

## A CRITICAL MULTIMODAL REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS IN BOTSWANA PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores how gender is depicted in English language textbooks used in Botswana's public secondary schools, focusing on gender roles, identities, and stereotypes through language and imagery. Recognizing gender as a social construct linked to power and ideology, the research highlights concerns that textbooks may reinforce traditional gender norms. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, and content analysis, it uncovers patterns of gender bias, such as the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles and the reinforcement of stereotypes. The findings reveal that these textbooks often contradict the Botswana Government's goals of promoting equity and inclusion. Given that textbooks influence students' perceptions of themselves and others, the study recommends that educators and curriculum developers create content supporting positive identity formation and actively challenging harmful stereotypes. By emphasizing the role of educational materials in shaping social norms, the research underscores the importance of developing more equitable and inclusive textbook content. Overall, the study advocates for a progressive educational approach that empowers all students, regardless of gender, fostering an environment of social justice and gender equality. This contribution aims to inform policy and practice towards more balanced and representative educational resources in Botswana.*

**Keywords:** *Botswana, gender, textbooks, stereotypes, multimodality, content analysis.*

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## Introduction

Botswana, a former British protectorate in Southern Africa, is positioned between South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The country has transitioned from being one of the world's poorest nations at independence in 1966 to one of Africa's fastest-growing economies, driven by diamond wealth, strong institutional frameworks, sound economic management, and a relatively small population (Statistics Botswana, 2022; Mooketsane et al., 2023). According to Mokibelo (2016), Botswana is a multilingual and multiethnic nation with each ethnic group having its own distinct culture. The country is lauded for its peace, stability, economic progress and good governance (Sebubudu and Mooketsane, 2016; Tsie, 2017), but persistent gender inequality rooted in patriarchal norms undermines these achievements.

Botswana's culture is deeply patriarchal (Phili, 2011; Sechele, 2022), with traditional and legal structures reinforcing women's subordination. Studies show that in Tswana culture, women were historically excluded from land ownership (Kalabamu, 2016) and leadership roles such as *dikgosi* remain male-dominated (Bennett, 2020). Men controlled the public sphere of politics, judiciary and government and are labelled in terms of their prowess, bravery, and leadership skills while women are associated with roles of motherhood, wifehood and domestic chores (Letsholo, 2009; Ellece, 2011). Chiepe et al. (2016) argue that Botswana's customary law marginalizes women by granting men authority as heads of families and guardians over women and children. This law permits practices such as corporal punishment and lacks explicit prohibition of domestic violence, which has contributed to the abuse of women (US Department of State, 2002, 2006).

Previous studies in Botswana reveal that history and social studies textbooks often marginalize women by excluding, misrepresenting, or stereotyping their roles. Mazile (1998) pointed out that social studies textbooks often depict males as authoritative and strong, while relegating females to subordinate roles. This bias channeled the boy child towards "masculine" subjects like mathematics, science and technology, and girls are steered towards "feminine" subjects such as home economics and language. He claimed that gender inequality has contributed to higher dropout rates and declining academic performance among girls at secondary school level (p.53).

This study is significant because the government of Botswana has shown commitment to ending all forms of discrimination including gender- based violence by formulating policies, and programmes such as the National Policy on Gender and Development (with a National Gender Commission to monitor implementation), Women's Economic Empowerment Programme (Botlhale, 2018). The government has also subscribed to the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Mooketsane et al. 2023). They have also called for the elimination of all forms of gender stereotypes in educational programs by reviewing curriculum (Policy on women in development, 1995) and ensuring that textbooks reflect gender equity (Mhlauli, 2011). These initiatives have improved women's confidence, economic independence, and social status enabling them to hold influential positions such as judges, ministers and governor of bank of Botswana (Kalabamu, 2022), but patriarchal gender inequality remains prevalent in Botswana's education system and teachers remain insensitive to it in their pedagogy (Magogwe and Bogwasi, 2004).

It is against this backdrop that this study examines the prevalence of gender discourses in English language textbooks used in Botswana's junior and senior secondary schools and proposes strategies to mitigate such practices. The remainder of the study is organized as follows: gender representation in textbooks, theoretical framework, methodology, Results/discussions, conclusion and recommendation.

### **Gender Representation in textbooks**

Representation is the meaning given to things around us which may not accord with reality but often works in the interest of the dominant classes, groups or institutions in society (Nwaefuna, 2022; Wodak and Meyer, 2015). Gender and language are intertwined because through language "man is constructed as the absolute sex" while woman as the "other sex," a notion that feminists continue to fight against (de Beauvoir, 1972, cited in Al Otoom, 2016, p. 130). Thus, language becomes an important aspect of gender because it is a means of perpetuating gender ideologies, often embedding biases and stereotypes within everyday discourse (Talbot, 2019). Language is also a means of social and ideological transformation because it allows people to challenge dominant ideologies and express different perspectives. Through words, narratives, and symbols, marginalized groups can question existing power structures, redefine meanings, and promote new ways of thinking that counter oppression or inequality.

Language and textbooks play vital roles in the socialisation of children because textbooks are the primary mode of information in schools and are written through language. Suchana (2020) claims that textbooks contain information that shapes students' perception about the world. They are written by authors whose experiences and ideas are influenced by society's practices, values and norms. If textbooks contain biased and stereotyped information, it is reflected in the students' attitudes since they view textbooks as authoritative tools (Nur & Farzana, 2024). In line with this thought, textbooks not only deliver academic content but also contribute to the construction of social identities and

the reinforcement of societal ideologies (Pingel, 2020). Conversely, textbooks not only promote gender inequality but foster change (Mooketsane, 2024) since they contain knowledge and ethical values that can shape readers' behaviour to make responsible decisions that support justice and human rights (UNESCO and UNODC, [2019](#)).

Globally, research around gender and education has proved that various forms of gender inequality such as gender stereotyping, quantitative imbalance, and male firstness are indexed in both linguistic and visual texts used in schools (Argular, 2021; Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Fonkwa, 2024; Nandine, Halder & Das, 2024; Porreca, 1984). One form of gender inequity, which is emphasized by some studies carried out in the Western world, is gender stereotyping, with males occupying a wider range of social and occupational roles, and women engaging mainly in domestic and nurturing tasks, both textually and visually. Gooden and Gooden's (2001) examination of American children's picture books for example, portrayed that most of the roles performed by women were traditional ones (e.g. mother, washerwoman), while male adults were illustrated in a variety of roles but were seldom seen caring for children or involved in domestic chores. Another form of gender inequality found in textbooks is the tendency to omit or under-represent women textually and visually, thereby implicitly presenting them as unimportant. Fonkwa (2021) investigation of gender inequality in ESL textbook used in Cameroon, claims that the male gender is afforded greater visibility than the female gender in terms of both pictorial and lexical representations. Additionally, males are assigned more occupational roles compared to females in the textbook. Furthermore, the conventionalized practice of putting female names after male names in coordinated expressions (e.g. Adam and Eve, Mr and Mrs Taylor) also conveys an implication of female inferiority.

Other forms of gender stereotypes in English textbooks are the use of adjectives and verbs associated to both males and females. Barton and Sakwa's (2012) study on gender inequality in English language textbook in Uganda proved that adjectives and verbs associated with men often convey action, power, and intellect, while those linked to women suggest passivity and emotion. Their results further revealed that positive female role models are under-represented and that the language of the text is not inclusive of females. The study further showed that the educators using the English textbooks taught English language uncritically, as a means of enhancing linguistic skills. In the same vein, Magogwe and Bogwasi's (2004) study on the perception of gender sensitivity among Botswana teachers of English using mixed method approach revealed that subtle gender bias exists in the Botswana English language classrooms, although teachers deny this notion probably because of their lack of training in this domain.

All the above reviewed studies on gender representation in English language textbooks indicate the existence of prevalence of gender stereotyped roles in various perspectives.

However, the present study differs from previous research because there is paucity of literature on the critical study of language and images in English language textbooks used in Botswana's junior and senior secondary schools. There is also limited study using triangulation methods to uncover the ideologies embedded within the visual texts and expressions associated with the images. This study closes this gap by attempting to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of male and female images in the English language textbooks used in Botswana junior and senior secondary public schools?
2. What kinds of activities are the characters performing in the images and where?
3. What ideologies or stereotypes are encoded in the images?
4. Do the language used reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes about females?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) articulated by Fairclough (2015), multimodal framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) and Halliday's transitivity model (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014) to explore the ideological and power dynamics embedded in English language textbooks used in Botswana government public secondary schools.

### **Critical discourse analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines the interplay of power and ideology in written, spoken, or visual texts. It aims to expose social issues such as discrimination, stereotyping, gender bias and inequality that are perpetuated through language, with the goal of fostering societal change (van Dijk, 2004; Fairclough, 2010).

Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 271-280) propose CDA as grounded in eight fundamental principles and one of the principles which is relevant to study is that "power relations and ideology are discursive." According to Fairclough (2001), power relations manifest in discourse, where dominant groups can shape and limit voices of marginalized groups. Such constraint can take the form of "what is said or done, or the social relations people enter into discourse, or the subject positions people can occupy" (p. 39). This means that the way language is used in specific discursive practices confers power on some participants and denies it to others (Fairclough, 2015). Historical insights from Kalabamu (2006) for example, highlight how pre-colonial Botswana exemplifies this male dominance, particularly in land and leadership roles. Fairclough (2003) further contends that power can be resisted, since wherever power exists, resistance is possible. Individuals can resist or transform power through alternative forms of communication, such as inclusive teaching, participatory dialogue, or critical media practices.

Fairclough (2015) further theorised that power is discursive within institutions. Institutional power refers to the ways in which power is exercised, maintained, and legitimized through discourse within social institutions such as education and media. This means that institutions use discourse (spoken or written communication) as a tool to sustain and control authority that ordinary people may not challenge easily. Institutions often embed ideologies within their discourse. For example, schools may reproduce gender or class hierarchies through curriculum content or teacher-student interactions. Fairclough explains that such discourses shape how individuals perceive themselves and others, making power seem natural or inevitable. Therefore, Fairclough (2003, 2015) emphasizes that language is not neutral but a social practice that both reflects and reproduces power relations.

Fairclough's CDA operates on three dimensions: "**descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory**," moving from micro-to macro-level analysis (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21). The **descriptive and interpretive stages** focus on micro-analysis, identifying linguistic features in a text and examining how they construct meaning and are produced or interpreted within society. The **explanatory stage** represents macro-analysis, where meanings are connected to wider social structures, institutions, ideologies, and power relations such as class, gender, or politics. (Baker & Ellece, 2011, Blommaert, 2005). At this level, discourse is viewed as a **form of social action** that can reproduce or challenge societal power. Thus, CDA links micro-level language use to macro-level social contexts, showing that language is never neutral but a powerful means of maintaining or transforming ideology. This approach is crucial because power dynamics are prevalent in patriarchal societies and Botswana exemplifies such a system (Sechele, 2022).

CDA is also inherently interdisciplinary because it draws upon a range of approaches or concepts when investigating complex social phenomena (van Dijk, 2009). This study integrates Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar with Fairclough's three dimensional analysis of CDA and Halliday's transitivity to critically analyze the discursive practices evident in educational texts, shedding light on the persistent patriarchal ideologies within Botswana's educational framework.

## Multimodality

Multimodality, also known as social semiotics, posits that the meaning of a text arises from various semiotic modes, including linguistic, graphic, audio, and visual elements (Parodi, 2012; Ventola & Moya, 2009). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 2021) developed a socio-semantic framework for analyzing visual images, grounded in Halliday's (1994) theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which encompasses three meta-functions: ideational (world experiences, representational), interpersonal (social world,

relationship between speaker and hearer), and textual (verbal world or flow of information in a text).

The first element of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar is called the narrative process. The narrative process represents participants engaged in visually unfolding actions or events. It typically involves vectors, such as lines, gestures, gazes, or movements that convey direction or force, linking participants and illustrating who is acting and who is being acted upon. Vectors are "imaginary or visible lines" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.203) that show who is doing what to whom in a picture and reveals power relations between the actor (who initiates action) and the goal (who receives the action).

The narrative process has two segments: action processes which are either transactional (involving multiple participants and exchanges) or non-transactional (featuring a single participant), and conceptual processes, which categorize participants based on class or meaning, resulting in classificational, analytical, and symbolic processes. The classificational processes relate participants to each other and often designating one participant as subordinate and the other as super-ordinate while the analytical processes connect participants in terms of "part-whole structures; the parts/possessive attributes belong to the whole/carrier." (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59). In the context of gender discourse, such visuals may depict one gender as dominant over the other.

Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar intersects with Halliday's transitivity model. The narrative processes (actional and relational) and conceptual process in visual grammar corresponds to Halliday's material process (action) and mental processes (seeing, feeling) and relational process of being and having in language. This is because Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar was adapted from Halliday's Transitivity model which explains how language represents experience. Both theories informed the present study because they show how ideology, stereotypes and power are indexed visually and linguistically.

The second element of Kress and van Leeuwen's model is the interactive/interpersonal structure, which explores the dynamics between the represented (depicted) and interactive (real) participants. Key dimensions include contact (visual demand vs. visual offer). Visual demand occurs when an image establishes direct engagement with the viewer, often through a gaze, as if seeking interaction while visual offer does not establish eye contact, portraying participants as objects to be observed rather than interacted with. Social distance (intimacy to impersonality) refers to the perceived closeness or remoteness between viewers and participants, determined by the framing and shot types used in visuals, ranging from close-ups to long shots.

The compositional meaning of images involves how visual elements are arranged to communicate meaning through three systems: information value, salience, and framing. Information value assigns significance based on placement. Left implies known information, right suggests new content, top conveys ideal or abstract concepts, bottom represents the real or practical, and the center highlights the main theme. Salience draws attention to specific elements using features like size, color, contrast, and focus, establishing a visual hierarchy. Framing uses lines, borders, and spacing to indicate whether elements are connected or separated, shaping how viewers perceive unity or division within the image.

## **Research Methodology**

This study employs content analysis which is commonly used in both quantitative and qualitative research. Krippendorf (2004) cited in Gheeyle and Jacobs (2017, p.1) defines content analysis as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts ... to the contexts of their use.’ In other words, it is a technique that is widely used in the social sciences to interpret meaning from the content of text, such as words, images, audio, or video by identifying patterns, themes, or biases (Cohen et al. 2007). Since the study aims to investigate how gender stereotypes and biases are espoused in English language textbooks used in Botswana public secondary schools, the researchers adopt this technique to examine how male and female characters are depicted in words and images.

## **Data collection/sample**

Four English language textbooks utilized in Botswana's junior and secondary schools were selected for thorough analysis: *Exploring English Form 1* (Conteh, Maika & Masendu, 2016), *English in Action Form 2* (Brennan & Grant, 2014), *Exploring English Form 3* (Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane, 2019) and *The Certificate English Language* (Bevan, 2006). The former books are used in Botswana public junior secondary schools while the latter is used at the public senior secondary schools. These texts were purposely chosen because they were endorsed by the Ministry of Education, specifically the Basic Education and Skills division and published by Heinemann, Longman, and Pearson Botswana.

The researchers concentrated on comprehension passages and selected exercises by critically and systematically analysing six units from Forms 1 and 3 textbooks, and 11 chapters from the Form 2 textbook, and 13 units from Form 4 textbook to obtain comprehensive insights necessary for their study. The justification for analysing more units in Form 2 and Form 4 textbooks was because the two textbooks have more images and activities than the previous texts. Images of both males and females were chosen

from these chapters. The final sample comprised of 120 male characters and 96 female characters in the images. The data samples are treated as representative because they are derived from the textbooks prescribed by the Ministry of Education and are widely read by students in public schools in Botswana. The texts were obtained from schools and are available in bookshops.

## **Analysis**

The researchers utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis to enhance their findings. For the quantitative analysis, the researchers analysed the textbook thoroughly by classifying the participants by sex: male and female based on observable traits such as appearance, hairstyle, and clothing. The number of males and females in images were quantified to assess gender dominance and their social and occupational roles were categorised into themes or frames, defined as structured representations of stereotyped situations (Nwaefuna, 2022; Odoemelam, 2021). This categorization facilitated an examination of gender discourse trends, with data organized in tables to measure disparities between sexes.

For the qualitative analysis, the researchers utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2015), Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) visual grammar and Halliday's transitivity model to investigate the roles attributed to male and female characters within the images, focusing on elements such as the actor-goal relationship and the actions depicted. The researchers examined the classificational processes to identify hierarchical representations among subjects. They also examine the vectors to identify who is the actor or goal and the nature of social interactions going on between the participants. The visual engagement (demand or offer) of the participants and the compositional meaning of the images were analysed. The researchers also analysed the visual through the lens of critical discourse analysis principles and the language associated with the images using Halliday's material and relational processes. This is because CDA is a theory and a method that caters for the analysis of multi-modal texts (Mansouri & Parina, 2023; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). The adoption of both quantitative and qualitative is justified because quantitative analysis mitigates the bias inherent in qualitative method.

## **Findings and discussion**

The analysis is divided into three sections. The first section presents the simple statistical data categorized in tables to show the disparities between male and female characters in the images. Section two presents the thematic analyses of the images to reveal the kinds of activities males and females were engaged in and places where the activities were performed. Section three analyses the images using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual

grammar, critical discourse analysis and Halliday's material process to unmask the power dynamics, discrimination and gender stereotypes depicted in the images.

### **Visual representations of males and females:**

#### **Research question 1: What is the frequency of male and female characters in the images?**

**Table 1:** The Visual representations of males and females in the 4 textbooks

No	Textbook	Male	Female
1	Exploring English, Form 1, student's book.	9 (4%)	11 (5%)
2	Exploring English, Form 2 student's book	32 (15%)	21(8%)
3	Exploring English, Form 3, student's book	26 (12%)	28(13%)
4	Certificate English Language	53 (24%)	36 (16%)
	<b>Total</b>	120 (56%)	96 (44.4%)

Table 1 above reveals that male characters dominate females in the pictures with a frequency of 120 (56%) males to 96 (44%) females. In exploring English book 1, the total number of males is 9 (4%) while females are 11(5%) which shows that female characters were more discussed in the textbook. In book 2 there are 32 (15%) male characters and 21 (8%) female characters in the pictures which show male characters were more discussed than female. In book 3, we have 26 (12%) male characters and 28 (13%) female characters while in book 4, we have 53 (24%) male and 36 (16%) female characters. The findings above align with Sechele (2022) views that male characters dominate female characters in various perspectives because there are more male characters than females in the images looking at the overall characters in the four textbooks.

#### **What are the kinds of activities the characters are engaged in and where are the activities taking place?**

**Table 2: Activities for men and women & places**

No	Activities	Male	Place		Female	Place	
			Outdoor	Indoor		Outdoor	Indoor
1	Leisure	24	17	7	16	10	6
2	Family	19	10	9	24	11	13
3	School	23	2	21	21	4	17
4	Domestic chores	3	2	1	3	1	2
5	Caring	9	6	3	9	7	2
6	Occupation	35	15	20	20	5	15
7	Causing trouble	7	6	1	3	2	1
	Total	120 (56%).	58 (48%).	62 (52%).	96 (44%).	40 (42%).	56 (58%)

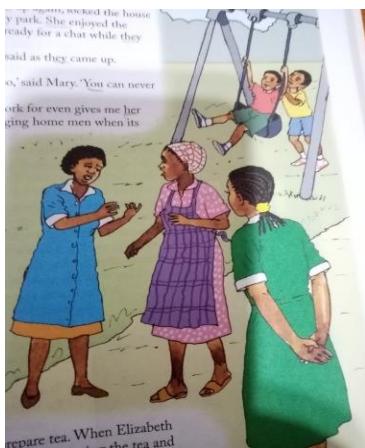
In table 2 above, the activities are thematised as leisure, family, school, domestic chores, caring and causing trouble. The table shows that male characters are more involved in activities that fall under the domain of leisure, school, occupation and causing trouble than the female characters. They are more involved in indoor activities with frequency of 62 (52%). For the female characters, there are 96 (44%) compared to male characters with 120 (56%) in the images. This shows that male characters are dominant while the female characters are under-represented aligning with Fonkwa (2021) observation that male characters are afforded more visibility than female characters. The table also reveals that female characters are more prominent in indoor activities with 58% than outdoor activities with 40 (42%). The table also reveals that female characters are more prominent in the activities that fall under family than men. This finding supports Gooden and Gooden (2001 cited in Aguilar 2021) that women are more home oriented than men, performing the role of sitting at home and nurturing children. Furthermore, there is no much disparity between male and female characters in the domain of education which reveals Botswana government's effort in promoting gender equity in schools (United Nations, 2022).

The table also reveals that men are more troublesome than women because they are more prominent in activities that involve causing trouble which depict the stereotypical assumption that female characters are passive and quiet (Spender, 2001). The table also shows that there are equal representations of both males and females in care and domestic roles which according to Botswana patriarchy norms belong to women. This representation reveals that the intervention of Botswana government in addressing gender equity is yielding dividends. Though the table did not show the kind of domestic or caring roles men are engaged in, a detailed analysis of the images may disclose such

emerging issues. There is also disparity in occupational roles. Men are frequently represented in occupational roles than women, but the type of roles designated to both sexes are also not visible in the table. The table 2 above did not clarify how power play out between males and females in the above activities since the study focusses on power relations between the sexes. Therefore, the next section below analyses the images using Fairclough's 3 dimensional framework, Kress and van Leeuwen visual grammar and Halliday's material process to show how gender stereotypes and bias play out in the images. This is achieved by focusing on the representational process/narrative process, interpersonal/interactive process and compositional meaning and Halliday's material and relational processes.

### Representation of male and female characters visually and linguistically

#### Leisure



**Fig 1:** Ladies gossiping  
Chanda, Chinodya, Kgomanyane  
(2019, p. 91)



**Fig 2:** Men reading newspapers  
Bevan (2006, p.129)

The text analyses two images using **Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar** and **Fairclough's critical discourse analysis** to explore how gender and social relations are represented in Botswana's visual culture. In **Figure 1**, three women and two children are shown in a playground. The women, dressed in aprons, are foregrounded, symbolizing their roles as domestic workers engaged in conversation, while the children play in the background. Their bright clothing draws viewers' attention, and the image conveys social bonding and communal life. However, it also reinforces gender stereotypes by depicting women in caregiving and gossiping roles, which diminishes their agency and portrays them as idle and unintelligent (Spender, 2001). From a classificational perspective, the

image portrays the female participants as social equals, all depicted as domestic workers without hierarchical distinctions. Their full-body framing suggests camaraderie and a shared social space. Through their indirect gaze, the viewer is positioned as a distant observer, reinforcing a narrative quality that reflects everyday life and natural social interactions.

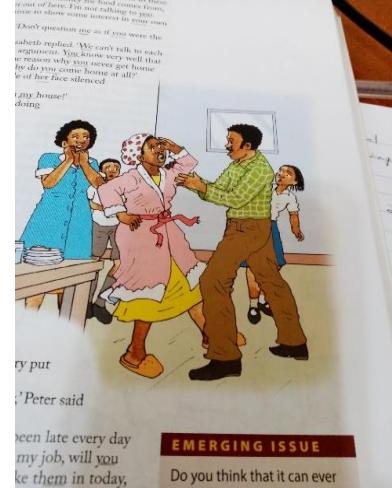
In **Figure 2**, both men and women are shown at leisure, but with gendered distinctions. The men, foregrounded and reading newspapers, are represented as intellectuals and dominant, while the back grounded women are shown serving and chatting. The absence of interaction between participants and with the viewer creates an “offer” image, depicting the viewers as passive consumers of newspapers. This reflects patriarchal norms in Botswana where men are viewed as heads of families (Phili, 2011; Mazile, 1998) and women occupy subordinate roles (Fonkwa, 2021). From **Fairclough’s perspective**, both images reveal how media discourse reproduces social hierarchies and ideologies. The visual separation and lack of interaction among participants suggest modern individualism and social detachment, demonstrating how institutional power shapes knowledge and reinforces gender inequality.

## Family

The concept of family lacks a single, definitive definition. Arsan (2023) describes it traditionally as a group of individuals related by birth, marriage, or adoption, living together with defined roles. However, this view has evolved. Boss et al. (2017) argue that modern families include diverse forms such as single-parent households, cohabiting partners, same-sex couples, and blended families. Kane (2019) emphasizes that what truly defines a family is the emotional connection and shared sense of belonging among its members. Nonetheless, given Botswana’s patriarchal context, the traditional definition is adopted here, as reflected in Figures 3 and 4, which depict conventional family structures.



**Fig 3:** Family, (husband threatening his wife) up a wife)  
(Chanda et al. 2019, p.151)



**Fig 4:** Family (Husband beating  
(Chanda, et al., 2019, p.86)

The analysis of Figures 3 and 4 using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Fairclough's critical discourse framework reveals the reinforcement of gendered power relations within family settings. In both images, men are portrayed as dominant actors: their gestures and vectors (e.g., pointing, grabbing) express aggression and control while women are shown as passive or fearful victims, highlighting powerlessness and resistance. For the classificational process, the men in both images are classified as superordinate because they are taller and more masculine than the women who are classified as subordinate because they are smaller. In Figure 3, the woman's indirect gaze and the bold word "RAPE!" create an offer image, appealing emotionally to viewers for justice. In Figure 4, the mutual gaze between characters forms an offer image, inviting viewers to observe domestic violence as a societal issue. This aligns with Fairclough's idea that power is not absolute but can be resisted.

Compositionally, Figure 3 positions the man as "Given" information representing traditional patriarchy, and the woman positioned as "New" symbolizing female resistance. The woman's bright dress and the salience of the word "RAPE!" foreground gender-based violence. This aligns with Fairclough's idea that power is not absolute but can be resisted. Figure 4 centers the couple to highlight domestic conflict, while the maid and children act as bystanders, symbolizing society's awareness of such issues.

Using Halliday's transitivity model, the text shows men as dominant verbal and material actors, silencing and controlling women through speech and violence. Applying Halliday's transitivity model of material process, the expressions such as "Peter, the only thing you have to say is to tell [verbal process] me what you have been doing until two o'clock this morning" portray a wife questioning her husband about his late return,

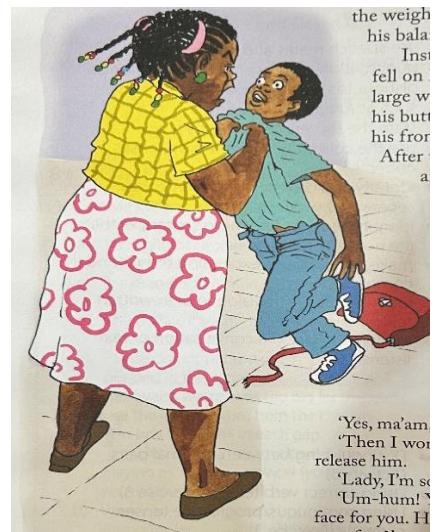
reflecting **traditional gender stereotypes**. Likewise, the dialogue “Shut up,” snapped [verbal] Peter, “don’t question [verbal process] me as if you are a man of this house” (Chanda, Chinodya, & Kgomanyane, 2019, p. 87) depict men as dominant figures with authority over women, and women as submissive and silenced through the physical violence: “a resounding slap [actor] on the side of her face silenced [material process] her” (p. 67). Verbal and physical actions such as silencing and violence emphasize **male control and gender-based oppression** within domestic settings

Overall, the analysis exposes a patriarchal struggle between domination and resistance, reflecting Botswana’s real-world gender-based violence (Mooketsane, 2023). It supports Chiepe et al. (2016) who note that Botswana customary law marginalizes women and normalises abuse. However, such representations in educational materials risk reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and socializing young people to accept male dominance and female submission as culturally acceptable.

### Causing trouble



**Fig 5:** Representing boys as thieves  
Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane (2019, p.6)



**Fig 6:** Boys as thieves  
Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane (2019.p.54)

The analysis of Figures 5 and 6, using Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) visual grammar and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), explores how visual and linguistic elements represent power relations between adults and children, particularly emphasizing female authority and moral discipline. Both images depict adults (female actors) exerting power over boys (goals). In fig 5, the adult female is dressed in an orange top with a green patterned skirt and wearing a camera around her neck. She has one hand resting on her hip while the other extends in a gesture toward the children (vector) which is suggestive

of confidence, control and power. The camera on her neck symbolizes observation which is suggestive of surveillance or power. The three children in fig 5 are in torn clothes and barefoot portraying an informal or rural setting. The two boys in torn outfits are positioned on the left (Given information) and this reinforces the traditional gender stereotypes that the boy child is always troublesome. In Figure 6, a woman on the left lifts a boy by his collar, illustrating authority and discipline, while the boy's lower position signifies vulnerability and resistance. Both women are classified as superordinate because they are bigger than the boys which adds to the power dynamics. The school bag on the ground suggests an educational context, and the colorful setting attracts viewers' attention.

From a social semiotic perspective, the women's direct gaze at the perpetrators and dominant positioning convey visual offer, engaging viewers to observe the disciplinary act. The boys are represented as delinquents or school dropouts involved in theft due to social neglect, while the women act as moral guardians and disciplinarians, upholding societal order. In this situation, the women hold the power by instilling discipline upon the boys who are powerless. This reflects Foucault's (1978) view that power is not fixed and can be positive depending on the context. In this context, power serves as a tool for correction and transformation. The women's authority is portrayed as a constructive force aimed at reforming the boys into responsible members of society.

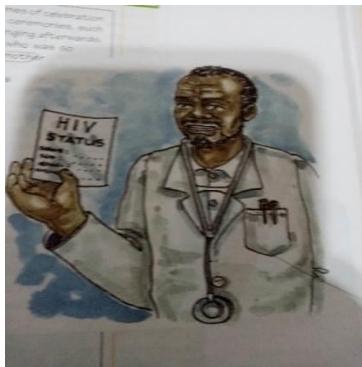
Lexical choices within the accompanying text such as "thief," "thief," the phrases "*frog marched* out of the store," "*sjamboked* their tender behind" (Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane, 2019, p.6), "*tried to snatch* her purse," "*snatched* her pocketbook," "*kicked* him hard on his buttocks," and "*shook* him till his teeth rattled" (p.54) serve to construct the male figures as thieves and pickpockets. [the italicized verbs are what Systemic Functional Grammar calls material processes in the ideational function which mostly construct social actors as performing real, observable actions in the physical world. The women act on the boys by disciplining them while the boys act on objects by stealing.

Descriptive adjectives such as "you (carrier) are (relational) "filthy" (attribute) and "your face (carrier) is (relational) dirty" (attribute) (p. 54), are relational attributive processes in SFG suggesting a carrier-attribute relationship where the boys are assigned unpleasant qualities. The descriptive adjectives "Three unkempt boys (p. 7) and the verb "then will get washed tonight" (p.54), together with the relational attributes reflect traditional perceptions associating masculinity with dirtiness and a lack of concern for personal appearance.

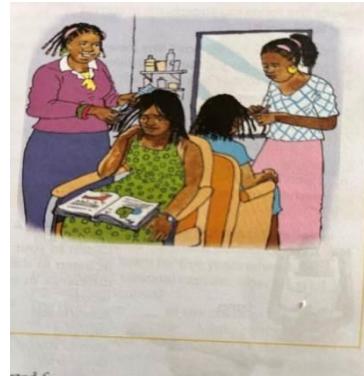
From a CDA viewpoint, the imagery and language reflect Botswana's cultural values of Botho that promotes community respect, morality, correction, and unity and where disciplining children is seen as a positive, corrective form of power (Foucault, 1978).

However, such depictions, when used in educational materials, may reinforce gender stereotypes while simultaneously instilling ethical values that promote social responsibility and respect (Mooketsane, 2024; UNESCO & UNODC, 2019). This images call the government to rethink restoring corporal punishment in schools (Gaegae, 2020) to support Botswana proverb that says: “**Lore le ojwa le sale metsi**” (**a person should be taught or guided while he or she is still young**) because early **education, discipline, and moral guidance** shape a person’s character

### Occupation



**Fig 7:** Men as doctors  
Brennan & Grant (2013 p. 113)  
p.61)



**Fig 8:** Women as hairdressers  
Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane (2019,  
p.61)

In Figure 7, a participant is depicted wearing a laboratory coat, with a stethoscope draped around his neck, and pens in his breast pocket, attributes traditionally associated with medical practitioners. The participant’s physical appearance depict a male character because he has low hair cut with a small beard. His facial expression involves a direct eye contact with the viewer; which is typical of demand image aimed at conveying information about HIV/AIDS and encouraging viewers to engage with the poster’s content. The depiction of the doctor is partially cropped at the knee level, close approximation with viewer just as he directly gazes at them suggesting a social distance that emphasizes his status as a figure of authority. Such visual representation underscores the association of medical authority predominantly with men, reflecting gendered stereotypes within professional roles. This biased portrayal marginalizes women’s capacity to occupy authoritative positions, confining them to support roles and reinforcing gender disparities in leadership within the medical profession despite that the government has introduced science and technology for all genders in the curriculum.

Furthermore, the textual component of the poster, which advocates for young women to undergo HIV testing prior to marriage (Conteh, Maika & Masendu, 2016, p. 75), implicitly positions women as the primary victims of the disease, and places the burden

of public health on them, thus promoting a gendered narrative of female vulnerability and inferiority relative to men. According to Botswana patriarchy structure, it is observed that men often control decision-making since they are the head of the family, thus limiting women the power to negotiate condom use or refuse risky sexual activity. This image is significant because it tries to sensitise the public with the social problems of HIV/AIDS pandemic at that time since cultural norms, gender inequality, and stigma amplify their risk and social burden.

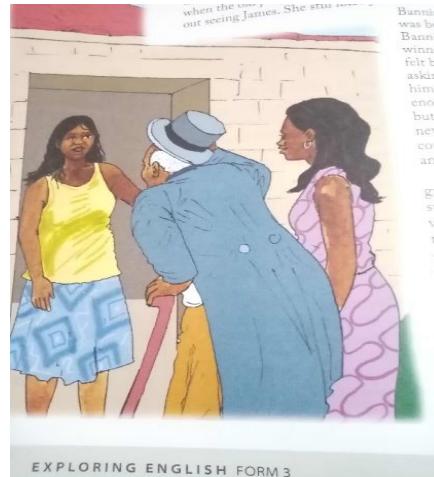
Contrastingly, Figure 8 depicts women engaged in less prominent occupational roles, specifically within the domain of hairdressing. The image features four female subjects; two are actively braiding hair, while the other two are seated. The interactions suggest a professional exchange of beauty services among women, with no evident display of power hierarchies or dominance. Nonetheless, this portrayal subtly reinforces gender stereotypes, particularly in workplace contexts where roles are traditionally gendered here, associating women predominantly with beauty and hairdressing, which are stereotypically regarded as feminine activities. Although men also work in related professions, such as barbering or hairstyling, their presence is minimal in educational representations. When such gendered portrayals are presented uncritically, they risk normalizing and perpetuating stereotypes, leading learners to accept these roles as socially natural and inevitable. This ongoing reinforcement of gender biases within educational materials contributes to the perpetuation of unequal gender norms and stereotypes.

### Representing men & women as Carers



**Fig 9:** women as carers

Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane (2019, p.36)



**Fig 10:** men as carers

Chanda, Chinodya & Kgomanyane (2019, p.118)

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2021) narrative process, the analysis of **Figure 9** shows a **female actor** engaged in the **material action** of caring for a baby, who is the **goal** of the action. The framing of the female figure is captured in a medium shot, from the knees upward which suggests proximity and approachability to the viewer. The direct gaze of both mother and child create a **visual demand**, conveying **authority, affection, and maternal power**, while bright colors and central placement of the participants emphasize their importance. The scene portrays everyday life and cultural practices typical of many African societies, including Botswana, where carrying a child on the back promotes emotional bonding and a sense of security for the child.

However, the image also **reinforces traditional gender stereotypes**, depicting women primarily as **nurturing caregivers** thereby perpetuating the notion that women's primary roles are reproductive and caregiving in nature (Ellece, 2011; Goode and Gooden, 2001). Such imagery perpetuates the belief that **childcare is solely a woman's duty**, thereby marginalizing men's roles in parenting and discouraging more **equitable gender relations**.

**Figure 10** portrays a scene involving **three characters**: an elderly man, two women (one dressed in yellow standing apart), and an implied **interaction or conversation** between them. The narrative, based on **Chanda, Chinodya, and Kgomanyane (2019, p.118)**, centres on **Elmina**, a young woman courted by two men: a **wealthy suitor (Bannister)** and a **poor one (James)**. While Elmina loves James, her **grandfather favours Bannister** for his wealth, viewing marriage as a means of **social and economic advancement** as illustrated in the following extracts below:

"Extract 1:

"They sat down and had a lot of small talk and then Bannister asked the grandparents if he could take Elmina out from time to time, and the grandfather, of course, agreed, sure he could tell a decent man when he saw one."

This excerpt further underscores the grandparents' preference for marrying their granddaughter to a wealthy man. Another extract illustrates the same motif:

"Extract 2:

"The grandparents watched with interest, wondering when Bannister was going to make a move to marry Elmina."

The above textual excerpts reveal the grandfather's **interest in securing Elmina's marriage to a rich man**, reflecting the **objectification of women** and their treatment as **commodities for family gain**. This representation highlights how **patriarchal and**

**economic values intersect**, portraying women's worth in terms of marital and financial benefit.

Overall, the image and narrative **reinforce gender stereotypes**, depicting women as **dependent on marriage for security** and defining their social roles primarily as **wives and mothers** (Spender, 2001). Such portrayals in educational materials risk normalizing the view that **a woman's value lies in her marital status and economic advantage through men**.

## Conclusion

The study has investigated how gender inequality is portrayed in English language textbooks used in junior and senior secondary schools in Botswana employing critical discourse analysis alongside Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2021) visual grammar framework and Halliday's transitivity model. The study indicated that despite Botswana government's commitment aimed at promoting gender equality, gender stereotypes and biases persist within the educational textbooks used in secondary schools. The analysis reveals a disproportionate representation of males over females, with males more frequently depicted in authoritative, active, and prestigious roles, while females are often portrayed in domestic, care-related, and subordinate positions. The language used against women also reinforce the existing gender norms that women are subordinate to men. These representations reinforce traditional gender norms, perpetuate unequal power relations, and may influence students' perceptions of gender roles.

The study reveals that while gender inequality persists in the curriculum, it also reflects the Botswana value of Botho, highlighting identity through relationships. It supports dominant discourses on child discipline and control, and affirms CDA's view that power is embedded in texts and images, yet open to resistance.

The findings have important implications for educational practice and policy. They indicate the need for curriculum reform that supports balanced and inclusive gender representations, both in language and visuals, to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equity. The study calls for curriculum developers to design better pictures that cater for the boy child. Pictures such as being involved in school activities or having a role model from the industries will shape their minds towards a new horizon rather than stealing or being involved in crimes.

## Recommendation for future research

1. The study recommends that the ministry responsible for teacher education train English Language teachers to adopt a critical approach to teaching and learning

2. Teachers should be encouraged to promote gender equality in their teaching practices
3. Future research could explore how students interpret gender representations in textbooks and how these influence their gender attitudes, aspirations, and behaviours.
4. Curriculum developers should revise the curriculum by integrating critical literacy modules into teacher training programs

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