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# How heteronormative are English textbooks in Norway? A critical discourse analysis of the textbook series Link

## Abstract

This study seeks to assess the degree of heteronormativity found in the English textbooks that are currently used in Norwegian schools. For this purpose, gender and sexuality are highlighted as dimensions of inclusion in foreign language education. It is argued that a non-, under-, or misrepresentation of marginalized or minoritized social groups forms a representational linguistic barrier that puts successful language learning at risk. At the theoretical level, a queer approach is adopted that fosters a critical discussion of heteronormativity in educational practices. Against the backdrop of the Norwegian curriculum, a multimodal critical discourse analysis of books in the Norwegian textbook series Link (catering to years 1 to 7) is carried out that foregrounds the representational aspects that construct gender and sexuality in heteronormative ways. This is done to raise awareness among English teachers as well as to give both teachers and textbook creators a chance to develop more inclusive learning materials. The analysis uncovers that the material targeting the youngest age groups (years 1 and 2) evinces a heteronormative erasure of non-heterosexual people and stereotypically binary, polarized gender constructions. The material created for year 7 is more inclusive in its representation of gender and sexuality but still shows certain weaknesses in how these social categories are constructed.

Keywords: heteronormativity, gender, sexuality, inclusion, social representation, ELT, English textbooks, critical discourse analysis

# Introduction

Teaching materials are texts that shape the socialization and worldviews of young learners. When using them in class, instructors teach more than just their respective subjects. What occurs in a textbook automatically enjoys a higher degree of authority. It is viewed as correct, preferred, or normal, and often remains unquestioned. What does not occur in textbooks, by contrast, lacks institutional support and is, therefore, likely to be viewed as unimportant, inferior, or abnormal, or may even stay unacknowledged altogether. When such absences involve aspects that matter to learners because they are deeply ingrained in their sense of identity, it is hard to see how a positive learning atmosphere, in which learners feel valued in who they are and in what they bring to the classroom, could be created and sustained.

As societies and people's identification options change, a continued critical monitoring of representational issues in teaching materials is mandatory. Textbooks may draw on social representations that are stereotypical, unnuanced, overly traditional, discriminating, and thereby limiting. They may exhibit harmful discourses or exclude or misrepresent certain social groups (Fuchs & Bock, 2018; Hickman & Porfilio, 2012). This can lead to a range of negative effects in learners that put successful learning at risk, such as feeling alienated, marginalized, and demotivated.

Even though textbooks generally enjoy a status of objective authority, it is evident that they cannot be neutral in the way that they construct or represent the world. The way that images and language are used in textbooks provides clues about ideologies, attitudes, perspectives on a topic and, not least, the underlying educational policies.

## 2. Gender and sexuality as dimensions of inclusion in ELT

Identity-based approaches to second language acquisition (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton & McKinney, 2011) have recognized the role of gender and sexuality in foreign language education for a long time (e.g., Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Elsner & Lohe, 2016; Nelson, 2009; Paiz & Coda, 2021; Sauntson, 2021), advocating for higher inclusivity levels for marginalized or minoritized learners. Gender and sexuality representation in teaching materials is key to raising the inclusivity levels. If certain social groups that matter to individual learners – either because they identify with them themselves or because their friends or family members do –

remain un-, under-, or mis-represented, this is likely to put successful learning at risk, as learners may feel that the material used in class ignores them, stereotypes them, or is irrelevant for them. In other words, such representational aspects may form linguistic barriers (Motschenbacher, 2016a, 2021a) that can cause learners to lose motivation or interest to engage with the foreign language. Ideally, all learners should be offered identification points that enable them to perceive language learning as a meaningful activity and the language classroom as a safe space with a positive learning atmosphere.

I approach my textbook analysis from a queer linguistic perspective (Motschenbacher, 2010, 2011; Jones, 2021), taking a critical look at heteronormativity as a dominant discourse. Heteronormativity is a cover term for ideologies that view (certain types of) heterosexuality as natural, normal, ideal, or preferred in comparison to non-heteronormative alternatives (i.e., non-heterosexualities and non-conforming heterosexualities) and that are firmly rooted in a gender-binary conceptualization of female and male people as opposites that attract each other. The notion of heterosexuality as a normative yardstick is actually a fairly recent, originally Western phenomenon. In the fourth edition of the American Illustrated Medical Dictionary, published in the early 20th century, *heterosexuality* is still defined in terms of pathology, as an "abnormal or perverted sexual appetite toward the opposite sex" (Dorland, 1907, p. 333) and, therefore, does not fare better than *homosexuality*, which is defined as a "sexual perversion toward those of the same sex" (Dorland, 1907, p. 336) in the same dictionary. This illustrates that our concept of sexuality and sexual normativity changes throughout time, and textbooks as educational texts tend to play a major part in these discursive formation processes.

In a queer theoretically informed approach, identity categories are treated with suspicion because they often cause essentialist thinking, normativity, and exclusion. In such a view, the categories "gay" and "lesbian" are equally problematic as the category "straight" and powerful identity-related binarisms (female – male, gay – straight, hetero – homo, butch – femme; etc.) are to be questioned. As a consequence, a pedagogy based on queer theoretical tenets does not just increase the visibility of non-heterosexual people in teaching practices and learning materials or advocate for LGBT rights. It couples inclusive strategies with a pedagogy of inquiry that encourages a critical analysis of all gender and sexual categories as

well as the normative discourses associated with them (see Nelson, 1999, 2006). When analyzing representations of gender and sexuality in textbooks, it is, therefore, not enough to check whether non-heterosexual people occur. It is equally of interest as to how they are represented, and whether the material also encourages students to engage in critical analysis and reflection about gender and sexuality.

Moore (2020, p. 121–122) has developed a taxonomy that distinguishes five degrees of heteronormativity potentially surfacing in textbooks (see Figure 1), acknowledging that social representation is more complex than a binary heteronormative vs. non-heteronormative distinction. The first and least inclusive category, "explicit heterosexism", refers to practices of explicitly valuing heterosexuality over other sexualities, which are in turn devalued. "Heteronormative erasure" describes a representation in which heterosexuality is used as the framework for all relationships and non-heterosexual people are non-existent. With "heteronormative marginalization", non-heterosexual characters are in fact represented, but this is done in a way that marks them as somehow special, abnormal, or exceptional, which causes them to be constructed as othered (us vs. them) or problematized. "Heteronormative mainstreaming" describes materials that include positive images of non-heterosexual people that mimic heterosexual relationship models (married, faithful, having children, etc.) and are, therefore, easier to digest for mainstream audiences. The last category, "queer inclusion", describes the representational target. It involves an inclusive and nuanced representation of all types of queer people and comes with a normalizing agenda, showing that they constitute a valued part of society and also have concerns and interests other than gender and sexuality.

**Figure 1:** Heteronormativity in textbooks: A taxonomy (Moore, 2020, p. 121)

| Type of heteronormativity | Level of heteronormativity |
|---|---|
| Queer inclusion | less heteronormative |
| Heteronormative mainstreaming | |
| Heteronormative marginalisation | ⇕ |
| Heteronormative erasure | |
| Explicit heterosexism | more heteronormative |

This taxonomy serves as a reference system for the description of teaching materials, as it enables analysts to classify specific materials and to identify what needs to be achieved to reach lower levels of heteronormativity. The latter is a goal from which not only non-heterosexual students and teachers benefit. As heteronormativity as a discursive formation includes the propagation of norms about how to be a "good" or "authentic" heterosexual woman or man, it is evident that all learners and teachers benefit from a critical engagement with heteronormativity (see also Motschenbacher, 2010, p. 16–17).

Previous work on gender and sexuality representation in foreign language textbooks has generally found fairly high levels of heteronormativity and gender stereotypicality (see, for example: Gray, 2013; Motschenbacher, 2021b; Mustapha & Mills, 2015; Paiz, 2015; Richards, 2022; Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2021; Sunderland, 2021; Nelson, 2007, for an overview of earlier work). Recent research on textbooks in Norway also documents a heteronormative bias across subjects (e.g., Røthing, 2017; Smestad 2018). However, none of these Norwegian studies has concentrated on English textbooks.

## 3. A critical look at the Norwegian curriculum

To provide a contextual background for the textbook analysis, this section looks into two curriculum texts that are most directly relevant to English language teaching in Norway: The latest version of the subject-specific "Curriculum in English" (valid from August 2020; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, hereinafter referred to as "CIE") and the more general "Core Curriculum" (hereinafter referred to as "CC"), which is based on the 2017 national Education Act and formulates learning goals independently of individual subjects (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). My discussion is based on the official English translations of these documents. While CC is incorporated in full, I concentrate on the initial part of CIE (pages 1–10), which discusses the English curriculum for primary and lower secondary education (years 1–10). I approach these documents with the following questions in mind: Are gender and sexuality recognized as educational issues in the curricular texts? Which other aspects mentioned in the curriculum are relevant to gender and sexuality as educational dimensions of inclusion?

A detailed analysis of the two selected curriculum documents reveals a striking absence of gender and sexuality as topics. CIE does not mention these aspects at all, and there is only one reference to them in CC, within the subsection on "Health and Life Skills": "Relevant areas within this topic are physical and mental health, lifestyle habits, sexuality and gender, drug abuse, media use and consumption and personal economy" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 15). CC does not specify how gender and sexuality may play a role in education, which suggests a default thinking that sees female, gay, and lesbian learners as vulnerable groups in need of support. Even though such a thinking covers aspects that can potentially surface in educational practices and teaching materials, there should be an awareness that it misses other issues that may be equally relevant today. It has been shown, for example, that boys learning foreign languages have to face linguistic barriers in the shape of normative gender discourses that dictate that boys are "bad at languages", while girls are constructed as more successful language learners (Carr & Pauwels, 2006). Another gender-related issue that is becoming more important is the representation of trans and non-binary characters in teaching materials (Knisely, 2021; Knisely & Paiz, 2021).

As shown in a recent study by Monsen & Steien (2022) on teaching practices and materials in Norwegian adult education, there may be a tendency to reverse traditional discrimination patterns. When being taught Norwegian culture and language, migrants are often presented with a picture of Norway as a modern and democratic society where everyone has equal rights. The actual portrayal of women and men in educational practices, however, espouses a gender representation that borders that of a matriarchal society, where women are on top of the social hierarchy and enjoy the greatest privileges, while men have no chance to speak up for their rights. The authors state that they found

> "[…] narratives about families in Norway as matriarchal. After all, the mother in the Norwegian family spends time studying, reading for pleasure and listening to music, while her husband is busy working to support his family, when he is not washing the floors and doing the laundry, or teaching his male friend how to cook soft, tasteless meals for his family" (Monsen & Steien, 2022, p. 27).

As the authors point out, "statistics show that women do more housework than men and they also earn less, even in Norway" (Monsen & Steien, 2022, p. 25), which indicates that the female superiority constructed is a misrepresentation. The marginalization of men in the name

of the Norwegian nation was shown to cause a loss of language learning motivation among male migrants, who did not feel valued in their gender identity by the host society and felt humiliated by constructions of Norway as a society that favors women (one of the students set up the social hierarchy he experienced in Norway as 1. women, 2. children, 3. dogs, 4. flowers, and 5. men; Monsen & Steien, 2022, p. 30).

In a similar vein, Røthing (2017) highlights the role of both gender and sexuality in Norwegian identity construction: "In the Norwegian context, acceptance of same-sex relations has become a symbol of "Norwegianness" in recent years. Gender equality and homotolerance are today considered core Norwegian values […] and are explicitly presented as such in Norwegian teaching and textbooks" (Røthing, 2017, p. 143). In other words, Norway shows a tendency to present itself through homonationalist discourses (Brotherton, 2023; Colpani & Habed, 2014), in which acceptance of non-heterosexualities is stylized as a nation-building device.

CIE discusses various aspects as learning goals that could be interpreted as being relevant to gender and sexuality. Most of these are discussed at the beginning of the text, in a section entitled "Relevance and central values". For example, the text highlights *identity development* as a central value of education, without specifying which kinds of identity are relevant. It also mentions the learning goal "to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 2). While *ways of living* and *ways of thinking* could in principle be interpreted in relation to gender and sexual diversity, the combination of these phrases with *intercultural understanding* and *communication patterns* indicates that, here, the focus is rather on cross-cultural differences and intercultural communication. A similar passage can be found one paragraph later: "Knowledge of and an exploratory approach to language, communication patterns, lifestyles, ways of thinking and social conditions open for new perspectives on the world and ourselves" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 2). Again, *lifestyles*, *ways of thinking,* and *social conditions* could potentially be read as relating to gender and sexuality, and an *exploratory approach* would certainly be useful for learners to become familiar with less traditional gender and sexuality representations. However, the construction *the world and*

*ourselves* once more suggests an intercultural focus, as it sets up a national in-group (*ourselves*) and an international out-group (*the world*).

 The total absence of explicit references to gender and sexuality from CIE is surprising, given that the curricular texts for other subjects in Norway do in fact contain such references (see Røthing, 2017, p. 144; Smestad, 2018, p. 5–6, on the earlier curriculum LK06). This absence is also unfortunate in light of the fact that English is one of the subjects in which these aspects are highly salient. When working with textual material in class, students are likely to encounter gender- and sexuality-related discourses. Most students orient to some form of gendered and/or sexual identity, and so such textual material offers them potential identification points. Most characters occurring in this material are gendered, with personal reference forms constructing them as female or male, adjectives potentially describing them in a gendered fashion, and the verbal vocabulary attributing potentially gendered types of activities to them.

The exploration of identities is a central component of English lessons. When engaging with a foreign language, learners are automatically required to reconstruct their identities in light of what has been learned. In this process, learners should be allowed to try out identity positions that matter to them personally in a supportive and positive learning environment. This is epitomized by role play exercises that enable learners to take on various social roles while using the foreign language. For many students, it is easier to explore social roles in a foreign language, especially when the roles in question are marginalized or stigmatized in society at large.

## 4. Methodological considerations

To assess the heteronormativity level of current English language teaching in Norway, I conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of English textbooks that are used in Norwegian schools. The main goal of this analysis is to raise awareness and to enable teachers and textbook creators to further lower heteronormativity levels in teaching materials and educational practices. CDA is a top-down approach to the analysis of textual data that generally involves an in-depth analysis of selected texts or text passages. Its starting point is typically some social issue (here, it is heteronormativity), and it seeks to find traces of

harmful discourses or hidden ideologies in textual data (see Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Leeuwen, 2008).

The analysis conducted here is multimodal in the sense that it incorporates both visual and verbal aspects contributing to the formation of discourses. I conceptualize "discourses" in a Foucauldian manner as ways of seeing the world or ideological patterns that are conveyed and supported by communicative practices, including language use and images. When performing a CDA, the aim is to identify textual features as traces of certain discourses. In textbooks, there are two major aspects that play a central role for the discursive construction of heteronormativity: 1. the way heterosexual and non-heterosexual characters are represented, and 2. the way gender is represented.

The textbook material to be analyzed is taken from the ELT textbook series Link, which targets the primary educational level (years 1–7) and has been published after the most recent national curriculum reform in 2020 (LK20). The series is published by Fagbokforlaget, a major publisher of teaching materials on the Norwegian market, which ensures that textbooks are under study that are commonly used in Norwegian classrooms. To reduce the amount of data, only the main textbooks in the series were inspected (i.e., the teacher guides and workbooks that are also part of the series were not included). To identify the whole breadth of representational practices surfacing in these textbooks, it was decided to concentrate on material created for the youngest (years 1 and 2) and oldest age groups (year 7). An in-depth qualitative analysis of the representational practices in these materials highlights which representations are more common in textbooks for young learners and which ones predominate in textbooks for adolescents. The three textbooks were read in their entirety (Link 1 contains 72 pages, Link 2 83 pages, and Link 7 223 pages). In a second step, passages that were found to be particularly relevant in terms of gender and sexuality construction were selected for closer inspection.

The multimodal CDA of the textbooks targets the following research questions: To what extent is sexuality represented in this teaching material? Where it is represented, how is this done at the visual and linguistic level? Are there linguistic (or representational) barriers that cause the material to be not fully inclusive? Special attention will be paid to the construction of heteronormativity in the material. Heteronormativity can surface in various

representational aspects, such as an absence or underrepresentation of non-heterosexual people, an asymmetrical representation of heterosexual and non-heterosexual people (often to the detriment of the latter), a presentation of non-heterosexual people as negative, abnormal, or sensational, and a binary representation of female and male people as opposites.

## 5. Analyzing gender and sexuality representation in the Norwegian English textbook series Link

### 5.1 Link 1/2

The textbooks Link 1 and Link 2 form a unity in the sense that the main characters whom we encounter in these books are identical. Both books introduce the same five families in the beginning (Link 1/2, p. 6–7, see Figure 2; Fagbokforlaget has kindly allowed me to reproduce individual images from the textbooks). This prominent presentation at the start highlights the family as a central topic throughout these books and sets the scene for a social space where discursive constructions of heteronormativity may surface in the way romantic couples as well as female and male characters are presented.

In Figure 2, we see that each family contains one child as a central character (two girls named *Mercy* and *Thea* as well as three boys named *Aryan*, *James,* and *Jonathan*). This centrality is signified by the children being the only people who are named in the picture. Moreover, they physically occupy central positions within the families and hold flags that anchor the respective family in a particular national culture. The families come from a selection of societies where the English language plays various roles. In the UK and Canada, English is mainly used as a native language and has (co-)official status as a national language. In India and Kenya, English is used as a second language, i.e., it is a co-official language with historical links to the former British Empire. In such societies, English is generally not the native language of the population but rather acquired through formal education. Finally in Norway, English has no official status but is frequently used as a foreign language.

All five families involve heterosexual adult couples, mainly the parents. In the Canadian family, we see an individual female person as a parent, accompanied by a grandmother and a grandfather. The son within this family holds up a photo of a male person (likely to be interpreted as a deceased father), which indicates that his mother also was in a heterosexual

relationship at some point. It is evident that the invariable presence of heterosexual couples suggests their status as an integral component of the family. Same-sex couples are not shown. The families contain varying amounts of children. Here, it is evident that the white families from Western cultures (Canada, Norway, UK) all have one child, while the families of color from India and Kenya have three and two children, respectively. The heterosexual couples fulfill gendered body stereotypes, with the male spouse being taller and having shorter hair than the female spouse. Three of the five adult men (Jonathan's father, James's grandfather, Aryan's father) have a beard and two of them (Thea's father, Aryan's father) wear some sort of tie. While most of the people depicted (16) wear trousers, the three that wear dresses are all female (Thea, Thea's mother, and Mercy's mother). Four female people (Mercy's mother, James's mother, Aryan's sister, Aryan's mother) wear earrings, while none of the male characters does. Similarly, only female people wear accessories in their hair (Mercy, Mercy's mother, Thea).

**Figure 2:** Family depiction (Link 1, p. 6–7, © Fagbokforlaget)

Overall, the family representation follows fairly stereotypical patterns in terms of the construction of romantic relationships and gender identities. The simultaneous absence of any non-heterosexual representation further contributes to the heteronormativity depicted. Interestingly, none of the people forming heterosexual couples in the pictures is shown to wear a ring, which could be taken to suggest that heterosexuality is important but official relationship status is not – an aspect that could be argued to be in contrast with heteronormative discourses. In fact, we learn in the textbook for year 2 (Link 2, p. 36) that Jonathan's mom and dad are divorced. Otherwise, heteronormativity remains unquestioned.

The heteronormative representation at the beginning of the two books is widely supported by the representation found in later passages. As far as gender representation is concerned, the material exhibits a binary girl-and-boy discourse that constructs female and male kids in different ways and allows for no other identification points than the two traditionally acknowledged gender classes. As a consequence, explicit non-binary or trans identifications are not supported by this material.

At the verbal level, this is achieved through conjoined lexically female and male personal reference forms. Figure 3 illustrates how third person pronouns are taught to learners in these textbooks.

**Figure 3**: Binary pronouns illustrated (Link 2, p. 42, p. 79; © Fagbokforlaget)
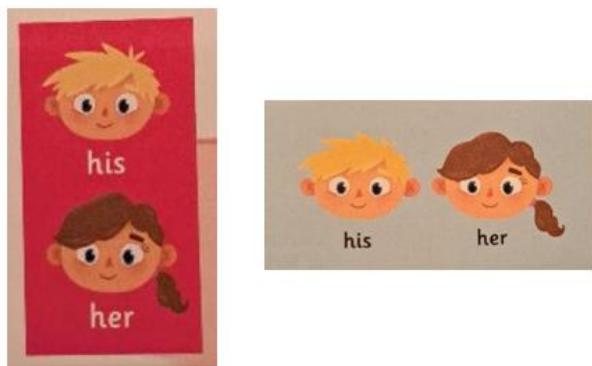


The female and male third person singular possessive pronouns *his* and *her* are here coupled with stereotypical images of the face of a girl (long hair, pony tail) and the face of a boy (short hair). Through this, the learners are not just familiarized with the pronouns but also with what kind of people these pronouns normatively refer to. Trans or non-binary

alternatives are rendered invisible, and singular *their* as a gender-neutral pronoun option is not mentioned, even though it is common in English today and a new gender-neutral third person singular possessive pronoun *hens* has also recently been acknowledged in Norwegian. Note that, in these images, the male face and pronoun precedes the female face and pronoun, thereby echoing a traditional male-first syntax (Motschenbacher, 2013).

Similar patterns can be found in the use of lexically gendered personal nouns in the textbooks, as illustrated in Figure 4. We see here that the noun *boy* is presented right next to an image of a prototypical boy (short hair, wearing blue shorts), while the noun *girl* is placed next to an image of a prototypical girl (long hair, hair band, dress, pink trousers). The difference between the two gendered characters is also verbally reinforced through the two lexical items *shorts* and *dress* placed next to the two children, underneath the lexically gendered nouns. In the exercise below the picture, the learners are asked to draw lines between lexical items and images; in other words, they are required to show that they have understood what kinds of a people the nouns *girl* and *boy* refer to (and it is likely that they would be corrected by the teacher if they linked *boy* to the prototypical girl image and vice versa).

**Figure 4:** Boy-and-girl representations (Link 1, p. 16; © Fagbokforlaget)

The strategy of presenting lexically gendered nouns next to prototypically gendered person images is also employed systematically in Section 7 of Link 1, which is entitled "Family". The section is introduced by a two-page image showing three of the families (Aryan's, Mercy's, and James's family) having a picnic (Link 1, 50–51). All adults except James's mother are part of heterosexual couples and designated in a binary fashion as *father* and *mother*, *aunt* and *uncle*, or *grandfather* and *grandmother*. Aryan's family also illustrates the binary pair *sister* and *brother*.

On the following page, gender binarism is further supported by presenting images of prototypically female and male heads subtitled by female and male nouns: *mum/mummy/mom* vs. *dad/daddy*; *sister* vs. *brother*; *grandmother/grandma* vs. *grandfather/grandpa*; *aunt vs. uncle* (see Figure 5). Again, the images visualize female and male representatives in fairly gender stereotypical ways. All female people have long hair and all male people have short hair. The person designated as *dad/daddy* wears a tie; the *grandfather* has a moustache; the people designated as *mum/mummy/mom* and *aunt* wear earrings. This particular visual representation is also stereotypical in its color distribution, as all colors in the pink to purple spectrum are worn by female people (*mum, sister, grandmother*), while all male people wear either blue or green. As Figure 5 illustrates, there is also a tendency in the textbooks to use hair color in socially relevant ways for the depiction of white people (people of color invariably have black hair): long blonde hair is a common attribute of (younger) female people, short dark hair of (younger) male people, while older people have gray hair. Syntactically, it is evident that the female heads and nouns are invariably placed to the left of their male counterparts, thereby yielding a contextual female-first pattern that partly contrasts with how these forms are commonly used in mixed-gender binomials (for example, *brothers and sisters* is more common in major English reference corpora than *sisters and brothers*; Motschenbacher, 2013).

**Figure 5:** The strictly gender-binary family (Link 1, p. 52; © Fagbokforlaget)
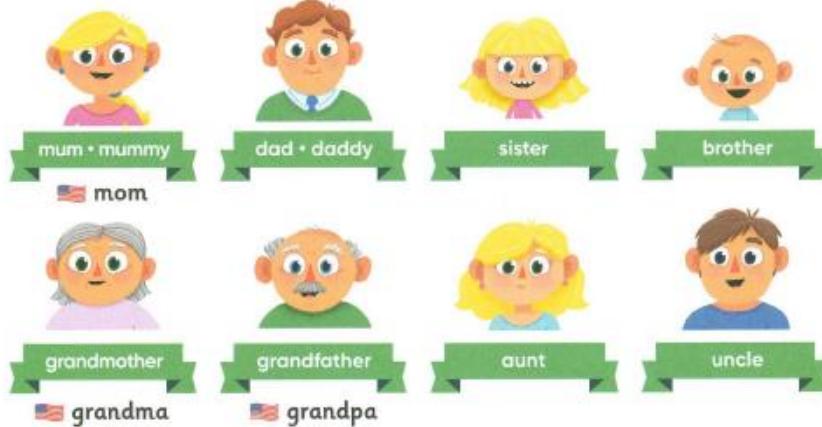


Sometimes, the binary gender distinction is practiced in a seemingly unmotivated fashion. In Link 2 (see Figure 6), for example, the learners are shown how children in different parts of the world celebrate their birthdays. Of the five descriptions, one uses an impersonal construction and two use lexically gender-neutral nouns to refer to the people celebrating their birthdays (*kids in Jamaica; a newborn baby in Ireland; the child*). Such constructions are pertinent strategies, as we are talking about children in these countries in general rather than specific children. However, the two remaining descriptions of birthday customs in Canada and Hungary both use the mixed-gender binomial phrase *the birthday boy or birthday girl*, thereby unnecessarily gendering referents. Again, we see stereotypical features in the visual representation. The two boys have short hair; one of them is wearing a bow tie. The two girls have longer hair. One of them has braids and both have flowers in their hair. Moreover, boys and girls are spatially segregated, as the boys occur on page 64 and the girls on page 65, with the gender-neutral depiction of the Irish baby being placed in the middle.

**Figure 6:** Unnecessarily gendering birthday kids (Link 2, p. 64–65; © Fagbokforlaget)
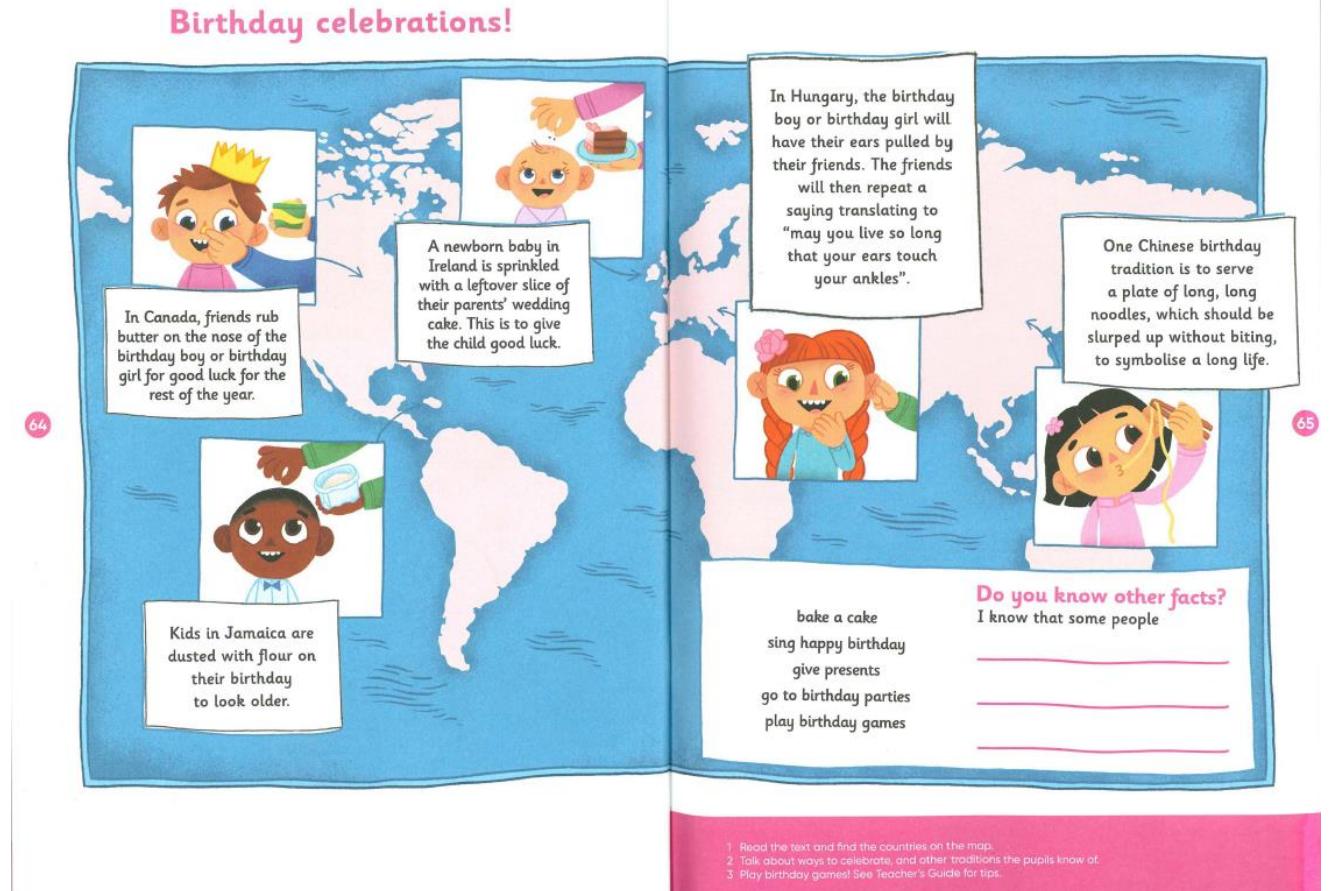


At the visual level, when girls and boys are shown to engage in different activities, these tend to be gender-stereotypical. For example, in Figure 7, we see on the right side how a girl and a boy are sitting in a classroom in front of the teacher. In the school yard scene on the left side, by contrast, one boy is shown playing soccer (alone), while two girls are playing hopscotch together in the background.

**Figure 7:** Boys' and girls' activities at school (Link 1, p. 8; © Fagbokforlaget)



Another boy in Figure 7 is kneeling on the ground trying to feed an insect, which may seem less gender stereotypical. However, the animals that children are shown to be accompanied by throughout the books also exhibit a gender pattern. We can see this, for example, in Figure 8, which shows the children with their favorite animals. The two girls in the picture have a *rabbit* and a *cat* next to them, i.e., prototypical pets with a high cuddle factor. The boys show a higher degree of variance in their animals. While one of them has a dog, the other three have animals that are less prototypical pets and less likely or impossible to be cuddled (*rat, parrot, fish*).

**Figure 8:** Boys' and girls' pets (Link 2, p. 68–69; © Fagbokforlaget).
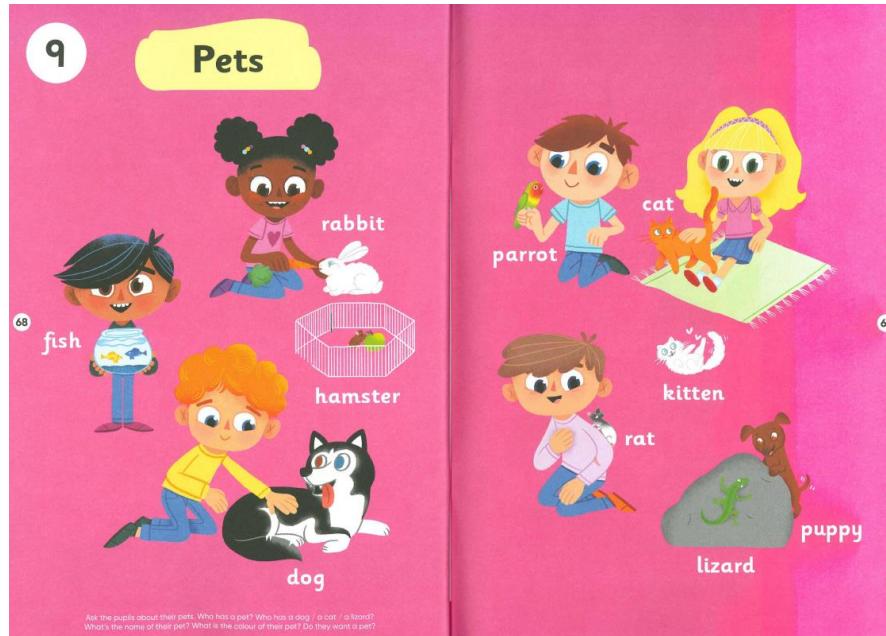


Another lexical domain that can play a role in gender construction is clothes. We already saw that stereotypically gendered pieces of clothing are used to visually construct female and male characters (ties; hair bands, dresses). Figure 9 shows a page that is used in Link 2 to introduce various vocabulary items for pieces of clothing. The visual setting seems to be Mercy's room (with pink as the dominant color in the background). The girl is lying on the bed, reading a book. Various pieces of clothing appear across the room and are coupled with the respective vocabulary items. Two of these items are strongly feminine (*dress, skirt*) in their associations, while the others are gender-neutral (*jumper/sweater, jacket, socks, shoes, T-shirt*) or slightly masculine in their associations (*trousers/pants, cap, shorts*). This illustrates a common asymmetry in the textbooks, as women and girls are regularly shown to wear all types of clothing, while men and boys are never shown to wear items of clothing that are feminine in their association.

**Figure 9:** Gendered asymmetries in clothing (Link 2, p. 52; © Fagbokforlaget)
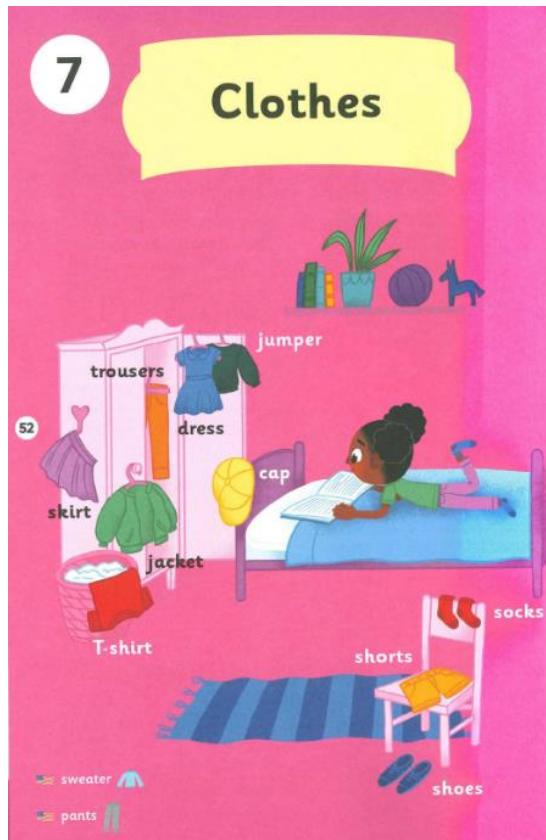
It should also be noted that there are representational aspects in the books that do not support a girl-vs.-boy discourse. One such aspect is the visual representation of groups of children playing together. These involve in most cases both female and male kids, thereby breaking down the stereotype of gender-segregated playgroups. Female-male pairs of kids are frequently visually represented. The depiction of mixed-gender pairs is unlikely to support a heteronormative reading, as kids are here shown at an age when romantic interests play a comparatively small role for them. Another representational layer is the colors of boys' and girls' clothes, which overall does not mimic traditional patterns. We find, for example, boys dressed in pink or orange pieces of clothing and girls partly dressed in blue and black.

Throughout the books, there are hardly any verbal or visual cues that could potentially be read as indexing non-heterosexuality. The only representational aspect that could allow for such a reading is the rainbow. The books sometimes display rainbows (Link 1, p. 24) or present colors in an order that resembles that of a rainbow (Link 1, p. 22), but the social meaning

potential of the rainbow as a symbol of gay pride or gender and sexual diversity is not exploited (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10**: The unexploited potential of the rainbow (Link 1, p. 24, 22; © Fagbokforlaget)



## 5.2 Link 7

Already a cursory glance at Link 7 reveals that the major focus here is no longer on the five families as in Link 1 and 2. Many other characters outside these families occur, and even though the five earlier protagonists (Aryan, James, Jonathan, Mercy, and Thea) still appear in the book, they are now adolescents who are predominantly presented as individuals in their own right who interact with peers. This opens an additional layer of sexuality-related construction, as adolescents generally start to view themselves as subjects potentially engaging in romantic activities. Romantic relationships are, therefore, no longer restricted here to the parents' and grandparents' generations. At the same time, as can be expected, verbal text components play a greater role in Link 7, due to the higher level of foreign language skills that the learners can be assumed to possess.

In total, 14 human couples are represented verbally and/or visually in Link 7. Of these, 11 are heterosexual (first mentions on pages, 18, 22, 46, 46, 64, 64, 70, 83, 90, 120, 146), and three are same-sex couples (first mentions on pages 19, 46, 57). This means that non-heterosexual couples amount to 21.4%, but also that their occurrence is restricted to the first third of the textbook. In addition, one heterosexual animal couple is depicted (page 149). The passages in which non-heterosexual couples are represented have been selected for a closer qualitative analysis. Furthermore, passages in the textbook in which gender construction is salient or that carry a certain potential for the inclusion of trans and non-binary people will be discussed.

Section 1 of the book is entitled "Who am I?" and revolves centrally around finding one's own identity. While gender is backgrounded as a potentially relevant identity facet in this section, sexuality is highlighted in a subsection that presents five diary entries written by a girl called Eleanor (see Figures 11a/b).

**Figure 11a**: Eleanor's diary entries – Part 1 (Link 7, p. 18–19; © Fagbokforlaget)
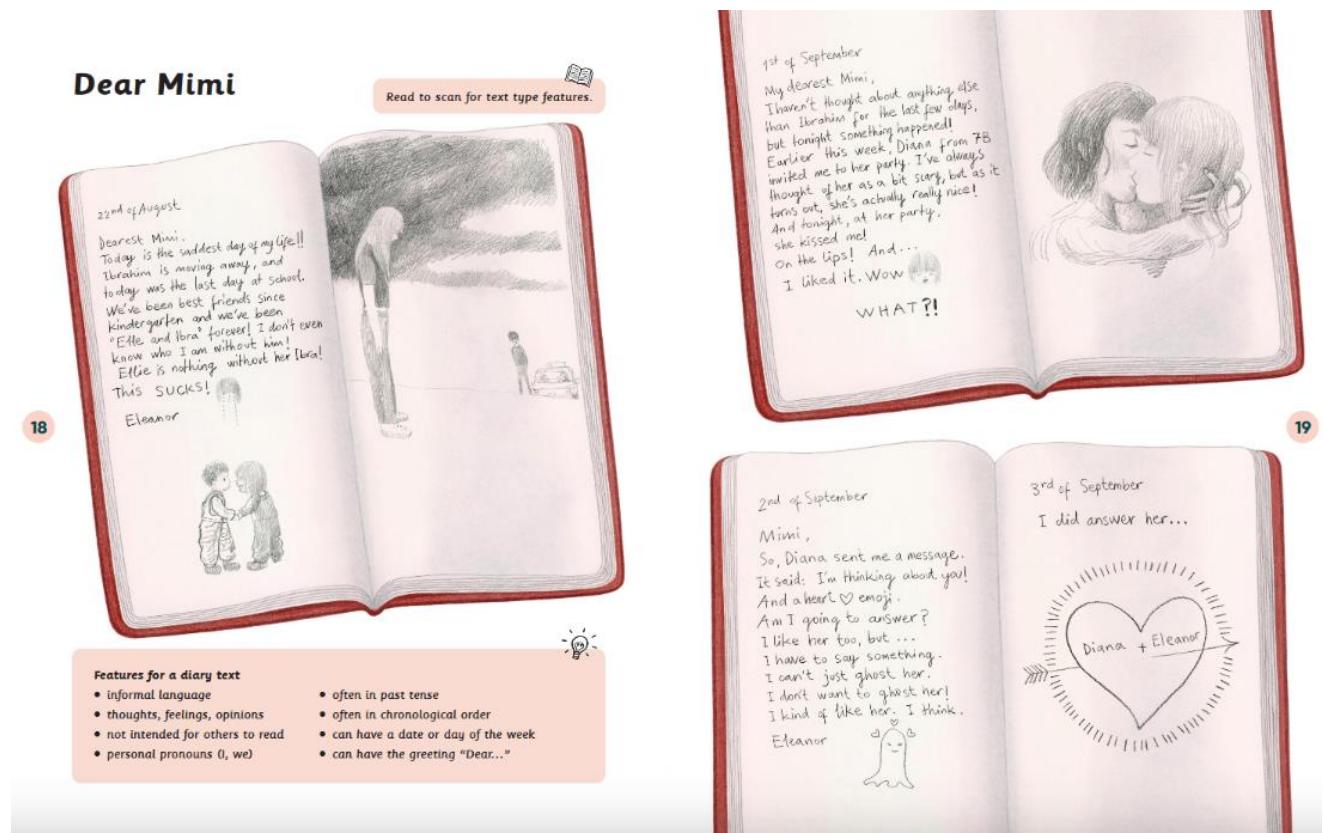
**Figure 11b:** Eleanor's diary entries – Part 2 (Link 7, p. 20; © Fagbokforlaget)
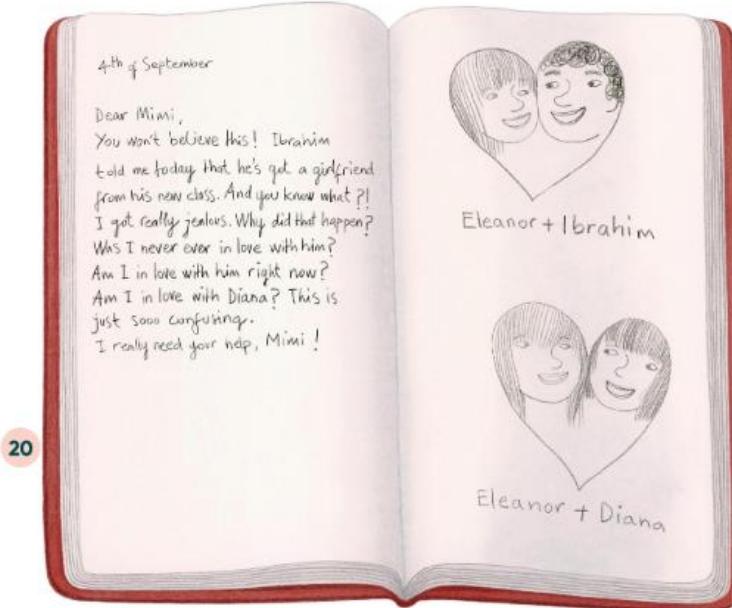


The diary entries consist of verbal text in handwritten form and black-and-white drawings. The visual stylization as diary entries creates a personal impression, and indeed the content of the texts is quite intimate. The language used in the entries includes emotive informal features that mimic youth language (e.g., *This SUCKS! WHAT?!*; frequent use of exclamation marks), thereby constructing the author of the entries as part of the learners' peer group.

Diary entry 1, on *2nd of August*, expresses Eleanor's sadness about the fact that a boy named *Ibrahim* is moving away. She constructs her relationship with Ibrahim as a long friendship (*We've been best friends since kindergarten and we've been 'Elle and Ibra' forever!*) and stresses the important role Ibrahim has played for her (*I don't even know who I am without him! Ellie is nothing without her Ibra!*). The verbal text is accompanied by three drawings. The first small drawing shows the head of a crying girl. The second drawing underneath the verbal text shows a young boy and a young girl holding hands, which illustrates the friendship in kindergarten days. The third drawing, which fills the whole second page, shows an older

boy next to a car in the background and an older girl in the foreground who lowers her head in sadness, which reflects Eleanor's current situation.

Diary entry 2, from *1st of September*, narrates an incident that happened at a party. Eleanor writes that she was kissed by a girl and liked it. The agency of this event is entirely on the other girl's side, as she is described as taking action (*Diana from 7B invited me to her party; she kissed me!*). Eleanor's comment *On the lips!* makes it clear that the kiss was a romantic kiss rather than a kiss among friends on the cheek. Furthermore, she expresses her surprise about the fact that she enjoyed the kiss (*Wow!*, accompanied by a drawn surprised face; *WHAT!?*). While female romantic agency could be viewed as a construction that clashes with heteronormative discourses, Eleanor's description also contains two aspects that construct the kiss in a heteronormative fashion. Firstly, she treats a kiss from a girl on the lips as unusual or marked. Secondly, her surprise about enjoying a kiss from a girl implies that she is normatively not expected to like it.

Diary entry 3, written one day later, narrates that Eleanor received a flirty text message (*I'm thinking about you! And a heart ♥ emoji.*) from the girl who kissed her. Eleanor is uncertain whether she should react but, at the same time, rules out ghosting Diana (*I can't just ghost her. I don't want to ghost her!;* accompanied by the drawing of a ghost surrounded by three hearts). Again we witness heteronormative discourses at work, since ghosting is constructed as a girl's easy and normal response to another girl hitting on her. Heteronormativity is further expressed in the mitigated way Eleanor expresses her affection for Diana (*I like her too, but…*; *I kind of like her. I think.*), which indicates that for a girl to like another girl is not a straightforward business. Diary entry 4 on the next day is very short. It only contains a single sentence, which for the first time places the romantic agency on Eleanor's side and uses *do*-support to emphasize the markedness of this move (*I did answer her…*). The entry is dominated by the drawing of a big, radiating heart pierced by an arrow, in which the names of the two girls appear connected by a plus symbol (*Diana + Eleanor*).

The final diary entry, dating from *4th of September*, puts an end to Eleanor's newly established security in her affection for Diana, as she writes that Ibrahim told her he has a girlfriend now. It is at this point that the reader can tell that Eleanor's relationship with Ibrahim was potentially more than just a friendship, as Eleanor frames her feelings in terms of jealousy (*I*

*got really jealous*), questions her affection for Ibrahim (*Was I never ever in love with him? Am I in love with him right now?*) and juxtaposes her feelings for him with her feelings for Diana (*Am I in love with Diana?*). The sequence of diary entries ends in a state of unclarity, with Eleanor expressing her confusion (*This is just sooo confusing!*) and illustrating the entry with two big hearts – one on top containing a girl's and a boy's face, subtitled with *Eleanor + Ibrahim*, and one at the bottom containing the faces of two girls, subtitled *Eleanor + Diana*. Even though this depiction can be read as a representation of bisexuality or biromanticism, same-sex and other-sex relationships do not receive the same treatment. Eleanor's uncertainty suggests that what she feels for Diana is perhaps just a phase and that she is actually in love with Ibrahim. Through this, same-sex relationships are depicted as less legitimate in their own right.

The second instance in the textbook where non-heterosexuality is made explicit occurs as part of the book section entitled *Ways of living* and it stages various types of family (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12:** Staging different types of family (Link 7, p. 46–47; © Fagbokforlaget)

As can be seen in Figure 12, the textbook presents four different types of family across two pages who all seem to live in the same neighborhood. Each depicted family is accompanied by a short text, in which one family member (mostly a child) gives a first-person description of their family. Visually, we see a heterosexual couple with three children standing on a balcony, another heterosexual couple with two children at the entrance of the house, a lesbian couple with two dogs in front of the house, and a single mom with her daughter and a cat in front of the neighboring house. The verbal text gives further information. For example, we learn that the second family is a blended family, as the child refers in the first person to *my step father, Kjetil, and my step sister Hanne-Mari*. Interestingly, the description of the lesbian family is the only one that explicitly refers to the adults' marital status, as one of the two women (*Rachel*) calls the other one *my wife Sarah*. However, this may be due to the other families being described by children. While two families seem to involve members from various racial backgrounds and thereby exhibit some diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender is visually constructed in fairly stereotypical ways: All male people have short hair, all female people have long hair, one man has a beard, and some female characters wear dresses, skirts, a dress-like jacket, or accessories in their hair.

The spatial positioning of the four families is interesting, as it indicates hierarchization. The reading direction in Norway is generally from top to bottom and from left to right. As far as the vertical axis is concerned, the first page presents a ranking with the intact heterosexual family on top, the blended heterosexual family in a lower position, and the lesbian family even further below. It is also noteworthy that the two families involving a heterosexual couple are presented on the right, while the lesbian family and the single-parent family follow further to the right. The positioning of the families signals that the intact heterosexual family is taken as the most prototypical, while deviations from these patterns (blended family, same-sex couple, one parent) are viewed as less prototypical and presented in more marginal spaces.

The prototypicality ranking of families is, furthermore, taken up in the learner tasks that are included on the two pages. Already before reading the text, learners are asked to discuss the question *What is a typical family?* As part of the post-reading tasks, they are encouraged to reflect on how typical their own families are. The stimulus questions *What is your family like? Is it typical?* in fact imply that there is a certain family type that is viewed as typical. Even

though it is not specified as to which type is meant, the intact heterosexual family is the most likely candidate for prototype status. The learners are also invited to relate this notion of family typicality to Norway as a national context. Here, the question phrasing (*Is there something that is a typical Norwegian family?*) is more open to critical stances. Learners may, in fact, conclude based on the evidence presented in the textbook that there is no such thing as a typical Norwegian family. However, framing blended, non-heterosexual and single-parent families as "less typical" or even "atypical" families is clearly compatible with heteronormative discourses.

The third instance in which non-heterosexuality surfaces in Link 7 also occurs in the section on *Ways of living* (see Figures 13a/b). Here, we can observe how Paul and his partner Teddy visit Paul's sister Pia, who is a single mother and has recently given birth to a baby. After discussing families in terms of typicality earlier in the same section, this constitutes a well reflected move, as it is now the two most marginalized family types (same-sex families, single-parent families) that are shown to get together to discuss what a family is. This corresponds to queer theoretical approaches that offer alternative accounts by viewing phenomena from the social margins.

The conversation that is shown to unfold between the three protagonists starts with some general small talk before Pia asks a question that serves as an introduction to the main topic of the exchange: *Have you guys thought more about having children yourselves?* Even before this question pops up, Paul is constructed as a man who is fond of and very good with children (he says *She's so cute* about baby Paulina and asks *Can I hold her, Pia?*). He is shown to engage in a dialogue with the baby that extends over five turns, which makes Pia conclude *You look so happy with a baby on your lap, Paul!*

The couple report that they are undecided about having children and they treat their social surroundings (*We are afraid our children will be bullied or get negative comments from other people.*) and norms (*Because our children would have two fathers and we won't be considered a "normal" family.*) as a major obstacle to having children. Pia reacts to this by questioning the concept of a "normal" family (*What's a "normal" family, anyway?*) and praises the couple's parenting qualities (*You two have so much love to give and you would be the best parents in the world.*). Teddy also points out the legal discrimination that gay couples

face in many countries, as they are not allowed to adopt children (*We considered maybe adopting from a country where it is legal for us to adopt a baby.*). He adds that Paul and Teddy have asked a lesbian couple that has adopted children from Colombia for their advice. The lesbian couple is constructed by Teddy as equally loving parents (*They love their girls, of course, and were so happy to bring them home.*), and their children are said to go through similar experiences as Paul and Teddy anticipated (*Unfortunately, the girls do not always feel like they fit in or that they are accepted in the same way as everyone else.*). Throughout this passage, being gay or lesbian is constructed as a problem for society, which contrasts with Norway's self-branding as a country where same-sex relationships are accepted.

The visual representation of the characters corresponds again to fairly common gender stereotypes. Pia has long hair, Paul has short hair, and Teddy is bald. Paul has a moustache and Teddy has a full beard. The couple status of the two men is visually expressed by them sitting next to each other on a sofa, with Teddy having his arm around Paul, who has the baby on his lap. In other words, we see a visual staging of a (potential) two-dad family.

**Figure 13a**: Staging the potential two-dad family (Link 7, p. 57; © Fagbokforlaget)



## Paul and Teddy

Read and interact.

Paul and Teddy are visiting Paul's sister, Pia, and her baby, Paulina.

| | |
|---|---|
| Pia: | So, how are things going? |
| Paul: | Fine, I guess. |
| Teddy: | Yeah, everything's fine. What about you, Pia? |
| Pia: | I'm fine, but I must admit I'm really tired. My little Paulina wakes up every two to three hours at night, so I long for a good night's sleep. |
| Teddy: | That must be exhausting, especially since you're a single mum. How old is she now? |
| Pia: | Seven months. |
| Paul: | She's so cute. It was so nice of you to name her after me, Pia. |
| Pia: | Well, you're my favourite brother, you know. |
| Teddy: | (laughing) Yeah, and he's the only one. Ha-ha! |
| Pia: | That's right, Teddy. But I still love my brother very much. He's the best. |
| Teddy: | I totally agree. |
| Paul: | Can I hold her, Pia? |
| Pia: | Of course. Here you go. |
| Paul: | (looking at Paulina) Hello, baby girl. Do you have anything funny to tell your uncle today? |
| Paulina: | (smiling and gurgling) Mamamamamama! |
| Paul: | Oh, so your mum took you to the playground today? Did she buy you ice cream? |
| Paulina: | Babababababa! |
| Paul: | What? You didn't get any ice cream? I'll talk to your mum about that! |
| Pia: | You look so happy with a baby on your lap, Paul! Have you guys thought more about having children yourselves? |
| Teddy: | Yes, we have talked about it a lot. We can't decide. |
| Pia: | Why not? |
| Teddy: | We think all children deserve the best. We are afraid our children will be bullied or get negative comments from other people. |
| Pia: | Negative comments? Why? |
| Teddy: | Because our children would have two fathers and we won't be considered a "normal" family. |
| Pia: | What is a "normal" family, anyway? You two have so much love to give and you would be the best parents in the world. |

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**Figure 13b**: Staging the potential two-dad family (Link 7, p. 58–59; © Fagbokforlaget



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Teddy: Thanks, that is kind of you, Pia. We considered maybe adopting from a country where it is legal for us to adopt a baby. Like Colombia, for example.

Pia: That's a great idea! I would love to become an aunt!

Paul: I know, Pia. But we also worry that our adopted child would not look just like us and that they could be bullied for that.

Pia: Are you serious?

Teddy: Sadly, yes.

Paul: Pia, do you remember Leah and Alex?

Pia: Sure, I met them at the grocery store last week.

Paul: Well, they adopted two girls from Colombia, so we invited them over and asked them about their experiences.

Teddy: They love their girls, of course, and were so happy to bring them home. Unfortunately, the girls do not always feel like they fit in or that they are accepted in the same way as everyone else.

Pia: What? I can't believe it! What are people thinking?

Paul: I don't know really, and they said that often it is the adults who are the least accepting.

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Pia: I don't know what to say. I'm at a loss for words, especially when many of these adults are role models for young people today.

Paul: I know.

Pia: But Paul, you know I will support you guys no matter what.

- Who are Pia and Paulina?     • Who is Paulina named after?
- How old is Paulina?          • How many brothers does Pia have?

Write more questions about the conversation above and ask each other.

- There are different types of families. What examples of families can you find in the text? What other types of families do you know of?
- How do you think it feels to get negative comments about your parents?
- How do you think it feels to get negative comments?
- What could you do or say if you hear negative comments about someone?

Overall, the representation of gay and lesbian characters in Link 7 as mainly white, middle-class, married or partnered, having children, expressing the wish to have children or having dogs could be viewed in terms of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002). That is, same-sex couples are constructed as "good gays" who normatively imitate heterosexual families. This is presumably done to make the topic of same-sex couples or gay- or lesbian-identified people more agreeable and easier to digest for the general public. However, it could also be argued that a motivation to represent families with same-sex parents in this way could be to make the point that they are like heterosexual families, despite all the differences. There is some value in such a representation, as it supports a normalizing agenda.

A closer look at how gender is constructed in Link 7 reveals some positive and some negative aspects. A textbook excerpt that deals with gender in relation to communicative practices is depicted in Figure 14. The background of the verbal text is in green, which can be interpreted as a gender-neutral choice. The two pages offer the reader two alternative conversational exchanges, both between two speakers named *Billie* and *Max*. The two names can potentially refer to female and male people, even though *Billie* is more likely to be interpreted as female

(vs. *Billy* as male) and *Max* is more likely to be interpreted as male (but it could also be an abbreviated form of the female name *Maxine*). The conversations take place after Max missed a goal during a soccer game. In scenario 1, the conversation is both competitive and confrontational, as the two speakers take turns calling each other names (*idiot, moron, klutz, loser, Max-the-Misser, Billie-Big-Mouth-Can't-Do-No-Better*). The exchange contains rude verbal behavior (*Shut up!*) and in the end escalates into a fist fight between the two characters that needs to be settled by the soccer coach. In Scenario 2, their communication is much more harmonious and cooperative. Here, Billie engages in supportive interactional work to help Max save face (*Bad luck, Max. You'll get it next time! / Remember that you dribble better than anyone on the team.*). Moreover, Billie offers Max to do some target practice with him after the match. The two conversations bear clear reminiscences to stereotypes of all-male and all-female conversational behavior, famously described by Tannen (1990) as competitive talk and cooperative talk (or report vs. rapport).

The learner instructions underneath the texts indeed ask the learners whether they think the two exchanges involve girls or boys. Under both texts, the learners are confronted with the questions *In this scenario, do you think Billie and Max are boys or girls?* and *What clues make you think so?* The stereotypicality of the scenarios is likely to make the learners attribute the first scenario to boys and the second to girls. In other words, there is a high chance that gender stereotypes are supported by this exercise. Also note that the question phrasing rules out that both a girl and a boy may be involved in these exchanges. On top of the texts, the learners are asked to enact the two dialogues (*Practice reading these dialogues. Match the intonation to the feelings of the speaker. Switch roles.*). This task carries some deconstructionist potential, as all learners, irrespective of their gender, can enact both exchanges and explore various types of gendered behaviors, which may lead them to conclude that both interactions could take place among girls and boys.

**Figure 14**: Gendered communicative scenarios (Link 7, p. 38–39; © Fagbokforlaget)



Gender stereotypes are more explicitly challenged in another passage from Link 7, which is devoted to stereotypes more generally (see Figure 15). The two photos on top of this page indicate that gender stereotypes are used here for illustration purposes. Photo 1 on the left side shows a man who is wearing an apron and rubber gloves while seemingly doing the washing up. The background is pink and contains drawings of various household utensils (a teapot, a vacuum cleaner, a microwave oven, dishes, an electric iron, a jug, a mixer). Photo 2 shows a woman wearing formal trousers and a suit jacket who is holding a laptop in her hands. The background is in blue and contains drawings of symbols that are more readily linked to professional contexts (such as a mobile phone, a pencil, a magnifying glass, a cloud, a globe, screws, a loudspeaker, a sheet of paper, a light bulb). The photos are obviously meant to flout stereotypes, presenting a male person in a way that women were traditionally portrayed and vice versa. As the smile on the two people's faces suggests, this subverting of gender stereotypes is viewed as a positive development. The task instructions underneath the photos invite the learners to engage in critical thinking, asking them to reflect on gender stereotypes, both in the photos and in society more generally. However, as the photos are obviously staged

and do not present people in real-life situations, this casts some doubt on the authenticity of these scenarios.

**Figure 15:** Challenging gender stereotypes (Link 7, p. 94; © Fagbokforlaget)



When analyzing in which professional contexts women and men are portrayed in Link 7, you find that gender stereotypes seem to be subverted to a higher extent with women. They are shown to be physicians (Link 7, p. 34), teachers (Link 7, p. 42), researchers (Link 7, p. 151), working on their laptop (Link 7, p. 94) or for a company (Link 7, p. 70), or participating in business meetings (Link 7, p. 63). In other words, they are almost exclusively represented in white-collar professions. Men are represented as businessmen (Link 7, p. 42, 63, 116), teachers (Link 7, p. 114), and policemen and pastors (Link 7, p. 116), but they also do less

prestigious jobs, working as excavator operators (Link 7, p. 42), butchers (Link 7, p. 90), and antiques dealers (Link 7, p. 122), besides being unemployed (Link 7, p. 88). Furthermore, they are depicted doing household chores (Link 7, p. 31, 94) and being involved in childrearing (Link 7, p. 31, 83). These findings are similar to those of Monsen and Steien's (2022) study on textbooks for Norwegian as a foreign language, as outlined in the theoretical section herein above.

One way to make textbooks more inclusive that goes beyond the representation of gay and lesbian characters is to offer points of identification for trans and non-binary people. These social groups are not directly represented in the material. However, there are signs that their needs are, to some extent, catered to. While we find binary pronominal constructions as in (1), Link 7 also contains gender-neutral constructions with generic singular *they*, as illustrated in (2).

> (1)
> *Write to your role model, explain why <u>he or she</u> is your role model, and ask if you can meet up or write to ask some questions.* (Link 7, p. 24)

> (2)
> *If you wrote a book, what would you name the main character and where would <u>they</u> go?* (Link 7, p. 41)

> *A first meeting gives us a first impression of a person and what <u>they</u> might be like.* (Link 7, p. 100)

Obviously, the authors of the textbook have made an effort to avoid male generic forms such as generic *he/him/his*. However, this effort is, to some extent, thwarted by the use of a new male generic, namely the address phrase *you guys*, when talking to a mixed-sex group (Clancy, 1999). Here are two examples from Link 7:

> (3)
> *Thea: I look forward to just being with you guys.* (Link 7, p. 21)

> (4)
> *James: You guys. I've been dreading this moment for a while. I've got something important to tell you.* (Link 7, p. 70)

There is no representation of trans people in the book, but what we do find is a less strict handling of gender identities. For example, Figure 16 shows an instance where the students in class play the game *Who am I?*. For this game, the players have a piece of paper with the name of a person attached to their foreheads, and everybody has to guess which person is written on their own sticky note. James has been given Harry Potter as a character to be guessed, which represents a gender-congruent choice. However, when James starts to ask questions about his character, he asks whether he (that is, the character) is female, to which another student responds with *No*. Even though gender crossing is not fully achieved here, it is remarkable that James sees the possibility that "he" could be female, and when the game is performed in an actual English lesson, this may in fact invite giving co-players a cross-gender name that they have to guess.

**Figure 16:** Potential cross-gender play (Link 7, p. 8; © Fagbokforlaget)



Another instance in Link 7, where gender-crossing is in fact performed, is in Section 2, which is entitled *Linking us* and discusses various topics related to communication. Figure 17 shows the page in question. It homes in on the topic of staying anonymous when communicating on the internet and depicts a girl who plays online games using a male avatar (*Alexandra is playing as her avatar, a barbarian named Alexander_the-Gr8.*). By referring to Alexander the Great in her online name, the girl does not just adopt a male online identity but also a

decidedly masculine one, namely that of a powerful ruler and warlord. However, this instance of gender-crossing is here not celebrated as positive. By contrast, Alexandra's co-player assesses her performance as lousy (*You suck! ... My grandma could do better!*). The heading presented on top of the page (*Anonymity – Hiding who I am*) frames Alexandra's gender-crossing in negative terms, as a matter of hiding her true identity, instead of taking a more positive stance and framing it in terms of identity exploration.

**Figure 17:** Actual cross-gender play on the web (Link 7, p. 35; © Fagbokforlaget)
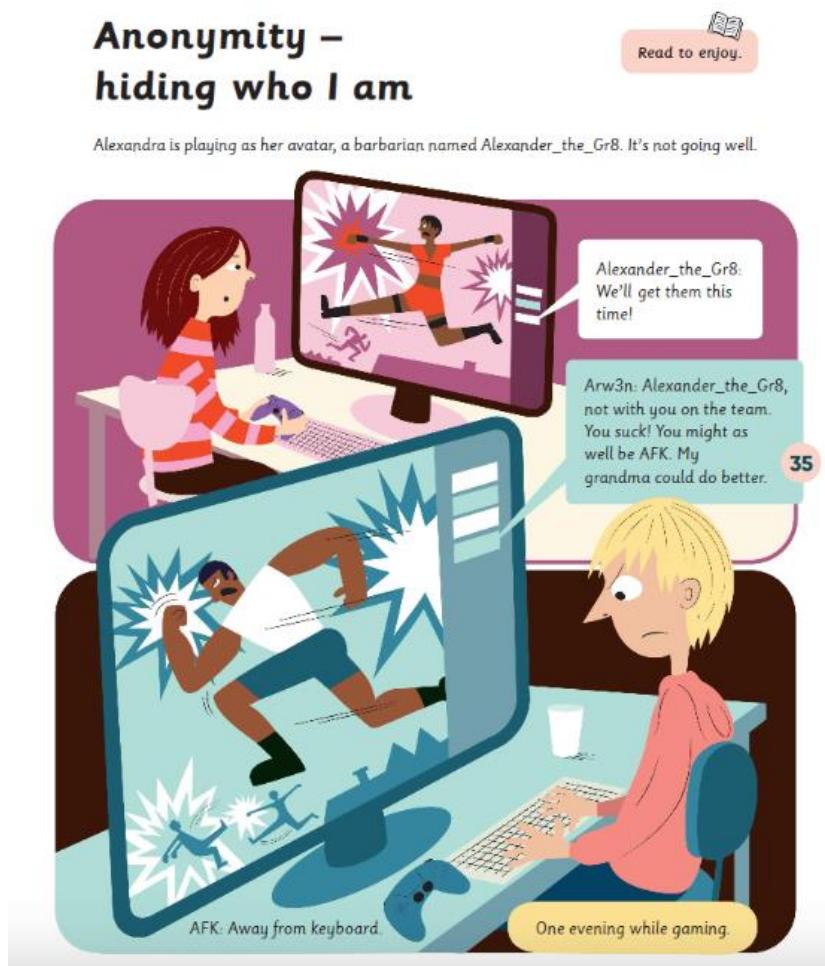


A final example that may resound with the experiences of trans people occurs as part of a question-and-answer game (Link 7, p. 41), in which one of the tasks for players is to answer the question *If you could change your name, what would you change it to?* Of course, changing one's name is of primary importance to trans people, and so the fact that name

changing occurs in a textbook and is discussed in class contributes to normalizing trans people's needs.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of the textbooks that are used in English education at the primary educational level in Norway has revealed quite a drastic contrast in the representational practices. The material targeting year 1 and 2 learners is highly heteronormative in its complete absence of non-heterosexual representation and a fairly simplistic and stereotypically binary representation of gender. It would, therefore, largely fall into Moore's (2020) category "heteronormative erasure". The textbook for year 7 offers a more nuanced – and, therefore, more inclusive – representation that can be characterized as incorporating aspects of the categories "heteronormative marginalization" and "heteronormative mainstreaming". On the positive side, we see that non-heterosexual people are represented, gender stereotypes are questioned, and there is an incipient sensitivity for the needs of trans and non-binary people. These are certainly good developments, and it is probably fair to say that we are dealing here with the first generation of textbooks that try to incorporate these issues.

However, there is also some room for improvement in the current representational practices, at least if it is our aim to include non-heterosexual, trans and non-binary learners and teachers as well as people who do heterosexuality in non-normative ways. Materials for young learners could clearly be designed in less heteronormative ways. This would also be in accordance with the suggestions of the World Health Organization:

> "According to these guidelines, children aged 4-6 should be informed that it is possible to fall in love with a person of the same gender and get help to develop a positive gender identity. At age 9-12, children should (among other things) get information about the difference between gender identity and biological gender, and be helped to develop an understanding of diversity in sexuality and sexual orientation" (Smestad, 2018, p. 5).

The representation of non-heterosexual characters in higher years needs to be more careful to avoid the trap of falling back into heteronormativity by describing non-heterosexuality as something that is special, sensational, or marked in comparison to heterosexuality. The challenging of gender stereotypes could be done in a more nuanced fashion, instead of presenting women invariably as winners at the professional level and men as the people who also work in less prestigious professions, do household chores, and raise the children. Finally,

the inclusivity levels for trans and non-binary learners need to be raised. There is still a lot of work to do in this respect, but the rising number of trans kids in Norway (and other countries; CNE 2023) calls for action.

A learning goal that none of the textbooks analyzed here addresses sufficiently is the development of "socio-sexual literacy" (Nelson, 2016). To enable learners to be fully functionable individuals in their foreign language, they need to be equipped with the linguistic means to express a diversity of gender and sexual identifications in English (see White et al., 2018, for an illustration of this diversity). This will enable them to construct themselves and other people in meaningful ways when using English. Topics to be taught include gendered and gender-neutral personal reference forms (personal nouns, personal names, pronouns) and potential asymmetries connected to them, positive terminology to talk and write about traditional as well as recently evolving gender and sexual identifications, and an awareness of the linguistic dimensions of sexism, homophobia, and cisnormativity. All of these aspects of structural gender linguistics (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001; Motschenbacher, 2015, 2016b) clearly fall in line with CIE's emphasis on *developing language awareness* as a learning goal.

 Finally, an aspect that needs to be highlighted is that neither teachers nor learners are helpless victims of the discourses presented to them in teaching materials. As Sunderland et al. (2000) have argued, it is unpredictable how materials will be used in class. Participants may accept the discourses presented or ignore them, which leaves them unquestioned. They may equally well spot them and view them critically or try to subvert them. Even if we have to work with teaching materials that are somehow biased, teachers can use these issues and let the learners critically work with the texts in the foreign language classroom (Motschenbacher, 2021c). However, as creating alternative teaching materials or modifying available materials is often too time consuming for teachers to be feasible (Richards, 2022, p. 170), it is adequate to ask textbook creators to provide them with learning materials that are as inclusive as possible. An interesting follow-up study would be to analyze the teacher's guides that are published together with the textbooks in order to see how far they address the representational issues outlined here.

## About the author

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