



Picturing Stereotypes: A Critical Visual Analysis of a Global Textbook and Its Paradoxical Curriculum Constructions

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Abstract

Aim: This study examines the visual representations of gender in the fifth edition of the Headway Advanced global textbook, focusing on the contradiction between its formal and hidden curricula.

Design: Through a critical visual analysis, this research investigates how images both inside and outside the dedicated “Gender Equality” unit perpetuate stereotypes, therefore undermining the textbook’s explicit equity goals.

Results: Of the 294 images in the textbook, fifty either reinforce or defy gender stereotypes, 72% of which reinforce them. They depict women primarily as caregivers, emotional, and passive, while men are portrayed as aggressors, leaders, and providers. Although the dedicated unit visually challenges some stereotypes, it also contains contradictory imagery.

Originality: The study concludes that this visual hidden curriculum sustains harmful stereotypes, with significant implications for learners in contexts like Cambodia. It calls for increased teacher awareness and critical engagement with textbook materials to disrupt these implicit messages and advance gender equity.

Keywords

1. Hidden curriculum
2. Gender stereotypes
3. Formal curriculum
4. Critical visual analysis
5. Textbook analysis

**AI Declaration**

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used Google Gemini 2.5 to check spelling and grammar. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.



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Introduction

Gender representations are not limited to one sex; they are societal problems with the potential to influence both men and women. These representations are the ways we construct ideas about gender through signifying practices and symbolic systems; wherein deliberate decisions are shaped by ideologies (Sunderland, 2015). This study uses Cambodia as an illustrative context because of the particular ways its educational system and cultural norms intersect with global textbook content. The Headway series is widely adopted there, yet Cambodian teachers tend to avoid critical engagement with cultural content (Lim & Keuk, 2018), and government-endorsed materials carry heightened authority as implicitly certified knowledge (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). Crucially, the textbook's visual patterns—women as caregivers, men as authoritative—mirror traditional Cambodian gender codes of conduct such as the *Chbab Srey* and *Chbab Proh* (Bunry & Walker, 2022), making the potential for reinforcement particularly salient.

Textbooks are authoritative cultural tools that shape students' understanding of gender and identity (Lee, 2019; Sunderland, 2015). As Akbari (2008, p. 647) notes, they function as "textbook-defined practice" that dictates what most teachers teach and how they teach, making them de facto arbiters of legitimate knowledge (Bernstein, 1975) and, given their pervasive presence in English as a Foreign/ Second Language (EFL/ESL) contexts (Harwood, 2014; Tomlinson, 2010, 2015), vehicles for ideologies that students may absorb without question (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015; Smith, 2022).

This study is grounded in poststructural feminist theory, which holds that gender is a socially produced category maintained through repeated performances (Butler, 1990; Oakley, 2015; St. Pierre, 2000). Within educational research, it aligns with critical feminist pedagogy, which resists patriarchal systems (Kenway & Modra, 1993) and challenges the historical prioritization of class over gender (Luke & Gore, 1992; Weiler, 1991). Since Vandrick (1994) identified sexism in ESL materials, research has shown that feminist approaches can transform student perspectives (Nagashima & Lawrence, 2023) and strengthen teacher education (Rio, 2016).

This study applies that lens to textbook imagery, investigating how visual representations function pedagogically to either challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes. It examines the tension between a global textbook's formal and hidden curricula. The study asks how the visual representations of gender in units inside and outside the dedicated "Gender Equality" unit contribute to a hidden curriculum that contradicts the textbook's stated equity goals. The primary argument is that the textbook's visual representations create a hidden curriculum in tension with its formal content on gender equality. The study pursues three aims: (a) to identify and categorize gender constructions in textbook imagery, (b) to analyze how these constructions appear across all units, and (c) to consider implications for learners, using Cambodia as an illustrative context. It does not measure actual learner impacts, which would require experimental methods beyond its scope;



however, it draws on established research (Ambady et al., 2001; Frawley, 2005; Good et al., 2010; Islam & Asadullah, 2018) to suggest potential implications.

Gender Stereotypes

The study of gender bias is traceable to Lakoff's (1973) foundational work, which argued that women are confined to subordinate roles through linguistic discrimination—both in how they are socialized to use language and in how language itself is used to refer to and address them. This study treats stereotypes not as static distortions but as dynamic constructions.

Coined by Lippmann (1922), the term stereotype refers to cognitive shortcuts that enable rapid social judgments (Casad & Wexler, 2017). This study understands gender stereotypes through three interconnected dimensions. Cognitively, they function as trait ascriptions mandating masculine norms (e.g., aggression, independence) for males and feminine norms (e.g., nurturance, emotional expressiveness) for females (de St. Aubin & Yadlosky, 2019; Kollmayer et al., 2018). Socially, stereotypes dictate behavior, rewarding conformity and penalizing deviation (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Prentice & Carranza, 2002); even apparently positive stereotypes become oppressive by restricting the full range of human experience (de St. Aubin & Yadlosky, 2019). Discursively, following Butler (1990), they are performative productions that actively shape gendered identities rather than merely reflecting pre-existing differences. This multidimensional understanding explains why gender stereotypes remain so persistent. Cognitive filtering may cause contradictory evidence to be ignored or forgotten, protecting the original stereotype (Wigboldus et al., 2003) while their prescriptive and discursive dimensions embed them within social structures and cultural practices. Matsuno (2002) outlines four primary forms of gender bias: the underrepresentation of women, their confinement to a narrow set of occupations, their depiction in stereotypical roles, and the use of sexist language.

Gender stereotypes also operate prescriptively. Taylor (2003) notes that people absorb cultural gender messages and use them as yardsticks for judging themselves and others, and Ellemers (2018) questions whether gender differences are truly innate or are instead created by stereotypes. Female students are underestimated in STEM (Leslie et al., 2015); male students are rated higher in biology despite equal performance (Grunspan et al., 2016), and instructors perceived as male receive better evaluations for identical teaching (MacNell et al., 2015). The same devaluation extends to hiring (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012) and creative work (Proudfoot et al., 2015). Identical achievements are therefore judged differently depending on the attributed gender—patterns that compound the documented effects of gender bias on girls' academic achievement, self-esteem, and aspirations (Ambady et al., 2001; Frawley, 2005; Islam & Asadullah, 2018).

This prescriptive dimension penalizes deviation in both directions. Women in male-dominated fields can be perceived as competent but cold (Badgett & Folbre, 2003; Fiske et al., 2002) while agentic women are socially disliked (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Men face equivalent pressure; those who display communal traits invite devaluation (Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010), and fathers who prioritize childcare are penalized for the same behavior praised in mothers (Riggs, 1997).

Gender stereotypes are disseminated through media—commercials, news, and published imagery—which persistently portray men in high-status roles and women in



caregiving ones (Ellemers, 2018; Matthews, 2007), a pattern amplified by digital algorithms (Cohn, 2015). This study contributes to that literature by examining stereotypes in a global ELT textbook from a curriculum standpoint, treating textbooks not as neutral delivery tools but as sites where knowledge is shaped by values and power (Barthes, 2018; Bitzer, 2011).

Textbooks and Gender Stereotypes

Cultural artifacts shape identity and perception (Hausfather, 1996). Within education, textbooks function as authoritative guides that represent societal values and influence how students perceive gender roles (Huang & Liu, 2024; Lee, 2019; Widodo, 2018). The selection or exclusion of gender representations establishes behavioral models (Canale, 2021; Lee, 2014a) that explicitly and implicitly reinforce gendered beliefs and dominant norms (Macalister, 2011). Given their documented tendency to reinforce bias rather than advance equality (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Durrani et al., 2022), textbooks should actively challenge prejudice and drive social reform rather than passively convey information.

Critical examination of textbook content is therefore essential (Harwood, 2014; McGrath, 2004), and scholarly interest in gender representation in EFL/ESL textbooks has grown markedly (Alexopoulos et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Early analyses documented bias against women in materials from the 1960s–80s (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Porreca, 1984), after which a trend toward gender fairness emerged (Jones et al., 1997). Contemporary publishers now enforce equitable representation guidelines (Richards, 2014); nonetheless, widespread gender bias persists—a contradiction the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017, 2020) has repeatedly flagged.

Guided by the principle that gender-equitable representation must be a core criterion in textbook evaluation (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017), this article investigates visual gender stereotypes in a textbook explicitly designed to promote equality. As stated by Fairclough (1989, p. 52), “not all photographs are equal: any photograph gives one image of a scene or person from among the many possible images. The choice is important, because different images convey different meanings.” Research confirms that textbook images act as vehicles for a hidden curriculum (Hintermann et al., 2014; Lee, 2014b; Torres, 2015), which reinforces students’ existing gender beliefs (Lee, 2014b), and that mere exposure leads to bias adoption (Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2023)—a problem compounded by educators’ uncritical use of materials (Kollmayer et al., 2018). The result is that textbooks designed to foster equality can inadvertently undermine it (Good et al., 2010).

Formal Curriculum and Hidden Curriculum

The term curriculum derives from the Latin for a “course to be run” (du Toit, 2011, p. 68) and defines what is considered valuable to experience and become (Parkay & Hass, 2000), thereby determining criteria for legitimate knowledge (Bernstein, 1975). The formal curriculum provides a documented framework of goals and methods (Penner-Williams, 2010); the hidden curriculum denotes the unintended, implicit lessons embedded in a school’s culture and materials (Boostrom, 2010; Jackson, 1970). Both are ideological, reflecting and reproducing dynamics of class, race, gender, and power (Apple, 1990; White, 1983). This study examines that tension in one widely used global textbook.



Context: Gender, Education, and Textbooks in Cambodia

Gender norms in Cambodia are deeply embedded in traditional codes of conduct; women are historically governed by the Chbab Srey (Women's Code of Conduct) and men by the Chbab Proh (Men's Code of Conduct), didactic poems that remain widely regarded as relevant to Khmer culture (Bunry & Walker, 2022; Ramage & Ramage, 2011). Survey data illustrate their persistence: 52% of respondents believed women should tolerate domestic violence for family unity and 44% endorsed a husband's right to punish his wife (Ramage & Ramage, 2011) while large proportions of young women (40% aged 13–17; one-third aged 18–24) justified beatings in various circumstances (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014). Masculinity is closely associated with toughness and aggression, normalizing male violence as a response to perceived disrespect (Ramage & Ramage, 2011).

Cambodia has made commitments to gender equity in education, including curriculum reforms aimed at eliminating bias and improving portrayals of women (NGO Education Partnership, 2024), yet challenges persist—most notably the continued underrepresentation of female students in STEM programs (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2024). Textbook analysis is particularly salient here because government-approved materials carry heightened authority, making them potential sites for either advancing or undermining equity goals.

English language classrooms in Cambodian tertiary institutions rely heavily on internationally imported textbooks, including the Headway series by Oxford University Press (Lim & Keuk, 2018). Likewise, Cambodian language schools routinely foreground the Headway titles in their promotional material as a marker of quality provision. The concern is that without critical engagement, assigned textbooks are effectively endorsed by institutions, leading students to internalize their content as established truth (Curdtt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). This risk is amplified in Cambodia, where teachers tend to avoid cultural discussions owing to limited knowledge (Lim & Keuk, 2018).

This study does not claim that Headway causes or uniquely determines Cambodian gender attitudes. Rather, global textbooks carry embedded ideologies that may interact with local norms. When visual patterns align with traditional Cambodian gender expectations, they may reinforce them; when they challenge them, they may open alternative possibilities. The analysis identifies what messages the textbook brings into Cambodian classrooms while recognizing that their effects are mediated by teachers, students, and broader cultural context.

Methodology

Corpus

The research examines the fifth edition of Headway by Soars and Soars (2019), an advanced-level global textbook used by juniors at arguably Cambodia's most renowned language school, where it serves as the core curriculum driving learning outcomes, course outline, and assessment methods. Its inclusion of a dedicated unit on gender (unit 08) provides a distinctive opportunity to identify paradoxes, or gaps, between the overt written curriculum and the covert hidden curriculum.



From the teacher's guide and the unit's content, the formal curriculum presents gender as a significant yet non-deterministic social construct influencing identity, careers, and family dynamics. Readings on female pilots—noting that only “4,000 out of 130,000” globally are women—and on house husbands illustrate workforce divides and non-traditional roles. Students analyze “typical gender traits” through a quiz and debate, then evaluate contemporary challenges such as gender-neutral parenting. Engaging with examples of prejudice, such as passengers “hostile to the idea” of women pilots, aims to cultivate the understanding that gendered roles are subject to change and individual agency.

Method

This study applies critical visual analysis within a content analysis methodology. Content analysis, a prevalent technique in educational research, offers a systematic approach for scrutinizing diverse materials to pinpoint specific features and deduce their deeper significance and is frequently applied to uncover bias or unequal representation (Ary et al., 2019). It distinguishes manifest content, the directly observable and quantifiable data, from latent content, the deeper symbolic meaning that must be interpreted (Lune & Berg, 2017). Its categories may be developed inductively from the data, deductively from existing theory, or through a hybrid of the two (Strauss, 1987).

Analyses of gender in educational materials typically combine attention to the frequency of male and female representations (manifest content) with interpretation of the roles, activities, and visual signals attached to them (latent content) (Furukawa et al., 2025). The present study follows that pattern; frequencies are reported in order to establish how codes are distributed across the corpus, but the analysis itself is qualitative and interpretive, since it is the underlying assumptions about gender that the study seeks to expose (Nazari, 2007).

As imagery has become central to communication and to our construction of reality (“Visual Culture”, n.d.), critical frameworks have been developed for analyzing visual culture, and how social constructs such as gender are formed within this pervasive visual landscape (Fleetwood, 2016). Critical Image Analysis, adapted from Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis, uncovers hidden power dynamics and gender positioning by interrogating agency, status, and non-verbal cues, exposing trends in representation that are otherwise easily missed (Cohen et al., 2018; Giaschi, 2000) while acknowledging that any interpretation remains incomplete (Schroeder, 2006). Following Schroeder and Borgerson (1998), analysis begins with close description of visual elements—form, color, and, in photographs, vantage point—then broadens to internal components and external context before arriving at the image's symbolic connotations.

Guided by these perspectives, the analysis followed an explicit eight-step procedure. First, the research question was defined to establish the central inquiry into gender representation. Second, a coding scheme was developed to categorize the visual cues that signify gender and the stereotypes attached to them. Third, the unit of analysis was fixed and the corpus selected. Every image in the textbook was screened, and an image was retained for coding only where it depicted one or more human figures whose gender was visually identifiable and whose role, activity, or bodily presentation could be read as either conforming to or departing from a gender stereotype. Images containing no human figures



(landscapes, objects, maps, and diagrams), and those in which figures were too small, too distant, or too indistinct to code reliably, were excluded. The textbook contains 294 images in total; of these, fifty met the criteria and constitute the analyzed corpus. The remaining steps structured the coding: for the dedicated “Gender Equality” unit (Unit 08) and then for the remaining units, images were examined first for those that challenge stereotypes—establishing what the formal curriculum makes explicit and how consistently the other units follow it—and then for those that conform to stereotypes, which exposes the paradox between the formal and hidden curriculum. Finally, recurring visual patterns were grouped into themes and interpreted to show how they contribute to a hidden curriculum. Although set out sequentially, the process was iterative; coding required moving back and forth across the corpus, and each image was read for both its manifest content (what is physically shown—who, what, and where) and its latent content (the underlying, implicit message about gender). The procedure is qualitative throughout, chosen for the flexibility needed to surface non-obvious meanings in the visuals (Schreier, 2012).

Coding Scheme

Tables 1 and 2 offer operationalized codes for identifying feminine and masculine stereotypes within the textbook images. While an image may carry multiple messages, the goal is to assess the primary stereotype being communicated, ensuring that specific visual cues justify the chosen code. Three stereotype categories widely documented in the literature did not occur anywhere in the analyzed corpus: the woman as a “damsel in distress” requiring male rescue (FEM_DAMSEL), the man whose value is tied to muscular physical display (MASC_APPEARANCE), and the emotionally restrained or stoic man (MASC_STOIC). Because no image was coded to them, they are not carried into the stereotype synthesis presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Findings and Discussion

The Formal Curriculum and Its Paradox

Of the 294 images in the textbook, fifty met the coding criteria, and each of these either challenged or reinforced established gender stereotypes. An image is categorized as challenging a stereotype when it depicts an individual (e.g., a male figure) engaged in an activity or displaying a trait conventionally associated with another gender (e.g., exaggerated facial expressions of fear). Conversely, an image reinforces a stereotype when it portrays an individual (e.g., a female figure) conforming to a trait or role traditionally ascribed to their own gender (e.g., working as a nurse). Of these fifty images, thirty-six (72%) reinforced established gender stereotypes and fourteen (28%) challenged them. Notably, six of the fourteen stereotype-defying images were concentrated in Unit 08, the unit explicitly dedicated to “gender equality”. This unit functions as the formal curriculum’s direct advocacy for gender equality, showcasing women in stereotypically masculine situations (e.g., operating excavators, working as pilots) (Figure 1) and men in traditionally feminine settings (e.g., sewing, nurturing children) (Figure 2). This indicates the unit’s objective is to impart the socially important knowledge that gender stereotypes should be questioned. It appears consistent with Richards’ (2014) observation that modern textbook

**Table 1**

Common Feminine Stereotypes (Coded as: FEM_[CODE]) (synthesized from Drew, 2023; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Planned Parenthood, 2024)

Code	Stereotype Category	Operational Definition (What to look for)	Example Visual Cues
FEM_CAREGIVER	Domestic Role	Woman is depicted as the primary or natural caregiver for children or family.	Interacting closely with children, feeding a baby, comforting someone, located in a domestic setting like a kitchen or nursery.
FEM_PASSIVE	Personality Trait	Woman is portrayed as submissive, quiet, deferential, or lacking agency.	Body language is closed or small (arms close to body, head tilted), not speaking while men are, looking at a male figure for guidance.
FEM_EMOTIONAL	Personality Trait	Woman is defined by her emotions, portrayed as overly emotional, irrational, or hysterical.	Crying, exaggerated facial expressions of fear/surprise/joy, being comforted for emotional distress, contrasted with a “rational” male figure.
FEM_APPEARANCE	Physical Appearance	Woman's value is tied to a prescribed, often sexualized, physical ideal: thin, graceful, youthful.	Emphasized body (thin waist, long legs), wearing makeup and styled hair, wearing dresses or “feminine” clothing, posed in a delicate or graceful manner.
FEM_WEAK	Physical/ Character Trait	Woman is portrayed as physically or psychologically fragile, vulnerable, or incapable.	In a position of needing rescue, struggling with a physical task, depicted as smaller or weaker than male counterparts, fainting.
FEM_DOMESTIC	Occupation/ Domestic Role	Woman is associated with domestic chores and the private sphere of the home.	Cooking, cleaning, sewing, shopping, depicted primarily in a home environment.
FEM_NURTURING	Occupation	Woman is in a nurturing or supportive profession, or this is her primary character trait.	Depicted as a nurse, teacher (especially young children), nanny, or volunteer. Shown comforting or caring for adults.

**Table 2**

Common Masculine Stereotypes (Coded as: MASC_[CODE]) (synthesized from Drew, 2023; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Planned Parenthood, 2024)

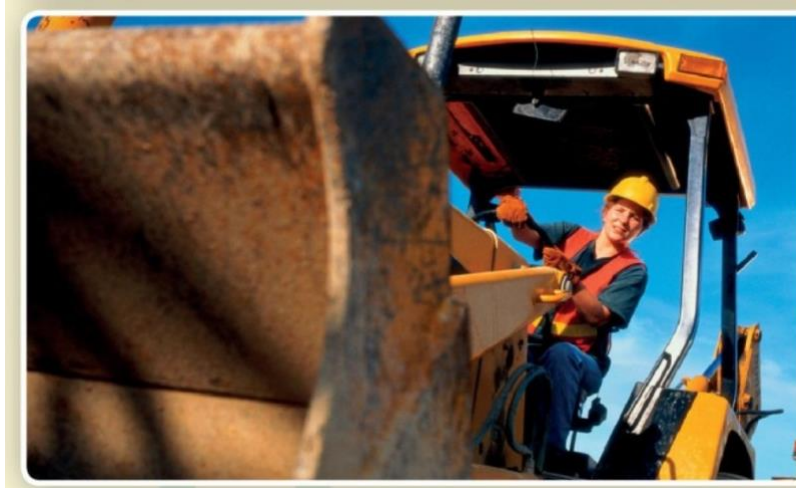
Code	Stereotype Category	Operational Definition (What to look for)	Example Visual Cues
MASC_LEADER	Personality/Role	Man is depicted as a natural leader, in a position of authority, or making decisive commands.	Centrally positioned, giving orders, wearing a suit or uniform of authority, standing while others sit, directing a group.
MASC_AGGRESSIVE	Personality Trait	Man uses aggression, dominance, or physical force to solve problems or express himself.	Clenched fists, angry facial expression, fighting, yelling, posturing in a threatening way, holding weapons.
MASC_PROVIDER	Role	Man is depicted as the primary financial provider (“breadwinner”) for the family.	In a business suit, working at a desk, handling money, depicted as successful in a career, contrasted with a domestic female partner.
MASC_HANDYMAN	Domestic Role	Man is associated with manual labor, fixing things, and technical tasks.	Working on a car, using tools, doing home repairs, building something, depicted in a garage or workshop.
MASC_COMPETENT	Occupation	Man is in a position of technical expertise, authority, or in a traditionally male-dominated field.	Depicted as a doctor, engineer, pilot, scientist, or CEO. Shown in a context that highlights their competence and intelligence.
MASC_ACTIVE	Narrative Role	Man is the active agent in the narrative; he drives the plot and takes action.	On a journey, exploring, conquering, pursuing a goal, physically moving through a space, the “doer” in the scene.

authorship is increasingly shaped by guidelines mandating equitable gender representation, resulting in more consciously inclusive and less biased materials.



Figure 1

Example of a Woman Being in Stereotypically Masculine Settings in the Formal Curriculum



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 67), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

Figure 2

Example of a Man in Stereotypically Feminine Settings in the Formal Curriculum



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 68), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

As suggested by Alsubaie (2015), the influence of the hidden curriculum must be carefully deduced or inferred as it is comprised of unspoken assumptions and expectations that are never formally communicated. A closer examination of Unit 08 reveals an internal contradiction as it also contains imagery that perpetuates the very stereotypes it aims to



challenge. Juxtaposed with progressive depictions of male caregivers and female pilots are conventional images of women as waitresses or in domestic settings with children, and boys exhibiting aggression through fighting or weapons (Figure 3). This inconsistency introduces a hidden curriculum within the unit itself, subtly reinforcing traditional gender norms that undermine its explicit equity-focused objectives. Across all units, the thirty-six stereotype-reinforcing images were evenly divided by gender—eighteen depicting female figures and eighteen depicting male figures—confirming that both genders were equally often represented in stereotype-conforming ways.

Figure 3

Examples of Gender Stereotypes in Unit 08



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., pp. 73, 74), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

The Hidden Curriculum

A paradox emerges between the textbook's formal curriculum and its hidden curriculum, as images that subtly reinforce gender stereotypes about both genders recur throughout the material. Among the eighteen images coding female stereotypes, the caregiver role was the most frequent (FEM_CAREGIVER, six images), followed by nurturing professions (FEM_NURTURING, three), while the remaining categories were distributed thinly: FEM_PASSIVE, FEM_EMOTIONAL, FEM_APPEARANCE, and FEM_DOMESTIC (two images each) and FEM_WEAK (one). The prevalent depictions of images containing women caring for children (Figure 4) must be interpreted within the patterned distribution of caregiving across the textbook. The issue is not that any individual image of a mother with a child is inherently problematic; caregiving is a valuable human activity. Rather, the concern emerges from systemic imbalance, for caregiving is almost exclusively associated with women across the analyzed images while men are rarely shown in nurturing roles. From the perspective of poststructural feminist theory, this repetition may perform the cultural work



of naturalizing the association between women and caregiving, potentially contributing to the discursive construction of motherhood as women's primary identity and responsibility. Also, this pattern gains further significance when considered alongside the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes. As noted earlier, individuals who adhere to established gender norms may receive social approval, whereas those who deviate from them might encounter criticism and sanctions (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). By repeatedly depicting women as caregivers and omitting men from such roles, the textbook not only reflects but actively reinforces the prescription that child-rearing is women's work and that men who might seek nurturing roles risk social devaluation.

Figure 4

Example of FEM_CAREGIVER



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 76), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

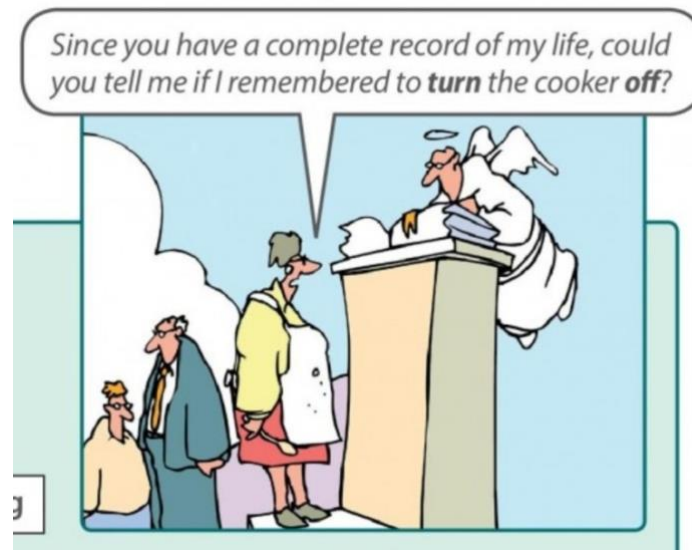
Figure 5 combines two female stereotypes into one image: a domestic homemaker, identified by her apron and ladle, and a psychologically dependent woman who must ask a man for reassurance about a domestic chore. Despite the humorous intent, the underlying message reinforces the stereotype of female incompetence and domestic role in a family. Occupational depictions further reinforce gender stereotypes by assigning women to nurturing and supportive professions such as teaching and nursing (Figure 6). While this study cannot establish a direct causal link between textbook imagery and Cambodian students' career aspirations, these portrayals might have significant cumulative implications. Cambodia is a nation where there is underrepresentation of women in STEM sectors and fewer girls than boys show an interest in these professions (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2023). Between 2013 and 2021, the gender gap in Cambodian STEM bachelor's enrolment widened, with men initially twice as likely as women to enroll, and by 2019–2021 over 2.5 times more men than women choosing STEM majors (MoEYS, 2024). This gender-specific stereotype does little to inspire Cambodian women's career



ambitions and could keep deterring them from the fields. Simultaneously, male students may be dissuaded from entering care-giving professions for fear of being devalued, leading to a loss of potential resources and talent in those sectors.

Figure 5

Example of a Combination of FEM_WEAK and FEM_DOMESTIC



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 65), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

Figure 6

Example of FEM_NURTURING



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 53), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

The textbook's exaggerated emphasis on women's emotionality and appearance (Figure 7) is also worth discussing. The former depicts women as overly scared of a spider or excessively joyful over their favorite boy band. The latter, featuring Eliza Doolittle from George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, presents a more complex case requiring contextual interpretation. While the play is widely lauded as a critique of class and gender—culminating in Eliza's feminist assertion of independence when she declares, "I'm not afraid of you, and can do without you" (Shaw, 1913, Act V)—the isolated image could be interpreted differently. Removed from the play's arc, it depicts a woman in an elegant white dress holding a cup, her appearance carefully styled and presented as a focal point, which aligns with the study's coding categories by linking women's value to prescribed physical ideals of grace and beauty. These depictions, when viewed within the broader visual patterns where women are repeatedly associated with emotional excess and physical appearance, contribute to a cumulative message that women's primary characteristics are emotional reactivity and decorative value. The prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Prentice & Carranza, 2002) means such representations do more than describe; they subtly instruct women on expected behavior and appearance while potentially signaling that deviation may invite social penalty.

Figure 7

Examples of FEM_EMOTIONAL and FEM_APPEARANCE



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., pp. 19 & 20), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

Turning to the eighteen images coding male stereotypes, aggression was by far the most dominant (MASC_AGGRESSIVE, seven images), ahead of the provider role (MASC_PROVIDER, four) and leadership (MASC_LEADER, three), with MASC_COMPETENT (two) and MASC_HANDYMAN and MASC_ACTIVE (one each) completing the set. The most dominant male stereotype is thus the idea that men resort to violence and aggression as their primary means of expression or conflict resolution (Figure 8). This is visually reinforced by images of men wielding weapons—whether for hunting or warfare—and having angry faces and clenched fists. Ultimately, these constant portrayals can lead to the damaging assumption that men are irrational and that violence is essential to their existence; furthermore, according to Canale (2021) and Lee (2014a), this portrayal can serve as a

**Figure 8**

Example of MASC_AGGRESSIVE



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 15), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

model, leading men to normalize such behavior. In the context of where the book was used, a pervasive societal norm in Cambodia links masculinity with toughness, normalizing male violence in response to anger or perceived disrespect, as evidenced by high rates of acceptance among Cambodian men (Ramage & Ramage, 2011). This is further reinforced by the widespread belief that wife-beating is justifiable for domestic transgressions, a view tragically internalized by many women who endure violence to preserve their families (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014).

Further, in mixed-gender images (Figure 9), men are typically shown as the aggressors—yelling or menacing—while women are shown as passive and defensive, remaining silent with their arms held close. The textbook's visual narrative aligns with the phenomenon described by Rudman and Phelan (2008), wherein agentic women incur social dislike. This seems to resonate with a report by the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs (2014) stating that a majority of both men (62.6%) and women (57.1%) endorse the patriarchal notion that men should hold ultimate decision-making authority in family matters. By portraying such scenarios without critique, the images subtly communicate that a woman's appropriate response to male assertiveness is the surrender of her own voice and power.

The idea that men are natural leaders is consistently reinforced by various visuals in the textbook (Figure 10). In meeting scenes, it is almost customary to see a man standing and directing the occasion. Another notable example is an image depicting four leaders, all of whom are male, as if women leaders are non-existent. By consistently showcasing only men in positions of power, the textbook implicitly supports the very barrier it ought to be helping to dismantle. This approach normalizes the exclusion of women from leadership, presenting the "glass ceiling" as a natural, unchangeable reality rather than a consequence of social bias. Research indicates that gender bias in educational settings can significantly curtail girls' perceived potential and career aspirations (Ambady et al., 2001; Frawley, 2005; Islam & Asadullah, 2018); consequently, providing visible examples of female leaders in the



Figure 9

Example of a Combination of FEM_PASSIVE and MASC_AGGRESSIVE



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 16), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

Figure 10

Example of MASC_LEADER



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 51), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

curriculum is critical to fostering their ambition and inspiring them to pursue leadership roles.



Men are routinely shown in their traditionally male-dominated professions, mirroring the stereotypical placement of women. While images of men as doctors and scientists (Figure 11) are not prevalent they are used and should be counterbalanced by images of women occupying the same positions. However, outside of a single gender-balance unit, the material's implicit instruction maintains that professions are gender-specific, thereby suggesting that those who disregard these occupational gender-norms are deviant. The persistence of this stereotype, which continually reinforces the notion of men's inherent scientific superiority, offers a plausible explanation for the patterns identified in studies such as those by Grunspan et al. (2016) and Leslie et al. (2015), who revealed a deeply ingrained gender bias in STEM perception.

Figure 11

Example of MASC_COMPETENT



Note. Adapted from *Headway Advanced* (5th ed., p. 96), by L. Soars and J. Soars, 2019, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2019. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research examined a global textbook to reveal a potential conflict between the formal and hidden curriculum through an analysis of its images. Although the textbook shows some progress in challenging gender stereotypes, particularly in the eighth unit, the visuals still widely and implicitly assign specific roles and personalities to different genders. This imbalance between images that defy stereotypes and those that conform to them could send subtle messages, thereby perpetuating the cycle of gender stereotyping. Since textbooks are a powerful tool for transmitting the hidden curriculum (Hintermann et al., 2014; Lee, 2014b), more focused effort is required to fully leverage their capacity to combat prejudices and foster social change (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Durrani et al., 2022).

This study is subject to some limitations. First, it analyzed visual representation but did not measure learner outcomes or teacher mediation of materials; claims about potential impacts are therefore suggestive rather than demonstrative, and context-specific studies would be needed to verify these mechanisms in Cambodian classrooms. Second, the analysis focused on a single textbook edition, and patterns may differ across levels or editions. Third, while Cambodia provides an illustrative context, the study does not claim



that the textbook's effects are unique to Cambodia or that the patterns identified fully explain Cambodian gender dynamics. Finally, the analytical framework is binary. A more comprehensive critical approach would ask not only how stereotypes restrict men and women, but also how non-binary and third-gender identities are stereotyped or excluded in global language learning materials. This is ultimately a question of methodological coherence; the poststructural feminist position adopted seeks to problematize binary gender representations, yet the coding scheme operationalized gender as a binary without examining how those binaries are actively produced in the textbook. Future iterations would benefit from a coding approach that asks not only which binary category a figure is assigned to, but how the textbook's visual grammar works to naturalize those categories—an approach more fully consistent with the Butlerian framework this study invokes.

While the research involves subjective interpretation, inferring and deducing meaning is essential for uncovering a curriculum's underlying messages (Alsubaie, 2015). Although existing studies have addressed gender stereotypes in textbooks, especially in Asia (e.g., Vu & Pham, 2023; Yang, 2016), this study offers a distinctive perspective by visually demonstrating the paradox between the formal curriculum's explicit content and the hidden curriculum's implicit messages. The goal is not a definitive reading of any individual image but the identification of systematic tendencies across the corpus; the argument rests on the cumulative weight of patterns rather than on any single image.

A crucial next step may involve considering how the primary consumers of textbooks can bring the hidden curriculum into the open. As Kollmayer et al. (2018) note, teachers' uncritical use of materials can reinforce their effects, so teacher training is needed to help educators identify social issues in textbooks and transform them into valuable learning opportunities. The discussion can also be broadened through public pedagogy—education that happens outside formal schooling (O'Malley et al., 2010)—by developing lessons that encourage students to notice stereotypes in their environments, such as social media, film, and music videos. Regardless of whether future textbooks achieve a fair balance in gender depictions, no longer allowing this critical issue to remain within the hidden curriculum will represent a major step toward a more equitable society.



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