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# Let's not *straighten* things out

An analysis of heteronormativity in two Swedish EFL textbooks

Lisa Erlman

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## Abstract

Heteronormativity entails the binary gender construction and the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. When ELT reading material is heteronormative, non-binary (gender identity other than male or female) and non-heterosexual pupils are ostracised. During the past decades, gender-bias in ELT reading materials has been extensively studied, and recently researchers have started paying attention to the portrayal of sexuality in the texts as well. Among the plethora of studies of gender and sexuality in textbooks, two issues have been neglected: (1) the presence of non-binary gendered characters, (2) the inseparability of gender and sexuality. In the present study, these two areas of heteronormativity are acknowledged, by the inclusion of the analysis of ungendered characters and by viewing (hetero)sexuality as a gender role. Using quantitative and qualitative analysis of two recently published Swedish EFL textbooks, gender visibility and gender roles are examined. Visibility is examined through the presence of female, male and gender neutral nouns and pronouns; gender roles are examined through critical analysis of occupations, physical appearances and sexual identities of characters of different genders. The results show that present day EFL textbooks still contain heteronormative material, partly in visibility and mostly through stereotypical gender roles. The results generate discussions on gender inclusion, gender neutrality and gender binarity. It is concluded that the textbooks are heteronormative and that gender neutrality in EFL textbooks might be preferable. Finally, some comments on pedagogical undertakings and suggestions for further research are put forth.

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. The context of this study .....	1
1.2. The present study .....	2
1.3. Definitions .....	3
<b>2. Background and theory .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Literature review .....	5
2.1.1. Visibility .....	5
2.1.2. Gender roles .....	7
2.1.3. Sexuality .....	9
2.2. The absent research .....	10
2.3. Poststructuralist feminism .....	11
2.4. Foreign language textbooks.....	12
<b>3. Method and material.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1. Method.....	13
3.1.1. Visibility .....	14
3.1.2. Gender roles .....	15
3.1.3. Binariness .....	16
3.2. Material.....	17
3.2.1. Outlooks On .....	18
3.2.2. Solid Gold .....	18
<b>4. Results and Analysis.....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1. Visibility .....	19
4.2. Gender roles .....	20
4.2.1. Occupations .....	21
4.2.2. Physical appearances .....	22
4.2.3. Sexuality .....	22
4.3. Binary gender norm .....	23
<b>5. Discussion .....</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1. Methodological considerations.....	24
5.2. Neutrality or visibility .....	25
5.3. Leaving gender binariness.....	26
<b>6. Concluding remarks.....</b>	<b>27</b>

6.1. Conclusion .....	27
6.2. Pedagogical implications.....	28
6.3. Future research .....	29
<b>Reference list .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Primary sources .....	31
Secondary sources .....	31
<b>Appendix 1: <math>\chi^2</math>-tests .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Gender specific occupations.....</b>	<b>5</b>

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. The context of this study

Gender dichotomy and gender roles are everywhere in society: the girl and boy sections in toy stores, people assuming that a surgeon is male, asking a pregnant person whether the baby is a boy or a girl, calling a sexually adventurous man ‘stud’ (positive) and woman ‘slut’ (negative), teaching girls that ‘boys who pull your hair just fancy you’, telling girls to stop wearing ‘provocative’ clothing because the boys cannot control themselves. The list goes on and on. These gender roles narrow the *acceptable* ways of being female or male, as well as exclude people who do not adhere to the norms or identify with the binary gender set. The issues of sexism and heteronormativity are not just present in society at large, but also as structures in language, since “[l]anguage is a part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of some sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 19). Moreover, Pawelczyk and Pakuła (2015) affirm that “[n]o language (including that produced in the foreign language learning environment) is ever produced in a social vacuum” (p. 193), meaning that social phenomena are always present in the production of language.

Due to gender’s close connection to language, it is also an important issue when learning a new or foreign language. “When people learn and use a foreign language [...] [t]hey may undergo different degrees in their understanding and expression of gender” (Safiyiddin, 2008, p. 208). As such, the genders and gender roles available, depicted, and discussed in the language classroom, must allow for every student to feel included and let them explore their own gender identity when, and through, learning a new language. With this in mind, it is not surprising that research on gender and sexism in and around the language classroom is widespread.

Since the 1970s, a multitude of research on gender in ELT (English language learning and teaching) material has been conducted (Erlman, 2015; Pakuła et al., 2015; Sunderland, 2000a), where the conclusion has often been that women are portrayed as lesser than men (Erlman, 2015; Sunderland, 2000a). Recently researchers have started to include sexuality in their analysis of gender-bias in textbooks (e.g. Gray, 2013; Pakuła et al., 2015, Pawelczyk & Pakuła, 2015), where the results often indicate that non-heterosexual identities are virtually absent. As such, results from previous research often echo Sunderland and McGlashan’s

(2015) conclusion that there are “very very few representations of gay relationships in language textbooks” (p. 18). Furthermore, Pawelczyk, Pakuła and Sunderland (2014) insist that the lack of research “in this area contributes to the maintenance of the status quo of heteronormativity” (p. 61).

Research on heteronormativity is needed on a global scale. Studying gender and sexuality in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom in Poland, Pawelczyk and Pakuła (2015) argue that Poland deserves special attention as it demonises both gender and sexuality. Whilst this might be true, we need not neglect countries on the basis that gender and sexuality are not tabooed. Sweden is often referred to as an inclusive country when it comes to gender and sexuality (e.g. Armbrecht, 2015, July 8; Breene, 2016, October 26). Moreover, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2013), “[n]o one in school should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, [...] transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, [...] or to other forms of degrading treatment” (p. 4). It should be evident that reading material made for Swedish schools should not be discriminating either, and it is thus important that these issues are studied.

## 1.2. The present study

In the paper at hand, the binary gender division (i.e. the idea that woman and man are the only available gender identities) is viewed as a social construction which excludes non-binary people (i.e. people who identify outside the categories ‘woman’ and ‘man’). The binary genders also allow for the distinction ‘heterosexuality’ to prevail and dominate social norms, which in turn ostracises non-heterosexual individuals. This study is permeated by the notion that these two issues, alongside other stereotypical gender roles, are viewed as heteronormative social and lingual constructions.

Notwithstanding the large body of previous research, few studies have included the analysis of non-binary characters or viewed sexuality as a gender role. Although the community acknowledges the inseparability of gender and sexuality (e.g. Pakuła et al., 2015), they are continuously studied as separate entities (Erlman, 2015; e.g. Pakuła et al., 2015). By analysing sexuality as a result of gender binarity, I aim to bridge the still existing gap between gender and sexual identity in EFL textbook research. I also aim to challenge the binary gender norm by not only examining the binary gender set, but also include an analysis of gender neutral characters and terminology.

In the present study, gender visibility and gender roles in two Swedish EFL textbooks will be analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The textbooks will be the material used to try to answer the following questions regarding current EFL textbooks:

- (1) To what extent are female, male and gender neutral nouns and pronouns visible?
- (2) In what way are gender roles portrayed, i.e. what is expected from people with different gender identities? Looking at (a) occupational roles, (b) physical appearances, (c) sexual identities.
- (3) Are male characters still dominant in visibility and gender roles?
- (4) Are gender neutral characters given any proper space, or simply mentioned in passing?
- (5) In what manner is heteronormativity reflected or challenged?

Following these introductory notes, the paper at hand is structured as follows: First, a selection of previous research is reviewed and the theoretical background and framework is laid out. Second, a presentation of method and materials is provided. Third, the results, and analyses thereof, are demonstrated. Fourth, methodological considerations are discussed, and the issues of gender binarity as well as gender invisibility are examined. Last, some concluding remarks from the study at hand, and what is needed from both teachers and researchers in the future, are presented.

### 1.3. Definitions

*Gender* — a cultural categorisation, is different from *sex* — a biological categorisation. Even if they are both culturally constructed, sex is defined by biological matters (e.g. hormones, genitalia), whereas gender is defined by cultural matters (e.g. looks, behaviour). Moreover, there is a distinction between *gender assignment*, *gender identity*, *gender role*, and *gender expression*. *Gender assignment* is closely connected to, and might be misconstrued as, sex. It “occurs at [and sometimes before] birth and is based on perceived physical characteristics. However, we all assign gender, all the time, to people we meet; we do this so unconsciously that we only notice ourselves doing it when we make a ‘mistake’” (Paechter, 2001, p. 47). *Gender identity* is what a person identifies themselves as, and is here seen to be the ‘true’ gender. *Gender role* is an expectation from a person based on their assigned gender, e.g. how they should look or dress and how they should act. Stereotypical gender roles are considered to reinforce the separation of the binary genders. *Gender expression* is the way someone’s gender is expressed through e.g. looks and behaviour. When someone identifies as non-binary,

their gender expression could still be aligned with the gender roles based on their assigned gender. It should thereby be impossible to assume someone's gender based on their name, looks or behaviour, since their gender identity can only be revealed when asked.

*Heteronormativity* has sometimes been used as a term for implicit heterosexism (e.g. Nelson, 1999; Pawelczyk & Pakuła, 2015). In this study, heterosexism is merely seen as a part of heteronormativity. *Heteronormativity* here entails a binary gender set, i.e. the view that man and woman are the only two available or acceptable genders. This in turn implies that heterosexuality is the only available sexual identity. To discuss — or even conceptualise — heterosexuality, we require the notion of binary genders. Therefore, when the term *heteronormative* is used in this paper, it includes the idea of gender dichotomy, and “the cultural expectation that people [...] adhere to the gender role” (Jones, 2016, p. 211).

The way in which we talk about sexuality is based on the binary gender division, and categorising people as heterosexual strengthens the binary gender division. Saying that girls should wear pink or that being a surgeon is a man's job contributes to the separation of genders. Comparably, expecting a man to be sexually interested in women contributes to the division of the ‘two’ genders. If we see gender roles as categorisations of attributes that we expect from people according to their assigned gender, and that these roles are what strengthen and separate the two normative genders even further, then sexuality should definitely be seen as a gender role. Firstly, men are normatively expected to be interested in women, and vice versa — thus expectations of the attribute ‘heterosexuality’. Secondly, defining the normative sexual identity as heterosexuality, requires ‘opposing’ genders — thus separating the ‘two’ genders.

In this paper, *gender neutral* and *ungendered* are seen as interchangeable. Some researchers have previously used the term ‘de-gendered’ (e.g. Mustedanagic, 2010), which will not be used here since it can be interpreted as the removing of gender, contrary to ‘ungendered’ which indicates that the word has not yet been gendered.

Moreover, to avoid exclusion of different identities, *non-binary* here refers to people who identify with other gender identities than male or female, such as transgendered, agendered, bigendered, pangendered, intergendered, demi-gendered, etc. (see e.g. Genderqueer and Non-Binary Identities & Terminology, 2015, July 24). The term ‘transgendered’ is sometimes used in the same sense as non-binary is used here (e.g. Jones,

2016). However, as transgendered could be associated with identifying with gender ‘opposite’ to one’s assigned gender, *non-binary* is preferred in this study. Likewise, the term *non-heterosexual* here refers to sexual identities other than heterosexuality. Also, sexuality and sexual identity are used interchangeably, indicating that sexuality is not a ‘preference’ or a choice, but rather a part of our identity.

## **2. Background and theory**

### **2.1. Literature review**

During the past four decades gender and sexism in EFL textbooks have been extensively studied (Pakuła et al., 2015). Researchers have focused on gendered vocabulary (male generics, e.g. man instead of human, male biased terms, e.g. bachelor vs spinster); gender portrayal in dialogues (who is given the most space, who discusses what topics); gendered portrayal in illustrations (who is portrayed and how); gender roles, e.g. occupations, appearances, activities, and characteristics; visibility (or rather female invisibility), e.g. looking at the occurrences of male and female characters, nouns, and pronouns. There are many aspects of gender in EFL textbooks that have been thoroughly analysed. However, very little research has been conducted focusing on sexuality (Erlman, 2015).

In order to see the current trends in research, most of the reviewed material is research from the past decade. Several of the reviewed articles are conducted in countries where one might expect less female visibility than in e.g. Sweden. Nonetheless, as these studies are parts of the most recently produced research in the field, they are still considered relevant for this literature review. Below, I will review previous research on gender visibility, gender roles, and sexuality. Here, sexuality will not be discussed as a gender role, since previous researchers have dealt with it as something other than a result of the separation of genders.

#### **2.1.1. Visibility**

Gender visibility refers to the extent to which different genders are visible in textbooks. Visibility could be looked at through, for example, the gender of main characters, the pronouns used, the gendered words used — including male generics, and firstness (i.e. which gender is stated first in a mention of two people, e.g. *Ross and Rachel*, *Mum and Dad*, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, and *his or her*). Previous researchers have looked at these (and many more) aspects of gender visibility in EFL textbooks (Erlman, 2015). Sunderland and McGlashan

(2015) assert that studies on language textbook continuously show an imbalance between male and female visibility: “older and sometimes more recent content analyses of language textbooks have consistently shown more actual and fictional male than female characters [...] Linguistic studies have shown, *inter alia*, an imbalance in male–female pronouns, nouns, titles and first names” (p. 18). Yet, the content analyses of gender neutral visibility through e.g. pronouns seems to be missing.

In a recent study, Hall (2014) analysed both visibility and gender roles in two EFL textbooks used in Iranian secondary schools. The occurrences of males and females in texts and illustrations were collected to see gender visibility in the textbooks. The results show that the two textbooks analysed contain more male than female characters in both texts and illustrations. In the texts, there were a total of 740 male occurrences, compared to 469 female occurrences, rendering male characters far more visible than female characters. Similar to Hall’s (2014) study, other research indicates a difference in visibility, with visibility of approximately 3:2 in favour of male characters (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Lee & Collins, 2009). However, Ghorbani (2009) analysed three ELT textbooks used in Iranian language institutes, and found that the visibility of male and female characters in the texts was on average 1:1 in total.

Even if there is a balance in character distribution between male and female characters, results might show more (in)visibility when analysing character presence through gendered (and gender neutral) terminology. When considering gender visibility through the presence of gendered nouns and pronouns, recent research has indicated that there are large discrepancies between the occurrence of male and female nouns and pronouns (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Ullah & Skelton, 2012). Bahman and Rahimi (2010) counted male and female nouns and pronouns in three volumes of an English textbook series taught in Iranian high schools. They found that the ratios of female to male nouns in the textbooks were approximately 1:1.71, 1:3.30, and 1:2.48, providing male gendered nouns with a visibility of 63%–77%, compared to female nouns ranging between 23%–37%. They obtained similar results in the visibility of male and female pronouns, where male pronouns were premiered in the textbooks. Lee (2014), who also analysed gendered pronouns in two Japanese EFL textbooks, found similar results, where male pronouns were more common than female pronouns.

Some researchers have also looked at the use of generic pronouns (e.g. Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Lee & Collins, 2009). A common, yet disputed (Lee & Collins, 2009), generic pronoun is to use the singular *they*. Lee and Collins (2009) found that generic *they* was the most common generic pronoun construction (sixty-five instances) in the ten textbooks they analysed. Moreover they found twenty-five instances of generic *he/she*, and only one instance of generic *he*. In contrast, Barton and Sakwa (2012) found that in the nine sections they examined in a Ugandan ELT textbook, there was a “frequent use of the male pronoun ‘he’ when the [gender] is unstated” (p. 182). However, one could argue that the use of male pronouns genders the person in question.

Research on female (in)visibility in textbooks was a hot topic even three to four decades ago (e.g. Hartman & Judd, 1978; Porreca, 1984), and has been thoroughly studied since. Nonetheless, very little attention has been shown to gender neutral or non-binary characters: “Research on gender and sexuality within the context of schooling needs to pay greater heed to [...] gendervariant, transgendered, and intersexed persons who are currently hidden or ignored by educational researchers” (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, p. 114).

### **2.1.2. Gender roles**

Gender roles might be what first come to mind when discussing gender bias and sexism. As such, they have also been researched in EFL textbooks. When analysing gender roles, researchers have previously gathered data on, inter alia, characters’ occupations, domestic roles, activities, characteristics, and appearances (e.g. Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Hall, 2014; Lee, 2014; Lee & Collins, 2009; Ullah & Skelton, 2012). For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the research analysing occupational roles and physical appearances.

Researchers have concluded that occupational roles in textbooks have been both gender-stereotypical and with less variation in occupational roles for women (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Ghorbani, 2009; Hall, 2014; Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Ullah & Skelton, 2012). Barton and Sakwa (2012) found that, in the nine analysed sections in an EFL textbook, 73% of the occupations were occupied by male characters. They also found that only “two [...] out of the 10 occupational roles listed for women require formal education, while most of the roles for men [...] require higher education” (p. 181). Moreover, Ullah and Skelton (2012) concluded, from the twenty-four textbooks they analysed, that men occupied positions with more authority and power, and women occupied less prestigious positions.

Appearances have been examined through analysing what adjectives are applied to male and female characters, and through analysing illustrations in textbooks. When analysing adjectives attributed to characters of different genders, some researchers have found that male characters are described as strong and tall (Lee, 2014; Ullah & Skelton, 2012), whilst female characters are described by physical shape and attractiveness (Ghorbani, 2009; Ullah & Skelton, 2012).

Holmqvist and Gjörup (2006) categorised a selection of illustrations from three Swedish EFL textbooks by whether they depicted characters in a way that reflected or challenged stereotypical appearances. The results show six pictures categorised as reflecting stereotypes and two pictures categorised as challenging them. Mustedanagic (2010) found similar results, where characters were mostly depicted in stereotypical clothing: “Most of the women were dressed in skirts, dresses and wearing makeup. In the mean time, males wore trousers, shirts and occasionally even ties” (p. 36).

When looks are analysed on the basis of illustrations, the gender of the illustrated person is presumed. Unless it explicitly says that the illustration portrays a specific character who is gendered in the text, to assume the gender of an illustrated character is in itself prejudicing. In Ghorbani’s (2009) study of three ELT textbooks, the procedure of collecting illustrations is presented: “the illustrations related to each reading passage or conversations were examined in terms of stereotypical views of men and women” (p. 10). Nevertheless, to identify the illustrated characters as male or female, Ghorbani presupposes certain stereotypical characteristics of appearances — and thus does not analyse the illustrations’ full gender bias.

Moreover, when gender roles are analysed, researchers have more often than not analysed the roles of male and female characters (e.g. Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Hall, 2014; Lee, 2014; Ullah & Skelton, 2012). Some researchers have noted the roles of characters with ‘unknown gender’ (e.g. Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Mustedanagic, 2010), but these instances are far from the majority of research. Also, when gender roles of characters with ‘unknown gender’ have been noted, they are not necessarily treated as ungendered or non-binary, but as if it cannot be deduced whether the character is male or female (e.g. Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Mustedanagic, 2010).

### 2.1.3. Sexuality

There is little research conducted on the question of sexuality in EFL textbooks (Erlman, 2015; Pakuła et al., 2015). Recently, researchers have started to analyse sexual identities in language learning textbooks (Pakuła et al., 2015), most of whom look at the occurrence of sexual diversity (Erlman, 2015). Pakuła, Pawelczyk and Sunderland (2015) analysed the presence of sexual diversity in five Polish EFL textbooks, and found no “gay characters or characters that could be characterised by an overtly ambiguous identity with respect to their sexuality” (p. 54). Similarly, after examining ten ELT textbooks, Gray (2013) concluded that “LGBT invisibility and pervasive heteronormativity remain entrenched in mainstream ELT materials” (pp. 60f).

A study of sexual identities in foreign language textbooks (other than English), was conducted by De Vincenti, Giovanangeli and Ward (2007). They sought sexual diversity in, inter alia, French textbooks, looking at both inclusion of sexual identities and their portrayal. In their analysis of French textbooks, they state that they found “material that includes heterosexual and homosexual references” (p. 64), meaning that the material did not exclusively portray heterosexual identities. Nonetheless, in their analysis of the portrayal of non-heterosexual identities, they conclude that “simply including representations and information on non-heterosexuals in materials does not necessarily provide affirmation of diversity, but can serve to reinforce the isolation of a social group by portraying them in a negative light” (pp. 64f).

Temple (2005) analysed sexuality through the content analysis of 20 texts approved for French Québécois secondary schools in five subjects. The results showed that nearly 95 % of the collected pages made no reference to same-sex sexuality. Moreover, Temple concluded that heterosexism was institutionalised in four ways:

[T]hrough the maintenance of a rigid dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality; through ‘heteronormativity’ [...] which posits heterosexuality as the only ‘normal’ sexuality; through the problematisation of same-sex sexuality as unnatural, abnormal, or otherwise inferior; and, [...] through maintaining a strict distinction between male/masculine and female/feminine. (p. 280)

It thus seems clear that heterosexism is present in current textbooks. Kedley (2015) asserts that the inclusion of non-heterosexual texts “not infrequently frames minority sexual and gender identities as the ‘other’” (p. 367), and that the inclusion of non-heterosexual texts does

not go far enough. Further, Motschenbacher (2010) claims that “[s]ingle parents, unmarried couples, couples without children or gay male and lesbian couples are hardly ever mentioned explicitly” (p. 40) in textbooks.

One could argue that the heterosexist results are due to geographic differences. For example, that Polish textbooks would be more heteronormative in their omission of non-heterosexual characters because of the cultural demonisation of sexuality in general and non-heterosexuality in particular (Pakuła et al., 2015; Pawelczyk & Pakuła, 2015). Nevertheless, the few Swedish studies conducted (e.g. Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006; Mustedanagic, 2010) indicate that gender bias is still present in EFL textbooks. As such, it is not improbable that sexuality is also depicted in a heteronormative manner.

The reviewed material seems to indicate that non-heterosexual identities are nearly nonexistent in textbooks, and when mentioned, discussed in a heterosexist manner. Pakuła et al. (2015) insist that further research on gender bias in textbooks needs to acknowledge heterosexism:

It does not take a detailed study to see that textbooks do not represent gay relationships, but closer consideration would reveal that they also tend to be extremely heteronormative, with continual representation of heterosexual couples, conventional nuclear families and possible heterosexual romance. Implications for textbook analysts are that they not only critique gender imbalance and stereotyping, but also critically highlight the textual prevalence/flaunting of heterosexuality (which is not hard!). (p. 22)

## 2.2. The absent research

There are two main aspects I believe researchers have previously omitted or avoided discussing. Firstly, that we should acknowledge more than only the binary genders. Secondly, the inclusion of sexuality as a gender role and a gender norm.

To only include male and female characters in an analysis on gender bias in textbooks will contribute to the bias because it indicates that other gender identities are not important. Since there are not many reports of gender neutral instances in previous research on gender in EFL textbooks, I assume that researchers have previously looked at characters which are gendered in some manner. Even if the inclusion of gender neutral characters/terminology in an analysis of textbooks will provide a lot of data on briefly mentioned gender neutral characters, researchers’ have to include ungendered and non-binary character mentions in their analysis of textbooks. By excluding them, one is saying that gender neutral or non-

binary gender identification is irrelevant, rendering the readers, learners and people who do not conform to the binary norm irrelevant.

Pakuła et al. (2015) discuss sexuality and gender as intersectional. That is, that they recognise their inseparability; nonetheless, when they analyse sexuality in EFL textbooks, they do this parallel to the analysis of gender. To emphasise that gender and sexuality intertwine, in this study they are not analysed in parallel, but as a result of one another where sexuality is seen as a gender role. One could argue that gender is as much a result of sexuality as sexuality is a result of gender. Nonetheless, this could apply to all gender roles, as a gender specific attribute reinforces the dichotomy of genders.

### 2.3. Poststructuralist feminism

The poststructuralist feminist approach to gender, which is applied here, “scrutinises binary models of sex, gender, and sexuality” (Bucholz, 2014, p. lxiii). Seeing gender as a binary social or cultural construction, of what is observed as binary sexes, forces people into a set of norms expected from them based on their assigned gender. Identity cannot be categorised in such categorical terms. In the same manner that young and old are not the only available age categories, gender identity cannot be available only as female or male, and sexuality cannot be available only as heterosexuality or homosexuality. Not only might a person not fully perform their assigned gender, they might perform the ‘opposite’ gender:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies. (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 10)

Moreover, identities are also viewed as something that can change or vary over time. Hence, gender is not seen as something that is *fixed*, but rather something *fluid* (Baxter, 2016; Cameron, 2005; Kehily, 2001; Talbot, 1998).

With the crumbling of binary genders, heterosexuality is no more. In a heteronormative society, where heterosexuality is considered the norm, everyone is assumed to be heterosexual. To be heterosexual, you have to first be identified as one of the binary genders (i.e. man or woman), and second be sexually interested in people of the ‘opposite’ (the other binary) gender (Erlman, 2015; Jones, 2016). Therefore, heterosexuality requires opposing

genders. Hence, if we did not divide people into men and women, there would be no way in which to categorise people's sexualities as hetero- or homosexuality. Thereby, according to poststructural theories of gender and sexuality, they "do not only inflect one another, they are to a considerable extent mutually constitutive" (Cameron, 2005, p. 494).

Within poststructuralist tradition, language is considered to be "the place where our sense of self and our identity or 'subjectivity' is constructed and performed. [...] Meaning is produced *within* language rather than reflected *by* language" (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). Thus, in accordance with Butler's (1990/1999) perception of the performativity of gender, gender (along with sex and sexuality) is not something we *are* but indeed something we *perform*. Language is a way in which we perform these identities, "we do not use language because of who we are: we *perform* who we are using varieties of language" (Dumas, 2008, p. 2). Furthermore, the poststructuralist view of language and gender acknowledges the possibility of learners performing different gender and sexual identities in second and foreign languages than in their first language (Pavlenko, 2004), making it truly important to supply foreign language pupils with a wider range of identities than heteronormative ones.

## 2.4. Foreign language textbooks

As EFL textbooks are produced with a didactic intention, and are meant to be a tool used to help learners learn English, it is not surprising that they are "often viewed by learners as authoritative" (Mustapha, 2013, p. 455). However, it has been discussed whether the content in textbooks is important in itself, or if the way teachers mediate texts (or 'talk around the text') could change how pupils understand them (e.g. Pawelczyk et al., 2014; Sunderland, 2000a; 2000b; Sunderland et al., 2000). Nonetheless, the analysis of ELT reading material might not be "a fruitless endeavour" (Sunderland, 2000b, p. 154), as a report on Swedish EFL teachers' use of textbooks shows that textbooks are appreciated in homework situations (Skolverket, 2006) — a place where the teacher might not be able to mediate the text. One could argue that the use of textbooks has changed since the report was published ten years ago, although, as textbooks are still produced in plurality, one could deduce that they are in fact being used.

There is also a discussion of whether textbooks should reflect norms in the target society/culture, or use inclusive language and portray non-normative gender roles (Erlman, 2015; Pawelczyk et al., 2014). In Sweden, the English courses should include teaching culture

(Skolverket, 2012). Nonetheless, one could assume that EFL teachers use other material than merely the textbook, thereby revealing other norms than those included in the textbook. Moreover, the exclusion of non-normative characters (through e.g. heteronormativity), could alienate pupils:

[T]he resources used to teach students a language are expected to represent, in some way, the culture in which that language is spoken; the ideology of men being more dominant than women continues to be salient in many English-speaking contexts. However, stereotypes in textbooks also have the potential to alienate certain readers, potentially impacting on their motivation and investment in learning the target language, and also run the risk of reinforcing negative preconceptions that learners might have about the roles of women or men. (Jones, 2016, p. 219f)

### **3. Method and material**

#### **3.1. Method**

This study implements both quantitative and qualitative approaches, where person referring nouns and pronouns are counted to see the frequency of gendered and ungendered occurrences, and the gender roles portrayed are collected and analysed. Through content analysis the occurrences of pronouns, nouns and gender roles are collected. This lays a foundation for further analysis, where the way in which the material presents gender is analysed. The qualitative analysis draws upon a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, where identity is seen as “socially construed [and] discursively mediated” (Zotzmann & O’Regan, 2016, p. 123), and where language is viewed as “a powerful means through which specific ideologies, identities, and culture become dominant in a society.” (Rahimi & Riasati, 2011, p. 107). Fairclough (2001) defines three stages in CDA: “*description* of text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction, and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context” (p. 91). As such, it can be viewed as an extension of the analysis of *what* in a text, to also include the *how* and the *why* (Rahimi & Riasati, 2011), thus aiming to unveil “how discourse structures are used to enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies on social issues” (Hall, 2012, p. 165).

By considering both visibility and gender roles, we can firstly see to what extent gender neutrality is present, and secondly see in what way visible genders are represented in the texts. When focusing solely on counting the number of occurrences, it could be difficult to claim that e.g. women are seen as inferior to men, since the visible gender (men in this

example) might be presented unfavourably. Merely counting occurrences could therefore miss subtle gendering, bias or power structures (Ullah & Skelton, 2013). To also critically analyse gender roles and gender portrayal could make the discussion more nuanced.

Due to human coding with only one coder, instead of computer coding, the reliability could be said to be impaired (Sándorová, 2014). Nevertheless, coding by hand was needed in order to ensure that the collected data included the subtle representations of gender roles present in the textbooks. When collecting the data, two Swedish EFL textbooks were studied and third person singular pronouns and nouns representing people were counted, and data on characters' occupations, appearances, and sexual identities was collected. Below, a closer description of the data collection and analysis procedure is presented. Detailed explanation of the coding procedure is described, increasing the reliability in that a recreation of this study would generate the same classification of data, thus increasing the study's semantic validity (Sándorová, 2014).

### **3.1.1. Visibility**

When examining the visibility of female, male and gender neutral characters, their frequency occurrence in pronouns and nouns was counted. The pronouns collected were the subjective, objective, reflexive, and possessive third person singular pronouns: *he* (*him, himself, his*), *she* (*her, herself, hers*) and singular *they* (*them, themselves, their, theirs*). When gendered generic pronouns (e.g. 'someone loves himself') occurred, they were recorded according to the gendered pronoun used. Nouns that are considered allegeable are countable nouns which in some manner represent a person or group of people. Proper nouns are not included, since names do not necessarily reflect the gender of a person.

Words like *hero* and *actor* are considered gender neutral, as they do not necessarily refer to male characters, whilst *heroine* and *actress* are considered female gendered since the suffix implies a female character. Words such as *salesman* are considered male gendered, as they are chosen instead of *salesperson* — a gender neutral version.

Nouns for groups of people that have no singular counterpart are not collected; *class*, *family*, *group*, *staff* and *team* are not considered to be nouns representing individuals. When the words *family member* or *team player* are used only the words *member* and *player* are collected. The only exception is the word *people*, which is collected to ensure a fair

representative of the gender neutral varieties of *men/women*; hence it is considered to be a plural form of *person/individual*.

All the recorded mentions were inserted into a document and the number of appearances was registered. They were coded according to what gender group they represented (male, female, gender neutral) and according to the categories pronouns, singular nouns and plural nouns. Statistical analysis was applied to the collected data, the frequency was summarised and percentages of the frequency within the different categories were calculated.

Moreover,  $\chi^2$ -tests were conducted with two-by-two variables (female–male, female–gender neutral, male–gender neutral), looking for significance in difference between (1) the textbooks (pronouns, nouns (singular, plural, total), and total visibility from each textbook analysed) (NB the number of pages analysed is only roughly the same), (2) the pronouns and nouns (compiled total analysed), and (3) singular and plural nouns (compiled total analysed).

Parts of Hartman and Judd's (1978) list of guidelines were also taken into account in the analysis of the nouns and pronouns collected. They created considerations to minimise sexism in language learning material, parts of which were as follows: "1. Is a true generic, instead of *man, mankind, he, workman*, and so on, used wherever possible without being too awkward linguistically? 2. Are trivialising sex-linked words, such as *poetess, astronette, and lady lawyer* avoided?" (p. 392). These guidelines are used for a brief closer analysis of some of the nouns and pronouns used in the analysed EFL textbooks.

### **3.1.2. Gender roles**

When reading previous research, I have often felt unsure as to what type of data researchers have chosen to include in their analysis. In some research, it is unclear on what grounds (e.g. pronouns, names, looks) a character's gender has been deduced, to later be included in an analysis of gender roles. Since a big part of my theoretical framework implies that names and looks cannot determine a person's gender, the gender roles are coded by the gender visible through nouns and pronouns in the text.

Occupations collected were all occupations mentioned, even when mentioned briefly. For example, job titles merely listing who was in a room, such as "doctors, social workers, and physical therapists" (*Outlooks On*, p. 233), were recorded. The instances were coded as M (male), F (female) or N (gender neutral) according to the character to whom the occupation belonged. The occupations were later coded according to shared domains as *administrator/*

*chairperson/owner, arts, food, law enforcement, legal, manual labour, media, medical practitioner, non-professional, nurse, politics, principal, scientist, sports, travel, and other.* The gender roles were analysed both by their coded categories, and by the occupation itself, to see whether there were any gender stereotypical gender roles. I also looked at what jobs only existed in one of the gender categories, to see what type of jobs were available only to specific genders.

Appearances were collected when a character's looks were described, either through an adjective, or descriptions of what they were wearing or how they looked. The instances were coded as M (male), F (female) or N (gender neutral), according to the described character. The appearances were later coded as *purely descriptive* or *descriptive and evaluative*, and analysed on the basis of type of appearance description.

When analysing sexuality, mention of romantic relationships, sexual interests, and explicit mention of sexualities were looked at. "Mum and dad" is coded *heterosexual identities*; "his husband" is coded *non-heterosexual identities*; "my boyfriend" (where the narrator is ungendered) is coded *possibly non-heterosexual/semi-gendered sexual identities* — i.e. a relationship between someone gendered and an ungendered other person; "your partner" with no gendering of 'you' nor 'partner' is considered *possibly non-heterosexual/ungendered sexual identities*. Moreover, whilst the occurrence of "my mother and father" is seen as heterosexual, "my parents" is seen as ungendered sexuality. In the sections where no sexuality is mentioned, asexuality is not presumed, since — even if it could be implied — the lack of explicitness leads to invisibility of such sexual identities; likewise, bisexuality is not assumed when heterosexual relationships are mentioned.

### **3.1.3. Binariness**

Instances of explicit gender binariness were also noted. That is, when the authors assumed the reader's, the teacher's or a character's gender to be either male or female. By stating that "he or she will tell you more" or speaking of potential partners as "girlfriends or boyfriends" is seen to adhere to, and to reinforce, the binary gender norm, which I argue excludes people identifying with non-binary gender identities.

In instances where gender neutral characters are represented, they are seen as such: gender neutral. Even though gender neutrality includes a possibility for both male and female characters to occupy the position, these genders are not explicitly mentioned. When

presenting and discussing the results, the gender neutral characters mentioned in the textbooks are therefore considered a third gender identity, next to male and female identity. Nonetheless, this should not be construed in any way to mean that I am saying that gender neutral identity should be considered a ‘third gender’, or that it is separate from male and female identity. I consider gender neutrality to include all gender identities, but to make my point, I will separate them in the results, so that it is clear to the reader what genders are available in the books — and what gender roles are expected from different gender identities.

### 3.2. Material

Two textbooks were examined, partly to open up for the possibility of a comparison, and partly to be confident that the one textbook chosen was not unrepresentative of the current textbooks trends (whether inclusive or heteronormative), thus increasing the validity of this study. Some previous researchers have chosen material based on what is commonly used in schools at the time (e.g. Hall, 2014; Ghorbani, 2009) or they have chosen to compare newer textbooks with older ones to see in what way they have developed (e.g. Mustedanagic, 2010; Holmqvist & Gjörup, 2006). I am not interested in once again reasserting that heteronormativity is present in older textbooks. Instead, I want to analyse the current state of norms in up to date textbooks. By using contemporary textbooks, I can analyse the gender norms based on today’s norm critical theories, and I can see what norms will be present in schools in the near future. The textbooks chosen were recently published for Swedish use, so that they could be analysed from a present-day Swedish perspective, as viewing “gender as culturally specific also suggests that notions of gender are not fixed but may in fact change over time and place” (Kehily, 2001, p. 117). Also, as certain stereotypical gender roles differ between cultures, it might be important for a researcher to be familiar with the norms of the region in which the textbooks is taught (Erlman, 2015). Thereby, the understanding of what is gender stereotypical is based on my own prejudice, something that is here seen as shaped by the society in which one lives, and thus based on an understanding of current Swedish norms.

When searching the Internet (book publishers, bookshops and libraries) for the newest Swedish EFL textbooks, the most recently published textbooks found were four from 2014. The textbooks all covered the whole English 5 course (see Skolverket, 2012) — an EFL course commonly occurring in the first year of upper secondary school (when the pupil is approximately 16 years old). Out of these four textbooks, two were randomly selected for this

research: *Engelska 5: Outlooks On* (Hallberg & Backemyr Nyberg, 2014) and *Solid Gold 1: Engelska 5* (Hedencrona et al., 2014). Apart for some glossary and the introduction in one of the books, they are exclusively in English. The research is limited to the core of the textbooks: the texts and their exercises, thus excluding the glossary indexes. The few instances where Swedish is still present in the analysed parts of the books, the words are not collected — as they are not part of the foreign language.

Data was collected both from texts and from exercises in — or connected to — the chapters. I did not, however, do the exercises in order to collect any data that might occur there. For example, in one exercise the pupil is supposed to fill in the blanks in sentences using words provided in a box. The sentence “She saved her best \_\_\_\_ for the prom” (*Outlooks On*, p. 34), was most probably supposed to be “She saved her best *gown* for the prom”. Nevertheless, as I cannot be certain that the pupil filling in the blanks did not choose to say that “She saved her best *ladder* for the prom”, it is not registered as appearances in the analysis of gender roles.

This study in no way aims to criticise or undermine the authors or publishers of the textbooks. The authors and publishers are however not treated confidentially, as this information is easily retrieved from the textbooks. It is not seen as a necessity to inform the textbook authors about this study beforehand, since no compromising personal information is discussed. It is therefore my opinion that this study is in line with ethical guidelines stipulated by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

### **3.2.1. Outlooks On**

*Engelska 5: Outlooks On* (or as it will henceforth be referred to: *Outlooks On*), published in 2014, is written by Eva Hallberg and Annika Backemyr Nyberg. The book is 309 pages long and divided into five chapters (with texts and exercises) dealing with different topics, one section with resource material, and finally an index. The analysed sections (the texts and their exercises) are together 257 pages long. *Outlooks On* covers the entire English 5 course, and the authors state that they (through the textbook) aim to inspire, engage and provoke the reader.

### **3.2.2. Solid Gold**

*Solid Gold 1: Engelska 5* (henceforth referred to as *Solid Gold*), published in 2014, is written by Eva Hedencrona, Karin Smed-Gerdin and Peter Watcyn-Jones. The book is 351 pages long

and divided into nine chapters (with texts) dealing with different themes, followed by a section with exercises connected to the texts, sections with resources, and grammar and vocabulary indexes. The analysed sections (the texts and their exercises) are together 234 pages long. *Solid Gold* covers the core content of the English 5 course, and the authors state that they aim to improve the learner’s communication skills and knowledge of the English speaking world.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1. Visibility

The data collected from *Outlooks On* shows that the visibility of women through the occurrence of pronouns and nouns is slightly larger than the visibility of men. In *Solid Gold*, the number of male occurrences is slightly larger than that of female occurrences. Gender neutral mentions have the largest total visibility overall, but the gender neutral pronoun is only used in 2.2 % of the third person pronoun mentions. The table below (Table 1) shows the spread of visibility in both number and percentage of the total number of occurrences in each category from *Outlooks On*, *Solid Gold*, and the compiled data from the two books.

**Table 1.** Visibility of genders through pronouns and nouns. Row percentages are shown within parentheses.

		Female	Male	Gender neutral	Total
<i>Outlooks On</i>	Pronouns	662 (50.6%)	594 (48.3%)	14 (1.1%)	1 270 (100%)
	Nouns (singular)	240 (28.4%)	196 (23.2%)	409 (48.4%)	845 (100%)
	Nouns (plural)	87 (12.9%)	52 (7.7%)	533 (79.3%)	672 (99.9%)
	Total	949 (34.5%)	842 (30.7%)	956 (34.8%)	2747 (100%)
<i>Solid Gold</i>	Pronouns	586 (40.6%)	812 (56.2%)	46 (3.2%)	1 444 (100%)
	Nouns (singular)	193 (21.4%)	210 (23.3%)	498 (55.3%)	901 (100%)
	Nouns (plural)	56 (9.1%)	44 (7.2%)	511 (83.6%)	611 (99.9%)
	Total	835 (28.2%)	1 066 (36.1%)	1 055 (35.7%)	2 956 (100%)
Compiled total	Pronouns	1 248 (45.6%)	1 406 (52.2%)	60 (2.2%)	2 694 (100%)
	Nouns (singular)	433 (24.8%)	406 (23.3%)	907 (51.9%)	1 746 (100%)
	Nouns (plural)	143 (11.1%)	96 (7.5%)	1 044 (81.4%)	1 283 (100%)
	Nouns (total)	576 (19.0%)	502 (16.6%)	1951 (64.4%)	3029 (100%)

Total	1 784 (31.5%)	1 908 (33.3%)	2 011 (35.1%)	5 723 (99.9%)
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NB the percentage is rounded off to one decimal, which in some cases leads to a total occurrence of 99.9 % instead of 100 %.

From the table, one can see that the use of gender neutral nouns is more common in plural form (81.4 % of the compiled total plural nouns recorded), compared to when singular nouns are used (51.9 % of the compiled total singular nouns recorded), indicating that groups are less often gendered than individual people. It can also be noted that terms coded as gender neutral are most common in nouns, and least common in pronouns, which one could interpret as gender neutral individuals not being discussed in depth — and therefore not needing to be re-referred to by a pronoun.

The  $\chi^2$ -tests conducted on the compiled total and textbook total rendered a value where  $p < 0.05$  (see Appendix 1), meaning that there is a significant difference between the total occurrences in the two textbooks. There is a significant difference in the total use of pronouns and nouns, and there is a significant difference in the total use of singular nouns and plural nouns. However, the  $\chi^2$ -tests for pronouns, singular noun, plural nouns, and total nouns paired by textbook, were significant where  $p < 0.05$  for all but singular nouns (male–gender neutral), plural nouns (female–male, male–gender neutral), and total nouns (male–gender neutral) (see Appendix 1), indicating that the difference in visibility between the books is not significant in all cases.

Considering Hartman and Judd’s (1978) guidelines, generics and gendering were briefly looked at. Both textbooks used male generic terms, e.g. the term ‘man’ instead of ‘human’. Moreover, both textbooks used suffixed gendering such as ‘waitress’ and ‘actress’, which could be seen as trivialised gendering. Nonetheless, the analysis also rendered some unexpected results, such as the use of a female generic pronoun in *Solid Gold*: “He or she records her findings” (p. 160). This could be seen as a step in the right direction, as the male generic is not chosen, even so, the pronoun is gendered — and thus gendering.

## 4.2. Gender roles

Below follows an analysis of the gender roles present in the analysed texts. The results from the two textbooks are discussed both separately and compiled. The gender roles are discussed

separately. In total, the textbooks, though entailing some inclusive material, show a heteronormative set of gender roles.

#### 4.2.1. Occupations

In *Outlooks On*, there were no clearly stereotypical gender roles visible in characters' occupations. In the commonly mentioned occupations *teachers, students, doctors, principals,* and *authors* there is a majority of gender neutral occurrences, and equal divisions between male and female occurrences. What could be viewed as stereotypical gender roles, is that the mentions of the occupations *nurse* and *whore* belong to female characters, and that the mention of *soldiers* belongs to male characters. The coded categories showed no clear stereotyping either, female characters were represented more than male characters in typical male professions (e.g. medical practitioner and politics). Every occupation coded *scientist* belonged to a gender neutral character. The type of occupation did not differ extremely between female and non-female characters, yet female characters were underrepresented when talking about opportunities for different occupations. That is, there were fewer types of jobs occupied by female character, than by other characters (see Appendix 2).

The occupations mentioned in *Solid Gold* were stereotypically divided between genders. In the cases where the occupation was sports related, three out of four instances the occupation belonged to a male character. Moreover, the male characters' sports were specified (e.g. Beckham being a famous footballer), whilst the only female sports occupation was unspecified (Freeman being "the world's greatest female athlete" (p. 50)). There were in total 18 mentions of occupations coded as *politics*, two of those were held by female characters, one of whom did not yet work with politics but had Prime Minister as her dream job. Six of the politics occupations collected were male, and ten were gender neutral. There are more gender neutral politicians than male politicians, and more male politicians than female politicians. Moreover, female characters possessed the majority of occupations coded *arts*, whilst *law enforcement* occupations only belonged to male and gender neutral characters. Male characters were the only ones occupying occupations coded *administrator/chairperson/owner*. Male characters also held more *non-professional* occupations than female characters, but there were no male nurses. Every medical practitioner mentioned was gender neutral. Furthermore, similar to *Outlooks On*, female characters were given the fewest occupation type opportunities in *Solid Gold* (see Appendix 2).

### 4.2.2. Physical appearances

In *Outlooks On*, all but one description of male physical appearance are purely descriptive, often mentioning what clothes the character is wearing, e.g. “wearing khaki pants and short-sleeve plaid button-down” (p. 236). Female characters are depicted both purely descriptively and evaluatively, they are described as wearing dresses, having smooth hair, and being pale and slender, and as “dressed quite normally” (p. 258), “very pretty” (p. 123), having “a comical nose” (p. 123), and “her nose was cutely round and her mouth was small and endearing” (p. 256). The few descriptions of ungendered characters’ appearances are very brief, e.g. “[m]y friend has grown a beard” (p. 33) and “the toddler’s curly hair” (p. 153).

In *Solid Gold*, men are described wearing jeans, a khaki shirt, and a sweatshirt, being tall, having grey hair and size-eleven feet. Women are again portrayed both descriptively and evaluatively, having long hair and smaller waistline, and complaining about being fat and ugly. There are very few and brief descriptions of gender neutral characters’ appearances in *Solid Gold* too. Through analysis of textual physical appearance descriptions in both books, it can be concluded that male appearance is often descriptive, female appearance is descriptive and evaluative, and gender neutral appearance is nearly non-existing — rendering gender neutral characters nearly invisible.

### 4.2.3. Sexuality

Neither of the textbooks show great progress in the visibility of non-heterosexual relationships. In both books, most of the sexual identities were heterosexual, with mentions of e.g. ‘his wife’, ‘her boyfriend’, ‘mother and father’, ‘her husband’, an uncle raping his niece, and boyfriends waiting for their girlfriends.

There were three non-heterosexual codings in *Outlooks On*; however, these were portrayed as non-normative. One chapter is about Lady Gaga in which her sexuality is discussed — here sexualities are expressly mentioned: “Depending on her mood at the time, she is straight, bisexual or gay” (p. 216). Another non-heterosexual instance was also an explicit mention of a non-heterosexual identity; the pupils are given examples about different speaking situations and one is to give a speech “about homosexuals in Uganda” (p. 72). The last non-heterosexual instance is a chapter about a woman who wonders whether she should tell her boyfriend that she cheated on him with a woman. Even if it is an improvement in inclusivity to include a chapter about lesbian or bisexual identities, this occurrence portrays

the heterosexual relationship (the woman and her boyfriend) as the norm, and the non-heterosexual relationship as a drunken mistake.

The fact that two out of three non-heterosexual references are explicit mentions of sexuality, is very problematic. To not incorporate non-heterosexualities into the texts as a natural occurrence, but instead discuss them explicitly could imply that non-heterosexual identities are something to discuss, rather than truly optional sexual identities. In one chapter (“Are you ready for sex?”) where they explicitly discuss sexuality, it says that you will need an additional form of contraception (other than condom) “[i]f you’re a boy/girl couple” (p. 252), thus opening for other sexualities than heterosexuality. However, they do not, in this chapter, open up for the possibility of relationships with a non-binary person, since — when they talk about a partner — they assume that it is a he or she, and also use partner synonymously with “boyfriend or girlfriend” (p. 252), thus reinforcing heteronormativity.

Moreover, *Outlooks On* contains one mention of a semi-gendered sexual identity (mentions parents (=ungendered) and genders mother (=female)), and several occurrences of ungendered sexual identities (e.g. my parents, the couple). Nonetheless, there were far many more heterosexual identities in both longer and shorter segments.

In *Solid Gold*, there were no sexual identities coded as non-heterosexual. The heterosexual instances are present in both brief mentions and longer sections, such as ‘his wife’ in fill in the blank exercises, and a longer description of a male narrator kissing a girl. There are instances coded as semi-gendered, all of which mention a female partner: e.g. my (=ungendered) wife (=female), mentions parents (=ungendered) and genders mother (=female), my (=ungendered) girlfriend (=female). The instances where the sexual identity is coded ungendered, are either a mention of ungendered parents or an ungendered couple.

Furthermore, every parent couple explicitly mentioned — i.e. not merely mentioned as “my parents” — is a heterosexual parent couple. It could also be problematic that the most commonly ungendered (and thus possibly non-heterosexual) sexual identity mentioned is parents, since parents are not necessarily a representation of a sexual identity, and possibly too far off for pupils — thereby not a preferable relatable sexual identity.

### 4.3. Binary gender norm

Both of the textbooks consistently depicted the general person as either male or female. By saying e.g. “[c]hoose a person to present. Focus on: his/her life and background” (*Solid Gold*,

p. 211), they imply that there are no people who identify (or should be identified) as something other than either male or female. He/she, his/her, and him/her could be used as generic pronouns, as a way of avoiding male generics. However, this construction might imply that all (important) genders are covered, and thus that binary genders are the only available gender identities.

In *Outlooks On*, the phrase “whatever the gender” (p. 219) is used, opening up for more gender identities than the binary set. In contrast, in *Solid Gold* there is a use of “sportsman or sportswoman” (p. 205), which reinforces a gender binarity since using ‘sportsperson’ is perfectly fine. Moreover, there were chapters without clear gendering of the narrator and main character. These characters were instead gendered e.g. in the question section connected to the chapter, where the narrator is referred to using a gendered pronoun. It is thus evident that chapters could be constructed without the gendering of even a main character.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Methodological considerations**

There are numerous considerations in the collection of data based on gender and gender roles. Below are a few notes on considerations made during this study:

Assuming parents are a mark of sexuality could be problematic, since there is nothing necessarily connected to sexual identity in the role of becoming or being a parent. This is why they are recorded only when a plurality of parents is mentioned (i.e. “my parents” is recorded as sexuality, “my parent” is not). The mentions of “mum and dad” or similar could represent conventional nuclear families with two heterosexual parents, and could thus be heterosexual mentions. Even so, it is important to keep in mind that the mention of a parent relationship does not undoubtedly imply a sexual identity per se.

In this study, I have not discussed the ‘couples norm’. Part of a heteronormative society is the idea that people strive to live in romantic twosomes. This of course excludes people who are polyamorous and people who prefer being single. This is something that future research could look at, however, it might be difficult for researchers to analyse the desires of fictitious people, and it might thus be difficult to define e.g. which characters are single by choice.

Character gender fluidity is not included in this study, as the characters are static in their depiction, and as the events are not prolonged in the short chapters included in textbooks. If it is not explicitly discussed, then it is not assumed that the character is gender fluid such that a change in gender identity occurred between the gendering mention and a gender role description. Thereby, the gender fluidity considered here is that of the reader.

Male pronouns do not necessarily indicate the presence of male characters, as they could be used as male generics. Nevertheless, “many studies have shown that people, including textbook writers, rarely conceptualise females when hearing or reading masculine generic nouns and pronouns” (Porreca, 1984, p. 708). Moreover, as shown above, there is a possibility to use female generics as well, and thus the presence of gendered pronouns could still be used to show the visibility of different genders even in generic constructions. Since neither of the books excludes the use of singular *they* altogether, I argue that most of the instances where gendered pronouns are chosen are actual instances of gendering characters — not merely the use of gendered generics.

Furthermore, the portrayal of men and women does not necessarily exclude transgender identities. When someone is referred to as ‘she’ or ‘he’, the person might be a trans woman or trans man. Even assuming a character’s gender based on a textual gender referral such as pronouns could be criticised, as it is then assumed that not only what a person identifies themselves as (gender identity) but also in what way they are defined by others (assigned gender) is sufficient in categorising a person’s gender. Although, since the characters are then portrayed as being one gender, the reader would most probably see them as such, hence the analysis of how genders are portrayed is seen as what genders (and thereby gender roles) are available to the reader.

## 5.2. Neutrality or visibility

A problem in the discussion of gender neutrality in textbooks, is that when genders are not explicitly mentioned — they could be viewed as invisible. As seen in the reviewed literature, one issue has previously been female invisibility, where male characters and male terminology have been used more frequently. Likewise, in my analysis of sexual identities, the lack of explicit mentions of non-heterosexual identities is seen as heteronormative through its lack of visibility. One could thus argue that it is better to gender characters in order to avoid gender invisibility. Still, the inclusion of some genders (but not all) could indicate that

only those mentioned are ‘the important genders’. Since the range of gender identities is innumerable, it could be an impossible task to include every conceivable gender identity in a textbook.

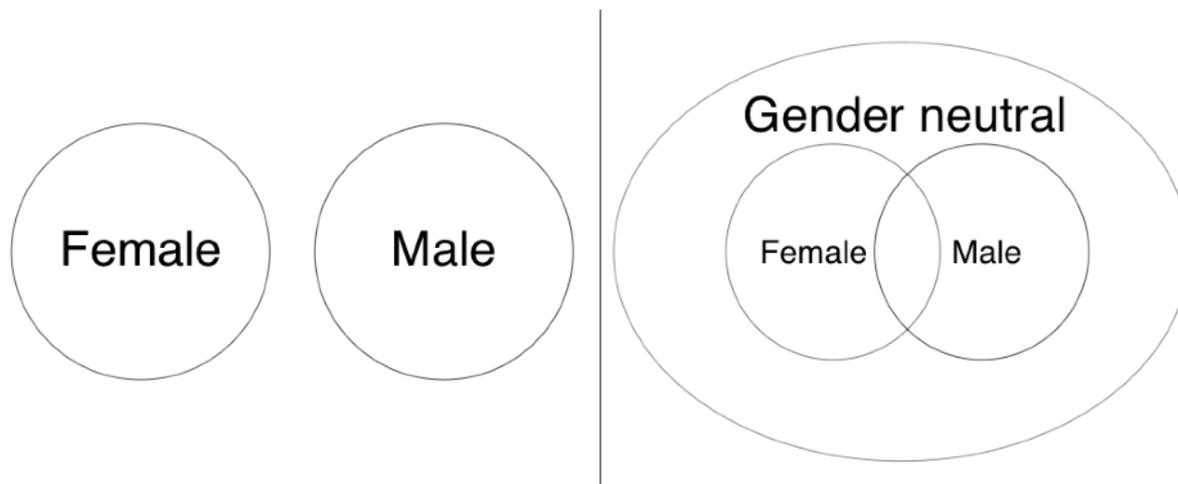
How do we possibly include all gender identities? A simple way is to use gender neutral characters and language, as such would include all genders. Nonetheless, this again brings up the issue of visibility. Perhaps, the problem of visibility only becomes a ‘problem’ when some genders are visible, whilst others are invisible. In Weinberg’s (2009) list of what teachers should do to be LGBT-inclusive, one point made is that we should substitute for gender neutral terms.

The use of inclusive language, or a anti-heteronormative language, could start with the end of gendering. The use of gendered terminology excludes non-binary people, and often degrades women through e.g. suffixing ‘male’ terminology (bachelorette, waitress, actress) (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Mills, 2008). In addition, there is a plethora of gender neutral pronouns up for discussion — e.g. *e*, *ey*, *peh*, *xe*, *zhe* (see Gender-specific and gender-neutral third-person pronouns, n.d.), but none seem to have been accepted by the general public yet. The only singular pronoun that I have come across in everyday life is singular *they*, which has been used in a generic sense since Shakespearian times (Hartman & Judd, 1978). Independent of the discussion of whether singular ‘they’ should be acceptable, it is time for a reconstruction of English, such that non-binary gender identities are included.

### 5.3. Leaving gender binarity

Gender neutral does not merely mean sans gender or the third gender, it includes every gender — male, female, transgendered, agendered, bigendered, pangendered, intergendered, demi-gendered, etc. Therefore, to choose gender neutral words would not exclude those identifying as male or female, merely include people of every gender (see Figure 1). In other words, the word *grandparent* includes both those identifying as grandmothers, those identifying as grandfathers and those simply identifying as grandparents. Thus, we do not need to gender a character at the risk of excluding those identifying themselves as male or female, because truly gender neutral words do not exclude specific genders they include all genders!

It is important to acknowledge gender neutral people in one’s analysis of gender in textbooks. Whether or not they are given a lot of space, or if the only gender neutral people are those merely mentioned by their job title, by acknowledging them in research we say that



**Figure 1.** Illustration of views on lingual gender categorisation. Left: Gender binarity, right: Gender neutral terminology. (Source: Lisa Erlman)

non-binary gender identities are (and should be) considered as important as women and men. That is, you do not need to be gendered or binary gendered to be acknowledged.

I am not saying that we should exclude male or female characters, but we need to include non-binary characters. That is, not merely by mentioning a person by their job title, and then not mention that person further — and hope that it suffices as inclusion of gender neutral characters. We certainly do not need to exclude women from textbooks again, but we do need to portray characters that every reader, learner and pupil can relate to — whether they identify as male, female or non-binary.

## 6. Concluding remarks

### 6.1. Conclusion

Through this study, I have aimed to bridge the gap between gender and sexual identity in EFL textbook research, by analysing sexuality as a gender role. I have also challenged the binary gender norm by including gender neutral characters and terminology in the analysis of the two textbooks. The two Swedish EFL textbooks analysed could be interpreted as both heteronormative, and inclusive, in different aspects. In toto, they have an equal inclusion/visibility of female, male and gender neutral nouns and pronouns. However, their use of gender neutral pronouns is rare. Gender neutral third person singular pronouns are not yet generally accepted, which could explain the results. Nonetheless, the results could also indicate a scarcity in explicit visibility for characters who are not gendered — as they are not explained further or enough to be referred to by a pronoun.

The gender roles analysed could be seen as heteronormative at times. It seems that occupations available to female characters are still fewer than those available to male characters. The physical appearances are still slightly stereotypical, where male characters wear khaki, female characters wear dresses, and gender neutral character descriptions are scarce. Explicit non-heterosexual identities are still very rare, and the few mentions present are discussed as non-normative. Ungendered sexual identities are present but not developed, and heterosexual identities still dominate in the analysed language learning material.

Looking at gender visibility through nouns and pronouns, male terminology is slightly more visible than female in *Solid Gold*, yet female terminology is slightly more visible than male in *Outlooks On*. Nevertheless, men are given more opportunities for occupational roles than women. Gender neutral characters are mentioned a lot, however, often briefly. They are given many occupational roles, yet are rarely described by appearances.

In conclusion, present day Swedish EFL textbooks still include heteronormative material. The equality between male and female characters is slightly levelled. Nouns and pronouns are approximately used to the same extent, but gender roles are still stereotypical in that male characters have a wider range of occupational opportunities than female characters, and that their physical appearances are described in different manners. Moreover, gender neutral characters are visible in nouns and occupational roles, but invisible in pronouns and physical appearances. Also, heterosexuality is still depicted as the norm. Hence, the textbooks could be viewed as heteronormative, especially when gender neutrality and sexuality are included in one's analysis of gender visibility and gender roles in EFL textbooks.

Finally, from the discussions following the analysis of the textbooks, the conclusion is that gender neutrality in textbooks might be preferable, as it includes all gender identities — and thereby also sexual identities. Hence, through the use of a gender neutral language the textbooks could cease to be heteronormative.

## 6.2. Pedagogical implications

With this study, I hope educators, textbook authors, and publishers understand the importance of challenging heteronormative standards present in EFL textbooks. With the improvement of female inclusion and representation, it might seem as if sexism has been eradicated. Nonetheless, as has been argued throughout this paper, both non-binary gender identities and non-heterosexual identities are being discriminated against through invisibility in both

textbooks and previous research. Therefore, it is utterly important that educators are aware of this bias, and consider it both when choosing ELT material and when teaching (the material). As Sunderland (2000b) asserts, there are many different readings of a text, and a teacher's treatment of it might therefore guide a learner into a specific reading.

Teachers thereby have to be anti-heteronormative in their selection and treatment of texts. To open up for inclusive interpretations of texts, such that non-binary characters are visible and non-heterosexual identities are acknowledged but not singled out. There is a thin line between acknowledging and singling out non-heteronormative characters, but it is important for teachers to be inclusive and acceptive of non-normative identities; to discuss heteronormativity and include non-heteronormative readings of texts, but also to be critical in the selection of textbooks, could be a step in the right direction. Naturally, I urge teachers to always be norm critical, inclusive and anti-heteronormative! It is something I deem important in all pedagogical activities, not merely those connected to the selection or use of textbooks.

### 6.3. Future research

Further research is needed to highlight the continuous preservation of a heteronormative portrayal of people in textbooks. There are many areas that future research could consider, some suggestions for future research are:

- (a) Analysing heteronormativity in teacher talk. In what way does the teacher approach the class and different topics. Are potential non-binary and non-heterosexual pupils considered and included?
- (b) How is pupil motivation or language learning affected by the use of heteronormative or inclusive materials?
- (c) Considering gender fluidity of the characters in the language learning material.
- (d) To what extent are other sexual identities than the heterosexual/homosexual binary present in textbooks?
- (e) How is the 'couples norm' reflected or challenged in language learning material?
- (f) Last but not least, I hope that future research on gender in EFL textbooks includes more than the analysis of binary gendered characters, by including e.g. ungendered characters and critically analysing the heterosexism present in textbooks.

With further research on the topic, we can shed light on the heteronormativity present in textbooks, and, hopefully, authors and publishers can try to avoid it in the making of new

material. The use of inclusive language when learning a foreign language could contribute to pupil identities which are not redefined in heteronormative terms over and over again.

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## Appendix 1: $\chi^2$ -tests

### $\chi^2$ of female–male pronoun visibility by textbook

	Female	Male
<i>Outlooks On</i>	662	594
<i>Sold Gold</i>	586	812
Results	$\chi^2= 30.488$	df= 1 p= 0.00000003359

### $\chi^2$ of female–gender neutral pronoun visibility by textbook

	Female	Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	662	14
<i>Sold Gold</i>	586	46
Results	$\chi^2= 19.065$	df= 1 p= 0.00001263

### $\chi^2$ of male–gender neutral pronoun visibility by textbook

	Male	Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	989	842
<i>Sold Gold</i>	835	1066
Results	$\chi^2= 7.7198$	df= 1 p= 0.005462

### $\chi^2$ of female–male singular noun visibility by textbook

	Female	Male
<i>Outlooks On</i>	240	196
<i>Sold Gold</i>	193	210
Results	$\chi^2= 4.0113$	df= 1 p= 0.0452

### $\chi^2$ of female–gender neutral singular noun visibility by textbook

	Female	Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	240	409
<i>Sold Gold</i>	193	498
Results	$\chi^2= 12.12$	df= 1 p= 0.0004987

**$\chi^2$  of male–gender neutral singular noun visibility by textbook**

	Male		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	196		409
<i>Sold Gold</i>	210		498
Results	$\chi^2= 1.0185$	df= 1	p= 0.3129

**$\chi^2$  of female–male plural noun visibility by textbook**

	Female		Male
<i>Outlooks On</i>	87		52
<i>Sold Gold</i>	56		44
Results	$\chi^2= 0.7946$	df= 1	p= 0.3727

**$\chi^2$  of female–gender neutral plural noun visibility by textbook**

	Female		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	87		533
<i>Sold Gold</i>	56		511
Results	$\chi^2= 4.4428$	df= 1	p= 0.03505

**$\chi^2$  of male–gender neutral plural noun visibility by textbook**

	Male		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	52		533
<i>Sold Gold</i>	44		511
Results	$\chi^2= 0.22781$	df= 1	p= 0.6332

**$\chi^2$  of female–male total noun visibility by textbook**

	Female		Male
<i>Outlooks On</i>	327		248
<i>Sold Gold</i>	249		254
Results	$\chi^2= 5.5591$	df= 1	p= 0.01838

**$\chi^2$  of female–gender neutral total noun visibility by textbook**

	Female		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	327		942
<i>Sold Gold</i>	249		1009

**$\chi^2$  of female–gender neutral total noun visibility by textbook**

	Female		Gender neutral
Results	$\chi^2= 12.478$	df= 1	p= 0.0004117

**$\chi^2$  of male–gender neutral total noun visibility by textbook**

	Male		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	248		942
<i>Sold Gold</i>	254		1009
Results	$\chi^2= 0.15801$	df= 1	p= 0.691

**$\chi^2$  of female–male total visibility by textbook**

	Female		Male
<i>Outlooks On</i>	949		842
<i>Sold Gold</i>	835		1066
Results	$\chi^2= 29.97$	df= 1	p= 0.00000004387

**$\chi^2$  of female–gender neutral total visibility by textbook**

	Female		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	949		956
<i>Sold Gold</i>	835		1055
Results	$\chi^2= 11.874$	df= 1	p= 0.0005692

**$\chi^2$  of male–gender neutral total visibility by textbook**

	Male		Gender neutral
<i>Outlooks On</i>	842		956
<i>Sold Gold</i>	1066		1055
Results	$\chi^2= 4.4449$	df= 1	p= 0.03501

**$\chi^2$  of female–male visibility by pronouns and nouns**

	Female		Male
Pronouns	1248		1406
Nouns	576		502
Results	$\chi^2= 12.346$	df= 1	p= 0.0004418

**$\chi^2$  of female–gender neutral visibility by pronouns and nouns**

	Female	Gender neutral
Pronouns	1248	60
Nouns	576	1951
Results	$\chi^2= 1816.5$	df= 1 p< 0.000000000000000022

**$\chi^2$  of male–gender neutral visibility by pronouns and nouns**

	Male	Gender neutral
Pronouns	1406	60
Nouns	502	1951
Results	$\chi^2= 2087.5$	df= 1 p< 0.000000000000000022

**$\chi^2$  of female–male visibility by singular and plural nouns**

	Female	Male
Singular nouns	433	406
Plural nouns	143	96
Results	$\chi^2= 4.7305$	df= 1 p= 0.02963

**$\chi^2$  of female–gender neutral visibility by singular and plural nouns**

	Female	Gender neutral
Singular nouns	433	907
Plural nouns	143	1044
Results	$\chi^2= 145.75$	df= 1 p< 0.000000000000000022

**$\chi^2$  of male–gender neutral visibility by singular and plural nouns**

	Male	Gender neutral
Singular nouns	406	907
Plural nouns	96	1044
Results	$\chi^2= 188.42$	df= 1 p< 0.000000000000000022

## Appendix 2: Gender specific occupations

*Occupations available only to one gender category*

<i>Outlooks On</i>			<i>Solid Gold</i>		
Male	Female	Gender neutral	Male	Female	Gender neutral
(Arch)bishop	French teacher	Actor	Broadcaster	Actress	Architect
Astronomer	History teacher	Administrator	Bus driver	Assistant pathologist	Baggage handler
Barman	Minister	Advisor	Captain	Athlete	Chemist
English teacher	Nurse	Artist	Caretaker	Cable car conductor	Computer analyst
Jeweller	Pop star	Assembly line worker	CEO	Director (arts)	Construction worker
News anchor	Preschool teacher	Astronomer	Chairman	Historian	Cook
News broadcaster	Prime Minister	Butchery	Clerk	Minister	Critics
Philosopher	Psychologist	CEO	Copywriter	Playwright	Dancer
Pilot	Waitress	Cleaner	Director (business)	Poet	Defence minister
Pirate chief	Whore	Columnist	Embassy worker	Scriptwriter	Dentist
President		Editor	Engineer	Songwriter	Designer
Professor		Foreign minister	Firefighter		Detective
Safari guide		Guide	Fisherman		Doctor
Singer		Journalist	Footballer		Editor
Soldier		Judge	Foreign secretary		Flight attendant
		Lawyer	Immigration officer		Government official
		Librarian	Manager		Governor
		McDonald's worker	Musician		Hairdresser
		Nanny	Photographer		Mayor
		Physical therapist	Restaurant owner		Nanny
		Pilot	Scientist		Navigator
		Police	Soldier		Personal trainer

*Occupations available only to one gender category*

<i>Outlooks On</i>			<i>Solid Gold</i>		
Male	Female	Gender neutral	Male	Female	Gender neutral
		Psychotherapist	Steelworker		Photographer
		Publicist	Taxi driver		Proctor
		Reporter	Tennis player		Professor
		Researcher	Waiter		Prostitute
		Salesperson	Zoo keeper		Psychiatrist
		Scientist			Publicist
		Senior associate			Researcher
		Social worker			Scientist
		Sociologist			Security guard
		Supermodel			Shopkeeper
		Surgeon			Soldier
		Telemarketer			Surgeon
		Trainer			Traffic wardens
		Yankee			Travel agent