An English Language Textbook Study from a Gender Perspective

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1. Introduction

Gender equality is a highly discussed subject in today’s society. Generally, men and women’s access to equality differs concerning salaries, respect and power. Children grow up learning about gender equality from parents, society and other adults that surround them. Clearly, gender equality deals with issues of democracy and fundamental values. To teach children at an early age about these issues will benefit our society. Therefore, the Swedish school system has an educational policy through the whole school system that brings up issues of gender, democracy and fundamental values.

An understanding for gender equality will of course not come by itself. R.W.Connell states that “a willingness to learn, gender theory and research can play a significant role in making a more democratic world” (151). Lpf94 states “that school shall actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women” (4). Connell argues that “pupils shall be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice as to gender differences” (4). Connell’s words are important to consider when discussing the Swedish school system and what is offered to the students in the form of texts or other teaching materials.

In higher education gender equality presumably could result in deeper knowledge of gender equality and also assist us toward the goals that are set up for the Swedish school system.

Text’s and textbook’s content that are provided to students will have an influence on their identity. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet in Language and Gender “gender is not something we are born with and not something we have, but something we do – something we perform” (10). It seems clear that it is important to discuss texts and images that are provided as teaching materials in the Swedish schools. In the Report 287, En granskning av hur kön framställs i ett urval av läroböcker i enlighet med skolans värdegrund, Berge and Widding
argue that in most teaching material both men and women are represented; however, boys and men are over-represented. Their research is based on analysing twenty-four different teaching materials divided in four subjects, biology, history, religion and social civics. Despite the fact that Swedish and English are two core subjects in upper-secondary school these subjects have been left out of the analysis of teaching materials. Little attention has been paid to gender equality in English textbooks.

2. Background

As mentioned, the Swedish school system shall actively work for gender equality. The National Agency for Education, *Report 287 Gender differences in goal fulfilment and education choices* states that, “the objective of the school’s gender equality work is to challenge gender roles and give the students the possibility of developing their talents without the restrictions of stereotyped ideas about masculinity and femininity” (9). Today many people work to improve gender equality and there are many theories and analyses of how to best reach gender equality. *Lpf94* declares that all teachers “shall make sure the education in terms of its contents and its structure reflect both male and female perspectives” (13). It is possible to speculate that this might be seen as a difficult task due to female dominance among teachers within all levels. As a teacher, it is important not to become a stereotype, as children tend to follow adults examples and manners. This does not necessarily mean that female dominance is the cause for inadequate gender equality within the school. Gunilla Molloy discusses in *Report 287* that “the students learn more from what the teachers do than from what they say, i.e. teaching by doing” (13). *Report 287* states “that the teacher’s biological sex and the teacher’s role as opinion maker and creator of culture have to be kept apart. There must be a consciousness among the teachers, not only of, for instance, language differences, but also of their own attitudes to masculinity and femininity as well as a deeper
understanding for the teacher’s importance as a role model” (13). It is my belief that teachers have a tendency to end up in a specific role and without being aware of it; he or she starts to treat boys and girls differently. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet state that “kids do not behave as good or bad people, but as good boys or good girls” (19). This might lead to a situation where girls and boys learn how to be girls and boys according to stereotypes that are left unquestioned. It further explains why I find it important to investigate an English language textbook. Not only will my own knowledge about gender studies become more in-depth, but it will also be useful to know whether the most commonly used textbook for English A in the non-compulsory school is gender-neutral.

Throughout history people have been treated and educated differently depending on their gender. In some countries, the progress of gender equality has moved forward very slowly. Note also that even a country like Sweden that has worked very hard on the issue of gender equality still has a long way to go. It was not until 1921 that women received the right to vote in Sweden. This is an interesting fact as it demonstrates that women have been able to take an active part in society for only a short period in history. The Swedish National Board of Education’s responsibility is to make sure that the schools follow a plan for gender equality. As stated above, the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system Lpf94 states “that school shall actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women. Pupils shall be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice as to gender differences” Lpf94 (4). Here an important factor is the selection of educational teaching materials offered to the students. It is of importance as English A in the upper-secondary school is a “core subject course” (www.skolverket.se) that requires the student to study 100 credits of English. The aim of the subject English is "developing an all-round communicative ability and the language skills necessary for international contacts, and increasingly
internationalised labour market”. Furthermore it also states the importance of “broadening perspectives on an expanding English-speaking world with its multiplicity of varying cultures” (www.skolverket.se).

3. Research question and aim
This study is only a small contribution to a general analysis of to what extent a teaching textbook is gender equal or not. The textbook studied is used in the upper-secondary school for the English A course. The aim of this study is to explicate the issue of whether gender stereotypes are reinforced or not by examining the representation of men and women in the texts in Blueprint A version 2.0. Actually, this study will attempt to show how Blueprint A version 2.0 reinforces gender stereotypes.

4. Thesis
In the context of this study, it is important to observe what the Swedish curriculum Lpf94 states about that all teachers “shall make sure that education in terms of its contents and its structure reflect both male and female perspectives” (13). In particular, it is important to focus on the awareness of equal rights and opportunities for men and women in a classroom. It is also of importance to relate English texts to the student’s surroundings and social life. In Språkboken Jan Van Ek states that “in planning the foreign language learner’s facilities we do not only seek to address the learner’s cognitive powers but also their psychological, their emotional, their social conditions” (18). Furthermore we must examine whether textbooks represent different ways of living, social matters and traditions to expand the student’s knowledge and understanding of a foreign language. Textbooks should therefore be written to suit both genders to be able to capture their interests and challenge gender stereotypes. As already stated, my study seeks to examine gender stereotypes and also to what extent men and
women are represented and also how they are represented in the textbook. Lpf94 states that gender equality is being violated if men and women are not represented, underrepresented, or overrepresented. If this is the case, the goals of Lpf94 are not fulfilled concerning gender equality.

5. Selection

In this study, the textbook Blueprint A version 2.0, is used. This textbook is a new edition of Blueprint A. To broaden our understanding of gender equality the study attempts to show text material that relates to the curriculum for 1994 reform named Lpf94. The focus of the study is therefore to examine textbooks printed no later than 1994. Blueprint A (2004) and Blueprint version 2.0 (2007) are two of the English textbooks on the market for level A upper-secondary school. Other textbooks like Professional and Core English were considered, and it would have been interesting to study all of them. However, I have limited my analysis to one textbook, given the scope of this essay. Another reason for choosing Blueprint A version 2.0 is because it has an interesting content of different texts, both fictional as well as factual. The Swedish National Board of Education states that one of the goals in English A is to “improve their ability to understand the contents communicated by different media”. Blueprint A version 2.0 not only consists of texts but also of many different images that may cause reactions and lead to further discussions with the students. It will also be useful to investigate the images as well and for this reason I will include a few of them in my analysis. The teacher’s role or own choice of text material falls outside this study.

The method used is textual analysis as a qualitative method. “Qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: (1) participation in the setting, (2) direct observation, (3) in depth interviews, and (4) analysis of documents and materials”
I concentrate on method number four “analysis of documents and materials” in examining the representations of gender. The strategy used is to study one or two texts in each of the eight sections in Blueprint Version 2.0 and to examine the representation of gender in texts and images.

6. Theory

Gender is the socially constructed difference between men and women. According to Connell there are different ideals for women and men: “bodily differences and social effects are often linked through the idea of character dichotomy” (40). Thus gender differences are established through oppositions. As Connell states, “women are supposed to be nurturing, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive, and sexually loyal” (40), while men, on the other hand, are “supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic and promiscuous” (40).

In this context, an important notion is what Connell refers to as the “sex role” (76). Connell claims in his book Gender that it has been assumed that “there are two sex roles, a male and a female one, with boys and girls getting separately inducted into the norms and expectations of the appropriate one” (12). Moreover, researchers like Barrie Thorne have observed children in school. She has particularly studied the ways children “pick up how to gender” (13). Even newborn babies are treated differently because of their gender; they are named either female or male names and dressed in either blue or pink baby clothes. From the time we are born we are associated with different objects. Many people associate the word boys with cars, the colour blue, wild games and bruises; the word girl is however connected to the colour pink, clean, dolls and quit games. Girls learn how to be polite, kind and take care of our appearance at an early age. As they grow up, girls and boys learn how to act and look feminine or masculine with the help from example make-up, clothes, or magazines.
Connell continues to discuss how “blue” babies are expected to be “rougner and tougher, more demanding, aggressive and vigorous” (76). Growing up boys are given computer games, cars and toy guns. Girls are on the other hand expected to be “more passive and compliant, also prettier” (76). Growing up they are dressed in pretty pink dresses and they are given dolls and makeup.

Kajsa Svaleryd states, in her text *Genuspedagogik*, that the conceptions of feminine and masculine ideals are present in the media more than ever. She continues by stating that the stereotypes for men and women have never been clearer: pink and pretty things for girls and tough and dark things for boys (73). She found that many gender differences were situational, created in some situations and ignored in others. Therefore, gender stereotypes continue to be very important in our lives.

7. Gender and Education

The role of gender in schools and how it has affected the students’ goal fulfilment has been very much discussed in numerous texts and theories. The feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow claims in *Gender* by Connell, that boys strive to break their relationship from their mother and female teacher in order to define a masculine identity. They seek to be opposite to female pedagogues and girls; boys strive to become something else; they are going to be men. Connell states, “In talking about gender we are not talking about simple differences or fixed categories. We are talking about relationships, boundaries, practices, identities and images that are actively created in social processes, come into existence in specific historical circumstances, shape the lives of people in profound and often contradictory ways, and are subject to historical struggle and change” (27). These factors are important to consider when examining girls´ and boys´ different behaviour.
According to Svaleryd, girls and boys are separated by gender, and they choose their own gender when it comes to friends or whom to sit next to (16). Studies show that an early experience of gender equality is of importance for children’s future. One study by the National Agency for Education states that the Agency’s annual compilation of final grades in compulsory school reveals “that there are clear differences in results between boys and girls” (8). According to Report 287, girls attain better results in subjects test and they are also more involved in discussing questions dealing with “human rights, environment, the future and ethical opinions” (8). The report underlines the importance of the Swedish school system to be “equal and all pupils shall be given the possibility of attaining the goals involved” (8). Berge and Widding argue that the perfect prototype of a textbook brings up men and women’s rights equally and also lets the students try and develop their skills and interests regardless of their gender. The texts should further contain both social themes and focus on the subject, in this case English A. Now we will turn to an examination of texts in Blueprint A Version 2.0.

8. Analysis of Blueprint A version 2.0

This analysis focuses on Blueprint A version 2.0, a textbook suitable for English A in the Swedish upper secondary-school. The new version was published in 2007 and the texts are set in the 20th and 21st century and have different themes. The layout is new and attractive and each chapter has a variety of pictures in colour; very few pictures are in black and white. The textbook is divided into eight chapters with different themes. These chapters are divided into sections, which are called: “The future”, “Pictures and media”, “Wonderful things”, “Human rights and wrong”, and “Gender differences”, “Adventures”, “Cyberspace and Racism”. After each text there are listening comprehension exercises and writing and speaking exercises to work with. The typeset is almost the same throughout the whole book but the colours of the pages vary and make the text more attractive and fun to read. Each theme
consists of a variety of texts: the total is thirty-seven parts, eleven of those focuses on
listening exercises and four on music and twenty-two are text stories.

The textbook also contains seventy-three images. Almost all images are colourful and show
different scenes containing both genders. It is sometimes hard to determine the gender of the
character in the image due to how the photo is taken and processed. An interesting aspect of
the images that emerges is that almost all images directed to boys show a stereotypical
masculine side. For instance, hard objects such as guns, fast cars, outdoor activities, and
expensive suits and last but not least beautiful women surround boys. Images containing
females are softer; girls are surrounded by music, makeup or wear pretty dresses, or they are
exposed to fear. Such a gender division seems relevant to R.W. Connells discussion about
gender expectations and sex roles. Connell claims “though language – speech and writing – is
the most analysed site of symbolic gender relations, it is not the only one. Gender symbolism
also operates in dress, makeup, gesture, in photography and film” (66).

9. Analysis of the texts

Cyberspace, different dangers for girls and boys

The section “Virtual Reality for Real” (163) contains three texts. I will analyse two of them.
The first one “A career in Computer games” (164), written by Anthony Horowitz, is about a
boy, Kevin, who is addicted to playing violent computer games. The text also tells us about
Kevin’s negative attitude towards schoolwork; and instead of studying he spends his time in
front of the computer playing games.
The text contains sentences that indicate that it represents a stereotypically masculine attitude to schoolwork. For instance “every day when he got home he threw his bag in to the corner, ignoring his homework” and that “he had failed all his exams” (165). This can be generally said to be a typical masculine behaviour. Instead of showing emotions of sadness or disappointment, he ignores the fact that he has failed his schoolwork and acts out by throwing things around him. Connell states “that boys are taught the importance of appearing hard and dominant – whether they feel like it or not” (3). The text seems to be aimed at a male audience because it contains facts about violent computer games and the language used in the text may appeal more to males than females. For Instance words that appear in the text that can be associated with stereotypical masculinity are: car, gun, bullets, exploded, motor cycles, and huge machines. Another fundamental factor is that it contains a profoundly relaxed attitude concerning computer games. The text gives the impression that computer games are harmless. The importance of having a pocket computer with games on in your pocket is underlined on page 164. The assumption is that computer games are or can be looked on as friends.

My opinion is that computer games might be harmful if they become your only friend. This is not to state that computer games are dangerous to everyone. However, there should be more discussions in the text whether it is possible to speculate that the main point in the text is to be critical of kids playing computer games too often and the danger that computer games can establish. For instance, playing can lead to computer game addiction. It is important not to overlook that there is no warning text on how computer games can destroy your life, if you are not careful.
Furthermore, there is one image that conveys a stereotypically violent masculinity by showing a young man holding a weapon and pointing it at a computer (167). The next images show four still pictures showing four big men dressed in suits, one wears sunglasses and they all have weapons. Their faces are serious. These images raise the issue if weapons and powerful men in suits are a stereotypical male syndrome of power. The content in the text seems especially aimed at male teenagers but there are no words of warning about the possible dangers of using computer games. Together image and text seem to reinforce stereotypical masculinity.

The next text “A Match Made in Cyberspace” (182) is from an article in the magazine *Cosmopolitan* by Jennifer Pirtie. The text that follows is about a young girl called June. She visits a site by coincidence called lovesearch.com and she describes her first blind date. On her date she meets Elias and after their meeting he gives her flowers and takes her for dinner at a restaurant. The text is quite interesting from a gender perspective as it brings up the question of equality. There are many facts pointing out the imbalance in gender equality. For instance, the man Elias wants to pay for June to go on a romantic holiday. Another point is that he has a bunch of flowers with him when they meet for the first time, but she has nothing for him. Most importantly, Elias expects June to come home with him after their first date and gets upset when June declines.

The article brings up the question of bought love; however, it is not directly stated. When a man like Elias brings a woman flowers and offers to pay her an airplane ticket to a romantic country in this case Thailand, what does he expect in return? It is clear in this case that Elias was expecting June to come home with him; otherwise he wouldn’t have been upset. We can assume that this raises questions among the students, for instance why cannot June pay for
herself. An interesting aspect of this narrative is that it would suggest that Elias expects sex in return. Importantly the story is introduced by a “follow our tips for safe web-romance surfing” (182). There we can read about how girls can protect themselves on the Internet from strangers. However, as mentioned, in the text for boys there is no warning text on how to play safe, and how to avoid becoming a computer addict, whereas the second text, aimed at girls starts with tips on how to stay safe for safe Web romance surfing.

This text *Blueprint A Version 2.0* is then a stereotypical text in the sense that it addresses the dangers of using a computer only for girls. Arguably this implies that there is a higher potential of danger for a girl to be on the Internet and it plays into our conception of girls as potential weak victims. The effect of these texts may be that students may believe that, firstly, it is dangerous for girls to be on the Internet while for boys there is no danger to play computer games.

**Male dominance and race in two texts**

The section “Wages of hate” (191) contains two texts based on two different movies that deal with racial and ethnic conflicts in America. Even if both texts present ethnicity as the main question, my focus will be on gender.

In the first text there is a scene from the movie *American History X* which takes place “in the Los Angeles gangland where racism and neo-Nazism are strong” (194). The focus is entirely on the white Vineyard family and especially on the older brother Derek who is full of hate towards black people after his father’s death. The text is from three different scenes in the movie. The first scene is a dialogue during a dinner at the Vineyards. Derek’s mother has invited her new partner Murray and they are “having an animated discussion” (195). The use
of language in the first scene is very disturbing, words like “fucking”; and “son-of-a-bitch” appear. In general it can be said that the text is very masculine because it contains male characters that are dominant and who are acting out their power by saying words stereotypically used by men. Stereotypically, women do not use that kind of language therefore I find the text very masculine.

Furthermore, the text reveals that Derek is very forceful and his language is full of disrespect for the others around the table. The mother Doris tries to calm the conversation down. However, no one pays much attention to what she says. The role of Doris is that of a fundamental character of a very nurturing woman, she wishes not to make the situation worse by arguing. The second scene is a conversation between two men, Derek and his teacher. They refer to each other as “man” and mainly the conversation is about anger. The third scene is a flashback from the time when Derek’s father is alive. The conversation is between Derek and his father and they talk about school and Derek’s father talks about the affirmative action, which he refers to as “affirmative blacktion” (199) because he wants to make fun of the term. Derek’s father indicates that it means that black people are wrongly given advantages in the form of education and job opportunities that they do not deserve. Derek and his father also talk about “Native Son” which is a book written by the black writer Richard Wright published in 1940. The novel is a classic of African American Literature and tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a black young man who takes a job as a chauffeur for a rich white family. The main issue of the novel is that because Bigger is black he is discriminated against the world of the white people. The father questions why they are introduced to black literature in school. The father’s opinion is that they should only read literature by white Americans.
In the last scene words as “man”, “job”, “bullshit”, “proud”, and “guy” are introduced. Derek who uses abusive language, investing his male power and the fact that he belongs to a dangerous gang can be seen in the light of Mia Thorell’s argues in *Genuspedagogik*; that boys’ power struggle is much stronger than girls’ (66). The women play a passive part; the mother keeps to herself without revealing her thoughts. It is apparent that the man, in this case her oldest son oppresses her. For instance when Derek asks his mother – “So you think you’re an authority?” (199). He implies that his mother as a woman is not of a higher rank. As his father is dead, Derek considers himself the man in the house and he is therefore the one with authority. Students who read this might come to the conclusion that men are rightfully superior to women if the text is not problematized.

In this section, there are two images. The first image shows Derek with a bare torso; his head is shaved and he has a Nazi cross tattooed on his chest. He is playing basketball and his standing very firmly holding the ball in his hands. He looks very angry. In front of him is a black man. They look like they are going to kill each other. The image is very stereotypically masculine as it shows half-naked men with tattoos and lots of muscles. The women who are standing watching the game observe the men with admiration. This draws the attention to the myth of dangerous men as more masculine and interesting for women. The image also shows the line between white and black; however it also shows the difference between soft and hard. The women represent the soft and the men the hard. The next image shows a more humble Derek as he is talking to his black teacher. They are both dressed in suites and Derek’s hair has now grown out. The image is serious, and Derek now has sadness in his eyes, and he looks guilty. The teacher looks like he is listening, as if he understands Derek’s situation. If you compare the two images you can see that Derek has changed, from a man with a shaved
head and hate in his eyes, to a man with hair and softness in his eyes. This change indicates that he has become a more vulnerable and softer man.

The second text is from the movie *A time to kill* by John Grisham and it is concerned with the situation of African Americans. The text is called “I Owe to My People” (204) and introduces two male characters: Carl Lee Hailey an African American who is full of hate after his daughter has “been attacked and hurt badly by two white men” (204), and a white young lawyer Jake Brigance.

The scene that follows contains a conversation between Carl and his lawyer. The conversation is about Carl’s daughter who is in hospital after having been raped by two white men. In *Gender* The Women’s Liberation analyse “rape as an assertion of men’s power over woman, and the critique of media images of women as passive, trivial and dumb” (58). This might lead to discussions that rape is a tool of power when for men. During the rest of the text the conversation is very male dominated for several reasons. Firstly the conversation contains words such as “bastards”, “niggers”, “kill”, “murder”, “shootings”, “hang” and “gas chamber”. Another argument that this text is male oriented is the sentence “A man’s supposed to protect his family” (207). The text does not argue that the wife could be protective of her family and support them if Carl is sent to jail. The mother and daughter are represented as potential victims, the ones who are being raped and beaten, and it is also understood that if Carl is sentenced to the gas chamber no one is capable of raising the children. The text avoids discussing the fact that the children have a mother or other female persons around them who are able to do the same job, raising and providing for the children as well as any father. Therefore, it reinforces stereotypical gender roles.
The image on page 205 also reinforces these gender roles; it shows how Carl is being questioned by his lawyer. Both are dressed in suits and ties; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet discuss that “a global man has to look trim in suit” and “his movements have to be graceful” (48). The text explains the position of the lawyer standing firmly with his hands steadily resting on the wood frame shows that he is a powerful man. In the back of the picture there is a blurry image of a judge. He is old with grey hair and has a black coat on. The whole image clarifies the male domination in the picture. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet “men are more expected to judge, offer advice and expertise” (39). We can assume that men in suits represent power. There are no images of women in suits. For a young adult this may not seem important however, it might reinforce assumptions that only men wearing suits have jobs in which one offers advice or expertise.

Males and females
The section “Under construction” (115) deals with the issue that there is a “difference between biological sex (woman or man) and gender, which focuses on the social or psychological (not the biological) qualities of men and women” (115). According to Connell, the term gender means “the cultural difference of women from men, based on the biological division between male and female” (8). This section claims that we have to look beyond biology to the fact that gender roles mainly are defined by expectations.

The section begins with showing a picture on page 115 that depicts a handsome man on a motorcycle. The fact that he has a small infant in his arms makes the picture appear soft. He holds the infant in a very protective way; it lies steady in his big arms. Clearly, this image stands for gender equality but it comes as a surprise why there are no more images like this one for the students to relate to.
The next chapter is called “Video” (116), it is written by India Arie and it focuses on music and lyrics. The lyrics discuss the topic that women should accept themselves for who they are and not attempt to live up to the ideals that women are supposed to be beautiful. In the lyrics India Arie expresses her feelings concerning being a woman and sings about that “sometimes I shave my legs and sometimes I don’t” (117). She continues to sing about the fact that she does not look like a supermodel. She however argues that no matter what she looks like she loves herself unconditionally; she is a queen to herself. She defines the supermodel as a woman who drinks fancy drinks, wears expensive clothes and fills her body with silicone. Her argument is that a girl should instead love herself for who she is no matter what she looks like or what she wears. From a woman’s point of view, it is a positive lyric that encourages women to love themselves. The picture on page 116 shows a beautiful woman sitting by the window with a guitar in her lap. It can be argued that it excludes male students as there is nothing in the text that is male oriented and students, especially male students, may believe this is the way girls think about themselves. It is however positive to read about a woman who is happy with herself.

The difference between the lyrics “Video” by India Arie (116) and the lyrics on page 26, which is a lyric called “Don’t Let Me Get Me” by Pink, are very distinctive. Pink writes about how she everyday fights “a war against the mirror” (26) and is a “hazard to myself” (26). She also continues with damning the popular female artist Britney Spears because of her being so pretty and she ends the song by asking the doctor to live her life for a day as someone else. Although the lyric is ironic, the effect of the lyrics might lead to the understanding that it is not good enough to look the way you do.
Clearly the two lyrics separate themselves in attitude to how a woman should be. The first song encourages women to be themselves while the second lyric is concerned with low self-confidence because of women’s inability to live up to the ideal for women: The typical ideal is that women live up to the values of a stereotypical nice educated pretty girl who wears neat and clean socks.

The second text is called “Making Sex” by Chris Anderson and is based on an article in TIME by Lev Grossman. This text is about a woman, Norah, who spends almost a year living as a man. Norah’s experiences living and behaving as a man are quite interesting. She noticed a difference straight away. For instance, as a woman Norah always felt that she was “an object of desire” (130) when walking down the streets. She explains that being a man makes such a walk quite a different sensation. When men met her as a “he” on the street, she felt that they immediately looked away when they met her eyes. It would have been interesting to know how women look at her as a man; however, the text does not mention that. She also discovers that women often apologise to her for things whereas men just continue as nothing has happened. The text also brings up issues of how hard it is to be a man. Both women and men have a lot of expectations on them. Especially men feel naked and insecure under their hard attitude. Norah ends the text by stating that “if women tried to understand men more, not just the other way around, the gender gap would be far easier to cut short” (131).

My opinion is that the effect of a deeper understanding between genders can be thought of as an important goal in understanding gender equality. There are also two images to this text and the first one shows Norah as a very soft woman with make-up, smiling. She looks very stereotypically feminine, her blouse is open and her eyes are warm and welcoming almost a bit sexy. Unfortunately the effect of this image among students, especially male students,
might be to focus on her sexual appeal rather than on the message of the text. The other picture shows Norah as a man, very serious, her eyes have an ice-cold look and she wears a shirt and tie very properly buttoned. The difference between women and men become very stereotypically clear to the student in this text and might lead to a greater gender gap rather than reducing it.

The third story in this section is called “And They Call Me Honey” (135) from Growing Out, in The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart by Alice Walker. The main character in the text, Anne, has left her husband Philip for another woman; however she is also having an affair with her ex-boyfriend Jason. Jason refers to Anne as “Butch” (135), which means that a woman dresses, behaves and looks like a man. In a conversation between Jerri and Anne, Jerri makes a comment that “Every man plans first for a son” (136). This is a very stereotypical comment made about men who supposedly always want a son first. The effect of this comment might lead to pressure among female student that men want them to give birth to a son first.

This story focuses on gender roles and expectations and the story continues to tell how Anne and Jerri meet. Every time Anne brings her car to the mechanics for service she is called ‘honey’ by the male mechanics. She says that being called honey is worse than being ignored. Therefore she looks for a mechanic operated by women and finds “Mechanical Women Car Specialists” (136). There she meets Jerri who becomes her girlfriend. Another reason for choosing the mechanical for women specialists is because she feels that men make her feel dumb. The text ends with the sentence “If women were as competent as men you wouldn’t give men a second look” (137). It is obvious that although the text is written by a woman, it
indicates that women are the less competent gender. However, the positive side is that the text deals with homosexuality and that love is not always between two people of different gender.

10. Discussion

Blueprint version 2.0 presents thirty-seven texts. It consists of eleven listening exercises: four texts of lyrics and twenty-two are text stories. A majority of them, twelve, are written by men, four by women, three do not have a named author and one text is co-written by a male professor of psychology and a female expert on child development. There are seventy-three images of which sixteen clearly depict women; nine depict both genders together and the rest clearly depict men. Of the ten analysed texts presented in Blueprint A Version 2.0, five are written from a male perspective, three are written from a female perspective.

Before embarking on a discussion of gender equality in the textbook Blueprint A Version 2.0 it is important to bear in mind that Blueprint A Version 2.0 is only one out of hundreds of textbooks for the upper-secondary school that has been analysed. We can also assume that teachers most likely also use other teaching material that follows what Lpf 94 states about schools and their work for rights and opportunities that are gender equal. The textbook is only one tool to help the students achieve the goals in English A. However, I found it disturbing that a majority of the texts where aimed at males and represented a male perspective. This indicates that the textbook Blueprint A Version 2.0 is not gender neutral. It is possible to argue that the texts examined indicate a real gap between men and women. Clearly, the texts encourage male and female stereotypes and reflect stereotypical gender assumptions. Note also that the ‘hard’ words in the texts made by men are disturbing for both women and men and only widen the gap between men and women. My study of the textbook suggests that there is a reinforcement of male and female encouragement in the stereotypes
instead of a diminishment. In relation to the study it would be wrong to state that the text material studied corresponds to what Lpf94 suggests on page two in this study concerning gender equality. However, given these observations it is important not to draw conclusions that it are not in the best interest by the authors of the textbook to make it gender neutral.

My own view is that this study only offers a specific survey of teaching material that must be examined more closely. Although, some key values like the importance to accept each other for what we are can be found in Blueprint A version 2.0, it’s discussion about gender equality is vague. To some extent the textbooks also demonstrate a dubious message: being female automatically assumes that you are less intelligent and oppressed by men. This becomes obvious in the text “A Match Made in Cyberspace” (182) where there is only a warning text for women not for men. This may indicate that women need warnings while men do not. The textbook Blueprint A Version 2.0 does not contain enough texts on how to encourage women more. Furthermore, it does not include texts that reveal men in vulnerable and weak positions.

I would argue that both men and women have something to gain from breaking away from the system and from challenging gender stereotypes. Blueprint A Version 2.0 should include texts that focus more on these issues. Both female voices in the two songs are presented and written by two female artists. One of the songs is about loving yourself for who you are while the other one is about being unhappy with who you are. In both songs the speaker compares herself to supermodels or pretty girls. The message of the songs underline that women seldom are happy with their natural looks. The conclusion to be drawn from the text is that women in most situations are not happy with the way they look. It is not advantageous for female students to read about women who depict women who in many occasions do not feel happiness or joy. My opinion is that it only feeds the stereotypical assumption about women
and it does not lead to higher self-confidence among women. Furthermore, two of the three texts presented from a female perspective represent the woman in situations where she is vulnerable to men. For instance the text “A Match Made in Cyberspace” (182) clearly shows examples of how women in male-female relations can end up in a conflict that can be dangerous to her. The text includes a staying safe online text that tells women how to avoid risks when dating over the Internet.

It is of importance, to note that many women are exposed to danger and women need to be aware that behind a romantic phone call from someone on the Internet may exist a potential danger for the woman. However it is interesting that the text “A career in Computer Games” (164), aimed at young men does not include a stay safe warning when playing computer games. It is overlooked that men can be also in danger in cyberspace, not only women. A further potential problem is that young men who read these texts believe that there is no danger for them in cyberspace. Women or men should not be looked as victims or dangerous creatures depending on the way they are portrayed in the texts. The effect of such representation can position men and women further apart from each other and lead to widening gender gaps.

Most of the texts also contain phrases or words that are stereotypically connected to the world of men, for instance as mentioned before that men like to drink beer and that men always fantasize about having a son first or that all heroes are men. I found it disturbing that there are no texts that cover men in a vulnerable situation or situations where the women are presented as a heroine. The effect of this is that both boys and girls who read these texts in school might think that it is the appropriate way to behave for. Apart from the study of gender equality I was pleased to find that Blueprint Version 2.0 provides two texts that are concerned with
intolerance against other people. This is linked to what Lf94 states “xenophobia and intolerance must be actively confronted with knowledge” (3). Such issues can be discussed in the scenes from the movie American History X and A Time to Kill. The reader gains an understanding about how men deal with hate. However, Blueprint A version 2.0 basically fails to show how women deal with hate and injustice. It is clear that the texts examined in the textbook Blueprint A version 2.0 often reveal women in weak positions. Such representation can be linked to what Lpf94 states about the importance of gender equality. It is important to note that the subject Home Economics has aims at gender equality in their syllabus. However, the syllabus for English does not mention gender equality at all. One might ask why the aim of gender equality is not included in the syllabus for English A in the upper-secondary school. Perhaps that would have influenced the production of Blueprint A Version 2.0 in a positive way.

This study has attempted to present a study of gender equality in texts from the textbook Blueprint A Version 2.0. It is important to bear in mind that it has only been a minor study of gender equality. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that this textbook focus more on traditionally masculine areas that interest males more; it also represents men to a higher degree and has a tendency to show women as weaker and more vulnerable. To conclude my study, it can be said that there is no doubt that this study strengthens the argument that teaching material for students in English needs to include texts that cover the issue of gender equality more and which do not reinforce stereotypes. It is also important for school leaders and school teachers to critically examine what the students are exposed to.
11. References:


Skolverket. *Report 287, Gender differences in goal fulfillment and education choices*.


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