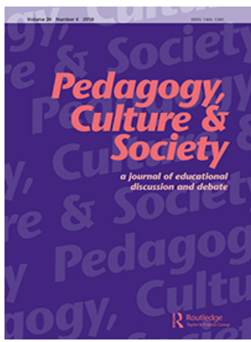

Routledge
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Pedagogy, Culture & Society

ISSN: 1468-1366 (Print) 1747-5104 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpcs20

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To cite this article: Lydia Namatende-Sakwa (2018) The construction of gender in Ugandan English textbooks: a focus on gendered discourses, Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 26:4, 609-629, DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2018.1436583

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1436583

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PEDAGOGY, CULTURE & SOCIETY
2018, VOL. 26, NO. 4, 609–629
https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1436583

The construction of gender in Ugandan English textbooks: a focus on gendered discourses

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ABSTRACT
Informed by a feminist post-structural framework, this study departs from the overriding emphasis on explicit constructions of women in textbooks. It focuses on culturally implicit knowledge and/or gendered discourses that have informed the construction of gender in Ugandan secondary school textbooks. Findings illuminate the construction of women using discourses networked to produce them as emotional, invested in physical appearances, vulnerable, and in need of men. Intertwined within these are mutually supporting discourses that construct them as irrational, passive, nurturing, trivial, empty-headed, and jealous. Women were constructed oppositionally to men, produced as rational, physically fit breadwinners. This configuration of discourses draw on an underlying 'common-sense' gender-differences discourse, which secures female/male border maintenance, sustaining unequal power relations. In exceeding the dominant focus on visibility therefore, this study illuminates how women are constructed, illuminating the workings of power through discourse to re-inscribe hierarchical gender-power relations, tackling deeper gender inequalities and hierarchies.

KEYWORDS
Gender; textbooks; English; Uganda; post-structural theory

The construction of gender in English textbooks

Scholarship on the construction of gender in English textbooks has focused on Western and Asian contexts (Foroutan 2012; Holmvist and Gjorup 2007; Lee and Collins 2009; Yi 2002). Textbooks published for developing countries, specifically Africa (Barton and Sakwa 2012; Opoku-Amankwa 2010), however, have received far less attention in spite of the widespread teaching of English, coupled with pervasive debate regarding gender and education (Sunderland 2000). Additionally, dominant textbook research has been undertaken using a quantitative and/or positivist methodology (Gupta and Yin 1990; Lee 2014). In problematizing this, Porecca (1984) explained that 'simple ratios reveal only quantities and cannot reveal the way in which males and females are presented' (713). Lee (2014) supported this, recommending that textbook studies should illuminate *how* textbooks construct gender. As such, some researchers have recommended the incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative data (Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland 1997; Poulou 1997; Rifkin 1998).

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The proliferation of mixed method textbook studies (Ansary and Babaii 2003; Hideto 2004) revealed more subtle and malevolent gender biases. While the quantitative data, for example, in Barton and Sakwa's (2012) study of a Ugandan English textbook demonstrated that women dominate some units, a qualitative analysis showed that they dominate within private and/or domestic spaces, reinforcing gender stereotypes. The strong female presence in the unit 'Back Nestling', for example, was attributed to the subject of baby rearing traditionally associated with women (Hartman and Judd 1978). This demonstrates that a mixed methods approach might secure a better understanding of how gender is constructed in textbooks (Figure 1).

However, the overriding focus on visibility and/or explicit constructions of women in textbooks, which has dominated research, overlooks the culturally implicit knowledge that informs how gender is produced in textbooks. I argue that the uncritical push for a simple insertion of women into texts in what Gonsalves (2010) has referred to as the 'add-women and-stir' method of changing gendered relations, leaves the status quo intact. Rather than focus on the visibility of women then, my study explores how dominant sexist assumptions and discourses are networked to produce specific gendered subjectivities, to secure unequal gender relations. This approach allows the interrogation of what is inherent within the culture that informs the construction of gender in textbooks, promising to tackle deeper gender inequalities.

Even as I focus on the gendered discourses that undergird the texts, I recognise textual meaning and/or interpretation is multiple, contradictory and contingent upon context as well as readers' gendered 'truths' (Baxter 2003; Connell 2008). Indeed, the ways in which teachers and students appropriate textual meaning is shaped by their own cultural understandings of gender relations. The discourses and practices in our experiences therefore, inform how we take up texts and/or counteract both traditional and non-traditional

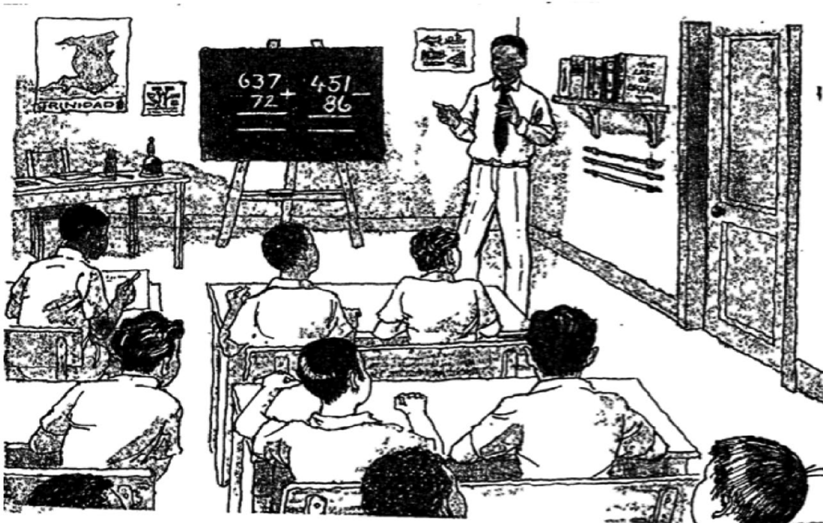

Figure 1. Well-groomed Mr. Hinds teaching mathematics. From *Integrated English*.

gendered textbook constructions. This paper illuminates some gendered discourses that produce men and women as particular subjects within some Ugandan English textbooks, recognising the complexities and possibility of different readings of the texts.

Context

Uganda, located in East Africa is a developing country with a population of about 40 million primarily based on agriculture. The population is multiethnic, comprising four ethnic groups with diverse cultures. Interwoven therein, are 'common strands of gender inequality rooted in patriarchal beliefs' (Mirembe and Davies 2001, 402). Indeed, women have traditionally been constructed as subservient to men, as reflected through practices like bride price, polygamy, and intergenerational marriage which structure gender relations (Bantebya and Keniston 2006; Kaleeba, Ray, and Willimore 1991; Obbo 1995). These gender discrepancies are reproduced in the pervasive gendered division of labour in homes, the work place, and education system.

According to Mugumya (2004), 'our society, which prescribes "work for women" and "work for men" has further entrenched this notion in the school curriculum' (5). Subject choice and performance are gendered with girls tending towards arts and boys sciences (Muhwezi 2003). As such, boys dominate science courses, taking up the biggest percentage of admission and funding in public institutions of higher learning which privilege sciences (Sakwa and Longman 2013). Further, the authorship of curriculum textbooks is gendered, with a predominance of science and math textbooks written by males (Muhwezi 2003).

The government of Uganda, through its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and Education For All foregrounded the education of girls, and strategies were established to accelerate their school participation and retention (Omagor et al. 2001). Under the policy of Universal Primary Education for example, the government provides free education for up to four children in each family, and priority is given to girls and children with physical disabilities. As an incentive to improve access to higher education, a policy on affirmative action gives young women an additional 1.5 points on top of their Advanced Level examination results (Onsango 2009). Regarding instructional materials, the government implemented the Instructional Materials Reform Programme, which allowed schools to participate in textbooks procurement. According to the *Education Statistical Abstract* (2015), this has improved the student-textbook ratio. The availability of textbooks is one of the factors that affect performance in secondary education. Yet, textbooks remain problematic in their construction of gender as my study demonstrates.

English textbooks in Ugandan secondary schools

The study focused on extracts from textbooks used to teach English to Senior 3 students (aged 15–17) in two secondary schools during one term (3 months) of a school year. These textbooks include *Summary Skills, Practical English, Integrated English, English in Use,* and *Skills of English*. Based on my experience as a former student, teacher, and now teacher educator, I consider this range of books to be the most commonly used for teaching English in Ugandan schools. As such, the study provided great insights into dominant constructions of gender made available to Senior 3 students through English textbooks.

Methodology

I situated my inquiry within a feminist post-structural framework (St. Pierre 2000; Weedon 1997). As affirmed by Francis (1998), 'Post-structural theory enables us to argue that there is no essential "femaleness"… dominant discourses of gender position all people as male or female, and provide narratives about the ways … people should behave and what they should desire' (8). Youdell defined discourse as 'bodies of knowledge that are taken as "truth" and through which we see the world' (2006, 35). They function as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1980) that sets out, for example, what it means to be a woman or man in ways that seem natural and/or self-evident. Textbooks, which prescribe roles of nurse and doctor to female and male respectively, deploy a gender differences discourse, which produces women as nurturers. Therefore, what we think we know about women and men informs how power is deployed to produce and regulate them, justifying the use of this framework to understand the intersection of multiple knowledge(s) (Popkewitz 1998) that inform the construction of gendered textbooks.

Feminist post-structural discourse analysis

My task in this feminist work is to illuminate how women are constructed, cognizant of the feminist goal to unsettle the invisibility and distortion of their experiences (Lather 1991). Rather than examine textbooks in their entirety, I focused on a collection of texts extracted from different textbooks, within the S.3 teachers' work plan for one term. While this corpus was not necessarily representative of all texts used to teach English in Uganda schools, it provided insights into the discourses and practices the students encountered in their textbooks during a specific school term.

Following Sunderland et al. (2002), I focused on nine texts from the textbooks within the work plans. These texts explicitly cite gender and are therefore 'gendered' as opposed to 'non-gendered' texts about, for example, scientific processes (230). I attended to the representation of female (and male), interrogating the narratives and illustrations using questions such as: What were they saying about women (and men)? What kinds of discourses were deployed? How were they produced? How did they function? How were they intertextually linked to other sociohistorical discourses? Rather than focus on the simplistic distribution of female and male characters, which dominates research, I 'spotted' (Sunderland 2004) gendered discourses that framed the textual narratives and illustrations, and coded them accordingly. I arrived at the codes and discourses, as Wood and Kroger (2000), and Hollway (2014) had done, 'through a combination of my own knowledge and what was suggested by the data' (272). I also situated the data into well-established discourses such as discourse of women as nurturers (Foulds 2013), marriage as very important to women (Sunderland 2004), women as sexual objects (Backhouse 2012) and women as emotional (Francis 1998). My analysis then went beyond the textual narratives to an analytic examination of the underlying assumptions (Bell 2002).

As Baxter (2003) explained, 'within any field of knowledge, there is never just *one* discourse but always plural and competing discourses' (46). Discourses therefore, are always intertextually linked and/or suffused with traces of others. Discourses, as Youdell (2006) affirmed, are entangled in webs of association evoking, extrapolating, implicating, and negating each other. As such, I illuminated how discourses within the textual narratives were networked to produce specific gendered subjects.

Findings and discussion

Analysis of the texts led to the identification of five gendered discourses: women as emotional, women-as-preoccupied-with-physical beauty, women as vulnerable victims, women-as-in-need-of-men and men as breadwinners/providers (see Table 1). While I organised each section under dominant gendered discourses, I recognise, as did Jaworski and Coupland, that '*most* texts are not "pure" reflections of single discourses', (1999, 9 in Sunderland 2004, 29). As such, I also highlight marginal discourses, showing that discourses are indeed 'linked, related, *networked* as constituting an "order of discourse"' (Sunderland 2004, 31).

I first identify, explain, and finally describe how data pertaining each discourse was generated (Sunderland 2004).

A discourse of women as emotional

This discourse, which positions women as sentimental and their judgment as based on feeling rather than reason, is evident in an exercise called 'A Letter From England' from *English in Use*. In this letter, Emma, a student from Cambridge, writes to Koku, a student from Mwanza, whom she and a group of fellow students had visited as part of an exchange programme. The discourse of women as emotional is recognisable through the choice of lexical items Emma uses to describe her feelings about her experiences in Mwanza. 'Girly' practices such as exchanging photos and promises to keep in touch, coupled with lexical traces such as 'like a dream', 'fantastic experience', 'special dishes', 'enjoyed', 'fantastic', 'really great', and 'best memories', suggest a sense of nostalgia and a fond, wistful longing for the past.

This emotionally charged text 'naturally' has a strong female presence, as both Emma and Koku the main characters, are female. Additionally, most of the people Emma mentions are females, described using feminine nouns like 'headmistress', 'head girl', 'Mrs. Clarke', 'Koku's mother', and 'sisters'. The strong female presence firmly locates the text within a sentimental realm traditionally associated with women, who write letters to each other reminiscing about 'sweet-nothings'.

This construction of females as emotional has been problematized. Walkerdine (1990) for example, problematized how 'girls' lives are portrayed as dominated by their emotions' (99). Walkerdine (1998) was critical that such discourses disregard the idea that boys also have anxiety, but do not show it because they are not socialised to do so. In agreement, Mac an Ghaill affirmed that the legitimation of such forms of masculinity can be injurious making 'it difficult for men to acknowledge their emotions and needs without feeling their masculinity is somehow brought into question' (1994, 38). This is why some men do not enact care (Richardson 2012). In troubling this polarising discourse, Middleton (1992, in Francis 1998) argues that the value judgments that both males and females make are based on emotion and impulse, thereby affirming that 'feeling and emotion do count in our thoughts and expression' (in Francis 1998, 15).

The construction of women as emotional collocates subtexts of weakness, irrationality, and poor judgment. Such discourses work to foreclose opportunities for women to take up leadership. This discourse also informs the gendered division labour which delegates roles of care – not considered 'proper' work, to women since 'they are softer, more emotional' (Francis 1998, 2). The responsibility for paid work is then associated with males 'since they are after all, more competitive, brave and ambitious than women' (Francis 1998, 2). Indeed, the idea of softer female vis-à-vis more competitive, braver male, is taken up in Emma's

Table 1. Gendered discourses in Ugandan English textbooks.

No.	Textbook	Title of text	Text type	Gender representation	Dominant discourse	Marginal discourses
1.	*English in Use*	A Letter from England	Female-dominated	Traditional	Women as emotional	Women as nurturers Women as physically inadequate Gender roles
2.	*Summary Skills*	Practical Exercise 38 (Bleaching women)	Female- dominated	Traditional	Women-as-pre-occupied-with-personal-appearances	Men-as-pre-occupied-with-physical-appearances Compulsory heterosexuality Marriage-as-very-important for w. Women-beware-women Women as: Future wives Passive Emotional Naïve/gullible Trivial Empty-headed Unrealistic/fantasy
3.	*Integrated English*	The Raffle	Male dominated	Transgressive	Men-as-pre-occupied-with-personal-appearances	Women as nurturers Men as gullible Men as trivial Men as evil
4.	*Skills of English*	A Freedom Song	Female- dominated	Traditional	Women as vulnerable victims	Women as nurturers Women as vulnerable victims Women-beware-women Women-as-preoccupied-with-physical-appearances Women as emotional Women as needing men Women as trivial Men as breadwinners
5.	*Summary skills*	Practical Exercise 47 (Child prostitution)	Female dominated	Traditional	Women as vulnerable victims	Male sexual drive Women as sexual objects
6.	*Practical English*	Detective Stories	Male dominated	Traditional	Women as vulnerable victims	Gender difference Men as protectors Women as physically inadequate

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (*Continued*).

No.	Textbook	Title of text	Text type	Gender representation	Dominant discourse	Marginal discourses
7.	*Summary Skills*	Practical English 15 (Fatherless Girls)	Female dominated	Traditional	Women-as-in-need-of-men	Men as protectors Men as breadwinners Men as rational Mathematics as masculine Women as passive Women as needing men Women as gullible
8.	*Skills of English*	Around the Fire	Male dominated	Traditional	Men as breadwinners	Men as breadwinners Men as heads of Home/leaders Men as protectors Women as in need of men Women as physically inadequate Women as trivial Gender roles
9.	*Skills of English*	The Land Boat	Male dominated	Traditional	Men as breadwinners	Women as pre-occupied-with-physical-appearances Women as trivial Women as mothers Women as cowards

description of the gendered roles partaken during her trip. Koku's mother prepared the special dishes Emma enjoyed, while the headmistress and Mrs. Clark, who accompanied Emma's group, were both female. The DJ was male. The production of women as nurturers (teachers, mothers) is illustrated.

The pervasive construction of women as mothers has frequently been problematized (Butler 1992; Foulds 2014; Paechter 2007). Depicting women primarily as mothers can be attributed to the amount of time spent with children, given their roles in homes and their duties as schoolteachers. What is disturbing about this construction is that women's role as mothers is almost always pitted against their other engagements and identities (Foulds 2014) as if to suggest that *all* women are necessarily mothers. As Butler (1992) affirmed, 'surely all women are not mothers; some cannot be, some are too young or too old to be, some choose not to be, and for some who are mothers, that is not necessarily the rallying point of their politicisation in feminism' (15). This image of women as mothers is oppositional to images of men participating politically and otherwise, in ways that do not pit one identity against another (Foulds 2014). As such, Foulds suggested, '[w]hile women's political engagement is still subtly tied to their role as mother, men do not have the same responsibilities' (666).

Further, the gendered division of sports, which Emma's letter illustrates when she describes girls as having played netball while boys had played football, emanates from the discourse of difference, reified in sports. This is problematized by Messner (2002), critiquing the enactment of hegemonic masculinity in professional sports, and affirming, 'sports provides a context in which the fiction of separate, categorically different, and unequal sexes can be constructed and made to appear "natural"' (2). On the whole, the overarching production of women as emotional is bound up with their construction as 'soft' echoing discourses of motherhood and physical inadequacy, and re-inscribing unequal gendered power relations.

Women-as-preoccupied-with-physical-beauty

This discourse, also listed as 'privileging of appearance in women discourse' (Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002), constructs women as more invested in physical appearances. It is predominantly taken up in 'Practical Exercise 38' within the textbook *Summary Skills*. It is a critique of women who bleach their skins to appear lighter. The strong female presence can be attributed to beauty, traditionally constructed as a 'woman's thing', and recognisable through linguistic traces such as 'fashionable', 'beautiful', 'light skin', and 'smooth complexion'. This discourse has close links to compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), illustrated in how women present themselves to appease the male gaze – to win 'man's heart', evoking a discourse of marriage as very important to women. There are also intertextual associations with narratives of women waiting in their towers – in need of a prince to rescue and marry them (Davies 2003; Walkerdine 1984, 1990), in texts like *Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty,* and *Njabala* (a Ugandan folkloric story). These stories, which have proliferated as elementary school readers, draw on White middleclass notions of femininity, which largely counteract the lived experiences of Ugandan women. The narratives therein serve to 'constitute the implicit … representation of a woman as a (future) wife' (Sunderland 2004, 40). Evoked within this intersection of discourses is a discourse of fantasy (Sunderland 2004), which constructs women as 'in-dreamland /la-la-loopsyland', – as 'unreal' and unreasonable vis-à-vis practical, rational males.

Closely aligned with the discourse of women's preoccupation with their beauty is a complementary discourse of 'women beware women' (Sunderland 2004), which positions women as competing for beauty and as jealous of each other. The text explains that women bleach their skin 'to compete favourably' with their peers. Linguistic traces such as 'peer pressure', 'easy to influence', 'bandwagon effect', 'insecure woman', and 'can't accept herself the way she is', are suggestive of the 'envious female gaze' (Sunderland 2004, 40). Even light-skin women bleach to get lighter, accentuating the construction of women as trivial and insecure. The construction of women as emotionally charged – typically with fear, insecurity and jealousy – is implicated in their positioning as trivial, displacing them from leadership, and firmly locating them in the hearth and home.

Discourses of women as preoccupied with physical beauty collocate their construction as naïve and gullible – unproblematically buying into Western constructions of beauty (such as light skin) while disregarding the health risks. Images of pretty, heavily made-up, dangerously thin girls are conjured within this discursive frame (Connell 2008). The dangers of bleaching are listed: 'get wrinkles faster … loses elasticity … longer … to heal after … cut or bruised … skin cancer … other ailments'. This list is juxtaposed with the statement: 'In spite of these risks, women and some men incidentally go ahead to apply these deadly chemicals'. Women are constructed as gullible, bleaching to appropriate media images, not realising that fair-skin people are from another race.

While the text overtly discourages bleaching, a pervasive at-risk practice, it speaks disparagingly, describing women's '*Mirinda* faces and *Pepsi* legs' in reference to the body parts such as knees, knuckles, toes, and lips that are likely to remain dark despite the bleaching. In making fun of women, the text produces them as the butt of jokes which has the effect of constructing them as not-to-be-taken seriously. Connell (2008) has mentioned 'whole genres of humour – bimbo jokes, woman-driver jokes … dumb-whore jokes, rolling-pin jokes – [which] are based on contempt for women's triviality and stupidity' (6). This pursuit of beauty, above all else, carries subtexts including empty-headedness, selfishness, and defunctness. Subtexts of empty-headedness are often juxtaposed with male preoccupations of the rational, objective, intellectual, which are regarded as more valuable and power*ful*.

The textbook writer seems to intentionally include men in stating, 'women and some men … are happy committing slow suicide.' This draws on a marginal discourse that implicates *some* men in a preoccupation with physical attractiveness and is oppositional to the dominant discourse in which 'boys are generally not taught to make themselves attractive' (Connell 2008, 3). Therefore, the use of 'some' as a qualifier for men accentuates the idea that bleaching is really a 'female thing'. As such, the discourse of men as preoccupied with physical appearances is cited in passing, sandwiched between several that are addressed directly to women.

Connell explained that such discourses crystallise through pervasive images in which 'girls are taught by mass culture that they need above all to be desirable, as if their main task was to lie on silk cushions waiting for prince charming to come' (2008, 2). Additionally, Connell has argued that:

> the discourse of fashion and beauty … positions women as consumers, subjects them to humiliating tests of acceptability … is responsible for much unhappiness, ill health … some deaths … Yet … women enter … because it delivers pleasures (Connell 2008, 59)

Indeed, as Francis (1998) explained, discourses of female beauty are not entirely debilitating. She convincingly argued that 'in a society where these discourses … predominate,

doesn't it feel great to believe that one has achieved that notion of beauty? As male eyes rest admiringly upon you, don't you feel a sense of power?' (Francis 1998, 169). Francis explained how glad she was (an elation I share) on reading Walkerdine's 'confession' of her love for beauty and style precisely because she indulges in this love too. Francis acknowledged that this position risks undermining the feminist project due to its investments in cultural practices of heterosexuality. Nonetheless, she problematized the difficulty puritanical feminist discourses have in recognising

> the pleasure and power of being constructed as a desirable girl … it is vital that we recognise the investments of pleasure, desire and power that many women and girls have in the narratives of female beauty and heterosexual romance. (Francis 1998, 170)

This stance disrupts the 'male as norm or think male discourse' (Sunderland 2004, 52) which valorizes masculine ways of being as liberating, and worth emulating, while discarding feminine ways.

Departing from the dominant construction of females as invested in their physical appearance is 'The Raffle', a lesson from *Integrated English* which draws on a marginal discourse of men as invested in their physical appearances. The text, set in a school, is male-dominated and narrated by Vidiadhar (a male character). This male-dominated text, which draws on discourses typically used to describe women, is transgressive. While Mr. Hinds is described as a young, athletic, math teacher, traits associated with masculinity, he is also 'careful about his dress'.

Mr. Hinds' way of dressing is described in detail: 'shining shoes', '[neat] roll up trousers', 'wine-coloured tie', 'brown suit', and 'cream tie'. This notwithstanding, he is athletic and 'stylishly' wins the Teacher's Hundred Yards race. He is also physically strong, as inferred from the way his strokes of the cane stung and lasted. It is ironic that his meticulous dress style, which *should* have ordinarily feminised him, instead added to the terror about him. The discourse of men invested in their physical appearance is largely associated with gay males – 'failed men' – and is thus viewed disparagingly. However, the discourse has a different connotation when associate with a typically masculine man. Mr. Hinds' masculinity was not threatened when he embraced practices associated with women seemingly because his hegemonic masculinity overshadowed the feminine, reassuring that he was *all* 'man'. Also transgressive is the idea that Vidiadhar, a male (rather than female student), undertook this description of the fashionable male teacher, engaging in trivial 'girl-idle-talk' through a detailed account of the teachers' attire. This male student, also atypically regarded as the 'teacher's pet', was also uncharacteristically constructed as 'soft' and gullible; traits typically associated with women. Also interesting is how Mr. Hinds is described drawing on a narrative of the 'wicked/evil teacher'; in a Ugandan context this would usually be associated with female rather than male teachers who are prototypically considered 'nicer'. Such narratives are a reminder of, and are intertextually linked to, the discourse of wicked witches in Western children's stories, which dominate Ugandan elementary school readings. The witches in such stories like *Wizard of Oz, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Cinderella* have traditionally been women. The text transgresses this discourse by associating evil with men rather than women.

Women as vulnerable victims

This discourse, which constructs women as weak, defenceless, and at-risk dominates in 'A Freedom Song', a lesson from *Skills of English* in which all the other characters are female.

This is probably because the poem is set in a domestic location and care is dominantly constructed as 'a woman's world'. Using verb phrases like 'washes the dishes … plucks the chicken … gets up early,' Atieno (who narrates the poem), like many of these girls, does all the housework without pay: 'Since she is my sister's child, Atieno needs no pay'. She is stopped from attending school, but ironically has to mind her uncle's children whom she prepares for school. Atieno is also constructed as a 'sly and jealous bad example to the kids … wants their dresses, shoes and beads'. This narrative draws on discourses which construct women as pre-occupied with physical appearances and jealous of other women. This envious female gaze collocates flimsiness and triviality because such 'wantings', associated with female desires, are not considered 'sensible'.

Further, a women-damn-women/women-beware-women discourse, which constructs women as complicit in the exploitation of other women is revealed. The narrator's sister provides the services of Atieno, her daughter, who works without pay in this cruel home, where the narrator's wife can then 'sit sewing every sunny day' while Atieno does all the work (Figure 2).

The women-damn-women discourse, like many gendered discourses, evokes other mutually supportive discourses. If women are jealous of each other, then they are unlikely to help each other. This not only disables the feminist project intended to espouse women, but also implicates women in joining hands with patriarchy to trample and victimise other women. This evokes the 'Queen bee syndrome' (Derks, Ellemers, and Laar 2011), which describes women who having achieved positions of power, and who undermine and legitimate rather than support and question the disadvantaged position of their female subordinates (Derks, Ellemers, and Laar 2011).

The poem also reproduces a dominant social practice, in which most housework and care work is done by women (Connell 2008; Francis 1998). When the narrator's wife goes to study, Atieno – another woman – takes on her domestic burden. Yet, ironically, women, whose role is less valued, are constructed as recipients of men's hard work: 'Don't I feed her, school my own ones … Aren't you grateful Atieno yo?' Further, Connell (2008) explains that women are 'less likely to be present in the public realm than men, and … have less … resources' (2). This is reproduced in the poem where the narrator, the only male, is the breadwinner, while the women are constructed as vulnerable, needy, and less powerful. This construction of men as breadwinners is a contradiction of my own experiences in Uganda. Most village settings conjure images of women's struggle with children strapped to their backs, tending farms and selling in markets. Urban settings also evoke images of middle-class women juggling a heavy workload with the cares of the home. This contradicts the pervasive common-sense discourses that position men as breadwinners, serving to re-inscribe unequal power relations and shore up patriarchy.

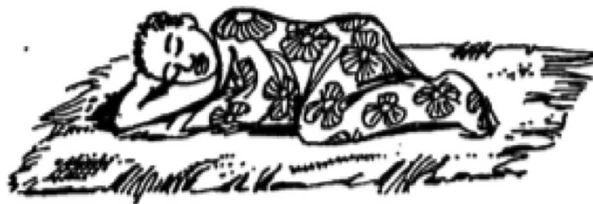

Figure 2. Atieno. From *Skills of English*.

Atieno eventually gets pregnant and dies during labour. She is presented in ways that erase her agency to resist the abuse to which she is subjected, and her fate, like many girls within such discourses, is predictable. Such stories I argue do nothing to highlight the resistance of girls to this victim-narrative. Instead, they work to crystallise their damnation, congealing the need for the prince-in-shining-armour narrative/discourse (Walkerdine 1984) in which men are the saviours of women. This female victim narrative, which disregards women's agency, is pervasive within Western constructions of women from the global south (Abu-Lughod 2013).

Atieno's story also illuminates the classed dimensions of gendered experience. Alongside gender and race, class remains a major determinant of the experiences, achievements and trajectories of girls and boys (Lucey 2001; Nayak 2001). Girls from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to take on roles as house-helps/ nannies for Ugandan middle class families for whom the employment of a maid is the norm. Girls from more affluent backgrounds on the other hand, are more likely to remain on the academic track. Maids are also more likely to be females (rather than males) from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, reproducing the traditional norm of women as nurturers.

The construction of women as victims is taken up in 'Practical Exercise 47' in the textbook *Summary Skills*. The text is about street girls in Kampala (the capital city of Uganda) who sell their bodies to survive. It describes the atrocities committed against these children culminating in a large number of deaths from AIDS. Although the writer later makes mention of this as a form of exploitation of girls *and* boys, s/he mostly alludes to girls through the choice of lexical items: 'girl's parents', 'daughters', 'waitresses', 'street girls', and 'sugar daddies' – a Ugandan phrase for older men who give financial favours to younger girls in exchange for sex. The predominance of feminine nouns and pronouns throughout the text is a foregrounding of girls as victims of prostitution. Men on the other hand are constructed as perpetrators of sex crimes, rather than victims per se.

Lexical traces like 'pimp', 'brothel', 'sexual tour', 'male customers', 'prostitutes', 'sex with children', and 'sexual services' collocate a male sexual drive as a discourse. Hollway explained that this discourse 'is explicitly about men and implicitly about women' (1984, as cited in Sunderland 2004, 58). It carries connotations of women as objects of men's sexual desire. As Connell asserts, 'women are treated as … objects of men's desire … A whole industry, ranging from heavy pornography and prostitution to soft-core advertising, markets women's bodies as objects of consumption by men' (Connell 2008, 6). Yet, the discourse appears self-contradictory because it constructs men as subjects and women as objects, while at the same time implicating men as objects since they fail to control their sexual desires ('point of no return'), blaming women for leading them on. This, as Phipps asserts, is an example of what Adrienne Rich (1980) described as the 'penis … once triggered cannot take responsibility for itself or take no for an answer' (Rich 1980, 646 in 2014, 40). The discourse of male sexual drive informs the expectation of fidelity for women (Muhanguzi, Bennett, and Muhanguzi 2011), also casting the responsibility for men's sexual permissiveness on them. This discourse, which treats 'women symbolically as a source of defilement for men' (Connell 2008, 6), is implicated in the web of discourses which produce a female subject who cannot be taken seriously. This might explain why, despite myriad equal opportunity reforms and gains from increased success in education, the number of women in top leadership positions remains disproportionately low (Connell 2008).

Further still, the discourse of women as vulnerable victims is cited in another male-dominated text, 'Detective Stories', from *Practical English*. The text, which is about crime and investigation, is addressed to males and alludes to males as the potential detectives:

> Detective stories are too exciting … they interest the reader by providing *him* … In a typical detective story … a *man* perhaps is found murdered … a detective is called... *He* gradually finds out … perhaps it might be plain that *Mr.* X wanted to kill the dead person …

and on goes the text, full of masculine nouns and their pronominal referents, relegating detective roles to men. The lexical absence of females and the foregrounding of males within the discursive field of security serves not only to shore up familiar gender-difference discourses, but also inscribes the vulnerable weaker and/or physically inadequate female who needs male protection, perpetuating gendered power relations.

Women-as-needing-men

The construction of women-as-needing-men is cited in 'Practical Exercise 15' from *Summary Skills*, which explains the precariousness of girls whose fathers are absent. The writer argues that the absence of a father negatively impacts girls' perceptions of males, the world, and their academic achievement. Citing a discourse that associates mathematics with masculinity, the absence of a father is constructed as likely to inhibit a girls' interest in the subject because of the apparent lack of a male role model. The text also argues that girls without fathers are prone to bad decisions and are basically vulnerable. Lexical traces like 'teenage pregnancy', 'dropping out of college', 'low self-esteem', 'negative reactions', 'sexually promiscuous', 'sexually aggressive', 'clumsily erotic', 'shy away from physical contact', and 'stunted in her emotional development' accentuate these girls' vulnerability and at-risk-ness. The writer predicts doom for the lives of fatherless girls, concluding that these behavioural patterns are carried with such girls into womanhood and may be the cause of unfulfilling relationships with men. This not only questions girls' agency in the decision to do subjects like mathematics, but also produces the passive female who needs a man to provide direction.

The lexical absence of *mother* in constructing the 'plight' of fatherless girls negates the role of mothers, suggesting that fathers are all-important (Lucey 2001). This valorization of the role of fathers in the upbringing of girls is contradictory and potentially disrupts discourses that construct mothers as universal nurturers. The valorization of fathers' roles over mothers', shores up patriarchy by exaggerating the former's role while understating the latter's. It constructs fathers as the silver bullet to raising children through their mere presence. Women, on the other hand, have to 'get their hands dirty' to raise girls (and boys), while fathers just have to be present, even remotely, and *voila!* Women are therefore positioned as always already in need of men at all stages: as girls needing their fathers, as young (and older) women needing princes, and as women needing husbands. Women are therefore positioned as vulnerable and in need of men for their growth, development, and very existence. This is implicated in a dominant discourse of marriage as very important to women (and not men) (Sunderland 2004). It is also bound up with the doom-and-gloom associated with lexical items like 'spinster', which echoes with loneliness, sadness, emptiness, incompleteness, and in-*need*-of-completion, as opposed to the word 'bachelor' which carries connotations of pomp, fun, and sought-after-ness.

Men as providers and/breadwinners

'Around the Fire', an exercise from *Skills of English*, is another male-dominated text that takes up the discourse of men as providers/breadwinners. The text is about Okonkwo, a father who wanted his son Nwoye to grow into a tough young man, capable of taking after him when he passes on. Okonkwo was therefore inwardly pleased that Nwoye no longer spent evenings in his mother's hut while she cooked, listening to stories about animals, sky, and earth which (unfortunately for Okonkwo) Nwoye inwardly preferred. Instead, Nwoye spent time in Okonkwo's *obi,* listening to stories about violence and bloodshed or watching him as he tapped his palm tree wine (Figure 3).

Nwoye also feigned anger and grumbled about women and their troubles each time his mother sent for him to go to the kitchen to help with some 'difficult and masculine tasks in the home'. This pleased his father.

The story dichotomizes male and female, producing them as oppositional. Males are positioned as tough listening to stories about violence and bloodshed, to prepare them for their roles as 'real' men. The association of violence with masculinity is a well-rehearsed discourse, with males steered towards competitive sports (Messner 2002) and immensely pressurised to showcase their toughness (Connell 2008). A dominant gender roles discourse is also cited, constructing men as physically strong, but women as physically inadequate, and as such requiring help with hard masculine tasks. The marginal position of women is also reproduced when Okonkwo is happy that his son now has minimal contact with them, thereby reducing the potential contagion of weakness, softness, and triviality, which Okonkwo associates with female presence and stories.

The lack of respect for women as a discourse crystallises when Okonkwo is pleased by Nwoye's grumbling about women and their troubles. To Okonkwo this is a disavowal of femininity and femaleness which simultaneously affirms masculinity and maleness. This lack of respect for women as a discursive practice was illuminated by Connell (2008) who attributes the failure of equal opportunity reforms in the workplace to men's rejection of the authority of women. He explained that 'the same happens in many religions, among them Catholic Christianity, mainstream Islam, and some sects of Buddhism. All these prevent

Figure 3. Nwoye in Okonkwo's *obi*, listening to stories of violence and bloodshed. From *Skills of English*.

women from holding major religious office' (6). Also cited in this text is the discourse that produces males as breadwinners, which is why Okonkwo wanted his son to 'man up' so that he can provide for his family when he, the current provider, dies.

This dominant narrative, which supports the construction of men as owners of most wealth (Connell 2008), is also taken up in 'Danda', an exercise from *Skills of English*. The text is about a man in Aniocha village whose car – named the 'land-boat' – was the first of its kind in the village; people gathered around the car in awe (Figure 4).

Of the nine people who gathered round the car, three are visibly women, drawing on a gender difference discourse in which cars are a 'man's thing'. One of the men, Danda, stubbornly enters the car when the person assigned to watch over it has gone to drink some water. There is an exchange between Danda and several of the villagers who try to get him out of the car. The ownership of the first car and the power that emanates from it is 'owned' by a man who attracts much attention and awe from the villagers who gather to look at his car. Four of the men in the text speak, including the herdsman, the driver of the car, Danda, and Ozo; two of the women also speak, although their names are not stated. This suggests a foregrounding of the individuality of men, while women are viewed as a nameless group or collective. This construction of women as a group not only masks their personal subjectivities, but is a magnet for attracting stereotypes through which women are 'bundled' together, negating differences within the group, and thickening the discourse which dichotomizes male and female.

Most of the talk is in awe of the car, for example, one of the men asks: 'Can the money in all Aniocha buy it?' However, one of the women, peering at her image distorted on the body of the car, retorts, 'I look like a spirit'. Juxtaposed with male investment and/or desire for 'serious' (valuable) stuff as reflected in discussions about the cost of the car, the woman's focus cites an enduring discourse of investment in physical appearance, accentuating the vanity and triviality of women. Further, in response to a reprimand from the driver taunting Danda to get out of the car, one of the old women reproachfully addresses the driver: 'You

Figure 4. 'The land-boat' From *Skills of English*.

can't talk to him that way, my son … He is not your age group'. Evoked in referring to a village-mate as her son, is a discourse of females as mothers. The discursive frame, which casts women into the private spaces of care, serves to push and define them primarily as housewives and nurturers, enervating their efforts to enter the public domain. As Connell (2008) argued,

> women entering the public domain – trying to exercise their rights as citizens – have an uphill battle to have their authority recognised. They may try to solve the problem by becoming 'honorary men,' tougher than the toughest … Most women in politics … have to struggle for their credibility. (56)

Yet, these discourses, while mutually supportive, are not without contradiction. I question how it is that women, who are constructed as trivial and preoccupied with appearance – signalling vanity, selfishness, and self-indulgence – can then create room for nurturing and caring for others. While these discourses exist seamlessly next to each other, an interesting contradiction therein suggests, as Foucault (1978) affirmed, that while particular discourses prevail and endure, no discourse is guaranteed because they have the potential to be unsettled and to trouble each other. Such contradictions in the ways women are constructed nonetheless, illuminate the double binds which women encounter in their lived experiences. Young women for example, are encouraged to express themselves sexually yet they are derided as sluts when they do (Tanenbaum 2015). Similarly, the beauty/narcissism double bind (Neumann 2017) requires women to invest themselves deeply in their appearance and yet they are derided for this. Such double binds buy into neoliberal girl power discourses (Gill 2007; Harris 2004), which construct unreasonable and conflicting standards for women setting them up to fail. I also call into question the pervasive construction of women as passive subjects who necessarily take up normative gendered scripts. The agency of women is as such erased, when they are pervasively produced to take up and/or reproduce rather than resist debilitating gendered scripts. This counteracts a myriad of Ugandan women's lived experiences that have deployed agency even within subordination to remake their realities (Namatende-Sakwa 2016).

In the third moment when a woman speaks in the story about the land-boat, she addresses the driver who is trying to get Danda out of the car, stating: 'the land-boat does not belong to you!' The driver, who had not talked back to any of the people (men) who had taunted him to leave Danda in the car, shot back at the woman: 'Get going, old bones!' at which the women are said to have shrunk away. This evokes the discourse of women as cowards who shy away when men exercise power. It is interesting that except for the women, and Danda the drunk loser, the driver did not talk back to other men. However, he had delivered an oft-referenced discursive barrage of abusive words for women such as the reference to 'old bones'. Old age is discursively cited to endow men with gendered connotations of wisdom and experience. In the case of women, however, it is often used pejoratively to insult them, insinuating a withered outdated-ness. It is also discursively linked to the idea of 'women's value as residing in youthful attractiveness' (Sunderland 2004, 65), which supports women's preoccupation with their physical beauty as well as a plethora of other discourses.

Conclusion

While *English in Use*, a textbook for teaching English in Ugandan schools, demonstrated the invisibility of women (Barton and Sakwa 2012), the assemblage of gendered texts used to

teach English during one school term which I analysed in this paper, are largely female dominated. Women within these texts have been constructed as marginal subjects through dominant discourses that produce them as emotional, preoccupied-with-physical-appearances, vulnerable victims, and needing men. Intertwined within these are mutually supporting discourses producing them as irrational, passive, naïve, gullible, trivial, empty-headed, insecure, jealous of other women, and nurturers. These discourses construct women in opposition to men produced dominantly as rational, and physically fit breadwinners. This configuration of discourses, which as I have demonstrated are interdiscursively linked, draws on an underlying 'common-sense' gender-differences discourse. Sunderland (2004) affirmed 'Gender differences is probably the most frequently invoked popular gendered discourse' (52). It is seemingly appealing because it offers a reassuring common-sense explanation for difference (Cameron 1996), accentuating a masculine/ feminine bipolarity to maintain essentialist thinking. This feminine/ masculine border maintenance (Davies 2003) works to sustain unequal and asymmetric power relations, characterised by a 'hierarchical female/ male duality' (Peterson 2002).

Therefore, while I recognise, as well articulated by Kaomea, that it is important to see 'oneself, one's people, one's culture included and represented in curriculum' (2000, 320), I also acknowledge Phelan's (1993) assertion that sometimes 'visibility can be a trap' (cited in Kaomea 2000, 320). The overriding appeal by scholars to increase the visibility of women while disregarding the ways in which women are produced, risks obscuring the workings of systems of power through discourse, to produce gendered subjectivities in ways that re-inscribed hierarchical gendered power relations. While the visibility of women is certainly important, we should exceed this to take into account, *how* women are represented: In what kinds of roles and positions are women produced? What power do they wield in those representations? How are they produced in relation to men? What are the power relations in their representations? Constructing female dominated texts in which women are produced in positions of powerlessness only serves to perpetuate unequal gender relations. Yet what is deemed powerful and empowering is subjective and must be defined by the context of textbook use, and taken into consideration in producing textbooks. Most importantly, textbooks should provide diverse gendered realities through images and narratives, which construct fluidity and multiplicity in performing gender. This would be useful in disrupting the gendered status quo as well as increasing the possibilities of enacting gender diversity.

Indeed, scholars vying for the production of non-sexist materials have suggested that students' thinking is likely to be extended 'beyond stereotyping, both through in-depth discussion and by providing a range of material – stories, pictures, films, people – which presents broader images of what girls and boys, men and women are really like' (Pinkerton 1992 cited in Walkerdine 1984, 88). This would be useful in exposing children to alternative discourses and practices around gender, disrupting some of the taken-for-granted 'truths'. Indeed, Davies and Kasama (2004) described reading as 'a significant aspect of subjection to the terms of one's cultural group, and paradoxically, it is the route to seeing beyond the terms of one's cultural group' (21). Therefore, changing discourses and practices in textbooks can avail diverse discursive positions and possibilities for males and females to take up, in order to disturb a given discursive order. Since textbooks remain a dominant curriculum material they are a significant site in the politics of challenging and transforming the gender order.

This notwithstanding, while both traditionally gendered and transgressive texts are disciplining forces imbued with the power to construct worlds, it is the active imagination of the reader that breathes life into the text. As such, the centrality of the teacher in using both traditional and progressively gendered textbooks cannot be overemphasised. The overriding focus on fixing textbooks however, overlooks the ways in which teachers and students may appropriate textual meaning. Sunderland et al. (2001) argue that textbooks depicting progressive representations of gender can be taught in ways that undermine them. Likewise, gender-biased textbooks can be taught in ways that challenge the biases. As such, teacher education remains central to promoting a gender-sensitive classroom. I recommend therefore, that teacher education should provide a curricular foundation for examining gender order in ways that support more flexible constructions. The exposure of teachers to more theoretical and practical approaches in attending to gender is one way of working towards a more fluid understanding.

Limitations and pointers for further research

This study was limited to English textbooks, and yet, English and language textbooks have been researched more than other disciplines. Further research should engage with gendered textbooks in other disciplines to provide more nuanced research in the field. Secondly, while this paper focuses on gendered textbooks, the broader study includes teacher and student engagements with gendered texts, illuminating how gendered discourses were taken up or rejected. I recommend that researchers conduct more classroom studies to show how teachers and students engage with gendered texts in the classroom. This is likely to demonstrate that such discourses, while pervasive, are far from prescriptive given that teachers and students have agency to take up, but also to disturb and trouble gendered discourses. Thirdly, even as I turned to teacher education as a panacea for attending to gendered texts to subvert the gender order, I recognise that the possibilities remain slippery, given that both teacher educators and teachers remain trapped within gendered discursive traditions. The study does not delve into the specifics and practicalities in regard to teacher education. It would be interesting therefore, for researchers to observe lessons in which expert teachers engage with gendered textbooks, providing a model to inform teacher education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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