in Japan was changing. In 1908, many people in Minamata were excited because change was coming to their town too.



WB (a) Write Michiko, Heizo and Sugimoto's names in the family tree in **Exercise 2, Workbook page 89.**

WB (b) Find out more about Minamata's new factory in **Exercise 3, Workbook page 90.**

Source: p. 85 Gateway to English Student's Book 3. London: Macmillan, 2005

1.F Female Characters [refer p. 18]

B Live on air

1 Radio requests

Kristal FM is a popular radio station in Brunei. Jenny Malai Ali is one of Kristal FM's presenters. Here is Jenny introducing the programme *Afternoon Drive*.




Good afternoon. It's Jenny Malai Ali here. Welcome to *Afternoon Drive* on Kristal FM. We've got an exciting afternoon planned for you, so stay tuned ...

p. 39

1 Saving turtles

Chun Tee's sister, Li Wen, is also interested in the marine environment. She is reading a leaflet about turtle conservation. This is what part of the leaflet said ...

I'm only 14, but can I help?



Millions of turtles used to roam the world's oceans. Today, the turtle population has decreased and they are in danger of becoming extinct.


Like many countries, Brunei Darussalam now has a turtle conservation programme. Its aim is to protect the turtles which come to our beaches to lay their eggs.

We need volunteers to help with the conservation programme. If you would like to take part, please contact the Department of Fisheries for more information: Tel. 238 2068.

p. 101

C Breaking the news

1 Siti Hj Mahmod



I'm Siti Hj Mahmod and I'm a reporter with the Brunei Press. You can read my articles under the by-line **CT Hj Mahmod**.

My friends sometimes ask me if it's an interesting job. My answer is 'Yes!' There are many exciting days when something unexpected happens. Then I have to write an article about it within a few hours - sometimes in just a few minutes!

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