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From Stereotypes to Change?

A Diachronic Analysis of Gender Representations in English Text-books Used in Lower Secondary Education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (2010-2018)

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1. Introduction

“Inequalities between women and men are the most universal and the most deeply embedded in the structures of our societies” (Oxfam, 2020, my translation).¹ This statement highlights the extent to which gender inequalities remain deeply rooted in contemporary society. Yet, demands for equality between women and men have a much longer history, with traditional gender roles being particularly challenged from the 1960s and 1970s onwards. Indeed, the second wave of feminism extended demands beyond legal equality by questioning the social roles traditionally attributed to women and men, particularly in relation to family life, employment, sexuality, and the domestic sphere (Bossé, 2019). These issues have remained prominent and have gained renewed public visibility during the 2010s through both social mobilization and institutional responses to persistent gender inequalities. In this context, the international prominence of the #MeToo movement from 2017 onwards brought renewed attention to gendered power relations and inequalities (Trovato, 2023). Moreover, the Council of Europe’s 2019 Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism recognized the persistence of sexism and gender stereotypes and called for action across areas including language, communication, media, and education (Council of Europe, 2019).

Among these areas, education is particularly relevant because of the role it plays in children’s socialization. As Adukia et al. (2023) state, ‘Education teaches children about the world, its people, and their place in it’ (p. 2226). Within this context, textbooks deserve particular attention. Far from being merely instructional tools, the images, narratives, and examples they contain may contribute to shaping students’ perceptions, including their understanding of the roles and characteristics associated with women and men (Denis, 2025; Kerger et al., 2023).

Given the role textbooks may play in conveying gender representations, their content has received considerable attention in academic research. Numerous studies have examined the representation of female and male characters in school textbooks, identifying gender differences across several dimensions, including the visibility of female and male characters, their agency and personality traits, and their representation in family, professional, and leisure settings (Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012; Aguilar, 2021; Aydinoglu, 2014; Hauksson-Tresch, 2026; Nasution et al., 2025). While these studies identify the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes, they also highlight representations that depart from conventional gender expectations,

¹ French original: ‘Les inégalités entre les femmes et les hommes sont les plus universelles et les plus structurantes de nos sociétés’ (Oxfam, 2020).

illustrating the possibility of more balanced portrayals of female and male characters in school textbooks (Hidayah et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2025; Hauksson-Tresch, 2026). However, relatively little attention has been paid to the potential evolution of gender representations over time, and research within the context of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles remains limited.

Against this background, the present study examines whether and how gender representations have evolved over time in English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. To this end, three textbooks published at four-year intervals are compared: *English in Mind* (2010), *Jelly 2* (2014), and *OF C(3)URSE!* (2018), all three targeting learners at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and thus providing a common reference point for comparison (Council of Europe, 2020). The analysis considers both textual and visual representations of female and male characters through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

More specifically, the present study seeks to answer the following question:

How have gender representations in the textual and visual content of English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles evolved between 2010 and 2018, and to what extent do these representations reflect gender stereotypes?

By addressing this question, the study contributes to existing research by focusing on the relatively unexplored context of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and by adopting a diachronic perspective on gender representations in educational materials.

This study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework. Section 3 reviews previous research on gender representations in educational materials. Section 4 introduces the research questions and hypotheses. Section 5 describes the methodology adopted for the analysis. Section 6 presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses, which are then discussed in Section 7. Finally, Section 8 presents the conclusions of the present study.

2. Theoretical framework

This first section introduces the key concepts relevant to this study, namely gender, sex, gender identity, the relationship between language and gender, gender stereotypes and textbooks.

2.1. Gender and sex

The first concept requiring attention is the notion of gender. Although gender has been defined in various ways throughout the literature (European Commission, 1998; Fairclough, 1995; Hauksson-Tresch, 2026; Nasution et al., 2025), this study relies primarily on the definition proposed by the European Commission (1998, p. 25), which describes gender as “a concept that refers to the social differences, as opposed to the biological ones, between women and men that have been learned, are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.” Therefore, gender should not be understood as something inherent or fixed within individuals, but rather as something constructed through the processes of socialization.

The idea that gender is socially constructed is a central theme in most definitions of the concept (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2008; European Commission, 1998; Fairclough, 1998; Nasution et al., 2025), highlighting its dynamic nature as a continuous construction that develops over time through learning, experiences and interactions. Building on Butler’s (1999) concept of gender performativity, Hidayah et al. (2025) emphasize that gender is continuously produced through everyday practices included by social expectations. Individuals therefore contribute to the construction of their gender identities through the ways in which they repeatedly act and behave, rather than merely adopting fixed gender roles. Gendered roles, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as the broader historical and cultural contexts, therefore contribute to shaping how gender is constructed and understood.

Another important aspect of the concept is that gender extends beyond a simple distinction between women and men. While this study mainly focuses on the binary framework that is most commonly depicted in textbooks, gender encompasses a wider range of realities, including transgender, cisgender, and other identities (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026; Simkus, 2023). Gender should therefore be understood as a concept that reflects diverse experiences and identities.

Finally, to better understand the notion of gender, it is necessary to distinguish it from the notion of sex. The distinction between gender and sex is often complex, given their

interconnected nature. According to Adriaenssens and Kupperberg (2012,), the notion of gender was introduced in English precisely to mark this distinction, as the term ‘sex’ carries a more restricted meaning in English than in other languages, such as French. Traditionally, French used the word *sexe* to refer to both biological differences and to the social position of men and women. This is not the case in English, where the more restricted meaning of the term *sex* led to the emergence of the concept of gender to distinguish biological sex from the social and cultural dimensions associated with women and men . In this context, sex refers to the biological characteristics that differentiate men and women, including physical attributes such as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormonal profiles (Brugilles & Cromer, 2008). These biological characteristics have traditionally formed the basis for classifying individuals as male or female. However, as highlighted by Hidayah et al. (2025), some individuals do not fit within this binary distinction. For example, people born intersex may possess a combination of male and female anatomical features or chromosomal patterns. Consequently, similarly to gender, biological sex cannot always be understood as a strictly binary category, as some biological characteristics that not fit exclusively within the categories of male or female.

2.2. Gender identity

Gender identity refers to an individual’s internal understanding and perception of their own gender (Simkus, 2023). Drawing on Warner (2016), Nasution et al. (2025) explain its development involve several interconnected factors and can be influenced by self-perception, the perception of biological factors, and the sociocultural environment. Gender identity is therefore not determined solely by biological characteristics but developed through continuous interaction between individual and social factors.

The social environment therefore plays an important role in the development of gender identity. Schools constitute a particularly important part of this environment, as children spend a significant amount of time in educational settings during their development. According to Kelley et al. (2022), schools can therefore contribute to shaping how children understand gender and develop their own gender identity.

2.3. Gender and language

Language plays an important role in the social environments through which people develop their understanding of gender. Family, school, and the media are among the main agents of socialization, and language is present within each of these domains. Drawing on Fairclough

(1989), language can be understood as a social institution whose use constitutes a social practice, through which cultural beliefs and social systems can be reflected (Aydinoğlu, 2014). Consequently, language can contribute to the construction and transmission of gender norms.

In this regard, Aydinoğlu (2014) emphasizes that gender is both reflected in and shaped by language. The words used to describe individuals, the roles assigned to speakers in interactions, and the ways in which women and men are represented in discourse all contribute to the construction of gender (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026).

As language is not merely descriptive but also constitutive, it contributes to the construction and reproduction of the social world, a process that may disadvantage socially and politically marginalized or stigmatized groups (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026). When certain groups are omitted, rendered less visible, or associated with stereotypical characteristics, these representations contribute to normalizing existing social inequalities and reinforcing unequal power relations. Whether intentional or not, such forms of invisibilization can be conveyed through linguistic choices (Kerger et al., 2023). In this sense, language is not inherently neutral and can play a central role in the construction and perpetuation of gender representations.

Against this background, the use of non-sexist, inclusive, or gender-fair language has been associated with efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, promote social change, and foster more equitable representations (European Parliament, 2018).

2.4. Gender stereotypes

While the concept of gender has already been defined, it is essential to clarify the notion of stereotype, and more specifically, gender stereotypes. According to Kerger et al. (2023, p.15), stereotypes can be defined as follows:

Stereotypes are rigid and preconceived beliefs assigned to groups or individuals. These generalized representations, sometimes justified on the basis of biological arguments, attribute particular characteristics to people in accordance with criteria such as skin color, age, sexual orientation, gender, and other social categories.

When applied to the concept of gender, stereotypes can be understood as oversimplified representations of what it means to be male or female. These representations often reflect traditional, binary conceptions of gender by associating particular roles, behaviors, or skills with one gender rather than the other (Collard & Meurant, 2021). However, these representations are not

fixed and may vary across historical periods, geographic regions, and social contexts (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026).

These gender stereotypes can be perpetuated in both private and public settings and are evident in everyday life, manifesting in the workplace, household responsibilities, leisure activities, personality traits, and appearance (Kerger et al., 2023). Their persistence is also closely connected to sexism. Drawing on the definition provided in *Discrimination toi-même* by the Ministère de la Communauté Française de Belgique (2010), Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012, p. 11, my translation) define sexism as:

The use of physical and biological differences between the sexes to establish differences in status, position, or rights between women and men, which may result in words, behaviors, or actions that exclude, marginalize, or place one sex in an inferior position.²

The relationship between the two concepts is explicitly recognized by the Council of Europe (2019), which states that “sexism and sexist behavior are rooted in and reinforce gender stereotypes.” Such stereotypes can take concrete forms in the representations of men and women. Kollymaer et al. (2020), for instance, show that male characters are frequently associated with high-status or high-responsibility positions such as politicians, CEOs, or engineers, while women are more frequently linked to caregiving or support roles, including teachers or nurses.

These different manifestations of gender stereotypes raise the question of how stereotypical representations can be identified in textbooks. According to Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012), a representation can be considered stereotypical when a female or male character is portrayed through a role, behavior, characteristic, or activity traditionally associated with their gender. At the broader level of a textbook, gender representations can be considered stereotypical when female or male characters are predominantly portrayed through such traditional associations, with limited alternative representations reflecting the diversity of gender roles. This may result in a simplified and caricatured portrayal of women and men.

Finally, although gender stereotypes are often structured around binary representations of men and women, their effects can also extend to individuals who identify as non-binary. As their gender identity does not conform to traditional gender roles, non-binary individuals may

² French original: ‘Le sexisme, c’est l’utilisation des différences physiques et biologiques entre les sexes comme prétexte pour établir des différences de statut, de position, de droits,... entre garçons et filles, hommes et femmes. Cette utilisation des différences se traduit par des paroles, des gestes, des comportements ou des actes qui excluent, marginalisent ou infériorisent un sexe par rapport à l’autre.’ (Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg, 2012, p. 11)

also encounter stereotypes and social barriers. For some, their identity is disregarded or treated as non-existent, further contributing to their marginalization (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026).

2.5. Textbooks

Textbooks are among the primary resources used for teaching English worldwide (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Sudewi et al., 2021). They function as instructional tools composed of various written and visual resources intended to achieve specific educational goals, while also transmitting knowledge, attitudes and behaviors (Nasution et al., 2025). Beyond the transmission of knowledge, textbooks can also contribute to educating learners as critical and responsible citizens (Kerger et al., 2023). As Cunningsworth (1995) argues, they therefore play a central role in education by supporting students in achieving specific learning goals and objectives.

However, beyond their explicit pedagogical function, textbooks also convey what Cunningsworth (1995, p.90) refers to as the *hidden curriculum*. This implicit dimension of educational materials may reflect ideological positions, conscious or unconscious values, and therefore adopt biases and perspective. Similarly, Onatra and Peña (2004, p.159), define the *hidden curriculum* as “that set of attitudes which filter the teaching-learning process during everyday lessons as well as the other activities of school.” In this sense, textbooks contribute to shaping students’ perceptions and can influence both academic and non-academic outcomes (Aguilar, 2021). Within this hidden curriculum, gender-related values can play a key role in shaping pupils’ identities, particularly with regard to the relationship between women and men, the roles assigned to them, and their position in society. These representations help shape students’ self-image, as well as their behavior, social interactions and professional aspirations (Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012).

This influence is further reinforced because textbook content is typically perceived by children as authoritative, leading them to accept it as unquestioned truth (Aydinoğlu, 2014). Therefore, several authors have emphasized the importance of both selecting appropriate textbooks and utilizing them effectively in the classroom (Aydinoğlu, 2014; Hidayah et al., 2025; Kerger et al., 2023, Sudewi et al., 2021). In this regard, Sudewi et al. (2021) present several criteria for evaluating textbooks, emphasizing that high-quality learning materials should be unbiased and free from stereotypes, present a comprehensive and inclusive perspective on society and its history, incorporate diverse points of view, and represent cultures beyond that of the majority group. Beyond the selection of appropriate materials, their use in the classroom is also important. Aydinoğlu (2014) emphasizes that textbooks should be used in ways that build

on and expand students' experiences, helping them critically analyze and understand real-life situations and better preparing them to navigate the complexities of the world beyond the classroom.

3. Literature review

This section reviews the literature on gender representations in foreign language textbooks. The studies examined analyze both the visibility of female and male characters and the way in which they are represented. While the literature consistently reports an overrepresentation of male characters and the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes, some studies also identify more balanced and less stereotypical representations of male and female characters.

The literature first provides an overview of the selected studies, before examining the visibility of male and female characters. It then reviews of the different dimensions through which gender stereotypes are expressed, namely agency, personality traits, family settings, professional settings and leisure activities. Finally, evidence of more balanced gender representations identified in the literature is considered.

3.1. Overview of the selected studies

The literature review is based on articles and books examining gender representations and gender stereotypes in school textbooks. Before reviewing the findings reported across the literature, a brief overview of each study is provided. For each study, the educational context, the corpus analyzed, the methodological approach and the main research focus are presented.

Aydinoğlu (2014) investigates gender representations in coursebooks used for teaching English as a foreign language in Turkish state primary schools. The study analyses two textbooks, *Fun with Teddy* and *Joyful English 1* (Books 1 and 2), which were used in second- and fourth-grade classrooms during the 2013-2014 academic year. Using content analysis of both textual and visual data, the author examines several dimensions of gender representation, including the visibility of female and male characters, their occupations and activities, the distribution of indoor and outdoor settings, as well as patterns of verbal interaction such as giving instructions, turn-taking and asking questions.

Aguilar (2021) investigates the representation of female and male characters in English as a Foreign Language textbooks used in Mexican public primary schools. The study analyses three activity books (*Play and Play 2*, *Brilliant! Two* and *Kites 1*), published between 2010 and 2011 and approved by the Mexican Ministry of Education for use within the National English Program. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study examines

the visibility of female and male characters in visual materials, as well as the occupational roles attributed to each gender.

Kerger et al. (2023) examine gender representations in school textbooks used in lower secondary education in Luxembourg. The study analyses a corpus of 52 textbooks covering eight school subjects (German, French, English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, History, Geography and Life and Society). Building on a previous study conducted in Luxembourgish primary education, the authors combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the representation of female and male characters in both textual and visual materials. The analysis focuses on the visibility of female and male characters, their representation in professional, domestic and leisure activities, the use of gendered language, and the presence of male and female authors in literary texts.

Nasution et al. (2025) examine gender representations in *Super Minds 6*, an English as a Foreign Language textbook published by Cambridge University Press in 2013 for elementary education. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study analyses both textual and visual content. It examines the visibility of female and male characters and explores how gender is represented across three social contexts: family, occupations and leisure activities.

Hidayah et al. (2025) investigate gender representations in the images of *English in Mind*, an English foreign language textbook used in tenth-grade education. Using a qualitative multi-modal discourse analysis, the study examines the roles, actions and contexts in which female and male characters are portrayed. Although the textbook contains 131 images, the analysis is limited to three photographs depicting both female and male participants. According to the authors, selecting images in which both genders appear within the same context allows for a more direct comparison of their roles, actions and relationships, making it possible to examine how female and male characters are represented relative to one another.

Hauksson-Tresch (2026) investigates gender stereotypes in the *Chez Nous* series, a collection of French language textbooks published between 2022 and 2024 and used in Swedish lower secondary schools. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study examines how gender roles and identities are constructed through both textual and visual representations. The analysis focuses on three main dimensions: the activities performed by female and male characters, the personality traits and behaviors attributed to them, and the language used throughout the textbooks.

Unlike the other sources included in this literature review, *Sexes & Manuels : Promouvoir l'égalité dans les manuels scolaires* (Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012) is not an empirical research article but a guide published by the Direction de l'Égalité des Chances de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. Rather than presenting the findings of a single study, the publication synthesizes the results of six major studies on gender representations in school textbooks and translates them into practical analytical criteria. Its primary objective is to provide teachers, inspectors, teacher educators and other educational stakeholders with tools to identify stereotypical or sexist representations in textbooks and to promote more gender-equitable educational materials. Throughout the guide, these criteria are illustrated with numerous examples drawn from school textbooks used in the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.

3.2. Visibility of male and female characters in textbooks

The visibility of female and male characters constitutes one of the most frequently examined dimensions of gender representations in school textbooks. Although some studies report patterns of gender visibility that differ from the general trend, most identify an overrepresentation of male characters.

This imbalance is illustrated by the findings of Nasution et al. (2025). The textbook analyzed reveals an overall imbalance in gender visibility, favoring male visibility. Indeed, out of the 128 images featuring people, 73 depict only male characters, whereas 18 images show exclusively female characters. The remaining 37 images include both genders. The authors suggest that this predominance may partly be explained by the themes addressed in the textbook, as topics such as science, technology, and innovation are predominantly associated with male figures. However, this thematic focus also contributes to the lower visibility of female characters. By repeatedly portraying men in these domains, the textbook reinforces traditional gender stereotypes by increasing the overall prominence of male characters while reducing the presence of female characters.

The predominance of male characters is also confirmed by the studies conducted by Kerger et al. (2023) and Aydinoğlu (2014). Across the 52 textbooks analyzed by Kerger et al. (2023), male characters largely outnumber female characters, with 36,139 male characters compared to 12,953 female characters, alongside 12,317 characters of undetermined gender. Similarly, Aydinoğlu (2014) reports a clear imbalance in the visual data, identifying 520 male characters compared with 288 female characters across the three textbooks analyzed. The author also observes a greater frequency of male than female names in the verbal data, with 473 male

names compared to 373 female names. Together, these findings reinforce the persistence of male overrepresentation in both the visual and textual content of school textbooks.

When illustrations and photographs are considered together, Aguilar (2021) also identifies an overall overrepresentation of male characters. However, a more nuanced pattern emerges when the two types of visual materials are analyzed separately. While illustrations consistently favor male characters, photographs reveal a less pronounced gender imbalance, with female characters outnumbering male characters in two of the three textbooks. For example, in the first textbook, the illustrations depict 152 male figures compared with 83 female figures, whereas the photographs show 55 male figures and 71 female figures. The author does not propose an explanation for this contrast but suggests that it raises questions for future research, particularly regarding the factors underlying the different patterns observed in illustrations and photographs.

In contrast, Hauksson-Tresch (2026) reports a different overall pattern of gender visibility. In the textual data, 87 female characters are identified compared with 73 male characters. A similar pattern is observed in the visual material, with 342 female figures compared with 292 male figures. These findings demonstrate that more balanced patterns of gender visibility are possible in foreign language textbooks.

Overall, the studies reviewed indicate that male characters remain more visible than female characters in school textbooks. Although some studies identify more balanced patterns of gender visibility, these examples remain limited and do not fully challenge the broader trend. These findings suggest that unequal gender visibility continues to characterize many foreign language textbooks.

3.3. Gender stereotypes in textbooks

The literature reviewed identifies several dimensions through which gender stereotypes are reflected in school textbooks. These stereotypical representations are expressed through the agency, personality traits, professional roles, leisure activities and family roles attributed to female and male characters. Each of these dimensions is examined in turn below.

3.3.1. Agency

Several studies examine how agency is attributed to female and male characters by analyzing how they participate in the narrative. More specifically, the analyses focus on who initiates actions, leads interactions, gives instructions, or assumes a central role in the development of

events. While most studies report traditional patterns of agency, others identify representations that challenge these traditional gender expectations.

Hauksson-Tresch (2026) highlights a predominance of male agency in school textbooks. The analysis shows that male characters more frequently occupy the role of the central protagonist than female characters (31 and 23 occurrences respectively, out of 85). Furthermore, when examining interactions between unfamiliar characters, the author observes that it is consistently the male character who initiates the conversation, whereas the female character responds to his action. These findings reinforce the stereotypical opposition between active masculinity and passive femininity by positioning men as the driving force behind social interactions.

Similar findings are reported by Aydinoğlu (2014), whose analysis focuses on verbal interactions. The author shows that male characters are more frequently portrayed as leading exchanges by giving instructions, initiating conversations, directing verbal interactions and asking questions. Such representations position men as active and authoritative figures, whereas women are more often confined to passive and receptive roles. By consistently associating leadership and initiative with male characters, these portrayals reinforce traditional gender expectations regarding agency.

However, Hidayah et al. (2025) provide a counterexample to these traditional patterns of agency. In two of the three images analyzed, female and male characters participate equally in the interaction, with neither gender assuming a dominant or subordinate role. In the third image, a female character leads the discussion, while a male and another female character contribute equally to the interaction. These representations challenge the traditional association between masculinity and leadership by portraying female characters as equally capable of assuming active and leading roles.

Overall, these findings indicate that agency remains predominantly associated with male characters in school textbooks. Male characters are more frequently portrayed as the initiators of actions and interactions, whereas female characters are more often assigned passive or responsive roles. Nevertheless, one study identifies representations that challenge these traditional patterns of agency by portraying male and female characters as equally active participants and by depicting female characters in leading roles.

3.3.2. Personality traits

The construction of gender representations in school textbooks is also reflected in the personality traits attributed to female and male characters. The studies reviewed consistently show that certain stereotypical personality traits are predominantly associated with female characters, whereas others are associated with male characters.

Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012) illustrate this pattern through the recurrent representation of the ‘tough boy’ versus the ‘well-behaved little girl’. Female characters are portrayed as vulnerable (crying, terrified or ill), whereas male characters are depicted as aggressive and proud of their strength. These portrayals reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by associating women with vulnerability and emotional sensitivity, while men are linked to strength and toughness.

A similar pattern is observed by Hauksson-Tresch (2026), whose analysis reveals that physical weakness, such as illness, is almost exclusively associated with female characters, whereas male vulnerability is largely limited to fatigue. Such portrayals reinforce the idea that vulnerability and emotional expression are more socially acceptable for female characters than for male characters and may influence learners' perceptions of gender by presenting vulnerability as a predominantly feminine characteristic.

Beyond the opposition between vulnerability and strength, Hauksson-Tresch (2026) also identifies care as a personality trait predominantly attributed to female characters. Through their involvement in childcare and family life, female characters are consistently portrayed as caring and nurturing individuals. Nasution et al. (2025) reach a similar conclusion, showing that adult female characters are primarily associated with caring qualities and nurturing behavior. Together, these findings reinforce the traditional association between femininity and care as a defining personality trait.

These observations are further reflected in a table presented by Hauksson-Tresch (2026), based on the work of Nikolajeva (2017), which summarizes the stereotypical personality traits traditionally associated with female and male characters. Female characters are commonly associated with characteristics such as being shy, vulnerable, caring, self-sacrificing and passive, whereas male characters are more frequently described as strong, competitive, independent and rational. This distinction further illustrates the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes by consistently associating different personality traits with female and male characters.

Taken together, these findings indicate that personality traits remain strongly gendered in school textbooks. Female characters are predominantly associated with vulnerability, care and self-sacrificing, whereas male characters are more frequently linked to strength, competitiveness and independence. These recurring patterns contribute to the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes by consistently associating contrasting personality traits with female and male characters.

3.3.3. Family settings

Across the studies reviewed, household chores and caregiving responsibilities are predominantly assigned to female characters. Although some studies present counterexamples by portraying male characters in household or caregiving activities, these representations remain relatively limited. As such, school textbooks continue to reinforce traditional gender roles within the family.

The study conducted by Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012) indicates that babies are almost exclusively depicted in the arms of their mothers or their older sisters. Across the textbooks examined, only a few illustrations portray fathers holding their children or pushing a stroller. Likewise, activities such as reading to a child or putting them to bed are predominantly associated with mothers, with only a limited number of comparable representations involving fathers. In addition, a division can be observed in domestic activities, with mothers and daughters depicted preparing meals or washing dishes, while fathers are associated with activities such as washing the car or working in the garden. These representations reinforce traditional gender divisions within the family, associating female characters with caregiving and domestic responsibilities and male characters with activities outside the home.

In line with the previous findings, Kerger et al. (2023) report a predominance of female characters in the domestic sphere, with 152 female characters represented across all textbooks compared with 105 male characters. For instance, sisters are portrayed preparing breakfast, walking the dog and performing household chores, whereas their brother is depicted listening to music and watching television. These representations suggest that traditional gender roles are projected onto child characters from an early age, assigning domestic and caregiving responsibilities primarily to girls while limiting the involvement of boys. As a result, these representations may contribute to normalizing the unequal distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities by providing children with few alternative models of male involvement in family life.

Accordingly, the study conducted by Hauksson-Tresch (2026) reveals that female characters are more frequently portrayed as assuming responsibilities for caregiving and domestic tasks, with 12 female characters involved in these activities compared with 6 male characters. Furthermore, domestic spaces such as the kitchen are predominantly occupied by female characters, reinforcing the association between femininity and domestic responsibilities. At the same time, the study also identifies several representations that depart from traditional gender roles within the family. Fathers are portrayed expressing affection toward their children and participating in activities such as meal preparation. However, these representations occur primarily in specific family contexts, such as single-parent families or same-sex couples. This suggests that male involvement in caregiving and domestic responsibilities remains context-dependent, appearing more prominently in the absence of a female figure.

By contrast, the analysis by Nasution et al. (2025) presents more balanced representations of parental roles, with mothers and fathers depicted as equally involved in childcare. The images analyzed do not portray mothers as solely responsible for family care, thereby challenging traditional gender stereotypes within the household. These findings demonstrate that more balanced representations of family roles are possible in school textbooks, broadening the range of parental roles represented.

Overall, the studies reviewed highlight the persistence of traditional gender roles within the family, particularly through the association of female characters with caregiving and domestic responsibilities and the gendered division of household tasks. Male characters, by contrast, remain underrepresented in caregiving and traditionally female-associated domestic roles. Although some representations challenge these traditional patterns, they remain limited and do not substantially alter the dominant pattern identified across the literature. Consequently, school textbooks continue to reinforce and normalize gendered expectations within the family context.

3.3.4. Professional settings

Several studies examine the professional roles attributed to female and male characters in school textbooks. The literature consistently highlights an uneven distribution of occupations, whereby certain professions are predominantly associated with female characters, whereas others remain largely male-dominated.

The studies by Aguilar (2021) and Aydinoglu (2014) highlight an unequal distribution of professional roles, with male characters being associated with a wider range of occupations than

female characters. For instance, in the first textbook analyzed by Aguilar (2021), male characters are represented in 13 different occupations, compared with only 6 for female characters. Similarly, Aydinoğlu (2014) identifies 17 occupations associated with male characters, compared with 6 for female characters. These findings suggest that male characters are portrayed as having access to a broader range of professional opportunities, whereas female characters are confined to a more limited set of occupations.

This imbalance is further reflected in the types of occupations attributed to female and male characters. Aguilar (2021) identifies a clear gendered distribution of professional roles, with female characters being more frequently associated with occupations in the care and education sectors, such as nursing and teaching, whereas male characters are more often represented as doctors or firefighters. More broadly, the professions assigned to male characters tend to be associated with greater authority and responsibility than those attributed to female characters. Such representations reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by portraying male characters in positions of prestige and leadership, while confining female characters to caring and supportive professions.

Similarly, the studies by Aydinoğlu (2014), Hauksson-Tresch (2026) and Nasution et al. (2025) illustrate how male characters are typically portrayed as inventors, scientists, directors, mayors, or presidents, whereas female characters are predominantly represented as teachers, makeup artists, greengrocers, or au pairs. Such representations contribute to the perception that certain occupations naturally belong to one gender rather than the other, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes related to professional roles.

The gendered distribution of professional roles is also reflected in the personal qualities implicitly associated with these occupations. Nasution et al. (2025) observe that occupations requiring physical strength are predominantly attributed to male characters. Men are represented as pedicab drivers and security guards, whereas no female character is depicted in these physically demanding roles. Conversely, female characters are more frequently associated with occupations such as nursing, which require care and empathy rather than physical strength. Similar findings are reported by Aguilar (2021), who shows that male characters are more often portrayed in physically active occupations, including firefighters, hunters and construction workers. Together, these representations suggest an implicit correspondence between stereotypically masculine and feminine personality traits and the professional roles assigned to each gender. As a result, occupations are portrayed as reflecting the personality traits traditionally

associated with one gender rather than the other, further reinforcing gender stereotypes related to professional roles.

However, the study conducted by Hidayah et al. (2025) presents a countertrend. One of the images analyzed depicts a professional setting in which two female characters and one male character are dressed in formal business attire. The standing female character is portrayed as leading the discussion, as suggested by her central position and active posture. Unlike the previous studies, this representation places a woman in a position of leadership while portraying the two other characters as equally engaged in a professional interaction. This representation suggest that more balanced portrayals of professional roles are possible by depicting a woman in a leadership position traditionally associated with male characters.

The evidence reviewed indicates a persistent gendered distribution of professional roles in the textbooks. Male characters are associated with a wider range of occupations, more prestigious positions, and professions requiring physical strength, authority and action, whereas female characters are predominantly represented in a narrower range of occupations related to care, education and support. Overall, these representations contribute to reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes regarding professional roles. Although some studies report more balanced representations, these remain limited and do not challenge the dominant pattern identified across the literature.

3.3.5. Leisure activities

Leisure activities also constitute an important dimension of gender representations in school textbooks. Previous studies reveal both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical patterns, particularly in the types of activities associated with female and male characters and contexts in which they take place.

Hauksson-Tresch (2026) highlights the diversity of leisure activities associated with both female and male characters. Female characters are portrayed engaging in activities such as motorcycling, hockey and combat sports, which are traditionally associated with male characters. Conversely, male characters are sometimes depicted participating in activities such as shopping, which is more commonly associated with female characters. At the same time, some leisure activities remain more strongly associated with one gender than the other. For instance, reading continues to be more frequently associated with female characters, whereas video games and playing the drums remain more commonly linked to male characters. Together, these findings

suggest that traditional gender stereotypes in leisure activities are represented in a more flexible manner, although they have not entirely disappeared.

However, Nasution et al. (2025) report a predominance of male characters in games and leisure activities. Although one female character is depicted engaging in a physically demanding exercise, significantly more male characters participate in this type of activity. These findings suggest that leisure activities are represented more frequently through male characters, particularly when they involve physical activity.

Similarly, Aydinoğlu (2014) identified a gender differences in the context in which leisure activities take place. Female characters are represented in indoor activities approximately twice as often as male characters, whereas male characters are associated with outdoor activities approximately twice as often as female characters. These findings suggest that gender differences extend to the settings in which leisure activities take place.

Overall, the studies reviewed indicate that leisure activities combine both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations. While some characters are portrayed engaging in activities traditionally associated with the other gender, gender differences remain visible in the types of activities represented, as well as in the settings in which they take place.

Although female and male characters participate in wider variety of leisure activities, traditional gender stereotypes remain visible through the continued association of certain activities with one gender and the contexts in which these activities take place.

3.4. More balanced gendered representations in textbooks

Although the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes remains one of the main findings reported in the literature reviewed, several studies also identify counter-stereotypical representations that challenge traditional gender expectations and point to more balanced gender representations.

This tendency is illustrated by the study of Hidayah et al. (2025). Through the analysis of visual representations, the authors identify a more balanced portrayal of female and male characters across different social settings, including educational, professional, and leisure settings. In educational settings, both genders are represented as equal participants in shared activities and interactions, without any indication of hierarchy, authority, or traditional gender roles.

Similarly, professional settings depict female and male characters as equally engaged in the workplace, while also portraying women in positions of leadership, thereby challenging conventional assumptions that associate authority primarily with men. Leisure settings likewise present female and male characters participating equally in social interactions, with neither gender portrayed as more active or dominant than the other. Overall, these findings illustrate more balanced gender representations, in which female and male characters are depicted as equally capable of participating in educational, professional, and social life.

Although Hidayah et al. (2025) explicitly highlight more balanced gender representations, similar patterns can also be found in studies that primarily emphasize the persistence of gender stereotypes. For instance, Hauksson-Tresch (2026) reports more diversified representations of leisure activities, with female and male characters engaging in a wider range of activities, including some that are not traditionally associated with their gender. The study also reports a higher visibility of female characters in both visual and textual representations. Nasution et al. (2025), meanwhile, identify more balanced representations within the family sphere, with a more equal distribution of parental responsibilities. Taken together, these findings suggest that traditional gender stereotypes coexist with counter-stereotypical representations. Although these patterns vary across studies and dimensions, they illustrate the possibility of portraying female and male characters in ways that depart from traditional gender expectations.

In addition to these findings, the publication of practical guides such as *Sexes et Manuels* (Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012) reflects an awareness of the need to reduce gender bias in educational materials. While the guide highlights recurring issues such as the overrepresentation of male characters and the traditional association of women with the domestic sphere, its primary aim is to provide concrete recommendations for producing more balanced and less stereotypical gender representations in school textbooks. It advocates both a qualitative and a quantitative approach to gender equality: qualitatively, female characters should be represented across a wide range of contexts, including family life, professional settings, and leisure activities; quantitatively, textbooks should ensure a balanced visibility of female and male characters. Published in 2012, this guide shows that concrete recommendations for promoting more balanced gender representations in school textbooks had already been formulated before the publication of the 2014 and 2018 textbooks included in the present corpus (see Section 5.2.1 The corpus). The present research therefore provides an opportunity to examine the extent to which these recommendations are reflected in the three English textbooks selected for this study, published in 2010, 2014, and 2018.

4. Research questions and hypotheses

This section outlines the research questions guiding the study and subsequently presents the hypotheses derived from the literature discussed in the previous chapter.

4.1. Research questions

This thesis examines the evolution of gender representations in English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles in Belgium. Its primary aim is to answer the following main research question:

(MQ) How have gender representations in the textual and visual content of English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles evolved between 2010 and 2018, and to what extent do these representations reflect gender stereotypes?

In order to do so, a set of sub-questions has also been formulated, all directly related to the main question. The first sub-question (SQ1) examines the frequency of male and female character occurrences in the textual and visual content of the three textbooks:

(SQ1) How frequently do male and female characters appear in the textual and visual content of the three textbooks?

The second sub-question (SQ2) examines the distribution of agency between female and male characters in the textual content of the three textbooks:

(SQ2) How is agency distributed between female and male characters in the textual content of the three textbooks?

The third sub-question (SQ3) examines the distribution of personality traits between male and female characters in the textual content of the three textbooks:

(SQ3) How are personality traits distributed between female and male characters in the textual content of the three textbooks?

The fourth sub-question (SQ4) examines the distribution of domestic roles, occupations and activities between male and female characters in the textual content of the three textbooks:

(SQ4) How are domestic roles, occupations and leisure activities distributed between female and male characters in the textual content of the three textbooks?

The fifth sub-question (SQ5) examines the extent to which the gender representations identified through the previous sub-questions reinforce or challenge traditional gender stereotypes:

(SQ5) To what extent do these representations reinforce or challenge traditional gender stereotypes?

Finally, the sixth sub-question (SQ6) examines whether changes toward more balanced gender representations can be observed across the three textbooks published in 2010, 2014 and 2018:

(SQ6) To what extent can changes toward more balanced gender representations be observed across the textbooks published in 2010, 2014 and 2018?

4.2. Hypotheses

The findings of previous studies discussed in the literature review allow for the formulation of several hypotheses related to the research questions.

One of the most consistent findings concerns the visibility of male and female characters in educational materials. Studies conducted by Aguilar (2001), Aydinoğlu (2014), Kerger et al. (2023), and Nasution et al. (2025) all report an overrepresentation of male characters compared with female characters in textbooks. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H1) Male characters are expected to remain more visible than female characters, in both textual and visual content.

The literature also points to a gendered distribution of agency between female and male characters. Studies conducted by Hauksson-Tresch (2026) and Aydinoğlu (2014) consistently report that male characters are more frequently portrayed as initiating actions, leading interactions, giving instructions and assuming central roles in the narrative, whereas female characters are more often assigned passive or responsive roles. Drawing on these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H2) Agency is expected to be predominantly attributed to male characters, who are more likely than female characters to initiate actions and interactions, give instructions, and assume central roles in the narrative.

Additionally, the studies conducted by Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg (2012), Aydinoğlu (2014), and Hauksson-Tresch (2026) suggest that certain personality traits are more frequently associated with female characters, whereas others are more commonly attributed to male characters. Female characters are often portrayed as vulnerable, emotional, caring or passive, while male characters tend to be represented as more assertive, independent, and more likely to take initiative. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H3) Female and male characters are expected to be associated with different personality traits reflecting traditional gender stereotypes.

Moreover, the findings of studies conducted by Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg (2012), Kerger et al. (2023), and Hauksson-Tresch (2026) highlight the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes in family settings, with female characters being overrepresented and male underrepresented in caregiving and domestic roles. These findings lead to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

(H4) Family settings are expected to reflect traditional gender roles, with caregiving and domestic responsibilities being more frequently associated with female characters.

Another consistent finding concerns the attribution of professional roles to female and male characters. Research conducted by Aydinoğlu (2014), Hauksson-Tresch (2026), and Nasution et al. (2025) highlights the predominance of men in higher-status occupations and positions of authority. Furthermore, studies by Aguilar (2021) and Aydinoğlu (2014) suggest that male characters are represented in a wider range of occupations than female characters. Drawing on these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H5) Professional roles are expected to reflect traditional gender stereotypes, with occupations distributed according to traditional gender associations and male characters represented in a wider range of occupations.

The literature suggests that leisure activities combine both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations. While some studies identify a diversification of the activities associated with female and male characters (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026), gendered patterns remain visible in their representation in leisure activities (Nasution et al., 2025), the types of activities attributed to each gender (Nasution et al. 2025), and the contexts in which these activities take place (Aydinoğlu, 2014). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H6) Female and male characters are expected to be represented in a variety of leisure activities, while certain types of activities and contexts are expected to remain more strongly associated with one gender.

Finally, Hauksson-Tresch (2026), Hidayah et al. (2025) and Nasution et al. (2025) identify counter-stereotypical representations that challenge traditional gender expectations and demonstrate that more balanced portrayals of female and male characters are possible in school textbooks. In addition, the publication of practical guidelines such as *Sexes et Manuels* (Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012) reflects an awareness of the need to promote more balanced and less stereotypical gender representations in educational materials. Drawing on these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

(H7) More recent textbooks are expected to display more balanced and inclusive gender representations compared with earlier textbooks.

5. **Methodology**

The present research aims to conduct a diachronic analysis of gender representations in English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, considering both textual and visual content.

Although numerous studies have examined gender representations in school textbooks, the Belgian context, and more specifically that of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, remains largely unexplored. This context is particularly relevant given the publication of institutional guidelines such as *Sexes et Manuels* (Adreiaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012), which reflects an awareness of the importance of promoting gender equality in educational resources.

A diachronic perspective is also relevant in light of the contrasting findings reported in previous research. While several studies continue to emphasize the persistence of gender stereotypes in textbooks (Aguilar, 2021; Aydinoğlu, 2014; Kerger et al., 2023), others identify more balanced representations (Hidayah et al., 2025; Kerger et al., 2023). None of these studies, however, examines gender representations from a diachronic perspective. The absence of such a perspective, together with the recommendations formulated within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Adreiaenssens & Kuppenberg, 2012) motivates the comparative and diachronic approach adopted in the present study.

5.1. Design of the study

To examine gender representations in English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles of Belgium, the present study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative analysis focuses on the frequency and distribution of gender representations in both the textual and visual content, while the qualitative analysis complements these findings by examining how female and male characters are portrayed. Considering both textual and visual content allows for a more comprehensive analysis of gender representation, as textual content provides insight into how female and male characters are portrayed through several dimensions, while visual content provides an additional measure of their relative visibility (See Section 5.3).

More specifically, the analysis considers dimensions such as character visibility, agency, personality traits, professional settings, family settings and leisure activities. Character visibility provides insight into the relative presence of female and male characters, while agency and

personality traits examine how they are characterized and the roles they assume. Professional, family and leisure settings further allow for the examination of the social roles and activities associated with each gender. The selection of these dimensions is primarily based on categories and recurring patterns identified in the literature review.

Furthermore, the study is based on three textbooks published in 2010, 2014, and 2018 (see Section 5.2.1). These textbooks were selected because they were available within the educational context of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, targeted learners at the same CEFR level (A2), and provided comparable textual and visual material. Their publication at four-year intervals provides a relatively regular timeframe for examining possible changes in gender representations over an eight-year period. This timeline was determined primarily by the availability and comparability of suitable textbooks rather than by predetermined historical dates.

5.2. Data and source of data

The data analyzed in this study consist of textual and visual content extracted from three English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. This section presents the corpus and the main characteristics underlying its selection, including the type of textbooks, their language level, and their status within the approval system of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.

5.2.1. The corpus

The corpus consists of three English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. Published by three different publishers in 2010, 2014 and 2018, all three textbooks target learners at the A2 level of the CEFR. The use of textbooks from different publishers was not an initial selection criterion, but the materials available for the present study did not allow for a diachronic comparison based on a single publisher. The three textbooks analyzed are presented in Table 1.

Name	Level	Publisher	Date
<i>English in Mind</i> Student book 1 (second edition)	A2	Cambridge University Press	2010
<i>Jelly 2</i>	A2	Van In	2014

<i>OF C(3)URSE!</i> (new edition)	A2	Plantyn	2018
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Table 1: Overview of the selected textbooks

Although this corpus does not represent all textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, it nevertheless allows for the identification of recurring patterns and trends in gender representations. The present study, therefore, does not aim to provide exhaustive results, but rather to offer a more in-depth understanding of gender stereotypes and representations that may be conveyed through these educational materials.

5.2.2. English textbooks

Several factors motivated the selection of English textbooks for this study. As Aydinoğlu (2014) points out, English textbooks constitute important tools for learning a second language while also providing learners with exposure to the culture associated with that language. Their relevance extends beyond linguistic instruction, as they expose learners to social and cultural representations through the characters, interactions, and situations they portray. These characteristics make language textbooks particularly suitable for examining how gender is represented in educational materials.

The choice to focus specifically on English textbooks is also justified by the educational context and level examined in the present study. While Dutch is the most widely studied foreign language in primary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, figures from 2023 show that English was the most widely studied language at lower secondary level (Larsimont, 2026). The prominence of English at this particular level further supports the relevance of examining English textbooks.

5.2.3. The targeted level

The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) distinguishes six levels of language proficiency, ranging from A1 to C2. These levels are divided into three broad categories: A1 and A2 correspond to basic users, B1 and B2 to independent users, and C1 and C2 to proficient users (Council of Europe, 2020). Within this framework, the present study focuses on textbooks corresponding to the A2 level.

According to the Council of Europe (2020), A2 learners have the linguistic skills required to deal with basic everyday situations and communicate about familiar aspects of their

immediate environment. The British Council (n.d.) similarly describes A2 proficiency in relation to familiar topics, including personal and family information, places of interest, and employment. These areas are reflected in the textbooks selected for the present study, in which recurring themes include family life, professions, leisure activities and personal characteristics. Such themes provide contexts in which characters may be portrayed through different activities, roles and social interactions, making them particularly relevant to the analysis of gender representations.

A further consideration in the selection of the A2 level concerned the balance between textual and visual content. During the preliminary examination of textbooks across different educational levels, primary-level materials appeared to rely more extensively on visual content, whereas textbooks intended for upper secondary education contained comparatively more textual material. The A2-level textbooks examined offered a more balanced combination of both dimensions, making them particularly suitable for the present study, which considers both textual and visual gender representations.

5.2.4. Textbook approval within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles

The present study examines three textbooks used in three different schools within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. It is therefore relevant to consider the institutional framework governing the approval and selection of educational materials for classroom use.

In 2006, the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles established a system for the approval and financial support of school textbooks through the *Décret du 19 mai 2006 relatif à l'agrément et à la diffusion de manuels scolaires, de logiciels scolaires et d'autres outils pédagogiques*. Under this framework, textbooks submitted for approval were assessed according to several criteria, including compliance with educational requirements and respect for the principles of equality and non-discrimination (art. 3). The decree also provided for the publication of an updated list of approved textbooks and established financial support for their acquisition by schools (arts. 8 and 10).

These requirements were consistent with the broader educational principles established by the *Décret Missions* of 24 July 1997. Article 6 identifies equal opportunities for social emancipation as one of the general objectives of education, while Article 10 specifically calls for equal access to educational pathways for female and male students. These principles are

particularly relevant to educational materials, which extend beyond the transmission of academic content. As Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012) emphasize, textbooks are not neutral. They constitute tools of socialization through which norms, values, and particular conceptions of society may be conveyed. From this perspective, educational materials should respect principles of equality and non-discrimination while contributing to social emancipation and societal change.

The institutional framework surrounding textbooks has subsequently evolved. In 2019, a new decree concerning the acquisition of textbooks and other educational resources replaced the 2006 approval framework. Article 3 establishes requirements concerning fundamental rights, including equality and non-discrimination, while also explicitly incorporating the principle of gender equality. The new framework also introduced a labelling procedure and a charter that publishers are required to sign for their educational materials to be eligible for acquisition through the *Manolo* subsidy³. Through this framework, publishers commit to principles including gender equality, non-discrimination, diversity, and respect for others (Denis, 2025).

The importance attributed to these principles reflects the potential role of textbooks in shaping representations of society. Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012) highlight that the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles expects educational materials to avoid reproducing unequal conceptions of women and men and to reflect the diversity of the roles they occupy in society. Nevertheless, institutional requirements do not necessarily prevent stereotypical representations from occurring. As Hauksson-Tresch (2026) points out, textbooks may continue to reproduce gender stereotypes despite being educational tools intended to implement objectives established by educational authorities. Against this background, examining textbooks used within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles provides an opportunity to investigate the extent to which their representations of gender reflect the principles of equality promoted within this educational context.

5.3. Collecting Data

The data analyzed in the present study were collected from three textbooks obtained from three different lower secondary schools within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. Several textbooks were initially considered. However, given the scope of the present study, the selection was

³ ‘The *Manolo* subsidy is an annual financial support provided to primary and secondary schools within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles for the acquisition of textbooks, teaching materials, and digital resources.’ (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, n.d.)

limited to three textbooks intended for the same educational level but published at different periods. Selecting textbooks from the same educational level allows for a more consistent comparison, while their different publication dates make it possible to examine gender representations diachronically. The three textbooks selected for this study are presented in Section 5.2.1.

The data collected from these three textbooks differ according to the type of analysis conducted. For the visual and textual quantitative analyses (see Sections 5.4.1.1 & 5.4.2.1), the three textbooks are examined in their entirety, with visual representations and first-name occurrences identified and counted manually. By contrast, the textual qualitative analysis requires a more focused selection of material given the scope of the present study (see Section 5.4.2.2). The procedure used to constitute this qualitative corpus involves two stages: the selection of relevant chapters and the subsequent selection of sentences within these chapters.

The first stage involves an initial reading of each textbook to identify chapters providing sufficient material for the analysis of gender representations. Chapters are selected based on two main criteria. First, they must contain sufficient textual material involving identifiable characters and interactions. Second, they must address themes relevant to the qualitative analysis, such as family life, professions, leisure activities, personality traits, and everyday interactions. By contrast, chapters focusing primarily on topics such as the weather, food and drinks, or furniture are not retained, as they provided limited material for the qualitative analysis. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the chapters selected from each textbook, together with their corresponding page ranges and main thematic content.

<i>English in Mind</i>						
Units	Free time	Helping other people	Making friends	Successful People	What a brave person	Traveler's tales
Pages	12-17	18-25	32-39	40-45	88-95	96-101
Themes	Hobbies, interests School subjects	House-work	Sport	Jobs and work	Adjectives of feelings	Personality adjectives

Table 2: Selected chapters for the qualitative analysis *English in mind*

<i>Jelly 2</i>			
Units	Once upon a time	It's a boy	Around the world
Pages	89-124	159-198	213-234
Themes	Personal characteristics, family and friends Daily life Holidays and leisure activities	Daily life	Personal characteristics, family and friends Daily life Holidays and leisure activities

Table 3: Selected chapters for the qualitative analysis in *Jelly 2*

<i>OF C(3)OURSE!</i>					
Units	Job stereotypes	Daily frustration	Worst holiday	Desires	Sport
Pages	15-45	123-130	131-153	161-189	191-217
Themes	Occupations Daily life Holidays and leisure activities	Personal characteristics Daily life Relationships with others	Holidays and leisure activities	Daily life Holidays and leisure activities	Hobbies

Table 4: Selected chapters for the qualitative analysis in *OF C(3)OURSE!*

The second stage concerns the selection of sentences within the retained chapters. As the size of relevant textual material differs across the three textbooks, a sampling procedure is adopted to ensure comparability between the sets of data. A total of 120 sentences are selected from each textbook for the qualitative analysis. Sentences are considered for selection when they contain a character's name, a singular personal pronoun associated with a specific gender, or a gendered noun (e.g., *woman*, *man*, *mother*, or *father*). Plural forms of gendered nouns are also included. Plural pronouns referring to groups, such as *they* or *we*, are excluded unless they

can be clearly associated with a specific visual representation or an identified group of characters.

The 120 sentences are distributed across the selected chapters according to the number of chapters retained for each textbook. Within each chapter, eligible sentences are selected in their order of appearance. This approach allows each textbook to contribute an equivalent amount of data, regardless of differences in the number or length of the selected chapters.

5.4. Data analysis

To examine the data collected from the selected textbooks, the analysis is organized into two distinct parts: a visual analysis and a textual analysis (see Sections 5.4.1 & 5.4.2). The visual analysis relies exclusively on a quantitative approach to examine the frequency and distribution of female and male representations. The textual analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the distribution of gender representations and the ways in which female and male characters are portrayed across the dimensions established for the present study.

The results obtained for each of the three textbooks are then compared with one another to identify potential diachronic changes and recurring patterns in gender representations.

5.4.1. Visual analysis

Visual content constitutes an important dimension of textbooks, as visual elements support learners' understanding of textual content and provide an important means of communication alongside written language. They contribute to the construction of meaning and may influence learners' perceptions of the characters and situations represented in textbooks (Baie, 2017). Given the scope of the present study, the visual analysis adopts a quantitative approach, focusing on the frequency and distribution of female and male representations.

5.4.1.1. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis focuses on all images depicting human beings throughout the textbooks. Particular attention is paid to the visibility of female and male characters, defined as the frequency with which they are visually represented. The images are first classified according to whether they depict individual characters or groups of characters. Individual representations are categorized as female or male. Group representations are categorized as female-only, male-only, or mixed-gender groups. For mixed-gender groups, the distribution of female and male characters is further examined to determine whether the group is gender-balanced or whether

one gender is numerically predominant. Characters whose gender cannot be identified are classified as gender indeterminate.

To avoid overrepresenting recurring characters, identical representations of the same character appearing repeatedly within the same sequence or interaction are counted only once. However, when the same character reappears later in a different visual context or in a different type of representation, for example, individually rather than as part of a group, the character is counted again.

Throughout the quantitative visual analysis, percentages are used to provide a clearer visualization of the distribution of gender representations and to facilitate comparison between categories and across textbooks. The corresponding absolute frequencies are also reported, with n referring to the number of visual representations identified in each category. Reporting both percentages and absolute frequencies allows percentage differences to be interpreted in relation to the actual number of representations observed.

Finally, the quantitative visual analysis is purely descriptive, as its purpose is to provide an overview of the frequency and distribution of gender representations in the visual content.

5.4.2. Textual analysis

Textual content constitutes another important dimension of textbooks, as texts not only convey educational content but may also transmit values, beliefs, and social representations (Baie, 2017). In the context of the present study, textual content therefore provides relevant material for examining gender representations. The textual analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, focusing both on the frequency and distribution of female and male representations and on the ways in which female and male characters are portrayed.

5.4.2.1. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis examines the entire textual content of the three textbooks. It focuses on the visibility of female and male characters through the occurrence of first names. First names are classified into three categories: female, male, and gender neutral. To avoid overrepresenting recurring characters, repeated occurrences of the same first name within the same sequence or interaction are counted only once. However, if the same first name reappears in a different sequence or context, it is counted as a new occurrence.

The results are expressed as percentages to provide a clearer visualization of the distribution of female, male, and gender-neutral names and to facilitate comparison across the three textbooks. Absolute frequencies (n) are also included to indicate the number of first-name occurrences recorded in each category, allowing percentage differences to be interpreted more precisely.

Finally, as with the quantitative visual analysis, the quantitative textual analysis is purely descriptive, as its purpose is to provide an overview of the frequency and distribution of gender representations in the textual content.

5.4.2.2. Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis focuses on the textual content to examine how female and male characters are portrayed. More specifically, the analysis considers their agency, the personality traits attributed to them, and their representation across different social settings, including family and professional settings, leisure activities, and everyday life. As described in Section 5.3, the qualitative analysis is based on a selection of 120 sentences from each textbook.

The qualitative findings are presented successively for each textbook, in more detail for the first textbook and progressively more concisely for the second and third. This approach avoids unnecessary repetition while allowing the analysis to focus on recurring patterns and differences in gender representations across the three textbooks. The findings are then compared to identify potential diachronic changes in these representations.

For each dimension of the qualitative analysis, a brief quantitative overview of the relevant data is provided before the qualitative findings are discussed. This provides a general picture of the representations analyzed within each dimension. The coding criteria applied to each dimension are described below, beginning with agency.

Drawing on previous studies examining gender and agency in textbooks (Aydinoğlu, 2014; Hauksson-Tresch, 2026), agency is assessed according to the role played by the character within a given situation. Representations are classified as *active* when characters take initiative, perform purposeful actions, make decisions, or influence others. They are classified as *passive* when characters depend on others, receive the actions of others, or react to situations or actions initiated by others. When a representation only provides descriptive information, such as personality traits, professions, emotions, or opinions, agency is coded as *not applicable*, as the information provided does not allow the character's role within a situation to be assessed. The

terms *active* and *passive* refer here to the degree of agency attributed to the character rather than to grammatical voice.

Regarding personality traits, this study draws on a table presented in Hauksson-Tresch's (2026) work, translated from Nikolajeva (2017), which identifies personality traits traditionally associated with femininity and masculinity. Given the scope of the present study, the analysis is limited to the traits included in this table (Table 5). However, some traits from the original table were excluded because they could not be clearly identified from the textual material. These include complex cognitive processes such as *analyzing*, *synthesizing*, *thinking quantitatively*, and *thinking qualitatively*, as well as traits such as *stable*. The traits *active* and *passive* were also excluded due to their conceptual overlap with agency, as both refer to the extent to which characters act or remain passive. Their exclusion aimed to maintain clearer boundaries between the analytical categories.

The retained traits are identified through explicit descriptions or implicitly through characters' actions, dialogues, descriptions, or activities. The analysis examines whether these traits (Table 5) tend to be associated more frequently with female or male characters and whether these associations reflect traditional gender patterns.

Male characters			Female characters		
Strong	Violent	Harsh	Beautiful	Peaceful	Emotional
Unemotional	Aggressive	Competitive	Cautious	Self-sacrifice	Caring
Self-confident	Protective	Independent	Shy	Vulnerable	Dependent
Persistent	Rational	Powerful	Nurturing	Intuitive	Sensitive

Table 5: Personality traits traditionally associated with femininity and masculinity

To ensure consistency throughout the coding process, operational definitions were established to clarify how selected personality traits from Table 5 were interpreted in the present study:

- *Emotional* representations refer to characters who openly express or discuss their emotions or display emotions.
- *Protective* representations refer to situations in which a character seeks to protect another person from physical or emotional harm, danger, or distress. They are

distinguished from *caring* representations, which more broadly involve providing care, empathy, support, or attention to another person's needs, as well as caregiving roles or activities.

- *Rational* representations refer to characters who approach situations through logical reasoning, problem-solving, or objective decision-making rather than through emotional responses.
- *Strong* representations include not only physical strength but also courage, resilience, or the ability to endure physical hardship.
- *Vulnerable* representations refer to characters portrayed in a position of physical or emotional vulnerability, for example when frightened, injured, ill, helpless, or distressed.

The last dimension of the qualitative analysis examines the social settings in which female and male characters are represented. Four categories are considered: family settings, professional settings, leisure activities, and everyday life. Family settings include representations of characters through their family relationships, roles within the household, and domestic tasks. Professional settings consider the occupations attributed to characters and the ways in which they are portrayed in work-related contexts. Leisure activities include activities undertaken during free time, such as physical or artistic activities, shopping, going to the cinema, or travelling. Finally, the *everyday life* category includes everyday routines and ordinary situations that cannot be clearly associated with a family, professional, or leisure context. The analysis considers how female and male characters are portrayed within these different contexts and whether these representations reflect or challenge traditional gender patterns.

6. Results

This section presents the results of the visual and textual analyses conducted on the three textbooks constituting the corpus of this study: *English in Mind*, *Jelly 2* and *OF C(3)URSE!*.

First, the visual analysis presents a quantitative analysis of the illustrations. The textual analysis then combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the textual content.

6.1. Visual analysis

The visual analysis includes all illustrations depicting human characters in the three textbooks and consists exclusively of a quantitative analysis (see Section 5.4.1).

6.1.1. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative visual analysis examines the frequency of visual representations of male, female and, where applicable, gender-indeterminate characters. More specifically, the analysis focuses on three dimensions: the distribution of individually depicted characters, the distribution of group representations according to their gender composition, and the gender distribution within mixed-gender groups. Identical representations of the same character appearing multiple times within the same visual sequence are counted only once. However, representations appearing in different visual contexts are counted separately (see Section 5.4.1.1).

The analysis is organized by textbook. Each textbook is first analyzed individually, before being compared transversally to examine possible changes in gender representations over time. As outlined in the methodology, this section remains purely descriptive.

6.1.1.1. *English in Mind*

English in Mind contained a total of 291 images depicting human characters, including 184 individual representations and 107 group representations. The first aspect examined is the distribution of male, female and gender-indeterminate characters depicted individually (Figure 1).

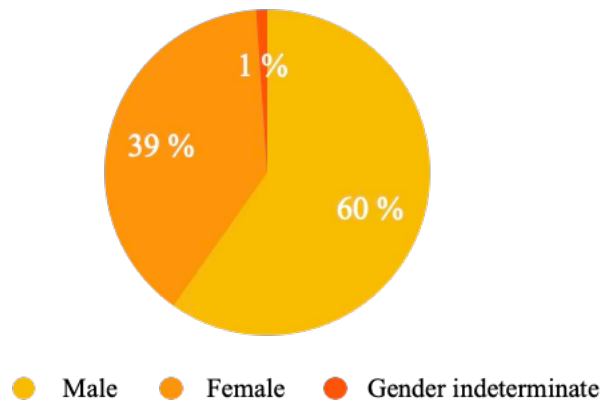


Figure 1: Gender distribution of characters depicted individually in *English in Mind*

Figure 1 shows that male characters are more frequently depicted individually than female characters. Male characters account for 60% ($n^4 = 110$) of all individual representations, compared with 39% ($n = 72$) for female characters. The remaining 1% ($n = 2$) consists of characters whose gender could not be identified based on the visual representation.

The second aspect examined is the distribution of group representations according to their gender composition: male only, female only, mixed gender and gender-indeterminate (Figure 2).

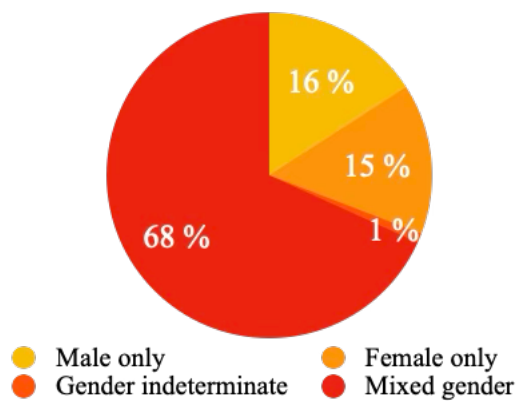


Figure 2: Distribution of group representations by gender composition in *English in Mind*

As shown in Figure 2, mixed-gender groups account for the majority of group representations, representing 68% ($n = 71$) of all groups. Groups composed exclusively of male characters account for 16% ($n = 19$), while groups composed exclusively of female characters represent 15% ($n = 16$). Only 1% ($n = 1$) of group representations is classified as gender-indeterminate because the characters' gender could not be identified from the illustration.

⁴ Throughout the quantitative visual analysis, n refers to the number of visual representations identified in each category.

Finally, the last aspect examined is the distribution of male and female characters within mixed-gender groups (Figure 3).

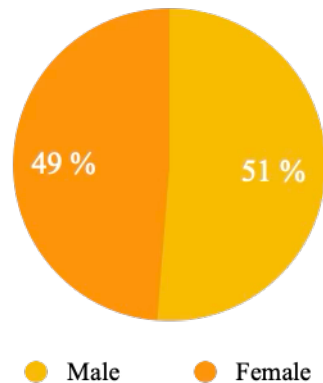


Figure 3: Gender distribution of characters within mixed-gender groups in *English in Mind*

Figure 3 shows that male and female characters are represented in almost equal proportions within mixed-gender groups. Female characters account for 49% ($n = 114$) of the characters depicted in mixed-gender groups, while male characters account for 51% ($n = 118$). The difference between the two genders is therefore marginal.

6.1.1.2. *Jelly 2*

A total of 259 images depicting human characters were identified in *Jelly 2*. Among these, 175 depict characters individually and 84 portray groups. The first stage of the analysis examines the gender distribution of individually depicted characters (Figure 4).

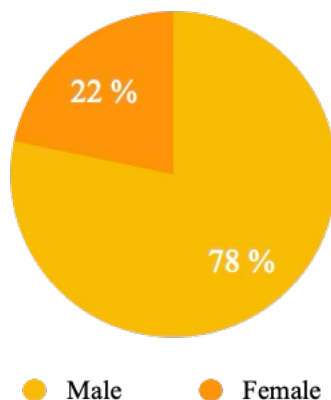


Figure 4: Gender distribution of characters depicted individually in *Jelly 2*

As illustrated in Figure 4, individually depicted characters are predominantly male. Male characters represent 78% ($n = 137$) of all individual representations, while female characters account for the remaining 22% ($n = 38$). Unlike *English in Mind*, no gender-indeterminate characters were identified among the individual representations.

The analysis then turns to the distribution of group representations according to their gender composition (Figure 5).

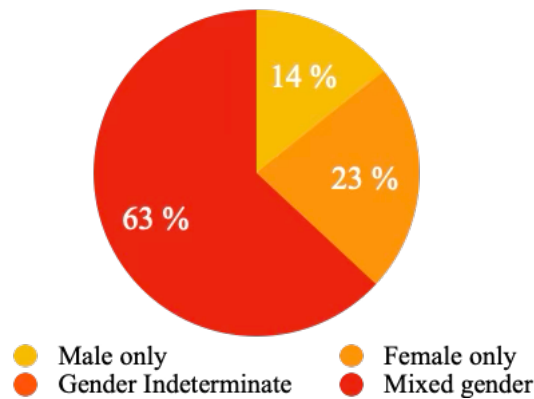


Figure 5: Distribution of group representations by gender composition in *Jelly 2*

Figure 5 indicates that mixed-gender groups constitute the largest category of group representations, accounting for 63% ($n = 53$) of all groups. Groups composed exclusively of female characters represent 23% ($n = 19$) of group representations, whereas exclusively male groups account for 14% ($n = 12$). No gender-indeterminate group representations were identified in *Jelly 2*.

The final aspect of the analysis examines the gender distribution of characters within mixed-gender groups (Figure 6).

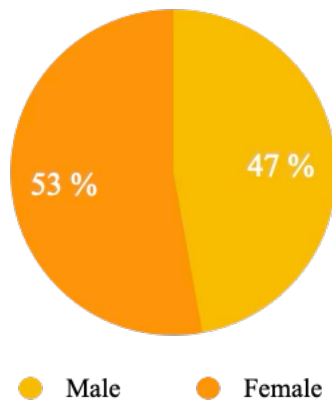


Figure 6: Gender distribution of characters within mixed-gender groups in *Jelly 2*

Figure 6 indicates a relatively balanced distribution of male and female characters within mixed-gender groups. Female characters account for 53% ($n = 111$) of the characters depicted in mixed groups, while male characters account for 47% ($n = 99$). Female characters are therefore somewhat more frequently represented than male characters.

6.1.1.3. *OF C(3)URSE!*

The corpus of *OF C(3)URSE!* comprises 288 images depicting human characters, including 193 individual representations and 95 group representations. The analysis begins with the distribution of male and female characters depicted individually.

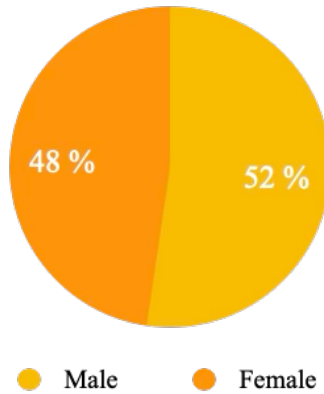


Figure 7: Gender distribution of characters depicted individually in *OF C(3)URSE!*

Figure 7 shows a relatively balanced distribution of female and male characters depicted individually. Male characters account for 52% ($n = 101$) of all individual representations, compared with 48% ($n = 92$) for female characters. Male characters are therefore slightly more frequently represented than female characters. No individually depicted characters were classified as gender indeterminate.

The analysis then examines the distribution of group representations according to their gender composition (Figure 8).

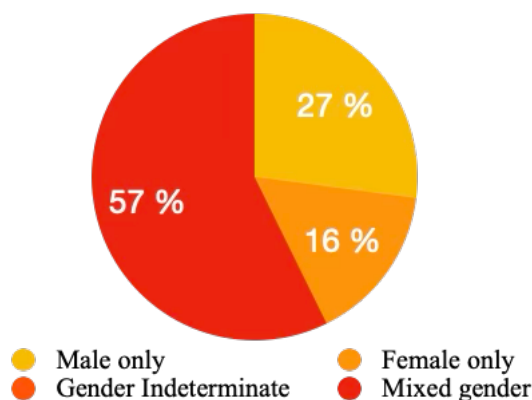


Figure 8: Distribution of group representations by gender composition in *OF C(3)URSE!*

Figure 8 indicates that mixed-gender groups constitute the majority of group representations, accounting for 58% ($n = 55$) of all groups. Groups composed exclusively of male characters

represent 27% ($n = 26$) of group representations, while exclusively female groups account for 15% ($n = 14$). No gender-indeterminate group representations were identified.

The final aspect examined concerns the gender distribution of characters within mixed-gender groups (Figure 9).

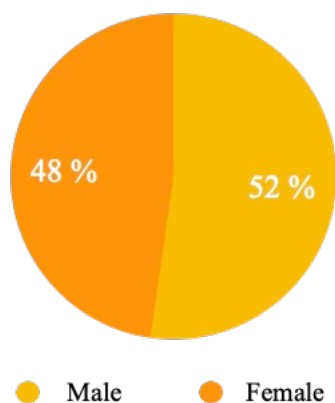


Figure 9: Gender distribution of characters within mixed-gender groups in *OF C(3)URSE!*

Figure 9 indicates a nearly balanced distribution of male and female characters within mixed-gender groups. Male characters account for 52% ($n = 92$) of the characters depicted in mixed-gender groups, compared with 48% ($n = 84$) for female characters. Although male characters are slightly more represented the difference between the two genders is therefore minimal.

6.1.1.4. Transversal analysis

The following section compares the results obtained for the three textbooks in order to identify possible changes in gender representations over time. As in the previous sections, the comparison remains purely descriptive.

	Male	Female	Gender-indeterminate
<i>English in Mind</i>	60%	39%	1%
<i>Jelly 2</i>	78%	22%	/
<i>OF C(3)URSE!</i>	52%	48%	/

Table 6: Distribution of individually depicted characters across the three textbooks

Table 6 presents the distribution of individually depicted male and female characters across the three textbooks. The distribution varies over times. *English in Mind* presents a predominance of male characters, who account for 60% of all individual representations. This imbalance

becomes considerably more pronounced in *Jelly 2* where male characters account for 78% of individually depicted characters. By contrast, *OF C(3)URSE!* displays a much more balanced distribution, with male and female characters accounting for 52% and 48% of individual representations, respectively.

	Male	Female	Mixed group
<i>English in Mind</i>	16%	15%	68%
<i>Jelly 2</i>	14%	23%	63%
<i>OF C(3)URSE!</i>	27%	15%	58%

Table 7: Gender compositions of groups representations across the three textbooks

Table 7 presents the gender composition of group representations across the three textbooks. In all three textbooks, mixed-gender groups constitute the largest category of group representations. However, their proportion gradually decreases over time, from 68% in *English in Mind* to 63% in *Jelly 2* and 58% in *OF C(3)URSE!*. Male-only and female-only groups show more variation across the three textbooks. Male-only groups decrease slightly from 16% in *English in Mind* to 14% in *Jelly 2*, before increasing to 27% in *OF C(3)URSE!*. Female-only groups increase in *Jelly 2*, before returning to similar proportion to that observed in *English in Mind*.

	Male	Female
<i>English in Mind</i>	51%	49%
<i>Jelly 2</i>	47%	53%
<i>OF C(3)URSE!</i>	52%	48%

Table 8: Distribution of male and female characters within mixed-gender groups across the three textbooks

Table 8 presents the gender distribution within mixed-gender groups across the three textbooks. The distribution remains relatively balanced. While *English in Mind* and *OF C(3)URSE!* show a slight predominance of male characters, *Jelly 2* displays a slight predominance of female characters (53%). Overall, the differences between the two genders remain limited across the three textbooks.

The comparison reveals that the three dimensions examined do not follow the same pattern over time. When the textbooks are considered according to their publication dates (2010, 2014 and 2018), the representation of individually depicted characters shows a more balanced distribution of male and female characters in the most recent textbook, *OF C(3)URSE!*.

Regarding group representations, mixed-gender groups remain the most frequent category across all three textbooks, although their proportion gradually decreases over time. Finally, the gender distribution within mixed-gender groups remains relatively balanced across the three textbooks.

The patterns identified in the visual analysis will be further discussed in Section 7 in light of the literature review and the hypotheses formulated earlier in the study.

6.2. Textual analysis

The textual analysis combines a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the textual content. The quantitative analysis is based on all first-name occurrences identified throughout the three textbooks, whereas the qualitative analysis is based on a corpus of 120 sentences selected from each textbook according to the criteria outlined in the methodology (see Section 5.4.2).

6.2.1. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis of the textual elements examines the frequency of male, female, and where applicable, gender-neutral first names. As explained in the methodology, each first name was counted only once within the same dialogue or textual sequence in order to avoid overrepresenting characters who were mentioned repeatedly in the same passage. The results are presented in form of figures and described below. As outlined in Section 5.4.2.1, this analysis remains purely descriptive

The quantitative analysis is first presented separately for each textbook, following the chronological order of their publication dates (2010, 2014 and 2018). A transversal analysis then compares the findings across the three textbooks in order to identify possible developments over time.

6.2.1.1. *English in Mind*

English in Mind contained 324 first-named occurrences, counted according to the procedure described in the methodology. The distribution of male and female first names is presented in Figure 10.

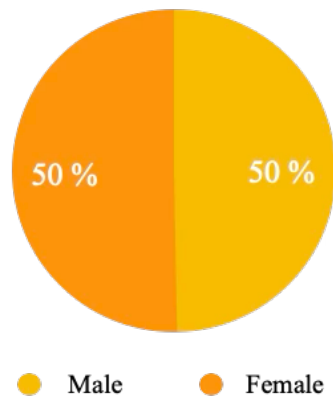


Figure 10: Distribution of male and female first-name occurrences in *English in Mind*

As illustrated in Figure 10, the distribution of male and female first names in *English in Mind* is almost perfectly balanced. Female first names represent 50.3% ($n^5=163$) of the textual representations, whereas male first names account for 49.7% ($n=161$). This corresponds to a difference of only two occurrences between the two groups. Percentages are reported to one decimal place in this case to reflect the small difference between the two categories.

No first names were classified as gender-neutral, as both the textual context and the accompanying illustrations always made it possible to identify the gender of the character.

6.2.1.2. *Jelly 2*

A total of 266 first-names occurrences were identified in *Jelly 2*. Their distribution by gender is presented in Figure 11.

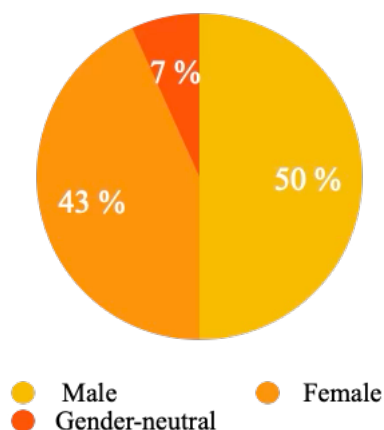


Figure 11: Distribution of male and female first-name occurrences in *Jelly 2*

⁵ Throughout the quantitative textual analysis, n refers to the number of first-name occurrences identified in each category.

As shown in Figure 2, *Jelly 2* presents a higher proportion of male than female first names. Male first names account for 50% (n=133) of the textual representations, while female first names represent 43% (n=115). Overall, male first names outnumber female first names by 18 occurrences.

The remaining , 7% (n=18) were classified as gender-neutral because neither the textual context nor the accompanying illustrations provided sufficient information to determine the character's gender. For instance, the name *Sam* was coded as gender-neutral in a chapter containing both *Samuel* and *Samantha*, making it impossible to determine which character was being referred to.

6.2.1.3. *OF C(3)URSE!*

The corpus of *OF C(3)URSE!* comprises 188 first-name occurrences. Figure 12 present their distribution by gender.

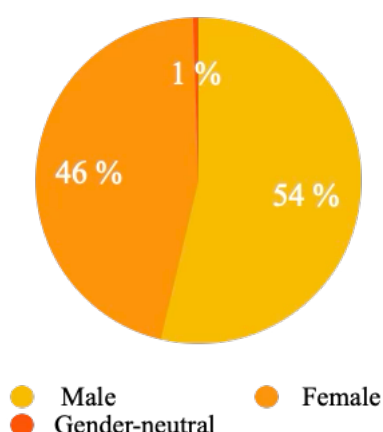


Figure 12: Distribution of male and female first-name occurrences in *OFC(3)URSE!*

Figure 12 shows that male first names are more frequent than female first names in *OF C(3)URSE!*. Male characters represent 54% (n = 101) of the textual representations, compared with 46% (n = 86) for female characters, resulting in a difference of 15 occurrences.

Only one first name was classified as gender-neutral, as the available textual and visual information did not allow the character's gender to be identified.

6.2.1.4. Transversal analysis

	Female	Male	Gender-neutral
<i>English in Mind</i>	50.3%	49.7%	/

<i>Jelly 2</i>	43%	50%	7%
<i>OF C(3)URSE!</i>	46%	54%	1%

Table 9: Distribution of female, male and gender-neutral first names across the three textbooks

Table 9 compares the proportions of male, female and gender-neutral first names across the three textbooks. Overall, the three textbooks display relatively balanced distributions of male and female first names. However, slight differences can be observed between them.

First, *English in Mind* presents the most balanced distribution, with female characters representing 50.3% (n=163) of the textual representations and male characters 49.7% (n=161), resulting in a difference of only two occurrences.

By contrast, both *Jelly 2* and *OF C(3)URSE!* contain a higher proportion of male than female first names. In *Jelly 2*, male characters account for 50% (n=133) of the textual representations, compared with 43% (n=115) for female characters, corresponding to a difference of 18 occurrences. Similarly, *OF C(3)URSE!* presents 54% (n=101) male first names and 46% (n=86) female first names, resulting in a difference of 15 occurrences.

With regard to gender-neutral first names, no such occurrences were identified in *English in Mind*. In contrast, *Jelly 2* contains the highest number of gender-neutral first names representing 7% (n=18) of the total, whereas only one gender-neutral first name was identified in *OF C(3)URSE!*.

When the textbooks are considered according to their publication dates (2010, 2014 and 2018), no clear evolution toward a more balanced representation of male and female first names can be observed. The earliest published textbook in the corpus, *English in Mind*, presents the most balanced distribution, whereas the two more recent textbooks display a slightly higher proportion of male first names.

These findings will be discussed in Section 7 in relation to the literature review and the hypotheses formulated earlier in the study.

6.2.2. Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis examines how male and female characters are represented through the language used in the textbooks. Following the methodology presented in Section 5.4.2.2, the analysis is based on a corpus of 360 sentences (120 per textbook) selected according to the predefined inclusion criteria.

Each sentence is analyzed with regard to three dimensions: agency, personality traits, and the social contexts in which the character are represented (family settings, professional settings, leisure activities and everyday life). For each dimension, a summary table is presented at the beginning of the section to provide an overview of the coded results before they are examined in greater detail through the qualitative analysis.

As in the previous analyses, the results are first presented separately for each textbook in chronological order of publication before being compared transversally.

6.2.2.1. *English in Mind*

The textual qualitative analysis begins with *English in Mind*, published in 2010.

A. Agency

The first dimension of the qualitative analysis examines agency. Agency refers to the extent to which characters are portrayed as taking initiative, making decisions, performing purposeful actions or influencing their environment. By contrast, passive representations refer to characters who primarily react to events, observe situations or depend on the actions of others. A third category, labelled not applicable, was used for sentences in which agency could not be assessed, such as descriptions, emotions, personality traits, opinions or other statements that do not provide sufficient information about a character's role in a situation (See section 5.4.2.2).

a. General overview

	Female	Male
Active	25	43
Passive	6	5
Not applicable	20	21
Total	51	69

Table 10: Distribution of agency by gender in *English in Mind*

Table 10 presents the distribution of active, passive, and not applicable representations identified in *English in Mind*. Across the textbook, active representations predominate over passive ones for both male and female characters when considering the distribution within each gender. This indicates that characters are more frequently portrayed as taking initiative, making decisions and participating in the action than as occupying passive roles. However, a substantial proportion of the corpus was also classified as *not applicable*, as many sentences did not provide

sufficient information to assess characters' agency. These representations typically consist of descriptions, emotions, personality traits and opinions rather than actions or interactions.

(1) *Sara loves films.* (p.13)

(2) *Pete gets a bit angry.* (p.36)

Both excerpts illustrate representations in which agency cannot be assessed. The first example express Sara's personal preference, while the second describes Pete's emotional state. Although both sentences provide information about the characters, neither depicts them acting, making decisions or reacting to a situation. Consequently, both representations were coded as non-applicable.

When comparing male and female representations, these frequencies should be interpreted with caution, as male characters are more represented in the corpus overall. Differences in the number of active or passive representations may therefore partly reflect this broader imbalance in gender representations. The following sections examine how active and passive agency is represented qualitatively for male and female characters.

b. Active representations

Several active representations reinforce traditional gender expectations by portraying male characters as the driving force behind the action. They frequently initiate interactions, organize collective activities, give instructions or assume responsibility for the progression of events. Across different contexts, male characters often occupy the role of the principal actor who moves the narrative forward rather than reacting to the actions of others.

(3) *Pete: 'Yeah let's give him a hand. Come on, Debbie. [...] Come on! One, two, three - push!'* (p. 22)

(4) *Mark: 'Jenny - please come to the cinema with me!'* (p. 93)

Both excerpts (3 & 4) illustrate stereotypical forms of male agency through the depiction of initiative and leadership. In Example (3), Pete assumes responsibility for coordinating the group's efforts to move a broken-down car. By directing the collective action through instructions such as '*One, two, three – push!*', he influences the behavior of the other characters and positions himself as the leader of the interaction. Similarly, Mark (4) initiates the interaction by inviting Jenny to the cinema. Taking the first step, he creates the social situation to which Jenny subsequently responds. In both cases, male characters are associated with initiative and

leadership in both social and romantic contexts, thereby reinforcing a stereotypical representation of male agency within the analytical framework.

Stereotypical active representations are also visible in male characters associated with achievement, success and progression toward a goal. Numerous male characters are portrayed as pursuing ambitions, striving for success in sport or making decisions linked to their professional status. In these cases, agency is not limited to one isolated action but is constructed through goal-directed behavior. The male character is presented as someone who actively pursues long-term objectives and contributes to the progression of the narrative.

(5) *Lewis' dream was to become a Formula 1 driver. He won a couple of race, and he knew that he had to win more.* (p. 43)

(6) *'The 2006 World Cup in Germany was fantastic because it meant I could give money for a new sports and community center,' he said.* (p. 100)

The first example (5) portrays Lewis Hamilton as pursuing his ambition of becoming a Formula One driver. His agency is expressed through his determination to achieve his goal and continuous progression toward success. The second example (6) depicts Ulises de la Cruz using the money earned through his football career to finance projects for his village. Although the caring dimension of this example will be discussed in the section on personality traits, from the perspective of agency Ulises is portrayed as an individual who actively transforms his environment through his own actions. Rather than merely expressing good intentions, he takes concrete steps to achieve a specific objective, illustrating agency through purposeful action directed toward a clearly defined goal. In both examples, male agency is constructed through purposeful action and the pursuit of meaningful objectives, reinforcing a stereotypical representation in which male characters are portrayed as actively shaping both their own future and the world around them.

However, active representations in *English in Mind* are not limited to stereotypical male agency. The coding also identifies several counter-stereotypical active representations among female characters. Rather than being confined to passive or supportive roles, some female characters are portrayed as autonomous individuals who initiate actions, manage their own activities or make independent decisions.

(7) *Every summer, Claire's bees produce about 40 kilos of honey. Clair takes the honey to a little shop and sells it.* (p. 12)

This example (7) portrays Claire as the central actor throughout the sequence of events. Rather than simply participating in a leisure activity, she independently manages every stage of her beekeeping activity, from producing the honey to selling it. Her actions are presented as self-directed and goal-oriented, demonstrating initiative and responsibility without relying on the intervention of another character. Consequently, Claire is associated with a counter-stereotypical form of female agency in which she actively shapes both her own activity and her surrounding environment.

Female agency is also expressed through speech and self-assertion. Several female characters actively participate in interactions by expressing their opinion, rejecting a proposal or resisting the behavior of others. In these cases, agency is conveyed not through physical action but through language, as female characters influence the direction of the interaction by asserting their own choices and boundaries.

(8) *Pete: 'OK. Well, look - it's yellow Debbie. The school chicken.'* - *Debbie: 'Chicken? Pathetic? No one calls me that!'* (p. 92)

(9) *Jenny: 'Listen Mark - I don't want to go to the cinema with you, and that's that. Ok?'* (p. 93)

Both examples illustrate a form of agency that is constructed through verbal interaction rather than through physical action. Debbie (8) refuses to accept the label imposed on her and immediately challenges Pete's insult by asserting her own position. Similarly, Jenny (9) rejects Mark's invitation without hesitation and clearly establishes the limits of her own decision-making. In neither case do the female characters simply respond to the initiative of the male character; instead, they actively redirect the interaction according to their own choices. Consequently, these portrayals constitute counter-stereotypical representations of female agency by associating women with self-assertion, autonomy and the ability to influence the course of social interactions.

c. Passive representations

Although active representations predominate for both male and female characters in *English in Mind*, passive portrayals are also identified throughout the textbook. While these representations are less prominent than active ones, they provide additional insight into the ways agency is constructed and reveal different patterns of passivity across the two genders.

Among female characters, passive representations are illustrated through situation in which characters remain outside of the central action rather than actively contributing to its development.

- (10) *Claire's friends Hannah and Kate come round. They don't go near the hives. 'We enjoy watching Claire with the bees', they said. (p. 12)*

In Example (10), Hannah and Kate remain at a distance while Claire independently manages the beekeeping activity. Rather than participating in the action themselves, they observe Claire from the sidelines and explicitly describe themselves as watching her work. As a result, the progression of the activity depends entirely on Claire, while Hannah and Kate play no active role in its development. From the perspective of agency, they therefore occupy a passive position, as they are represented as observers rather than participants. This portrayal corresponds to the stereotypical representation of female agency identified in the analytical framework, in which women tend to occupy a less central and more passive role in the progression of the narrative.

Nevertheless, not all passive female representations can be interpreted as stereotypical, as some examples position female characters outside the central action without conveying a clear gendered message.

Passive representations are likewise identified among male characters, indicating that passivity is not exclusively associated with female characters in *English in Mind*. Rather than initiating events, some male characters are portrayed as responding to external circumstances, seeking advice from others or allowing other characters to guide their decisions. These portrayals challenge the traditional expectation that male characters consistently occupy the role of the principal actor within the narrative.

- (11) *Steve: 'I don't know which jacket to wear.' - Paul: 'The white one is great.' (p. 97)*

- (12) *Peter: 'Mum, I feel awful this morning.' - Mother: 'You look ill. Perhaps you shouldn't go to school today.' (p. 97)*

Although the situations differ, both examples construct passivity through the male characters' reliance on another person's judgement. In Example (11), Steve does not make the decision himself but turns to Paul for advice before choosing which jacket to wear, allowing another character to guide the interaction. Likewise, Peter (12) seeks his mother's opinion after feeling

unwell and waits for her recommendation before deciding whether to attend school. In both cases, the initiative does not originate from the male character but from the person to whom he turns for guidance. Consequently, these portrayals associate male characters with a passive form of agency, thereby constituting counter-stereotypical representations within the analytical framework.

d. Summary of findings

The analysis of agency in *English in Mind* shows that active representations predominate over passive ones for both male and female characters. However, the way agency is expressed differs according to gender.

Male characters are more frequently portrayed through stereotypical forms of agency involving leadership, initiative, and goal-directed behavior. They commonly initiate interactions, coordinate the actions of others or actively pursue long-term objectives, positioning them as the principal drivers of the narrative. However, some male characters are also represented in passive roles, particularly when relying on others for guidance or decision-making. These representations challenge traditional expectations of male agency.

Female characters likewise display diverse forms of agency. While passive representations continue to reflect traditional portrayals of women as observers or as reacting to the actions of others, the textbook also contains several counter-stereotypical active representations. Female characters are portrayed managing their own activities, making independent decisions and asserting themselves during social interactions. These portrayals demonstrate that agency is not exclusively expressed through physical action but can also be conveyed through speech, self-assertion and autonomous decision-making.

Overall, the findings indicate that *English in Mind* combines stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations of agency rather than presenting a single model of gendered behavior. Although traditional forms of male activity and female passivity can still be identified, the presence of active female characters and passive male characters broadens the range of agency associated with both gender throughout the textbook.

B. Personality traits

The second dimension of the qualitative analysis focuses on the personality traits associated with male and female characters in *English in Mind*. Traits were identified either when they were explicitly mentioned in the sentence or when they could be inferred from the immediate

context. Although other personality traits, such as *nice*, *funny*, or *terrible*, were occasionally identified in the textual material, only the personality traits retained in the analytical framework were coded. Restricting the analysis to this predefined set of traits ensured a systematic and comparable coding procedure across the corpus (see Section 5.4.2.2).

a. General overview

	Male	Female
Aggressive	2	0
Ambitious	2	0
Caring	20	8
Cautious	2	1
Competitive	4	0
Independent	1	2
Persistent	2	1
Powerful	0	2
Protective	1	0
Rational	5	0
Self-confidence	3	3
Self-sacrifice	3	0
Strong	2	2
Vulnerable	1	3

Table 11: Personality traits associated with male and female characters in English in Mind

Table 11 presents the distribution of the personality traits identified in *English in Mind*. Overall, the coding reveals that male and female characters are associated with a broad range of personality traits, although some clear differences emerge.

Caring is by far the most frequently coded trait and is attributed to both genders, with male characters displaying this characteristic more often than female characters (20 and 8 occurrences, respectively). As *caring* is traditionally associated with femininity in the analytical framework (see Table 2, Section 5.4.2.2), its frequent association with male characters

constitutes a counter-stereotypical representation. However, these frequencies should be interpreted with caution, as male characters are more represented than female characters in the corpus and several occurrences originate from the same narrative passages or recurring characters. Consequently, the results reflect the frequency of coded representations rather than the proportion of individual characters displaying a given personality trait.

Several other traits, including self-confidence, independence, cautiousness, and strength, are also attributed to both genders. More traditional gender associations are nevertheless present. Male characters are frequently associated with traditionally masculine traits such as competitiveness, ambition, rationality, and persistence, whereas female characters are often characterized as vulnerable, a trait traditionally associated with femininity. These findings indicate that *English in Mind* combines traditional and counter-stereotypical personality traits rather than presenting a single, fixed model of masculinity and femininity.

b. Male personality traits

A first pattern emerging from Table 7 concerns the predominance of traditionally masculine personality traits among male characters. Competitiveness, ambition, rationality, persistence and self-confidence are all more frequently associated with men than with women. These traits are particularly evident in contexts involving achievement, personal goals and situations requiring initiative or determination.

(13) *Lewis Hamilton had a dream, and he followed it and found what he wanted.* (p. 43)

(14) *Many years ago in 1971, the US table tennis team was at the World Championship in Japan. [...]. Glen Cowan, from the US team didn't like the situation. One day, he saw a Chinese player and invited him to play.* (p. 43)

These examples illustrate different manifestations of traditionally masculine personality traits. Lewis Hamilton (5 & 13) is characterized as ambitious, competitive and persistent. His determination to become a Formula One driver, together with his repeated victories and desire to achieve further success, portrays him as a character who continuously strives to accomplish his goals. Glen Cowan (14), by contrast, is characterized by self-confidence through his willingness to take the initiative and approach a Chinese player despite the tense atmosphere surrounding the competition. His behavior demonstrates confidence in social interaction and a readiness to act rather than hesitate. Collectively, these portrayals associate male characters with ambition,

competitiveness, persistence and self-confidence, thereby reinforcing personality traits that are traditionally linked to masculinity within the analytical framework.

A second recurring pattern concerns the association of male characters with rationality, one of the traditionally masculine personality traits identified in the analytical framework. Rationality is particularly evident in contexts involving career choices and future planning.

(15) *When he was young, my uncle Erol always wanted to be a policeman, but when he was 18, he decided to be a dentist because dentists earn more money. (p. 45)*

(16) *Mark : 'I want to be a pilot [...] You have to get good school results and you have to be good at Math and Physics. And you have to speak English really well. (p. 42)*

Both examples (15 & 16) portray male characters as making decisions based on practical reasoning. Uncle Erol (15) abandons his childhood ambition in favor of a profession offering greater financial rewards, suggesting that his choice is guided by economic considerations rather than personal preference. Similarly, Mark (16) explains the academic requirements needed to become a pilot, demonstrating a logical understanding of the steps required to achieve his career objective. In both cases, male characters are characterized by rationality, as their actions and aspirations are presented as the result of careful reasoning and planning rather than emotion or intuition. Consequently, rationality emerges as a recurring characteristic of male characters, particularly in contexts involving professional aspirations and career choices.

Alongside these traditionally masculine traits, the analysis also reveals a prominent counter-stereotypical tendency. Male characters are frequently portrayed as caring individuals who provide assistance, express concern for others or act for the benefit of a wider community. Since caring is traditionally associated with female characters in the analytical framework, these portrayals challenge conventional gender expectations. Interestingly, caring is expressed through different forms throughout the textbook. In some cases, it is conveyed through concrete actions intended to improve the well-being of others, whereas in others it is reflected in empathy, emotional support and moral concern expressed during everyday interactions.

(17) *He says, 'I'm working with the doctors and nurses here to help sick people.' (p. 18)*

- (18) [...] *Ulises used the money he earned to buy a fresh water supply for Piquiucho. [...] Since he started to play abroad, he has sent hundreds of thousands of pounds back to his village.* (p. 100)

These examples (17 & 18) portray male characters whose actions are primarily motivated by concern for the well-being of others. Mike (17) explains that he works alongside doctors and nurses to help sick people, presenting caring as a defining aspect of his character. Likewise, Ulises de la Cruz (18) uses the income from his football career to improve the living conditions of his village by financing a fresh water supply and supporting the local community. His actions not only reflect caring but also illustrate a form of self-sacrifice, as he chooses to use his personal success for the benefit of others rather than for his own interests. Within the analytical framework, both caring and self-sacrificing behavior are traditionally associated with female characters. Their attribution to male characters therefore challenges conventional gender expectations by portraying men as compassionate, supportive and community-oriented rather than being defined solely by ambition, competition or achievement.

This counter-stereotypical tendency is also reflected in everyday interactions. Caring is not only expressed through acts of practical assistance or community service, but also through concern for the feelings and well-being of others. Several male characters demonstrate this trait by encouraging empathy, offering emotional support or acting according to moral responsibility.

- (19) *Joel: 'Yes Debbie. But on the other hand, real friends try to not hurt each other.'* (p. 36)
- (20) *Mr. Autrey said 'I wasn't brave. I didn't do anything special. I just saw someone who needed help. I did what I thought was right.'* (p. 88)

Both examples demonstrate that caring is not limited to practical assistance but is also conveyed through everyday interactions and moral attitudes. Rather than encouraging confrontation or personal achievement, Joel (19) defines friendship in terms of consideration for others by reminding Debbie that "real friends try not to hurt each other." Likewise, Mr. Autrey (20) deliberately downplays his own bravery, insisting that helping someone in need was simply "the right thing" to do. In both cases, the discourse shifts the focus away from traditionally masculine qualities such as heroism, competition or individual achievement and instead foregrounds concern for another person's well-being.

Consequently, the variety of these examples shows that caring is integrated into male representations across different situations, ranging from everyday emotional concern to direct assistance and broader community support. By associating male characters with the traditionally feminine trait of caring in these different contexts, the textbook challenges conventional gender expectations

c. Female personality traits

Turning to the representation of female characters, the coding reveals that stereotypical personality traits remain more prominent than counter-stereotypical ones. Among these, vulnerability emerges as one of the most recurrent traits identified in the corpus. These portrayals reinforce conventional expectations of femininity by associating female characters with vulnerability, which is expressed through fearfulness and, in some cases, low self-confidence when confronted with potentially challenging situations.

(21) *Claire's friends Hannah and Kate come round. They don't go near the hives. 'We enjoy watching Claire with the bees', they say. 'But we are a bit scared of them.'* (p. 12)

(22) *Debbie: 'No, I know. But [...] oh I don't know. I'm just not brave enough that's all. I can't do it, and that's that.'* (p. 92)

Although the situations differ, both examples illustrate how female characters are represented when confronted with situations perceived as challenging or intimidating. Hannah and Kate (21) deliberately choose to remain at a distance from Claire's beehives because they are afraid of the bees, positioning themselves as observers rather than participants. Similarly, Debbie (22) refuses to give a public talk because she considers herself "not brave enough," allowing her fear and lack of self-confidence to determine her decision. In both cases, fear influences the characters' behavior and limits their willingness to engage with the situation. Consequently, these representations associate female characters with the traditionally feminine trait of vulnerability, expressed through fearfulness and, in Debbie's case, low self-confidence, thereby reinforcing conventional gender expectations within the analytical framework.

Another recurring stereotypical tendency concerns the association of female characters with the traditionally feminine personality trait of caring. Throughout the textbook, caring is expressed in a variety of contexts, including helping others, working in caring professions and showing concern for another person's well-being.

(23) *If Kate gives me some help, I'll finish my homework in an hour.* (p. 89)

(24) *My mother's a nurse.* (p. 42)

(25) *Debbie: 'Ok. I'm sorry I hurt you, Pete. I didn't mean to'.* (p. 36)

Although these examples occur in different contexts, they all construct caring as a defining characteristic of the female characters. Kate (23) is presented as someone who willingly helps another person complete their homework, associating her with supportive behavior. Likewise, Debbie (25) acknowledges that she has hurt Pete and apologizes for her behavior, demonstrating concern for another person's well-being rather than focusing on her own perspective. Finally, the mother (24) is identified as a nurse, a profession traditionally associated with caring for others. These portrayals correspond to conventional expectations of femininity by associating women and girls with supportive behaviors and concern for others. However, their stereotypical character becomes more nuanced when they are considered alongside the male representations analyzed previously. Caring emerges across the textbook as a trait shared by both genders and expressed in a variety of contexts. Its attribution to female characters therefore does not necessarily constitute a stereotypical representation in itself, as the textbook does not present caring as an exclusively feminine characteristic. Instead, its association with both male and female characters weakens its traditional gendered character within *English in Mind*.

The coding also reveals some counter-stereotypical personality traits attributed to female characters. These representations associate women with characteristics traditionally considered masculine within the analytical framework, particularly independence (7) and power.

(26) *Oprah Winfrey: people (even politicians) listen to her.* (p. 40)

As illustrated in Example (7), Claire's beekeeping activity and the sale of her honey led to the character being coded as independent, as she is portrayed as self-reliant and capable of managing her own activity. Similarly, Oprah Winfrey (26) is described as someone whose opinions are listened to, even by politicians. Rather than emphasizing her appearance or relationships with others, the textbook highlights her capacity to influence people occupying positions of authority. Within the analytical framework, this representation associates the female character with the traditionally masculine trait of power, thereby challenging conventional gender expectations.

Counter-stereotypical personality traits also emerge in everyday interactions. As discussed previously in Examples (8) and (9), Debbie's response to Pete and Jenny's refusal of

Mark's invitation were interpreted as counter-stereotypical representations of female agency through self-assertion and autonomy. From the perspective of personality traits, however, these same examples were coded as self-confident, strong and independent. Debbie (8) openly confronts Pete's insulting remark rather than accepting it, reflecting both strength and self-confidence. Likewise, Jenny (9) firmly refuses Mark's invitation and remains consistent in her decision, leading to her being coded as independent and self-confident. In both cases, the female characters are associated with personality traits that are traditionally attributed to male characters within the analytical framework, thereby constituting counter-stereotypical portrayals.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that, although counter-stereotypical portrayals remain less frequent than stereotypical ones, they nevertheless broaden the range of personality traits associated with female characters throughout the textbook by showing that traditionally masculine personality traits are occasionally attributed to women.

d. Summary of findings

The analysis of personality traits in *English in Mind* reveals that male and female characters are associated with a wide range of characteristics, although the distribution of these traits is not uniform across genders. Male characters are frequently linked to traditionally masculine personality traits, particularly competitiveness, ambition, rationality, persistence and self-confidence. At the same time, the textbook repeatedly portrays male characters as caring and, in some cases, self-sacrificing, thereby challenging conventional gender expectations by attributing traditionally feminine personality traits to men.

Notably, caring emerges as the most frequently coded personality trait in the corpus and is associated with both male and female characters. Although traditionally classified as a feminine trait, its attribution to both genders in *English in Mind* presents caring as a shared characteristic rather than an exclusively feminine one. Its association with female characters therefore cannot be considered stereotypical in itself.

As with male characters, female characters are associated with both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical personality traits. Their association with vulnerability reflects traditional expectations of femininity, while traits such as independence, self-confidence, strength, and power challenge these expectations by associating female characters with characteristics traditionally attributed to masculinity.

Overall, the findings indicate that *English in Mind* combines stereotypical and counter-stereotypical personality traits rather than presenting a single, fixed model of masculinity and femininity. While traditional gender expectations remain visible for both male and female characters, the textbook also attributes a number of traditionally feminine traits to male characters and traditionally masculine traits to female characters.

C. Social settings

The third dimension of the qualitative analysis examines the social settings in which male and female characters are represented throughout *English in Mind*. Following the analytical framework presented in the methodology, each occurrence was coded according to the context in which the character appears. Particular attention was paid to family life, work and leisure activities as these settings may reinforce or challenge traditional gender representations. An additional category, everyday life, was used to code representations that could not be assigned to the other settings. This category includes everyday routines as well as ordinary situations in which no specific family, professional or leisure context could be identified (see Section 5.4.2.2)

a. General overview

	Family	Professions	Leisure activities	Everyday life
Male	4	17	11	36
Female	4	9	13	26
Total	8	26	24	62

Table 12: Distribution of characters across social settings in *English in Mind*

Table 12 provides an overview of the distribution of male and female characters across the social settings defined in the methodology. Everyday life is the most represented setting for both genders. Professional settings come next and display the clearest gender imbalance, with male characters appearing almost twice as often as female characters. Leisure activities show a relatively balanced distribution, with a slight predominance of female characters. Finally, family settings are the least represented overall and are evenly distributed between female and male characters. These differences should nevertheless be interpreted with caution, as male characters are more represented in the corpus overall. Their higher frequency in some social settings may therefore partly reflect this broader difference in gender representation.

Overall, the distribution of male and female characters varies across social settings, with the clearest gender imbalance emerging in professional contexts. The following sections examine how male and female characters are portrayed within these settings and whether their representations reflect or challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

b. Family settings

Family settings reveal a combination of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations rather than a single, consistent pattern. Although female characters are still frequently associated with caregiving and domestic responsibilities, several examples also depict male family members participating in household tasks. As a result, the textbook presents family life as a context in which traditional gender roles remain visible but are not applied systematically.

- (27) *My sister has got a young baby, so she often has to get up during the night.* (p. 41)
- (28) *My mum's in the kitchen preparing food, and my dad's helping her.* (p. 24)
- (29) *My father usually does the cooking, but my mother always does the washing up.* (p. 21)

The first example (27) reflects a more traditional representation of family life by associating a female character with childcare and caregiving responsibilities. The second example (28) initially appears to reproduce a conventional division of labor, as the mother is responsible for preparing the meal. However, the father's participation in the activity suggests that domestic responsibilities are shared rather than assigned exclusively to women. This tendency becomes even more explicit in the third example (29), where cooking, a task traditionally associated with female characters in the analytical framework, is presented as the father's usual responsibility, while the mother performs a different household task. Rather than portraying domestic work as exclusively female, these examples suggest a more balanced distribution of family responsibilities. Traditional representations therefore coexist with more egalitarian portrayals, indicating that *English in Mind* does not present a fixed model of gender roles within the family setting.

c. Professional settings

Professional settings reflect traditional patterns of occupational representation. Male characters are frequently associated with employment, particularly prestigious, highly qualified or well-known professions, whereas female characters are represented in occupations related to care or

education. These portrayals largely correspond to conventional gender expectations regarding occupational roles.

(30) *She only works two hours every morning - it's just a part-time job.* (p. 45)

(31) *My brother works 9-5, five days a week - it's a full-time job.* (p. 45)

These examples illustrate a traditional division of working roles. The female character (30) is associated with part-time employment, suggesting that work occupies a less central place in her daily life. By contrast, the male character (31) is described as working full-time, reinforcing the traditional expectation that men are more strongly associated with full-time employment and professional commitment. Within the analytical framework, these representations contribute to a conventional portrayal of gender roles in relation to employment.

Another recurring tendency concerns the representation of male characters in prestigious or publicly recognized professions. Throughout the textbook, several male characters are introduced as successful or well-known figures.

(32) *Johnny Depp: a famous face in many films.* (p. 40)

(33) *Jeff Bezos: wealthy creator of amazon.com.* (p. 40)

Both examples contribute to a similar representation of male professional success. Johnny Depp (31) is introduced through his public recognition as 'a famous face in many films,' associating the male character with prestige and visibility. Likewise, Jeff Bezos (32) is described as the 'wealthy creator of amazon.com,' emphasizing entrepreneurship, economic success and professional achievement. Together with other examples identified throughout the textbook, such as Lewis Hamilton (5) and Ulises de la Cruz (6), these portrayals associate male characters with prestigious and publicly recognized occupations. Consequently, they reinforce the stereotypical representation of men occupying positions characterized by success, influence and high social status.

Although female characters, most notably Oprah Winfrey (26), also occupy influential positions in a few instances, such representations remain relatively limited. Female characters are therefore less strongly associated with positions of comparable status, success, or influence.

The coding also identified counter-stereotypical professional representations. As discussed previously, Claire's beekeeping activity (7) portrays a female character engaged in an independent economic activity. Similarly, Mike (17), who works alongside doctors and nurses in a hospital, represents a male character employed in a caring profession. This portrayal is

consistent with the broader representation of caring identified among male characters in the personality-trait analysis. Although the profession itself challenges traditional occupational expectations, it therefore reflects a characteristic already associated with male characters throughout the textbook. These examples illustrate that the textbook occasionally departs from traditional occupational patterns through representations of female professional independence and male involvement in a caring profession. Nevertheless, such portrayals remain relatively limited compared with more conventional professional representations

Finally, educational occupations differ from other professional settings identified in the textbook, as both female and male characters are represented in this occupation.

(34) *Mrs. Jameson teaches us English.* (p. 13)

(35) *My teacher was annoyed when I told him I didn't have my homework.* (p. 90)

The presence of both a female and a male teacher suggests that teaching is not associated exclusively with one gender. While the female teacher remains consistent with the traditional association between women and education, the inclusion of a male teacher broadens this representation by showing that educational professions can also be occupied by men. Teaching therefore presents a more gender-diverse pattern than the other professional contexts identified in the textbook.

d. Leisure activities

Leisure activities present both male and female characters with a variety of hobbies and interests. While participation in leisure activities is not restricted to one gender, some differences can be observed in the types of activities attributed to male and female characters.

(36) *My mum reads a lot of books.* (p. 9)

(37) *'My favorite club is the pottery club,' says Sarah. I love doing artistic things.*
(p.16)

(38) *My dad enjoys running on the beach.* (p. 15)

(39) *Mike: 'When I finish the two months' work, I want to travel around Namibia for three weeks.'* (p. 18)

Although leisure activities are represented for both genders, the examples (1, 36, 37, 38 & 39) reveal a subtle distinction in the type of leisure associated with each. Female characters are primarily linked to indoor or creative activities, such as reading, watching films and pottery, whereas male characters are more often portrayed engaging in outdoor, physical or adventure-

oriented pursuits, including running and travelling. Rather than simply reflecting different hobbies, this distinction constructs different ways of occupying free time. Female leisure is presented as calmer, more domestic and creativity-oriented, while male leisure is associated with movement, exploration and physical activity. Within the analytical framework, these representations reproduce traditional gender expectations by positioning girls and boys in different recreational environments.

However, this pattern is not observed consistently throughout the textbook, as a limited number of counter-stereotypical portrayals challenge these conventional representations.

(40) *My sister loves riding her bike.* (p. 15)

Example 40 associates a female character with an outdoor and physical activity that is more traditionally linked to male characters. While relatively isolated, this counter-stereotypical portrayal shows that the association between gender and leisure activities is not entirely fixed within the textbook.

e. Everyday life

Everyday life constitutes the most frequently represented social setting in *English in Mind*. Unlike the family, professional or leisure settings, this context does not reveal clear gendered patterns in the activities or roles attributed to female and male characters. Consequently, this category does not allow stereotypical or counter-stereotypical representations to be identified in the same way as the other social settings. Female and male characters are portrayed carrying out similar everyday routines, such as attending school, doing homework, walking the dog or interacting with friends.

(41) *'Sorry, Eddie isn't here. He's taking the dog for a walk.'* (p. 19)

(42) *Ellie isn't doing her homework.* (p. 19)

Although these examples (41 & 42) involve both outdoor and indoor activities, they do not reveal the same gendered distribution observed in the leisure setting. Whereas leisure activities tended to associate female characters with indoor or creative hobbies and male characters with outdoor or physically oriented pursuits, everyday activities are distributed without a clear gender pattern. Walking the dog and doing homework are presented as ordinary aspects of daily life rather than activities associated with one gender in a particular setting.

Consequently, everyday life emerges as the least gendered social settings identified in *English in Mind*. Rather than reinforcing traditional gender expectations, these contexts primarily depict shared experiences and everyday routines that can be performed equally by male and female characters.

f. Summary of findings

The analysis of social settings in *English in Mind* reveals that gender representations vary according to the context in which characters are portrayed.

Traditional gender expectations are most apparent in professional settings, where men are more frequently associated with prestigious occupations and full-time employment, while women are more commonly linked to caring or educational professions.

Family settings also reproduce certain conventional roles, particularly in relation to caregiving and domestic responsibilities, although these representations are occasionally challenged by a more balanced distribution of household tasks.

Leisure activities present a more balanced distribution between male and female characters, even if subtle differences remain in the types of hobbies associated with each gender. Female characters are more often linked to indoor or creative activities, whereas male characters tend to engage in outdoor, physical or adventure-oriented pursuits.

Finally, everyday life does not reveal clear gendered patterns in the activities or roles attributed to male and female characters. Both gender are represented in similar everyday routines, making stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations less clearly identifiable in this setting.

Overall, the findings indicate that *English in Mind* does not portray gender uniformly across all social settings. Rather, the degree to which traditional stereotypes are reproduced depends on the context. While some settings continue to reflect conventional gender expectations, others provide more balanced or neutral representations, resulting in a varied and context-dependent portrayal of gender throughout the textbook.

6.2.2.2. *Jelly 2*

The textual qualitative analysis now turns to *Jelly 2*, following the same analytical structure as for *English in Mind*.

A. Agency

a. General overview

	Female	Male
Active	21	34
Passive	25	11
Not applicable	17	13
Total	63	58

Table 13: Distribution of agency by gender in *Jelly 2*

Table 13 presents the distribution of active, passive and non-applicable representations identified in *Jelly 2*. A total of 121 coded occurrences were reported, as one sentence was assigned to both active and passive categories because it contains two distinct forms of agency (Example 49). The category *non-applicable* includes representations in which no agency is expressed:

(43) *She is a nurse.* (p.217)

Example (43) describes the character's profession rather than portraying agency or passivity according to the definition adopted in this study.

Unlike *English in Mind*, this textbook displays a more stereotypical distribution of agency. Male characters are predominantly associated with active representations, while female characters are more strongly associated with passive roles. Although a substantial number of representations were classified as non-applicable, the remaining data still reveal a noticeable gender imbalance. Female characters are coded as passive more than twice as often as male characters (25 versus 11), while the male characters outnumber females in active representations (34 versus 21).

b. Active representations

Active representations of male characters in *Jelly 2* are characterized by initiative, purposeful action and the ability to influence the progression of events.

(44) *'Nippun: I was looking at some mobile covers when I saw a woman drop something, I picked it up and I returned it to her.'* (p.213)

(45) *After two minutes of panic, he realized his wife was in trouble and call an ambulance.* (p.177)

Example (44) illustrates Nippun as acting immediately after noticing a woman has dropped an object. Rather than ignoring the situation, he picks it up and return it to its owner, demonstrating initiative and purposeful action. Similarly, Example (45) portrays the male character as responding decisively to an emergency by recognizing his wife's distress and calling an ambulance. In both cases, the male characters are represented as initiating purposeful actions that influence the progression of events. By positioning them as the principal actors responsible for responding to and shaping the situations presented, these portrayals reflect traditional gender expectations associating men with initiative and action.

Beyond isolated examples of agency, a longer narrative involving Javier and a stranded woman illustrates how agency is presented across an extended interaction. The story follows Javier as he notices a woman whose car will not start and repeatedly intervenes to help her solve the problem.

(46) *Javier offered to have a look at her car.* (p.215)

(47) *Then Javier tried to start the car but without success.* (p.215)

(48) *He drove her to the next petrol station. There they bought a jerry can and filled it with petrol.* (p. 216)

(49) *My friend drove the woman back to her car.* (p.215)

In Example (46), Javier immediately takes the initiative by offering his assistance without being prompted, positioning himself as the character who initiates the interaction. Example (47) further reinforces this active role, as Javier attempts to solve the mechanical problem himself instead of remaining a passive observer. When this attempt proves unsuccessful, he continues to take responsibility for the situation by driving the woman to the nearest petrol station, where they buy and fill a jerry can with petrol (48). Finally, Example (49) shows that Javier's active role continues until the final stage of the situation, as he drives the women back to her car after obtaining the petrol. His repeated interventions throughout the narrative position him as the driving force behind both the progression and the resolution of the events. This sustained pattern of initiative not only reinforces Javier's active role but also creates a clear contrast with the representation of the woman throughout the same narrative. This contrast reflects traditional

gender stereotypes, with the male character portrayed as the active agent who drives the narrative forward, while the female character remains largely passive.

c. Passive representations

The same interaction (46-49) illustrates how agency is distributed differently between the two characters. Whereas Javier consistently drives the progression of events, the woman is primarily represented through her responses to his initiatives. This tendency is already apparent in Examples (48) and (49), where Javier drives her to the petrol station and back to her car while she adopts a more receptive role by following his lead. This pattern continues throughout the remainder of the narrative.

(50) *He also gave her his coat because she was completely soaked and was coughing and trembling with cold.* (p.215)

(51) *The woman said, 'my husband told me this morning to fill it up but I completely forgot!'* (p.215)

Example (50) further reinforces this asymmetry by positioning Javier as the initiator of an action directed towards the woman. He is represented as actively responding to the situation by giving her his coat, while the woman is primarily depicted through her physical condition, as “soaked”, “coughing” and “trembling with cold”. Her role in the interaction is therefore comparatively more receptive, with Javier’s action foregrounded as a response to her needs. In Example (51), the woman explains that she forgot to fill up the car despite her husband having reminded her to do so. Although she is given a speaking role, her contribution mainly provides an explanation for the situation, while the reference to her husband introduces another male character as having previously identified what needed to be done. Taken together, these examples reinforce a clear asymmetry of agency. While Javier makes decisions and provides solutions, the woman is more frequently portrayed in a reactive role, responding to the situation rather than directing its progression. Although she remains involved in the interaction, the progression and resolution of the events are predominantly driven by Javier. This representation is consistent with previous research reporting that female characters are more frequently associated with passive roles than male characters.

d. Summary of findings

The findings indicate a clear gender asymmetry in the distribution of agency in *Jelly 2*. Male characters are more frequently portrayed through active representations, involving problem-

solving and leadership, whereas female characters are more often associated with passive and reactive roles.

This imbalance extends beyond isolated examples and can also be observed across longer narrative sequences. In these interactions, male characters repeatedly initiate actions, make decisions, and drive the narrative forward, while female tend to respond to situations rather than shape their progression.

Overall, these representations reflect traditional gender stereotypes that associate male characters with agency and female characters with passivity.

B. Personality traits

a. General overview

	Male	Female
Beautiful	1	0
Caring	14	11
Dependent	0	1
Dynamic	1	2
Emotional	1	3
Independent	0	1
Protective	5	0
Rational	1	1
Self-confident	1	0
Self-sacrifice	0	1
Sensitive	0	1
Shy	0	1
Strong	2	1
Vulnerable	1	6

Table 14: Personality traits associated with male and female characters in *Jelly 2*

Table 14 presents the personality traits attributed to male and female characters in *Jelly 2*. Although both genders are associated with a wide range of traits, the results reveal clear differences in their distribution.

Caring is by far the most frequently coded personality trait and is attributed to both genders in *Jelly 2*. However, these frequencies should be interpreted with caution, as several coded occurrences originate from the same narrative passages or recurring characters. Consequently, the results reflect the frequency of coded representations rather than the number of individual characters displaying a given personality trait.

Beyond this shared trait, gendered patterns remain apparent. Male characters are frequently associated with traditionally masculine traits such as being protective, self-confident, and strong, whereas female characters are often portrayed as being caring, emotional, and vulnerable.

Overall, the findings suggest that *Jelly 2* presents predominantly traditional representation of personality traits. Although the textbook includes some counter-stereotypical portrayals, traditional gender representations are more prevalent.

b. Male personality traits

The qualitative analysis reveals several stereotypical portrayals of male characters. Across a variety of situations, they are represented as protecting others or demonstrating physical strength. These recurring representations associate male characters with qualities traditionally linked to masculinity.

(52) *He told her it was really dangerous to walk alongside the motorway because motorists can't see you. (p.215)*

(53) *He is carrying a very heavy suitcase. (p.192)*

In Example (52), the male character warns woman about the dangers of walking alongside the motorway, positioning himself as the person responsible for ensuring her safety. Rather than simply providing information, he assumes a protective role by anticipating the potential danger and guiding the woman's behavior. Example (53) associates masculinity with physical strength by portraying a male character carrying a very heavy suitcase. Although the action itself is ordinary, the emphasis on the weight of the suitcase reinforces the idea of men as physically capable and resilient. Taken together, these examples portray male characters through stereotypical masculine traits, reinforcing their association with protectiveness and strength.

Alongside these stereotypical portrayals, *Jelly 2* also includes counter-stereotypical representations, most notably through the association of male characters with caring behaviors. Several examples illustrate this tendency, although it should be noted that many of them originate from the same narrative sequence involving Javier.

(54) *He did the shopping, the housework, the washing and visited her as much as possible. (p.177)*

(55) *So, my husband's friend told her not to worry. (p.216)*

(56) *The woman was frightened but my friend told her he didn't want to do her any harm and just wanted to help her. (p.215)*

(57) *He decided to stop and ask the woman why she was walking alone on that lane in the middle of the night. (p.215)*

Example (54) portrays a husband who supports his wife during her stay at the hospital. His efforts to help her and visit her as much as possible present him as a caring and supportive character. The narrative involving Javier provides further example of caring behavior. In Example (55), Javier reassures the woman by encouraging her not to worry. Rather than dismissing her concerns, he responds to her emotional state and attempts to provide comfort, highlighting empathy and emotional support. Likewise, in Example (65), he seeks to reduce the woman's fear by explaining that he intends no harm and only wants to help. His behavior is characterized by reassurance and consideration for her feelings, presenting care as an important aspect of the interaction. This caring attitude is further illustrated in Example (57), where Javier voluntarily stops to check on a woman walking alone at night. His decision demonstrates concern for her well-being and his willingness to help. Taken together, these examples portray male characters as attentive to the emotional and physical well-being of others. Rather than emphasizing emotional restraint or detachment traditionally associated with male characters, they foreground empathy, reassurance, and supportive behavior. As such, these representations challenge traditional masculine stereotypes by associating male characters with caring qualities traditionally associated with femininity. However, this counter-stereotypical representation should be interpreted with caution, as many of these examples originate from the same narrative sequence involving Javier. While they challenge the traditional association of caring with female characters, this challenge remains relatively limited, as caring does not emerge as a more general characteristic of male representations throughout the textbook.

Nevertheless, other counter-stereotypical traits remain far less prominent. For example, the only instance in which a male character is portrayed as vulnerable involves physical illness.

(58) *He became ill while he was flying to New York.* (p.193)

In Example (58), the male character's vulnerability is presented as the result of a temporary physical condition rather than emotional or psychological fragility. Although this representation departs from the traditional association of masculinity with strength, its counter-stereotypical dimension remains limited, as vulnerability is expressed only through a temporary physical state. This contrasts with the representation of female characters, whose vulnerability extends to other dimensions, as discussed in the following section. This representation of male vulnerability is consistent with previous research.

Consequently, although *Jelly 2* includes counter-stereotypical portrayals of male characters, these tend to be concentrated within a particular narrative sequence, as in Examples (55) - (57), or remain limited in their expression, as illustrated by Example (58). As a result, these portrayals challenge traditional stereotypes to some extent, while broader gendered differences in the personality traits associated with male and female characters remain apparent.

c. Female personality traits

In contrast to male characters, whose vulnerability is limited to a single instance of temporary physical weakness, female characters are portrayed as vulnerable across a wider range of situations. Their vulnerability is expressed through different forms, including fear and physical injury. In addition, female characters are also portrayed as emotional and sensitive, further reinforcing traditional feminine stereotypes.

(59) *Last November Mrs. Nelson had an accident. She was seriously injured.* (p. 177)

(60) *The woman was frightened but my friend told her he didn't want to do her any harm and just wanted to help her.* (p.215)

(61) *My sister never accepts criticism, she's sensitive.* (p.91)

(62) *Jane: 'I was quite disappointed.'* (p.92)

In Example (59), Mrs. Nelson is portrayed as vulnerable through physical injury after being involved in an accident. The emphasis on the seriousness of her injuries places her in a position of physical weakness and reinforces her vulnerability. Likewise, example (60) presents a woman who is frightened while walking alone at night. She is characterized by fear and emotional vulnerability and is subsequently reassured by the male character. Sensitivity is explicitly

attributed to a female character in example (61), where the narrator describes his sister as someone who "never accepts criticism". Rather than depicting a temporary emotional reaction, the passage presents sensitivity as a stable aspect of her personality. Finally, in example (62), Jane openly expresses her disappointment. By verbalizing how she feels, she is portrayed as emotionally expressive, a trait traditionally associated with femininity. Taken together, these examples portray female characters as vulnerable, emotional, and sensitive. Unlike the male vulnerability discussed previously, which is limited to a temporary physical condition, female vulnerability is represented through both physical and emotional dimensions, including injury and fear. Female characters are also characterized through sensitivity and emotional expressiveness. These portrayals are consistent with traditional representations of femininity identified in the literature.

Alongside vulnerability, sensitivity and emotional expressiveness, caring also emerges as an important aspect of female representations in *Jelly 2*. In contrast to male caring representations, which are largely concentrated within a single narrative sequence, caring behaviors among female characters are portrayed across different contexts and involve several characters.

(63) *Jodie was worried because she was not able to do anything and was worried about causing her husband so much extra work. (p.177)*

(64) *She helped me paint my room. (p.92)*

(65) *Granny joined them at the hospital. (p. 158)*

In Example (63), Jodie is primarily concerned about the additional responsibilities placed on her husband while she is unable to help because of her injuries. Rather than focusing on her own situation, she worries about the impact that her condition has on someone else, portraying care and consideration for another person's well-being. Similarly, Example (64) presents a female character helping another person to paint a room. By voluntarily offering her assistance, she demonstrates cooperation and a willingness to support others in everyday situations. Finally, in Example (65), Granny joins the family at the hospital. Her presence suggests emotional support and concern for her relatives, portraying caring behavior within a family context. Taken together, these examples portray female characters as attentive to the needs and well-being of others. Caring is expressed through different forms of support, including concern for a partner, practical assistance, and being present for family members. These portrayals are consistent with traditional feminine stereotypes identified in the literature, particularly the association of female characters with caring and supportive behaviors.

Nevertheless, some counter-stereotypical traits are also present but they do not substantially alter the broader pattern identified in the qualitative analysis.

Overall, *Jelly 2* presents a predominantly traditional representation of female personality traits. Caring, vulnerability, and emotional expressiveness contribute to a representation of female characters that largely aligns with conventional expectations of femininity.

d. Summary of findings

The analysis of personality traits in *Jelly 2* reveals gendered patterns in the representation of male and female characters.

Male characters are portrayed through traditionally masculine traits such as protectiveness and strength, but are also associated with caring and vulnerability, traits traditionally linked to femininity. While these latter representations may appear counter-stereotypical, they only partially challenge the traditional association of these traits with female characters. Indeed, caring representations are largely concentrated within a particular narrative sequence, while male vulnerability remains limited in its expression.

Female characters are predominantly portrayed through traditionally feminine personality traits, especially caring, vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, and sensitivity. Their caring behaviors are represented across different contexts and relationships, while vulnerability extends across both physical and emotional dimensions.

Overall, the qualitative analysis shows that the personality traits associated with male and female characters remain largely gendered, despite some representations that partially challenge traditional gender associations.

C. Social settings

a. General overview

	Family	Professional	Leisure activities	Everyday life
Male	13	6	5	35
Female	30	3	5	24
Total	43	9	10	59

Table 15: Distribution of characters across social settings in *Jelly 2*

Table 15 presents the distribution of male and female characters across the different social settings defined in the methodology. Everyday life is the most frequently represented setting for both genders. The clearest gender difference occurs in family settings, where female characters appear more than twice as often as male characters. An opposite pattern can be observed in professional settings, where male characters appear twice as often as female characters, although this setting is less represented overall. Leisure activities, by contrast, are evenly distributed between genders.

The total number of occurrences across social settings is 121 rather than 120, as one occurrence was coded in two different contexts. Example (73), discussed below, was classified under both family and professional settings, as it describes a female character giving up her job to take care of her children.

Overall, these findings show that the distribution of female and male characters varies across social settings, with the clearest contrast emerging between family and professional contexts. The following sections examine whether these patterns are accompanied by stereotypical or counter-stereotypical gender representations.

b. Family settings

The analysis of family settings in *Jelly 2* reveals differences in the ways female and male characters are represented within family life. Female characters are primarily associated with domestic responsibilities and caregiving, while male involvement occurs under more specific circumstances.

(66) *Your mum left you a list of chores to do.* (p.165)

(67) *Sam: 'I have to lay the table, clear the table, empty the dishwasher, make our sandwich for school.'* (p.159)

These examples associate female characters with domestic responsibilities. In Example (66), the mother is presented as the family member responsible for organizing household tasks by preparing a list of chores, positioning herself as responsible for the management of domestic activities. Similarly, in Example (67) Sam describes a range of routine household tasks, including setting and clearing the table, emptying the dishwasher and preparing sandwiches for school. In both cases, female characters are portrayed as taking responsibility for routine household tasks, reinforcing traditional associations between femininity and domestic roles.

This pattern is further reflected in Jodie's concern in Example (63) about causing her husband additional work while she is recovering from her injuries. Her concern is not only directed toward her husband but also toward the household responsibilities she is temporarily unable to fulfil. This suggests that these responsibilities are presented as part of her usual role within the family, further reinforcing the association between female characters and domestic work.

Male characters are also portrayed as participating in family life, although their involvement takes different forms. Rather than being consistently associated with routine domestic responsibilities, their participation occurs in more specific circumstances or through roles that remain compatible with traditional gender expectations.

(68) *Paul was washing the car.* (p.158)

(69) *Javier was hurrying to get back home and see his wife and two children.* (p.215)

In Example (68), Paul participates in a household-related activity by washing the car. However, this task differs from the routine domestic responsibilities associated with female characters in the previous examples and remains more closely aligned with traditionally masculine household roles. Example (69) presents a different form of involvement in family life. Javier is portrayed as a committed husband and father who is eager to return home to his wife and children. While this representation emphasizes his attachment to his family, his involvement is expressed through this emotional connection rather than through domestic or caregiving responsibilities. The narrative instead presents his wife as caring for their children, thereby maintaining a conventional division of family roles. Male involvement in domestic responsibilities is also illustrated in Example (54), discussed previously, where Jodie's husband takes over the grocery shopping, the housework, and washing while she is recovering from a serious accident. Although this portrayal places a male character in traditionally domestic roles, its counter-stereotypical nature remains limited by the context. His involvement results from Jodie's temporary inability to carry out these tasks, which are otherwise presented as part of her usual responsibilities. Taken together, these examples show that although male characters are represented within family settings, their portrayals do not substantially challenge traditional gender representations. Their involvement remains relatively limited and differs from the domestic and caregiving responsibilities traditionally associated with female characters.

Overall, family settings in Jelly 2 largely reflect traditional gender representations, particularly through the different roles attributed to female and male characters within family life.

c. Professional settings

In *Jelly 2* the professions attributed to male characters include both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations. Male characters are portrayed as electricians but also as teachers.

(70) *The teacher was angry because the pupils were not listening to him. (p.193)*

(71) *He is an electrician. (p.217)*

Example (70) and (71) illustrate these contrasting representations. In Example (70), the male character is portrayed as a teacher, challenging traditional gender expectations by associating a man with a profession traditionally linked to women. By contrast, Example (71) portrays a male character as an electrician, reinforcing a more conventional association between masculinity and skilled manual occupations. Taken together, these examples illustrate the coexistence of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical professional representations of male characters. Notably teaching remains the only occupation in which male characters depart from traditional gender expectations. The repeated representations of male teachers, combined with the absence of female in this profession, may indicate a less rigid association between teaching and femininity in *Jelly 2*.

Female characters are less represented in professional settings, but their occupations include both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations.

(72) *She is a policewoman. (p.217)*

Example (72) provides a counter-stereotypical representation by portraying a woman as a police officer, a profession traditionally associated with authority and masculinity. By contrast, Example (43), previously presented in the analysis of agency, portray a female character as a nurse. From the perspective of professional representation, this occupation reinforces the traditional association between female characters and caring professions. The occupations attributed to female characters therefore include both traditional and non-traditional representations, although their limited presence in professional settings calls for caution when interpreting this pattern.

Beyond the occupations themselves, the textbook also represents female characters' relationship to employment in connection with family responsibilities.

(73) *She stopped working because she was taking care of her small children. (p.193)*

Example (73) explicitly links the interruption of a female character's career to childcare responsibilities. Her decision to stop working is presented as a consequence of caring for her children, positioning family responsibilities as directly affecting her participation in professional life. No comparable representation is found among male characters, whose participation in employment is not portrayed as being affected by family responsibilities. This example therefore reinforces a traditional gendered division between professional and family roles, in which female characters' participation in employment may be limited by their responsibilities for childcare.

Overall, professional settings in *Jelly 2* include some challenges to traditional gender representations, while conventional gender expectations remain apparent.

d. Leisure activities

Both male and female characters in *Jelly 2* are portrayed as participating in leisure activities. However, gender differences emerge in the contexts in which these activities take place.

(74) *My grandfather was watching television while my grandmother was knitting.*
(p.192)

(75) *Tim was playing in the garden.* (p.157)

Example (74) portrays both a male character and a female character engaging in quiet indoor leisure activities, with the grandfather watching television and the grandmother knitting. Example (75), by contrast, presents Tim playing in the garden, placing the male character in an outdoor leisure context. Taken together, these examples show that male characters are represented across both indoor and outdoor leisure settings, whereas female characters remain associated with quiet indoor activities. This pattern only partially reflects traditional gender representations identified in previous research. While female characters remain associated with the indoor sphere traditionally linked to femininity, male representations extend beyond the outdoor settings traditionally associated with masculinity and are also represented in indoor leisure contexts.

Overall, although both genders participate in leisure activities, female representations remain more closely aligned with traditional gendered settings, whereas male characters are portrayed across a wider range of contexts.

e. Everyday life

Everyday life constitute the most represented social setting in *Jelly 2*. In contrast to family, professional, and leisure settings, the situations included in this category do not reveal a

particular gender pattern in the roles or activities attributed to male and female characters. Stereotypical representations may nevertheless occur within everyday contexts but these generally result from other aspects of character representation rather than from the setting itself.

(76) *My neighbor always wants what we have. He is jealous.* (p.91)

Examples (59) and (77) illustrates this distinction. In Example (76), the male character is described as jealous in an ordinary everyday situation, without establishing a particular association between the context and the gender. In Example (59), Mrs. Nelson is portrayed as vulnerable following her accident, a trait traditionally associated with femininity. As discussed in the analysis of the personality traits, the stereotypical dimension of this example therefore derives from the association between female characters and vulnerability rather than from the everyday context in which it occurs.

Overall, everyday life provides a relatively neutral context in which male and female characters are represented through ordinary situations rather than gender-specific roles or activities.

f. Summary of findings

Overall, the analysis of social settings in *Jelly 2* indicates that traditional gender expectations remain evident across the different social settings, although their expression varies according to the context.

Family settings show the strongest traditional gender pattern, with female characters predominantly associated with domestic responsibilities and childcare, while male characters' participation occurs under more limited or exceptional circumstances. Their involvement therefore does not substantially challenge the traditional division of family roles.

Professional settings include both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations. For male characters, departures from traditional gender expectations are limited to teaching. Female characters have a more limited presence in professional settings and are represented through both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical occupations. However, their relationship to employment is also portrayed as being affected by family responsibilities.

In leisure settings, both male and female characters are represented as participating in leisure activities, but differences emerge in the contexts in which these activities take place. Female characters remain associated with quiet indoor activities, while male characters are

represented across both indoor and outdoor contexts. Female representations therefore remain closely aligned with traditional gendered leisure settings.

Finally, everyday life provides a relatively neutral context, as male and female characters are represented through ordinary situations rather than gender-specific roles or activities.

6.2.2.3. *OF C(3)URSE!*

The textual qualitative analysis concluded with *OF C(3)URSE!*, following the same analytical structure as the two previous textbooks.

A. Agency

a. General overview

	Female	Male	Indeterminate
Active	22	11	1
Passive	9	8	/
Not applicable	37	32	/
Total	68	51	1

Table 16: Distribution of agency by gender in *OF C(3)URSE!*

Table 16 presents the distribution of agency among female, male and gender-indeterminate characters in *OF C(3)URSE!*. The largest proportion of representations falls into the not applicable category, indicating that many textual representations do not provide sufficient information to determine whether the character is portrayed as active or passive.

(77) *Marina: 'I also enjoy teamwork.'* (p. 16)

(78) *James has not finished his homework yet.* (p.179)

Both examples illustrate representations that cannot be classified in terms of agency. Marina (77) expresses a personal preference, while James (78) is simply described in relation to his homework. Neither example portrays the characters initiating an action, responding to an external constraint, or being the recipient of another character's actions.

In addition, one active representation is classified as gender-indeterminate because the first name *Terry* may refer to either a female or male character, and neither the textual nor the visual context provided sufficient information to determine the character's gender.

Finally, despite the high proportion of non-applicable representations, the remaining examples reveal a difference between female and male representations. Female characters are represented as active twice as often as male characters, with 22 active representations compared with 11. By contrast, passive representations are distributed more similarly between female and male characters, with 9 and 8 occurrences respectively. However, these differences should be interpreted with caution, as female characters are more represented in the corpus overall. The following sections examine these representations in greater detail.

b. Active representations

Female active representations in *OF C(3)URSE!* are characterized by autonomy, self-determination and independent decision-making. Rather than being limited to isolated everyday actions, agency is expressed through important life choices, entrepreneurial initiatives and long-term personal projects.

(79) *The range was developed after Katie read the book Half the Sky, it inspired her to want to help women and children in developing countries, and through that, Believer, was born.* (p.26)

(80) *Cecily: 'I bought myself an apartment in the South of the UK, near the seaside.'* (p.165)

(81) *Cecily: 'And I opened a flower shop.'* (p.165)

These examples illustrate different forms of female agency centered on autonomy and self-determination. In Example (79), Katie transforms her inspiration into concrete action by creating her own fashion range. Rather than merely expressing a desire to support women and children in developing countries, she develops a project through which this objective is realized. Her agency is therefore expressed through entrepreneurship combined with purposeful action. Similarly, Cecily is portrayed as independently shaping the course of her own life. Buying her own apartment (80) and opening a flower shop (81) both reflect purposeful decisions that transform her personal and professional circumstances. She is portrayed as actively directing her own future through a series of long-term commitments. Overall, these representations portray female characters as independent individuals capable of making significant personal and professional decisions, thereby departing from traditional representations of female characters as passive.

Male active representations tend to take a different form, involving purposeful individual actions without particular emphasis on leadership, authority, or influence over others.

(82) *During his last holidays he climbed mountains.* (p.139)

In Example (82), the male character performs a purposeful action by climbing mountains during his holidays. He is therefore positioned as the agent of his own action, without depending on or responding to another character. However, the representation does not place him in a position of leadership or portray him as influencing others. His agency is instead expressed through an individual action, reflecting the broader pattern identified among active male representations in the textbook. While these representations remain maintain the traditional association between male characters and agency, the agency attributed to them remain limited through purposeful individual actions.

Overall, agency is attributed to both male and female characters, challenging the traditional association between active roles and masculinity.

c. **Passive representations**

Passive representations in *OF C(3)URSE!* are primarily associated with external circumstances rather than stereotypical gender traits for both genders. Instead of portraying passivity as an inherent characteristic of either gender, the textbook presents it as the consequence of circumstances that temporarily restrict the characters' agency.

(83) *Oliver: 'I'm not saying that my parents should give me more, but even with 40 euros a month, I can barely buy the birthday presents and the cinema tickets I want.'* (p.111)

(84) *Cecily: 'I couldn't get up at all, I felt down all the time, aching in my back and my belly, but the doctors couldn't find what was wrong with me.'* (p.165)

These examples illustrate how passive representations are primarily associated with external constraints. In Example (83) Oliver's financial resources depend on the amount of money provided by his parents. As a result, his ability to buy what he wants is constrained by his financial dependence on his parents rather than determined by his own actions. Likewise, Cecily's inability to get out of bed in Example (84) results from a physical condition beyond her control. Rather than simply portraying a medical condition, the representation emphasizes a constraint that deprives her of the ability to act independently, thereby limiting her agency. These examples portray passivity as a situational experience that can affect both female and male characters, rather than associating it with stereotypical feminine qualities such as fear, submissiveness

or dependence. In the textbook, passivity is present as a temporary limitation of agency rather than an inherent gender characteristic.

Overall, passivity is attributed to both male and female characters without reproducing traditional gendered representations of passive roles.

d. Summary of findings

Taken together, the analysis of agency in *OF C(3)URSE!* reveals representations that depart in several ways from traditional gender expectations surrounding active and passive roles.

Female characters are portrayed as autonomous individuals who shape their own personal and professional lives through independent decisions, entrepreneurial initiatives and long-term commitments. Male characters are also associated with agency, although its expression tends to remain limited, primarily taking the form of purposeful individual actions. Agency is therefore attributed to both genders, challenging its traditional association with masculinity.

Passive representations similarly involve both female and male characters and are primarily linked to situational constraints rather than stereotypically gendered characteristics. Passivity is therefore presented as a temporary limitation of agency rather than as a quality associated specifically with female characters.

Overall, both active and passive roles are distributed across genders in ways that weaken traditional associations between agency and masculinity and between passivity and femininity.

B. Personality traits

a. General overview

	Male	Female
Caring	7	8
Competitive	0	5
Dependent	0	1
Emotional	7	3
Harsh	1	0
Independent	1	6
Rational	2	1

Self-confident	1	0
Vulnerable	4	5

Table 17: Personality traits associated with male and female characters in *OF C(3)URSE!*

Table 17 presents the personality traits attributed to male and female characters in *OF C(3)URSE!*. The representations are concentrated around a relatively limited number of traits, with caring, emotionality, vulnerability, independence, and competitiveness accounting for most of the personality characteristics identified.

Female characters are associated with both traditionally feminine and masculine traits. Caring and vulnerability remain present, while independence, rationality, and competitiveness provide counter-stereotypical representations.

Male characters similarly combine stereotypical and counter-stereotypical traits. While some traditionally masculine characteristics such as rationality and self-confidence are represented, male characters are more frequently associated with caring, emotionality, and vulnerability, traits traditionally linked to femininity.

Overall, personality traits in *OF C(3)URSE!* do not follow a strict traditional gender division. Both male and female characters are associated with stereotypical and counter-stereotypical characteristics. The following section examines these patterns in greater detail.

b. Male personality traits

Male personality traits in *OF C(3)URSE!* predominantly depart from traditional representations of masculinity. Male characters are primarily associated with traits traditionally linked to femininity, particularly caring, emotional openness, and vulnerability, while traditionally masculine traits are less prominent. Rather than suppressing their emotions, male characters openly express their feelings, show concern for others and, are portrayed as vulnerable.

(85) *Ethan: 'I think it's great to take care of children and see them grow.'* (p.16)

(86) *Oliver: 'as soon as the end of the month is approaching, I start feeling anxious, try to think of a way of making more money, but most of the time, I'm simply broke by then.'* (p.111)

(87) *He was going back home, when he was hit by a flying umbrella.* (p.142)

These examples illustrate different ways in which male characters challenge traditional representations of masculinity. In Example (85), Ethan expresses genuine satisfaction in caring for

children and supporting their development, presenting nurturing and caring as valued aspects of male identity rather than a predominantly feminine traits. Similarly, Oliver openly acknowledges his anxiety about money in Example (86), portraying emotional expression as a natural response to everyday difficulties instead of concealing his feelings. Finally, the character in Example (87) is portrayed as physically vulnerable after being injured in an unexpected accident. Rather than emphasizing strength or resilience, this representation presents physical vulnerability as an ordinary experience that can also affect male characters. Taken together, these examples challenge traditional masculine stereotypes by portraying men as caring, emotionally expressive and physically vulnerable.

This counter-stereotypical tendency is further reflected in the explicit rejection of certain traditionally masculine characteristics.

(88) *Boy: 'In fact, I'm not competitive at all.'* (p. 196)

In Example (90), the male character explicitly rejects competitiveness, a trait traditionally associated with masculinity. Rather than reinforcing competitiveness as a defining characteristic of male characters, the textbook presents a male character explicitly distancing himself from this traditionally masculine traits.

Overall, male personality traits predominantly challenge traditional gender expectations.

c. Female personality traits

Female characters in *OF C(3)URSE!* are portrayed through a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine personality traits. Independence and competitiveness provide important counter-stereotypical representations.

(89) *Kathie: I find that I'm extremely competitive when it comes to sports.'* (p.197)

(90) *Godmother: 'Lily generally travels alone, but this time, she asked me to go with her.'* (p.151)

These examples illustrate counter-stereotypical representations of female personality traits. In Example (89), Kathie explicitly describes herself as extremely competitive, presenting a trait traditionally associated with masculinity as part of her personality. Similarly, Lily's habit of travelling alone in Example (90) reflects independence and self-reliance as an ordinary aspect of her life, thereby associating a female character with a trait traditionally linked to masculinity. These representations therefore suggest a departure from traditional expectations of femininity by associating female characters with traditionally masculine personality traits. This is

particularly notable for competitiveness, as male characters are not portrayed as competitive and the only male character who explicitly refers to this trait rejects it, stating that he is “not competitive at all.”

Alongside these counter-stereotypical traits, female characters also remain associated with traditionally feminine characteristics, particularly caring and vulnerability.

(91) *Lara: ‘I really like helping people.’* (p.16)

(92) *She was swimming peacefully, when a shark attacked her.* (p.142)

Example (91) portrays Lara as caring through her willingness to help others. Her statement presents consideration for others as part of her personality, reflecting the broader pattern of caring representations identified among female characters. In Example (92), the female character is placed in a vulnerable position when she is unexpectedly attacked by a shark. This physical vulnerability reflects a trait traditionally associated with femininity, reinforcing traditional gender expectations. Taken together, these examples show that traditionally feminine traits remain present alongside the counter-stereotypical characteristics attributed to female characters.

Overall, female characters are portrayed through both traditionally feminine and masculine personality traits, resulting in a combination of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations.

d. Summary of findings

Taken together, the analysis of personality traits in *OF C(3)URSE!* reveals different patterns in the representation of male and female characters.

Male characters are predominantly associated with traits traditionally linked to femininity, particularly caring, emotional openness, and vulnerability, while traditional masculine characteristics are less prominent. The explicit rejection of competitiveness by a male character further contributes to this counter-stereotypical pattern.

Female characters, by contrast, are portrayed through a combination of traditionally feminine and masculine personality traits. Caring and vulnerability maintain conventional representations of femininity, while competitiveness and independence challenge them.

Overall, the personality traits attributed to both genders move beyond a strict division between traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics.

C. Social settings

a. General overview

	Family	Professional	Leisure activities	Everyday life
Male	7	9	12	24
Female	12	19	21	16
Indeterminate	/	1	/	/
Total	19	29	33	40

Table 18: Distribution of characters across social settings in *OF C(3)URSE!*

Table 18 presents the distribution of male, female, and gender-indeterminate characters across the different social settings defined in the methodology. Everyday life is the most frequently represented setting overall, with male characters appearing more frequently than female characters. Leisure activities constitute the second most represented setting and show a predominance of female characters. A similar pattern occurs in professional settings, where female characters appear more than twice as often as male characters. Finally, family settings are the least represented overall and also include more female than male characters. These differences should nevertheless be interpreted with caution, as female characters are more represented in the corpus overall. Their higher frequency in several social settings may therefore partly reflect this broader difference in gender representation.

The total number of occurrences across social settings is 121 rather than 120, as one occurrence was coded in two different contexts. Examples (93) was classified under both everyday life and leisure activities, as the character is simultaneously doing his homework and watching television.

(93) *My brother was doing his homework while he was watching TV.* (p.146)

Overall, these findings show that the distribution of male and female characters varies across social settings. The following sections examines whether these patterns are accompanied by stereotypical or counter-stereotypical gender representations.

b. Family settings

Both female and male characters in family settings are primarily represented in relation to other family members rather than through specific family roles and responsibilities.

(94) *Billy, whose mum died, lives with his father, Jackie and his elder brother, Tony.*
(p.28)

(95) *Cecily: I used to be married with a guy my parents thought suited me well.*
(p.165)

In Example (94), Billy is introduced through his family relationships, with the emphasis placed on the members of his family rather than on specific interactions or responsibilities within the household. Likewise, Cecily's statement in Example (95) defines her through relationship with her former husband and her parents. Family settings therefore often serve to establish family relationships rather than depict active participation in family life.

However, specific family roles and responsibilities are also represented, although to a more limited extent.

(96) *Ethan: 'I take care of my little cousins all the time and I enjoy it tremendously.'*
(p.16)

(97) *Eve: 'I want a big family and so for me, staying at home is the ideal thing to do in order to raise my children.'* (p.16)

Unlike the previous examples, Ethan (96) is actively involved in caring for his younger cousins and explicitly states that he enjoys doing so. Rather than presenting caregiving as an obligation, the textbook portrays it as a positive and rewarding experience. While Ethan's involvement in childcare challenge traditional gender expectations, Eve's representation in Example (97) remains more conventional. She expresses a desire to stay at home in order to raise a large family, associating a female character while childcare and the domestic sphere. Although this is presented as a personal aspiration rather than an obligation, her family role is defined in a way that places childcare at the center of her future life. Her representation therefore maintains the traditional association between female and primary responsibility for raising children. Thus, when specific family roles are represented, they include both counter-stereotypical and traditional gender representations.

Overall, family settings are primarily centered on family relationships rather than gendered roles, while the more limited representation of specific family responsibilities include both traditional and counter-stereotypical portrayals.

c. Professional settings

Male professional representations in *OF C(3)URSE!* predominantly challenge traditional gender expectations. Male characters are associated with professions involving care and education.

(98) *We all laughed but the teacher (he) was very angry.* (P.142)

(99) *Norbert: It's my dream job to become a doctor in developing country. I wish to help people and I want to save their lives, working in a humanitarian organization would be an opportunity to be proud of myself.* (p.16)

(100) *Ethan: 'I would love to be a nanny.'* (p.16)

Example (98) portrays a male character as a teacher, associating him with education, a professional field traditionally linked to women. In Example (99), Norbert aspires to become a doctor in a developing country and to work for a humanitarian organization. His professional ambition is explicitly motivated by his desire to help others and save lives, emphasizing the caring dimension of his career aspirations. Similarly, Ethan's desire to become a nanny in Example (100) associates a male character directly with childcare and caregiving, traditionally linked to female professional roles. Taken together, these examples reflect the predominantly counter-stereotypical pattern of male professional representations by associating male characters with education and caring professions.

Female characters are portrayed in a wide variety of professional roles, ranging from creative and entrepreneurial careers to highly qualified and physically demanding occupations. In *OF C(3)URSE!*, female characters are not limited to traditionally feminine professions but are also associated with positions of responsibility and occupations that challenge conventional gender expectations.

(101) *Lara: 'So, I'm not sure which one to choose between a firefighter, a soldier and an emergency nurse.'* (p.16)

(102) *Cecily: I worked in a bank as a CEO.* (p.165)

In Example (101), Lara considers careers such as firefighter and soldier, occupations traditionally associated with men and requiring physical abilities. Although she also mentions becoming an emergency nurse, her professional aspirations extend beyond traditionally feminine occupations. Likewise, Example (102) portrays Cecily as a former CEO who later established her own flower shop, as discussed in Example (81). Her professional trajectory therefore associates a female character with both a high-level position and entrepreneurship, broadening the range of

processional roles associated with female characters. Together, these examples illustrate the diversity of professional roles attributed to female characters and challenge traditional representation of women's professional life.

Despite this predominantly counter-stereotypical pattern, some traditional representations remain visible, particularly through caring professions and the influence of family responsibilities on female employment. As discussed previously in Example (97), Eve expresses a desire to stay at home to raise her children. From a professional perspective, this representation associates female employment with family responsibilities, as childcare is presented as a reason for remaining outside of the professional sphere. No comparable representation is found among male characters, reinforcing the traditional association of women with the domestic sphere and men with employment.

Overall, professional representations are predominantly counter-stereotypical for both male and female characters, although some traditional gender patterns remain present.

d. Leisure activities

Leisure activities in *OF C(3)URSE!* involve both female and male characters across a variety of activities. These activities include both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations.

(103) *Mia: 'Dancing is my all-time favorite, I've been doing it since I could walk but other than that I like playing netball, basketball and tennis.'* (p.196)

(104) *Boy: 'I also like kayaking and dancing.'* (p.196)

Example (103) combines traditionally feminine and masculine leisure activities within the same female representation. Dancing reflects a more conventional feminine activity, while Mia's participation in basketball extends her leisure interests beyond traditional gender expectations. Likewise, Example (104) combines kayaking, an activity traditionally associated with masculinity, with dancing, which challenges traditional expectations for male characters. Taken together, these examples show that both female and male characters are portrayed through leisure activities that combines stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations.

Overall, leisure activities in *OF C(3)URSE!* appear less gendered, with a wide range of activities associated with both genders.

e. Everyday life

Everyday life remains the most frequently represented social setting. However, the situations depicted are generally gender-neutral and do not, in themselves, reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Stereotypical or counter-stereotypical representations may still occur, but they result from the way individual characters are portrayed rather than from the setting itself.

Rather than being conveyed by the social setting itself, stereotypical or counter-stereotypical representations emerge from the way individual characters are portrayed.

(105) *He did not arrive early this morning.* (p.139)

(106) *She is frustrated because she wakes up earlier but still doesn't get to school on time.* (p.112)

Both examples illustrate ordinary everyday situations that are not inherently associated with either gender. In Example (105), the male character is simply described as arriving late, while Example (106) portrays a female character struggling to arrive at school on time despite walking up early. Neither representation conveys gendered expectations through the setting itself.

Overall, everyday life functions as a largely gender-neutral setting in *OF C(O)URSE!*

f. Summary of findings

The analysis of social settings in *OF (3)OURSE!* shows that gender representations vary across the different contexts.

Family settings are primarily centered on family relationships rather than specific gendered roles or responsibilities. When family roles are represented more explicitly, both traditional and counter-stereotypical representations occur.

Professional settings predominantly challenge traditional gender expectations for both genders. Male characters are associated with education and caring professions, while female characters are represented across a wide range of professional roles, including traditionally masculine occupations and high-level positions. Some traditional patterns nevertheless remain visible, particularly in the connection between female employment and family responsibilities.

Leisure activities are less strongly gendered, as both female and male characters participate in a variety of activities combining traditional and counter-stereotypical representations.

Finally, everyday life functions as a largely gender-neutral setting, as the situations represented do not establish clear associations between particular roles or activities and gender.

Overall, social settings in *OF C(3)URSE!* are generally less strongly structured by traditional gender expectations.

6.2.2.4. Transversal qualitative analysis

The transversal analysis compares the findings from *English in Mind* (2010), *Jelly 2* (2014) and *OF C(3)URSE!* (2018) in order to identify possible changes in gender representations over time. The comparison is structured across the three dimensions examined in the textual qualitative analysis: agency, personality traits and social settings.

A. Agency

The transversal analysis reveals that the representation of agency does not evolve in a linear manner across the three textbooks. When considered according to their publication dates, the textbooks reveal three distinct patterns in the representation of agency.

English in Mind combines stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations of agency. Active representations predominate for both female and male characters, although agency is expressed differently according to gender. Male characters are predominantly associated with leadership, initiative and goal-directed behavior, whereas female characters are more commonly portrayed through autonomy, self-assertion and independent decision-making. At the same time, the textbook includes passive female and male characters, indicating that neither activity nor passivity is portrayed as an exclusively masculine or feminine characteristic. Consequently, *English in Mind* presents a relatively balanced portrayal of agency while maintaining distinct gendered patterns in the ways agency is expressed.

This relatively balanced representation is not maintained in *Jelly 2*. Instead, the textbook displays a more stereotypical representation of agency. Male characters are predominantly portrayed through active representations involving leadership, initiative and problem-solving, whereas female characters are primarily associated with passive and reactive roles. Unlike *English in Mind*, relatively few counter-stereotypical representations challenge this dominant pattern. Consequently, *Jelly 2* strengthens the traditional association between masculinity and action and between femininity and passivity.

A different pattern emerges again in *OF C(3)URSE!*. Like *English in Mind*, active representations predominate for both female and male characters. However, the gendered distinction in the expression of agency becomes considerably less pronounced. Female characters are predominantly portrayed through autonomy, entrepreneurial initiative and long-term decision-making, whereas male characters are no longer systematically associated with stereotypically masculine forms of leadership, authority and dominance. Likewise, passive representations are attributed to both genders and are primarily linked to situational constraints rather than to traditional gender expectations. Consequently, *OF C(3)URSE!* presents the least gendered portrayal of agency among the three textbooks.

Overall, the comparison suggests that the representation of agency does not evolve in a linear manner across the three textbooks. Instead of showing a continuous progression over time, the findings reveal a temporary return to more stereotypical representations in *Jelly 2*, followed by a shift toward less gendered representations in *OF C(3)URSE!*. Ultimately, the most recent textbook presents the most balanced representation of agency among the three textbooks.

B. Personality traits

The transversal comparison reveals notable differences in the representation of personality traits across the three textbooks. Although all three textbooks include both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical portrayals, they differ in the way these characteristics are attributed to female and male characters. Notably, caring emerges as the most recurrent counter-stereotypical personality trait associated with male characters throughout the corpus, although its prominence varies considerably from one textbook to another.

English in Mind combines stereotypical and counter-stereotypical personality traits. Male characters are predominantly associated with traditionally masculine characteristics, such as competitiveness, ambition, rationality and self-confidence, while also displaying traditionally feminine traits, particularly caring and self-sacrifice. Caring is especially noteworthy, as it is attributed to both female and male characters and therefore emerges as a shared characteristics rather than an exclusive feminine one. Female characters display traditionally traits such as vulnerability, alongside counter-stereotypical traits including independence, self-confidence and strength. As a result, both female and male characters are associated with a broader range of personality traits than traditional gender stereotypes alone would suggest

In comparison with *English in Mind*, *Jelly 2* places greater emphasis on traditional gender stereotypes. Male characters are predominantly associated with traditionally masculine traits, particularly protectiveness, strength and activity. Although caring continues to appear as a counter-stereotypical trait, these portrayals remain largely confined to a small number of recurring male characters. Female characters are predominantly represented through traditionally feminine characteristics, particularly caring, vulnerability, emotional expressiveness and sensitivity, resulting in a narrower range of personality traits than in the previous textbook.

By contrast, *OF C(3)URSE!* display a broader and more even distribution of personality traits across female and male characters. While female characters continue to display some traditionally feminine characteristics, they are also portrayed as competitive, rational and, independent. Similarly, male characters are no longer predominantly associated with stereotypically masculine characteristics but are instead frequently represented as caring, emotionally open and, vulnerable. As a result, personality traits are distributed more evenly across female and male characters, reflecting the least gendered representation observed among the three textbooks.

Overall, the representation of personality traits follows a pattern similar to that observed for agency. Although the evolution is not linear, the comparison nevertheless indicates a movement toward more balanced gender representations. Despite a temporary return to more traditional patterns in *Jelly 2*, the most recent textbook presents a more balanced distribution of personality traits across female and male characters than the two earlier textbooks, resulting in the least gendered representation observed in the corpus.

C. Social settings

The transversal comparison shows that gender representations vary across the four social settings examined. While family, professional and leisure settings are characterized by varying degrees of gendered representations, everyday life primarily functions as a gender-neutral context in all three textbooks.

English in Mind presents a context-dependent representation of gender. Family settings maintain some traditional gender patterns, particularly through the association of female characters with caregiving, while domestic responsibilities are more evenly distributed between female and male characters. Professional settings more often link men with prestigious occupations and full-time employment, although counter stereotypical portrayals are also present. For instance, male characters are portrayed as teachers. Leisure activities present a relatively

balanced representation of female and male characters, although differences remain in the contexts in which these activities take place. Female characters are more commonly linked to indoor or creative activities, whereas male characters tend to engage in outdoor activities. Consequently, gender representations vary according to the social setting rather than following a single pattern throughout the textbook.

Like *English in Mind*, *Jelly 2* presents a context-dependent representation of gender, although the patterns observed across social settings evolve in different ways. Family settings show a more traditional division of roles, with female characters predominantly associated with the domestic sphere and childcare, while male participation in family responsibilities remains limited. Professional settings show a more mixed pattern in *Jelly 2*, with both female and male characters represented in traditional and counter-stereotypical occupations. For male characters, this represents a departure from the predominantly traditional professional pattern observed in *English in Mind*. However, teaching remains the only counter-stereotypical occupation identified, although its repeated occurrence gives it a visible presence in the textbook. Female characters are similarly represented in both traditional and counter-stereotypical occupations, while the connection between their professional lives and family responsibilities remains present. Leisure settings show a relatively broad distribution of activities for both genders, with female and male characters participating in a variety of leisure activities. However, the gendered distinction between indoor and outdoor contexts persists, although it takes a slightly different form than in *English in Mind*. Female characters remain exclusively associated with quiet indoor activities, whereas male characters are represented in both indoor and outdoor contexts. Consequently, *Jelly 2* does not show a uniform shift toward either more traditional or more counter-stereotypical representations. Instead, the evolution varies across social settings.

Unlike the two previous textbooks, *OF C(3)URSE!* presents a less gendered representations across family, professional and leisure settings. Family settings are no longer primarily structured around gendered family roles, as characters are mostly represented through their relationship with other family members. Professional settings further challenge traditional gender expectations by broadening the range of occupations and career aspirations associated with both genders. However, as in *Jelly 2*, female employment remains connected to family responsibilities, while no comparable pattern is observed for male characters. Leisure activities also become less gendered, with both female and male characters associated with a wide range of activities. Unlike the patterns observed in the previous textbooks, these representations are not clearly differentiated according to either the type of activity or the indoor or outdoor context in which

it takes place. Consequently, OF *C(3)URSE!* presents the least gendered representation of social settings among the three textbooks.

7. **Discussion**

The present study examines how gender representations have evolved in English textbooks used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, focusing on three textbooks published in 2010, 2014, and 2018. More specifically, it investigates the extent to which female and male characters are represented in relation to traditional gender stereotypes and whether these representations become more balanced over time.

The analysis focuses on several dimensions identified in the literature as relevant to the construction of gender representations, namely visibility, agency, personality traits, family settings, professional settings, and leisure activities. Examining these dimensions make it possible to identify both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical gender representations in English textbooks.

The findings show that neither traditional nor counter-stereotypical representations occur consistently across the corpus. While some of the patterns identified in previous studies remain visible, others are challenged by portrayals that depart from conventional gender expectations. The degree to which gender is represented stereotypically varies according to both the dimension considered and the textbook analyzed. Overall, the most recent textbook presents the least gendered representations, although this tendency is not observed consistently across all dimensions.

The aim of this discussion is to interpret the findings found in the previous section in relation to the literature (see Section 3) and the hypotheses formulated in Section 4.2. Each dimension and its corresponding hypothesis will be discussed in turn to determine whether the hypotheses are confirmed, partially confirmed, or rejected.

7.1. Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that male characters would be more visible than female characters in both the textual and visual content of the textbooks.

The findings concerning individual visual representations confirm Hypothesis 1. Male characters are depicted more frequently than female characters in all three textbooks, with the imbalance being particularly pronounced in *Jelly 2*, where 78% of the illustrations portraying a single character represent male characters. However, this difference is considerably reduced in the most recent textbook, with 52% male and 48% female representations.

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Aguilar (2021), Aydinoğlu (2014), Kerger et al. (2023), and Nasution et al. (2025), all of which report a greater visibility of male than female characters in school textbooks. One possible explanation for these findings is the persistence of an androcentric perspective of the world. As argued by Kerger et al. (2023), androcentrism positions men as the social norm and masculinity as the neutral point of reference. From this perspective, male characters may be more readily selected as the default individual figure, whereas female characters are less frequently portrayed as representative figures in their own right.

The textual quantitative analysis provides more limited support for Hypothesis 1. Although male first names are slightly more frequent than female first names in two of the three textbooks, the differences are considerably smaller than those observed in the visual data. This more balanced distribution may be related to the use of recurring protagonists throughout the textbooks. As noted by Hauksson-Tresch (2026), recurring characters create familiarity and allow learners to develop emotional connections with the narrative, making them particularly significant within textbook stories. Textbook authors may therefore rely on a relatively stable group of both female and male recurring characters, resulting in a more balanced textual visibility than that observed in individual visual representations.

By contrast, the analysis of illustrations depicting several characters does not support Hypothesis 1. Mixed-gender groups are considerably more frequent than single-gender groups, and the distribution of female and male characters within these groups remains relatively balanced. One possible explanation is that illustrations depicting several characters frequently represent everyday social situations and interactions, allowing both female and male characters to appear within the same scene and thereby contributing to a more balanced gender distribution. This interpretation is supported by the methodological approach adopted in the study by Hidayah et al. (2025), which focuses exclusively on illustrations depicting interactions between several characters and likewise reports relatively balanced gender representations.

Overall, these findings provide only partial support for Hypothesis 1, as patterns of gender visibility in textbooks vary according to the type of textual and visual representation analyzed.

7.2. Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis (H2) predicted that agency would be predominantly attributed to male characters, who would be more likely than female characters to initiate actions and interactions, give instructions, and assume central roles in the narrative.

The findings from *English in Mind* provide partial support for this hypothesis. Agency is clearly present among both female and male characters, but it takes different forms. Female agency is frequently expressed through speech and self-assertion, allowing female characters to express their opinions, defend their positions, and participate actively in interactions. More traditional forms of agency involving leadership, giving instructions, and directing the actions of others are, however, more strongly associated with male characters. *English in Mind* therefore does not restrict agency to male characters but maintains a gendered distinction in the forms through which it is expressed.

The findings from *Jelly 2*, by contrast, confirm Hypothesis 2 more clearly. Male characters frequently take initiative, solve problems, and direct the progression of events, while female characters are more often positioned as responding to the actions initiated by others or relying on male assistance. The distinction therefore concerns not only the form of agency but also the more traditional distribution of active and passive roles.

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Hauksson-Tresch (2026) and Aydinoglu (2014), which similarly found male characters to be more strongly associated with initiative, leadership and authority.

A different pattern emerges in *OF C(3)URSE!*, where the findings do not support Hypothesis 2. Female characters display agency through independent decisions, personal and professional projects, and long-term life choices. Male characters also remain active, but their agency is primarily expressed through purposeful individual actions rather than leadership, authority, or influence over others. This more balanced attribution of agency is consistent with Hidayah et al. (2025), who similarly report agency among both genders. In *OF C(3)URSE!*, agency is therefore clearly attributed to both female and male characters, weakening its traditional association with male characters.

Overall, Hypothesis 2 is only partially confirmed. *English in Mind* maintains gender differences in the expression of agency, while *Jelly 2* more clearly reproduces its traditional association with masculinity. *OF C(3)URSE!*, however, challenges this pattern by clearly attributing

agency to both male and female characters without placing particular emphasis on male leadership or authority.

7.3. Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis (H3) predicted that female and male characters would be associated with different personality traits reflecting traditional gender stereotypes.

English in Mind and particularly *Jelly 2* largely support this hypothesis. In both textbooks, female characters are predominantly associated with traditional feminine personality traits, such as vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, and caring, whereas male characters are more frequently portrayed as strong, ambitious, protective and competitive. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012), Hauksson-Tresch (2026) and Nasution et al. (2025), which likewise report a gendered distribution of personality traits in textbooks.

This gendered distribution is particularly evident in the representation of vulnerability. While female vulnerability is expressed through fear, emotional insecurity, and physical injury, male vulnerability remains considerably more restricted in both *English in Mind* and *Jelly 2*. For instance, in *English in Mind*, Claire's friends are portrayed as being frightened of bees (Example 21), while in *Jelly 2*, Mrs. Nelson is seriously injured in a car accident (Example 59). By contrast, one of the few clear examples of male vulnerability identified in these two textbooks concerns a male character who becomes ill during a flight to New York (Example 58). These findings are consistent with Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012) and Hauksson-Tresch (2026), who likewise observe a broader range of vulnerability among female characters, whereas male are portrayed as though, with vulnerability generally remaining more limited.

However, one finding clearly departs from the existing literature. Although previous studies consistently associate caring with female characters (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026; Nasution et al., 2025), caring is frequently associated to male and female characters in both *English in Mind* and *Jelly 2*. One possible explanation for this finding lies in the way caring was conceptualized in the present study. While previous research, particularly Hauksson-Tresch (2026) and Nasution et al. (2025), primarily associates caring with women's involvement in childcare and family life, the present study examined caring as a personality trait expressed across a broader range of contexts. Consequently, behaviors such as helping others, showing empathy, or contributing to the well-being of a community were also coded as caring. This broader conceptualization is

illustrated by characters such as Ulises de la Cruz in *English in Mind*, who uses the money earned from his football career to finance a fresh water supply for his village (Example 18), and Javier in *Jelly 2*, who repeatedly assists and reassures a stranded woman throughout an extended narrative (Examples 46–49). These findings suggest that caring is not exclusively associated with female characters when it is understood more broadly than childcare and family responsibilities.

The findings from *OF C(3)URSE!* do not provide support for Hypothesis 3, as they depart from the traditional distribution of personality traits identified in the literature (Hauksson-Tresch, 2026; Nasution et al., 2025). Female characters are associated with both traditionally feminine traits, such as caring and vulnerability, and traditionally masculine traits, particularly competitiveness and independence, resulting in a more balanced representation. Male characters show an even clearer departure from traditional gender expectations, as they are predominantly portrayed through traditionally feminine traits, particularly caring, emotionality, and vulnerability. Moreover, these traditionally feminine traits are expressed in forms that closely correspond to those described in the literature, including care for others, childcare, emotional openness, and different forms of vulnerability. Personality traits in *OF C(3)URSE!* are therefore less strongly gendered. This difference from the two previous textbooks may partly be explained by the nature of the texts included in *OF C(3)URSE!*. The textbooks contains numerous personal testimonies and life stories in which characters reflect on their experiences, emotions, and personal achievements. This type of narrative provides greater opportunities for both female and male characters to display a wider range of personality traits, resulting in less gendered representations.

Overall, Hypothesis 3 is only partially confirmed. *English in Mind* and *Jelly 2* predominantly reproduce the traditional gendered distribution of personality traits, although the attribution of caring to male characters introduces an important counter-stereotypical pattern. *OF C(3)URSE!*, however, does not support the hypothesis as female characters combine both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations, while male characters are predominantly associated with traditionally feminine characteristics.

7.4. Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis (H4) predicted that family settings would reflect traditional gender roles, with caregiving and domestic responsibilities being more frequently associated with female characters.

English in Mind provides only partial support for this hypothesis. Although female characters remain associated with traditional caregiving responsibilities, such as childcare (Example 27), several representations depict male family members actively participating in domestic tasks. For instance, fathers are portrayed helping with meal preparation (Example 29) or taking primary responsibility for cooking (Example 30). Rather than assigning household responsibilities exclusively to female characters, these representations suggest a more balanced distribution of domestic work within the family. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Nasution et al. (2025), who likewise identify more balanced family representations in which mothers are not portrayed as solely responsible for caregiving and domestic responsibilities. One possible explanation for this similarity may lie in the fact that *English in Mind* and *Super Minds 6*, analyzed by Nasution et al. (2025), were published by Cambridge University Press. Although a shared publisher cannot alone explain these similar findings, it may have contributed to similarities in the representation of gender roles within family settings.

Jelly 2, by contrast, largely confirms Hypothesis 5. Female characters are predominantly portrayed as responsible for childcare and household management, whereas male participation in family life remains more limited and often occurs under specific circumstances. For example, mothers are presented as organizing household chores (Example 66), and Jodie continues to worry about her domestic responsibilities even while recovering from a serious accident (Example 63). Although male characters occasionally contribute to family life, their involvement generally reflects exceptional circumstances or traditionally masculine household tasks (Example 68) rather than an equal sharing of domestic responsibilities. A similar pattern is observed in the studies by Adriaenssens and Kuppenberg (2012), Kerger et al. (2023), and Hauksson-Tresch (2026), which likewise portray female characters as primarily responsible for domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while male involvement in family settings remains more limited. One possible explanation may lie in the traditional division between family and professional life. As discussed by Aguilar (2021), previous research tends to associate men more closely with professional and economic roles, while women remain more strongly connected to family sphere. This division may therefore contribute to the more limited representation of male characters in family life.

The findings from *OF C(3)URSE!* provide only limited evidence for assessing Hypothesis 5. Unlike the previous textbooks, family settings are relatively uncommon and primarily serve to establish relationships between characters rather than to portray domestic or caregiving responsibilities. Few representations directly address family roles. Ethan enjoys looking after his

younger cousins (Example 96), thereby challenging traditional gender expectations, whereas Eve expresses her aspiration to become a stay-at-home mother (Example 97), reflecting a more conventional representation of family life. As these examples remain isolated, the textbook does not present a sufficiently consistent pattern to confirm or reject the hypothesis.

Overall, Hypothesis 5 is only partially confirmed. While *Jelly 2* largely reproduces the traditional association between women and caregiving or domestic responsibilities, *English in Mind* presents more balanced representations of gender roles within the family setting. The limited representations of family roles in *OF C(3)URSE!* does not provide sufficient evidence to confirm or reject the hypothesis.

7.5. Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis (H5) predicted that professional roles would reflect traditional gender stereotypes, with female and male characters associated with different types of occupations and male characters represented in a wider range of occupations.

The first part of Hypothesis 5 is supported by *English in Mind*, where professional roles largely reflect traditional gender expectations. Male characters are more predominantly associated with prestigious and high-status occupations, while female characters are more often represented in caring and educational professions. Although some counter-stereotypical representations occur, such as Claire's beekeeping activity (Example 7), the dominant pattern remains traditional. This pattern reflects previous findings associating male characters with professional status and success, and female characters with traditionally feminine occupations (Aguilar, 2021; Aydinoglu, 2014; Hauksson-Tresch, 2026; Nasution et al., 2025).

The findings from *Jelly 2* provide less support for this part of the hypothesis. Both female and male characters are associated with stereotypical and counter-stereotypical occupations, resulting in a more balanced distribution of professional roles. For instance, alongside representations such as a male electrician and a female nurse, counter-stereotypical are also presented, including a male teacher and policewoman (Examples 43, 70, 71, & 72).

In *OF C(3)URSE!* this part of Hypothesis 5 is not supported. Male characters are frequently associated with professionally linked to women, particularly education and caregiving, while female characters are represented in traditionally masculine occupations and positions of responsibility. Professional roles therefore predominantly challenge rather than reproduce traditional gender expectations.

The departure from traditionally gendered occupations is particularly evident in the representation of teaching. While Aydinoğlu (2014) and Hauksson-Tresch (2026) associate teaching with female characters, the present analysis reveals a different pattern. Male teachers are represented across all three textbooks, while one of the textbooks does not portray any female teacher. Teaching therefore constitutes a recurring counter-stereotypical professional representation across the corpus. As suggested by Aguilar (2021), textbooks may alternate between female and male teachers because teachers are familiar figures whom students encounter regularly in everyday school lives. This may explain why teaching is less strongly gendered in the present corpus.

However, this pattern does not extend to nursing, which remains exclusively associated with female characters across the three textbooks. This finding closely reflects Hauksson-Tresch (2026), who similarly reports three female nurses and no male nurse. Moreover, the only doctor identified in the present corpus is male, echoing Aguilar's (2021) association of female characters with nursing and male characters with the higher-status profession of doctor. Thus, while teaching shows a departure from its traditional gender association, the nurse-doctor distinction continues to reproduce both traditional gender stereotypes and the professional hierarchy identified in previous research.

The second part of Hypothesis 5 is supported by *English in Mind and Jelly 2*, where male characters are represented in a greater variety of professional roles than female characters. This finding is consistent with Aguilar (2021), Aydinoğlu (2014) and Hauksson-Tresch (2026), who similarly report greater occupational diversity among male characters. In *OF C(3)URSE!*, however, this part of the hypothesis is not supported, as female characters are represented across a wide range of professional roles. The greater occupation diversity expected for male characters is therefore only observed in the two earlier textbooks.

The traditional division between family and professional life observed in the previous section (7.4) may partly explain the pattern observed in *English in Mind* and *Jelly 2*. Male characters' stronger association with professional life may provide more opportunities for occupational representation. In *English in Mind*, a female character is presented as working part-time while a male character works full-time (Examples 30–31), and in *Jelly 2*, a woman stops working to care for her children (Example 73). Moreover, although *OF C(3)URSE!* departs from this pattern by presenting female characters across a wider range of professional roles, the association between women and non-employment remains visible. In Example (97), Eve expresses her aspiration to stay at home to raise her children, distancing herself from the professional sphere.

No comparable representation of male character reducing or leaving employment was identified across the three textbooks, reinforcing the traditional association between male characters and employment.

Overall, Hypothesis 5 is only partially confirmed. *English in Mind* largely reflects the traditional professional patterns identified in previous research, while *Jelly 2* combines stereotypical and counter-stereotypical professional representations. In *OF C(3)URSE!*, counter-stereotypical portrayals become more prominent, resulting in a less clearly gendered representation of professional roles.

7.6. Hypothesis 6

The sixth hypothesis (H6) predicted that female and male characters would be presented in a variety of leisure activities, while certain types of activities and contexts would remain more strongly associated with one gender.

The findings show that all three textbooks associate both female and male characters with a wide variety of leisure activities, a pattern also observed by Hauksson-Tresch (2026). However, the contexts in which these activities occur differ across the textbooks. *English in Mind* largely supports the second part of Hypothesis 6, as female characters are predominantly associated with quieter indoor activities, while male characters are more strongly linked to outdoor and physical activities. This pattern reflects Aydinoglu's (2014) distinction between female indoor and male outdoor activities, as well as Nasution et al.'s (2025) greater male representation in physically demanding activities. In *Jelly 2*, this distinction becomes less pronounced: female characters remain associated with quieter indoor activities, whereas male characters participate in both indoor and outdoor activities. *OF C(3)URSE!* departs more clearly from the hypothesis, as both genders participate in stereotypical and counter-stereotypical activities without a clear indoor-outdoor distinction. Female characters engage in sports such as basketball and tennis, while male characters participate in activities such as dancing and creative pursuits, reflecting the counter-stereotypical representations identified by Hauksson-Tresch (2026). *OF C(3)URSE!* therefore presents the least gendered distribution of leisure activities across the three textbooks.

Overall, hypothesis 6 is partially confirmed. Female and male characters are represented across a variety of leisure activities in the three textbooks, supporting the first aspect of the hypothesis. However, the persistence of gendered associations varies across the corpus: they

remain clearly visible in *English in Mind* and *Jelly 2*, particularly through the distinction between indoor and outdoor activities, but are less apparent in *OF C(3)URSE!*.

7.7. Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 (H7) predicted that more recent textbooks would display more balanced and less stereotypical gender representations than earlier textbooks.

Although, the comparison does not reveal a consistent progression across all dimensions, *OF C(3)URSE!*, the most recent textbook, displays less traditionally gendered representations in several areas.

This tendency is particularly evident in agency, personality traits, professional roles and leisure activities. In *OF C(3)URSE!* (2018), female characters are frequently portrayed as active and participating in leisure activities and occupations traditionally associated with male characters. Male characters are also represented as vulnerable, emotional, or involved in activities and professions traditionally associated with female characters. Family settings also show limited gender differentiation. Unlike earlier textbooks, family contexts are rarely structured around traditionally gendered domestic roles or responsibilities. Instead, they are mainly conveyed through relationships between characters. The difference with the previous textbooks lies not simply in the presence of counter-stereotypical representations, since these already occur in the two older textbooks, but in their emergence as a broader pattern across different dimensions in *OF C(3)URSE!*. These findings further illustrate how textbook representations can depart from traditional gender expectations, as also demonstrated by Hauksson-Tresch (2026), Hidayah et al. (2025), and Nasution et al. (2025).

However, the overall findings do not indicate a consistent progression toward more balanced representations over time. When comparing *Jelly 2* (2014) with *English in Mind* (2010), differences in stereotypical representations emerge in both directions. *Jelly 2* presents more stereotypical representations in terms of agency and family settings, while representations of personality traits remain relatively similar across the two textbooks. At the same time, *Jelly* shows a less pronounced association between male characters and outdoor settings, as male characters are also more frequently represented indoors. Professional roles also appear more balanced, with both female and male characters represented in stereotypical as well as counter-stereotypical occupations. Thus, the four-year difference between the two textbooks does not

correspond to a systematic reduction in stereotypical gender representations, as expected in Hypothesis 7.

The quantitative analyses of gender visibility in textbooks provides another contrasting finding. Compared with *English in Mind*, *Jelly 2* does not show a progression towards greater gender imbalance. In individual representations, the proportion of male-only images increase while the proportion of mixed-gender groups slightly decreases, although mixed groups remain the dominant category. The distribution of names also becomes slightly less balanced, with a decrease in the representations of female names.

OF C(3)URSE! presents a more nuanced pattern. Individual visual representations are considerably more balanced than in two earlier textbooks, in which male characters were more frequently represented. However, this development is not reflected in group representations. Although mixed-gender groups remain dominant, their proportion decreases, while male-only groups become more frequent. Textual visibility remains relatively balanced overall but does not show an improvement over time. Finally, while *OF COURSE!* represent an improvement compared with *Jelly 2*, its distribution of female and male names is slightly less balanced than that observed in *English in Mind*, where near parity was already achieved.

Together these findings suggest that publication date alone does not appear sufficient to account for the differences observed between the three textbooks. Nevertheless, the broader presence of counter-stereotypical representations in *OF (3)OURSE!* may be considered in relation to the increasing attention given to gender representation in education material. Adriaenssens & Kuppenberg (2012) for instance, had already formulated concrete recommendations promoting more balanced visibility and less stereotypical representations across the different dimensions analyzed in the present study. The fact that such changes are not consistently visible in *Jelly 2* (2014), published only two years later, may suggest that increased awareness does not necessarily translate immediately into textbook representations. As gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in educational materials (Nasution et al. 2025), changes in representational practices may occur gradually. The broader pattern of counter-stereotypical representations observed in when *OF C(3)URSE!* may therefore reflect a greater awareness of gendered bias in educational material although no direct connection can be established.

Differences between the textbooks may reflect editorial choices rather than publication date alone. *OF C(3)URSE!* places greater emphasis on personal experiences, individual inspirations and life story than the two earlier textbooks. This focus may create more opportunities

for characters to be represented through individual choices, emotions and aspirations rather than primarily through conventional gender roles. The relatively balanced family representations in *English in Mind*, despite its earlier publication, also suggest the influence of factors beyond publication date. Interestingly, Nasution et al. (2015), identified similar counter-stereotypical family representations in *Super Minds 6*, also published by Cambridge University Press. While no conclusion can be drawn from this shared publisher, the similarities points to the possible role of editorial choices.

The persistence of traditional patterns alongside more counter-stereotypical representations may reflect the extent to which gender stereotypes remain embedded in educational materials. Rather than showing a linear replacement of stereotypical representations by more balanced ones, the three textbooks therefore appear to reflect a more complex development in which traditional and counter-stereotypical patterns coexist.

Overall, Hypothesis 7 is thus only partially supported. Although the most recent textbook displays less traditionally gendered representations across several dimensions, this tendency is not consistently observed when comparing *Jelly 2* with *English in Mind*.

8. Conclusion

This study examined the evolution of gender representations in three English textbooks, *English in Mind*, *Jelly 2*, and *OF C(3)URSE!*, used in lower secondary education within the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and published between 2010 and 2018. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses of textual and visual content, it investigated the extent to which these representations reflected gender stereotypes and whether such stereotypes became less prominent over time.

The findings show that traditional gender stereotypes coexist with counter-stereotypical representations across the three textbooks. While *OF C(3)URSE!*, the most recent textbook, displays a broader pattern of less traditionally gendered representations across several dimensions, this tendency is neither consistent across all dimensions nor linear across the three textbooks. Overall, these findings highlight the complexity of gender representations in English textbooks and the importance of continuing to consider gender representation in the development and evaluation of educational materials.

The limited corpus restricts the conclusions that can be drawn regarding the evolution of gender representations over time. With only one textbook per publication year and a timeframe ending in 2018, the findings cannot establish whether the patterns observed reflect a broader evolution in English textbooks used in the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. In addition, due to the scope of the study, the qualitative analysis was limited to textual representations, while images were examined only quantitatively. Finally, the qualitative analysis necessarily involves a degree of researcher interpretation.

Future research could address these limitations by examining a larger number of textbooks from each period and extending the analysis to textbooks published after 2018. Comparing textbooks from the same publisher could also provide further insight into whether editorial choices influence gender representations. Furthermore, including textbooks used in Flanders could offer a comparison with a different Belgian educational context. Finally, extending the qualitative analysis to visual representations could reveal whether textual and visual content reinforce or challenge similar gender representations.

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