

WOMEN IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS - WHAT MESSAGE DOES THIS SEND TO THE YOUTH?¹

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Abstract

History textbooks, like all textbooks, play an important role in the facilitation of learning. They act as vehicles by means of which past knowledge legitimated by government and related authorities, as contained in the curriculum, is presented to school-going youth. Textbooks are by nature powerful and authoritative because they are approved by government and other authorities. As a result, school-going youth are likely to consider the way women and men are portrayed in history textbooks as unquestionable and historically truthful. Having reported on findings of empirical studies on women in history textbooks from, amongst others, Taiwan; the United States; the United Kingdom; Russia and South Africa, we conclude that women are underrepresented, misrepresented and marginalised in history textbooks. Women are portrayed as historically unimportant and incapable, contributing little to society outside of the domestic sphere. We furthermore argue that this type of portrayal sends powerful messages to the youth about men and women in history and in contemporary society.

Keywords: History textbooks; Gender; Women; Youth; Females.

Introduction

History textbooks, like all textbooks, play a vital role in education, and their use to support students' learning about the past is an almost universally accepted practice.² Textbooks are widely used in the classroom to illustrate

1 This article was originally presented as a paper at the 16th Annual Conference of the South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT), 23-24 September, hosted by UNISA at the Willow Park Conference Centre and Resort, Gauteng, South Africa.

2 K Bourdillon, "History and social studies – Methodologies of textbook analysis" (Unpublished paper presented at the Report of the Educational Research Workshop, Braunschweig, Germany, 1992), pp. 1-8; S Foster & K Crawford, "The critical importance of history textbook research", S Foster & K Crawford, *What shall we tell the children?: International perspectives on school history textbooks* (Connecticut, Information Age Publishing, 2006), pp. 1-23.

historical information, concepts, skills and to facilitate learning. As such, history textbooks act as vehicles or channels through which legitimated past knowledge, as contained in the curriculum, is presented to the ultimate consumers of this product – the school-going youth.³ This is the case because textbooks are powerful cultural, ideological and political tools of the society in which the youth they are aimed at are socialised. Although some researchers⁴ argue that the content of textbooks is not necessarily unquestioningly learnt as it is presented because students and teachers select material, accepting or rejecting content we argue that because of the powerful nature of textbooks even the sections selected could have an impact.

In this article we, in the context of the above, argue that the youth are likely to consider the way men and women are portrayed in textbooks to be unquestionable or beyond dispute. We further argue that history textbooks, besides serving curricular goals, also convey a sub-text which influences the understanding of the social and historical roles of men and women. The way women are portrayed in history textbooks therefore, in all likelihood, influences the way the youth understand the contributions of women to history. Our arguments are based on reports on the findings of empirical studies on women in history textbooks from, among others, Taiwan; the United States; the United Kingdom; Russia and South Africa. In pursuing this line of argument, the position of women in history textbooks will be problematized and the following research questions pursued: How are women portrayed in history textbooks and what are the implications of this for the youth?

The article is divided into three sections. The first section, based on the literature reviewed, focuses on how women are portrayed and represented in relation to the portrayal and representation of men in history textbooks. In this, the focus is placed on the historical roles attributed to women, the frequency with which women appear in historical accounts and the language used in the textbooks. In the second section, we interrogate the message that such a portrayal sends to the youth and examine the ideological power of

3 MW Apple, "The culture and commerce of the textbook", pp. 22-39; PD Regueiro, "An analysis of gender in a Spanish music textbook", *Music Education*, 2 (1), 2000, pp. 57-73.

4 DR Olson, "On the language and authority of textbooks", S de Castell, A Luke & C Luke, *Language, authority and criticism: Readings on the school textbook* (London, Falmer, 1989), pp. 233-244; V Kalmus, "What do pupils and textbooks do with each other?: Methodological problems of research on socialization through educational media", *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36 (4), 2004, pp. 469-485; F Pingel, "From evasion to a crucial moral and political education: Teaching national socialism and the holocaust in Germany", S Foster & K Crawford, *What shall we tell the children?: International perspectives on school history textbooks* (Connecticut, Information Age Publishing, 2006), pp. 131-153.

textbooks. In conclusion, we argue that history textbooks convey the message that women contributed little to society outside of the domestic sphere. By adopting such a perspective, history textbooks convey a powerful educational message which serves to perpetuate a certain *status quo*.

The portrayal and representation of women in history textbooks – a review of the literature

Recurring themes in the literature reviewed related mainly to the portrayal and representation of the historical roles and activities of men as opposed to those of women; the representation in text and illustrations of women as well as the gendered language employed in history textbooks. These three broad themes will be interrogated in some depth below.

The roles and activities of women as depicted in history textbooks

According to the literature reviewed, women in history textbooks are largely portrayed in stereotypically traditional feminine roles in a domestic environment.⁵ It is only on rare occasions that they are shown in more traditionally masculine roles outside the home.⁶ O’Kelly, in her content analysis study of gender role images within fine art works produced during the Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Modern periods, found a world dominated by men who are portrayed as rulers and leaders. In addition, they were shown as soldiers and workers, with a small number shown in somewhat more gender-neutral activities such as attending the theatre. None of the men was portrayed in conducting ‘traditionally feminine’ activities in a domestic environment. However, women, on the other hand, were almost exclusively portrayed in the roles of mothers, housewives, prostitutes, servants and peasants. It was the exception for women to be portrayed in more traditionally

5 CG O’Kelly, “Gender role stereotypes in fine art: Content analysis of art history books”, *Qualitative Sociology*, 6 (2), 1983, pp. 136-148; A Osler, “Still hidden from history? The representation of women in recently published history textbooks”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235; CE Sleeter & CA Grant, “Race, class, gender and disability in current textbooks”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics of the textbook* (New York, Routledge, 1991), pp. 78-109. Y Su, “Ideological representations of Taiwan’s history: An analysis of elementary social studies textbooks, 1978-1995”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37 (3), 2007, pp. 205-237; S Schoeman, “The representation of women in a sample post-1994 South African school history textbooks”, *South African Journal of Education*, 129, 2009, pp. 541-556.

6 CG O’Kelly, “Gender role stereotypes in fine art...”, *Qualitative Sociology*, 6 (2), 1983, pp. 136-148; A Osler, “Still hidden from history?...”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235; CE Sleeter & CA Grant, “Race, class, gender and disability...”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109. Y Su, “Ideological representations of Taiwan’s history...”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37 (3), 2007, pp. 205-237; S Schoeman, “The representation of women...”, *South African Journal of Education*, 129, 2009, pp. 541-556.

masculine pursuits such as leading soldiers to victory, farming and bartending.⁷

In the United States, Sleeter and Grant concluded that most of the social studies textbooks tended to portray women in both traditional and non-traditional roles. Women were, however, not usually discussed in sections examining major political and economic decision-making events activities. Furthermore, regardless of their portrayal, the roles and contributions of women were downplayed in the detail of the stories in these textbooks, resulting in their marginalisation. Men on the other hand, were rarely portrayed in 'traditional female' roles and dominated the storylines in the text.⁸ Osler, in her content analysis study conducted in the United Kingdom, came to similar conclusions. The pictures of women in the history textbooks she researched showed them engaged in predominantly 'traditionally domestic' roles. For instance, women were shown looking after children and nursing babies, spinning, working in the kitchen and dancing. They appeared in family portraits with their husbands and children or were seen being punished as scolds and as witches. In portrayals of scientific discoveries, they were shown as mere observers. In contrast, men were shown in almost all of the above activities but not as in the 'traditionally feminine' roles. In addition, men were also shown as involved in activities such as fishing, riding horses, praying and preaching, and loading goods for transportation.⁹

A study conducted by Su on the ideological representations of women in Taiwanese history in elementary social studies textbooks documented similar results. She reported that no space was devoted to Taiwanese women's experiences and perspectives or to their contributions to the past. In addition, their social, economic and political status was not mentioned. The textbooks' content, however, did illuminate the fact that women faced pressure because of their dual roles as employees as well as the primary caregivers of children and as engaged in domestic work. However, the content never questioned why the pressures of caring for children and doing housework remained the sole responsibility of women. Instead, the text simply validated the fact that such roles were traditionally expected of women.¹⁰

Likewise Schoeman, in her content analysis study of history textbooks in South Africa, found that women were mostly cast in 'traditionally female' roles.

7 CG O'Kelly, "Gender role stereotypes in fine art...", *Qualitative Sociology*, 6 (2), 1983, pp. 136-148.

8 CE Sleeter & CA Grant, "Race, class, gender and disability...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109.

9 A Osler, "Still hidden from history...", *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235.

10 Y Su, "Ideological representations of Taiwan's history...", *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37 (3), 2007, pp. 205-237.

Furthermore, the pictures in these textbooks revealed a dominant conception of women in a domestically-oriented field in which they were portrayed as dependable, conforming and obedient. Contrary to this, men were portrayed as active, assertive and curious. They dominated the images and content in the process. The gender roles portrayed in these textbooks were also patriarchal in nature and presented from a male perspective.¹¹ In another South African study, Fardon and Schoeman noted that no reference was made in the text to the occupations and activities of women. The content was exclusively about men and masculine activities/occupations, with 64 incidences of traditionally male-oriented occupations and activities mentioned, while no reference was made to those of women.¹²

Muravyeva, in her study of Russian world history textbooks, concluded that the narratives dealt with masculine characteristics of power. Descriptions of issues of economy, revolution, war and international relations were all from a male perspective. When women were mentioned in these textbooks, it was because they were notorious. For instance, Catherine the First, the wife of Peter the Great was labelled as a prostitute and Olga, the wife of Prince Igor the First of Kiev, was mentioned because she annihilated the nation in revenge for the death of her husband. At the same time, whenever the country was imaged as “mother Russia” it was in a negative sense – it had been conquered, ravished, devastated or economically ruined.¹³

This portrayal was exacerbated by the tendency to “ghettoise” women when they did appear in history textbooks. Commeyras and Alvermann, in their analysis of content in the textbooks, revealed that the books represented an androcentric view of history. Attempts to include women were achieved by adding curriculum subsections on famous women; paragraphs about women’s status and rights and sentences about their contributions as the wives and or mothers of famous men. This invariably happened in isolated sections generally removed from the main text.¹⁴

What can be concluded at this stage is that a general consensus exists among the various studies reviewed that women, if they appear at all, are present in history textbooks in stereotypically traditional feminine roles and in positions

11 S Schoeman, “The representation of women...”, *South African Journal of Education*, 129, 2009, pp. 541-556.

12 J Fardon & S Schoeman, “A feminist post-structuralist analysis of an exemplar South African school history textbooks”, *South African Journal of Education*, 30, 2010, pp. 307-323.

13 MG Muravyeva, “Shaping gender and national identity through Russian history textbooks on world history”, *Yearbook of the International Society for Didactics of History* 2005, 2006, pp. 51-62.

14 M Commeyras and DE Alvermann, “Reading about women in world history textbooks from one feminist perspective”, *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), 1996, pp. 31-48.

subordinate to those of men.

Number of women present in history textbooks

Apart from the differences in historical roles, the literature reviewed revealed that the representation of women and men in history textbooks is not nearly numerically equal, with women not represented as often as men in either text and illustrations.¹⁵ A study conducted by O’Kelly revealed that women represented 30 per cent of the subjects in the art works in the art history textbooks she studied. When women did appear, they were depicted because of their husband’s or father’s achievements and not for their own accomplishments. In contrast, men constituted 70 per cent of the subjects while also making-up 60 per cent of portraits studied.¹⁶ Although Sleeter and Grant concur with O’Kelly, their studies were undertaken within a different context, on different textbooks. They reported that males were represented in more pictures than females, the numbers being 855 and 512 respectively.¹⁷

In a different research project, Ruthsdotter provides a vivid picture of the marginalisation and underrepresentation of women in history textbooks in the United States. She cites examples from two commonly used history textbooks: *A history of the United States*¹⁸ in which women constituted less than three per cent of the content and *World history: Traditions and New Directions*,¹⁹ of which only two per cent of content dealt with women.²⁰ Within the South African context, Fardon and Schoeman also found that women were generally absent from the discursive text of the textbooks they analysed.²¹

On a more positive note, Frederickson, in her content analysis of United States history survey course textbooks for college and high school students,

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- 15 KA Chick, “Gender balance in K-12 American history textbooks”, *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 1 (3) 2006, pp. 284-290; J Fardon & S Schoeman, “A feminist post-structuralist analysis...”, *South African Journal of Education*, 30, 2010, pp. 307-323. JE Fournier & SS Wineburg, “Picturing the past: Gender differences in the depiction of historical figures”, *American Journal of Education*, 105 (2), 1997, pp. 160-185; A Osler, “Still hidden from history?...”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235. CE Sleeter & CA Grant, “Race, class, gender and disability...”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109; Y Su, “Ideological representations of Taiwan’s history...”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37 (3), 2007, pp. 205-237.
- 16 CG O’Kelly, “Gender role stereotypes in fine art...”, *Qualitative Sociology*, 6 (2), 1983, pp. 136-148.
- 17 CE Sleeter & CA Grant, “Race, class, gender and disability...”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109.
- 18 DJ Boorstin, BM Kelley & RF Boorstin, *A history of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1992), pp. 1-25.
- 19 PN Stearns, DR Schwartz & BK Beyer, *World history: Traditions and New Direction* (Menlo Park Calif, Addison-Wesley, 1991), pp. 4-17.
- 20 M Ruthsdotter, “Writing women back into history”, *Education Digest*, 61 (7), 1996, pp. 13-16.
- 21 J Fardon & S Schoeman, “A feminist post-structuralist analysis...”, *South African Journal of Education*, 30, 2010, pp. 307-323.

found that some minor improvements regarding the inclusion and portrayal of women were taking place. She noted an increase in the number of women included in the indexes of certain general survey history textbooks. For example, the first edition of *The National Experience*²² included only six topical entries on women, while the eighth edition, published in 1993, included 14 topical entries.²³ A similar pattern was observed in the editions of *The American people*²⁴ in which the first edition of 1986 contained 54 topical references to women while the fifth edition had more than double that, with 120 references. According to Frederickson, no single textbook for the survey history course had reduced the number of references to women in later editions.²⁵ Despite this encouraging phenomenon, the representation of women, when compared to men, still remained limited and marginal. For instance, textbooks reviewed by Frederickson barely reflected women in the tables of contents, while women are also almost completely absent from charts and maps, which were presented from a predominantly male perspective. She concluded that the narrative of the American past, covered in survey courses, is still largely male-dominated.²⁶

Chick, who analysed the K – 12 United States history textbooks for gender balance, concurs with the findings of Frederickson. She reported that all three textbooks researched contained significantly more men than women in both content and pictures. Chick noted that though the content on and illustrations of both men and women increased across grade levels from elementary to high school, the rate of increase for men was greater than that of women. Thus, as students proceeded in their studies they were increasingly exposed to a smaller male-to-female ratio.²⁷

From the above it is clear that in terms of sheer numbers men are, in studies conducted across the world, far more visible in history textbooks. The implication of this is that the youth are on a global scale receiving a similar message namely that women did less in history and are consequently therefore represented accordingly.

22 JM Blum, *The National Experience* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 1-858.

23 M Frederickson, "Surveying gender: Another look at the way we teach United States history", *The History Teacher*, 37 (4), 2004, pp. 476-484.

24 GB Nash, JR Jeffrey, JR Howe, PJ Frederick, AF Davis, AM Winkler, C Mires, CG Pestana & A Yarnell, *The American people: Creating a nation and a society* (New York, Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 1-999.

25 M Frederickson, "Surveying gender...", *History Teacher*, 37 (4), 2004, pp. 476-480.

26 M Frederickson, "Surveying gender...", *History Teacher*, 37 (4), 2004, pp. 476-484.

27 KA Chick, "Gender balance in K-12...", *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 1 (3) 2006, pp. 284-290.

Language

Sexist language was the third important theme that emerged from the literature reviewed. Language, both written and oral, is a powerful tool that can be used subjectively, with the ability to locate subjects in positions of power or to demean them -or even exclude them entirely from history textbooks. One cannot overlook how language is used to present women and men and their historical experiences.²⁸

The studies reviewed showed that in most history textbooks the use of sexist language to refer to both women and men was generally avoided.²⁹ For instance, Osler reported that the texts she studied steered clear of the use of sexist language and instead opted, where possible, to use gender neutral terms to refer to both men and women.³⁰ Similarly, Sleeter and Grant reported that the authors of the social studies textbooks they analysed had, for the most part, successfully eliminated sexist language. There were a very few instances where reference would be made to a fireman or a postman instead of a fire fighter or a mail carrier, for example.³¹

In spite of the attempts to avoid sexist language, the problem of the presentation of content from a male perspective had not been resolved.³² Osler reported that one of the textbooks examined had adopted a style similar to traditional boys' comics with cartoons and jokes presented from a male perspective, showing mainly male characters.³³ Commeyras and Alvermann showed similar results in their study. They reported that language traditionally associated with female characteristics such as sensuality; insecurity; beauty; wilfulness and cupidity was used to describe women in their rise to positions of power and influence.³⁴ Similarly, Fardon and Schoeman observed a related

28 A Osler, "Still hidden from history?...", *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235; M Commeyras and DE Alvermann, "Reading about women in world history textbooks...", *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), 1996, pp. 31-48; S Schoeman, "The representation of women...", *South African Journal of Education*, 129, 2009, pp. 541-556.

29 CE Sleeter & CA Grant, "Race, class, gender and disability...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109; M Commeyras & DE Alvermann, "Reading about women in world history textbooks...", *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), 1996, pp. 31-48; J Fardon & S Schoeman, "A feminist post-structuralist analysis...", *South African Journal of Education*, 30, 2010, pp. 307-323.

30 A Osler, "Still hidden from history?...", *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235.

31 CE Sleeter & CA Grant, "Race, class, gender and disability...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109.

32 CE Sleeter & CA Grant, "Race, class, gender and disability...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109; M Commeyras & DE Alvermann, "Reading about women in world history textbooks...", *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), 1996, pp. 31-48; J Fardon & S Schoeman, "A feminist post-structuralist analysis...", *South African Journal of Education*, 30, 2010, pp. 307-323.

33 A Osler, "Still hidden from history?...", *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235.

34 M Commeyras & DE Alvermann, "Reading about women in world history textbooks...", *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), 1996, pp. 31-48.

pattern in the use of language to present women in a South African context. They reported that the narrative structure in the examined texts favoured men rather than women and supported masculine meaning. In addition, the textbook used a neutral and naturalising style in its narrative which rendered women and androcentricity invisible.³⁵

From this analysis it is apparent that, although sexist language is avoided in most history textbooks, the problem of presenting the narrative from a male perspective still persists. It can therefore be argued that women are generally marginalised and underrepresented in - and in some cases even excluded from - history textbooks. This is reflected in both the content coverage, illustrations used and the language employed. What message would this then send to the users of these books – the school-going youth?

The possible implications of the portrayal and representation of women in history textbooks on school-going youth

It is apparent from the preceding review of the literature that women are portrayed very differently from men in history textbooks. In this section we argue, based on this evidence, that such portrayals convey a powerful message to the youth which could influence their attitude towards, and view of, women in society past and present, since textbooks are believed to reflect the reality and truth of the society they serve. This we will do by interrogating three vignettes from the literature before embarking on a discussion.

Vignette 1 – Women as exceptional or wicked

Some of the studies reviewed portrayed women performing traditional masculine activities such as leading soldiers to victory, farming and bartending.³⁶ This carries both a positive and a negative message – positive in the sense that it recognises women as having the ability and potential to perform successfully roles that are traditionally viewed as those of men. However, on the other hand, since very few women are portrayed in such activities, it can give the impression that, for example, working in the army, farming and bartending are dangerous, difficult and mysterious jobs not meant for the majority of ordinary women but are activities for a minority

35 J Fardon & S Schoeman, "A feminist post-structuralist analysis...", *South African Journal of Education*, 30, 2010, pp. 307-323.

36 CG O'Kelly, "Gender role stereotypes in fine art...", *Qualitative Sociology*, 6 (2), 1983, pp. 136-148.

of “special and extra-ordinary women”. This sends the message to both girls and boys that girls need to be exceptional to perform the roles that history has depicted as relatively easy or natural for men.

What was also evident in the reports reviewed was the depiction of women “behaving badly” by, for example, being punished for being scolds and witches³⁷ or for prostitution or being a woman bent on annihilation for the sake of revenge.³⁸ The logical assumption to be made, considering the underrepresentation of women in history textbooks as outlined earlier, is that women outside of the domestic sphere are responsible for only negative or evil contributions to history. Men, on the other hand, are spared the indignity of these portrayals. The sub-text is simple - historically only women, and especially women of high status and influence, like Catherine the First and Olga, behaved in such a way. Furthermore, the study by Commeyras and Alvermann revealed that a language of sensuality and willfulness was used by historians to describe women who had risen to positions of power.³⁹ To draw this to its logical conclusion, the literature revealed that women are underrepresented in history textbooks and when they do appear in positions of power, it is because of feminine mystique or because they had behaved very badly. What then should the youth using these textbooks learn from this? That historically, women rose to high positions not because of merit or hard work but through crooked, wicked and seductive means?

Vignette 2 – Science is not for women

The second cameo gleaned from the literature depicts women shown as observers at a scientific experiment conducted by men.⁴⁰ The implication of this is that science and scientific experiments are for men and are dangerous or frightening to women, who must meekly and cautiously stand at a distance and merely observe their courageous men. The message seems to be that science is the dangerous domain of men and is not for women, who are incapable of practising it.

37 A Osler, “Still hidden from history?...”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235.

38 MG Muravyeva, “Shaping gender and national identity...”, *Yearbook of the International Society for Didactics of History 2005*, 2006, pp. 51-62.

39 M Commeyras & DE Alvermann, “Reading about women in world history textbooks...”, *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), 1996, pp. 31-48.

40 A Osler, “Still hidden from history?...”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235.

Vignette 3 – The historical place of women is in the home and if they leave, they must do double the work

According to the literature reviewed, women in history textbooks were largely portrayed as performing the ‘traditional roles’ of wife, mother, cleaner, cook and so forth, in a domestic setting.⁴¹ But women were also presented in dual roles – doing not only these, but other jobs as well. However, in none of the studies reviewed did the role of men change convincingly in this regard by for example, being portrayed as supportive of women by engaging in domestic duties to support them. The message therefore is that the primary role of women is still to care for the home and for children, whether or not women are also employed outside the home. Seeking paid employment therefore, would therefore not necessarily lead to an improvement in the status of women - if anything, it would simply increase their burden.

The history textbook as ideological tool

The problem here lies in the way that the messages as explored in the three cameos are communicated, since textbooks have a significant impact on the minds and attitudes of the youth. This is the case because textbooks are cultural mirrors of society as they contain and transmit the knowledge, beliefs and values a society recognises as legitimate and truthful either for sustaining or transforming the social order.⁴² As the ideologies of society are kept in the form of an organised body of knowledge through the textbooks, the latter have the ability to canonise the social norms of the society. This canonised knowledge tends to influence, persuade and mould the attitude of the readers. It therefore follows that the way men and women are represented in such a canon of knowledge is likely to have an effect on the attitude of the youth when this is done by means of a narrow and single perspective of knowledge in an incontrovertible manner.⁴³

41 CG O’Kelly, “Gender role stereotypes in fine art...”, *Qualitative Sociology*, 6 (2), 1983, pp. 136-148; A Osler, “Still hidden from history?...”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 1994, pp. 219-235; CE Sleeter & CA Grant, “Race, class, gender and disability...”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109. Y Su, “Ideological representations of Taiwan’s history...”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37 (3), 2007, pp. 205-237; S Schoeman, “The representation of women...”, *South African Journal of Education*, 129, 2009, pp. 541-556.

42 MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, “The politics of the textbook”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics of the textbook* (New York, Routledge, 1991), pp. 1-21; V Kalmus, “What do pupils and textbooks do with each other?...”, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36 (4), 2004, pp. 469-485.

43 MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, “The politics...”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 1-21; S Foster & K Crawford, “The critical importance of history...”, *What shall we tell the children?...*, pp. 1-23; CE Sleeter & CA Grant, “Race, class, gender and disability...”, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109.

Besides serving as carriers of curricular knowledge to students, textbooks signify particular constructions of reality and also reflect the values and aspirations of the society they represent.⁴⁴ Furthermore, history textbooks, like all textbooks, are authoritative in nature as they are authorised or approved by government, educational authorities and other societal groups.⁴⁵ In this respect, they are regarded as valid, true and accurate knowledge of society.⁴⁶ This implies that the way historical figures, both men and women, are portrayed in history textbooks conveys a authoritative message to the youth concerning the position, actions and contribution of such people in society in the past as it is viewed from the present. Therefore, the way in which women and men are portrayed in history textbooks, we argue, is most likely to be considered by the youth as true and accurate historical knowledge. Consequently, through their absence on the one hand, and by being cast in specifically limiting historical roles on the other, the message conveyed is that women contributed little to history outside of the domestic sphere.

The position allocated to women in history textbooks as explored in the three cameos is the result of an intricate curriculum planning process based on a patriarchal system. During this process, decisions are made on what should be selected for inclusion in the textbooks. This selection process is guided by the narrow and particular view of what constitutes legitimate knowledge of a person or a dominant group. The consequence of this is the production of teaching materials that have the potential to predispose students to think and act in a specific way without considering other perspectives, possibilities, interpretations, questions and actions. The ideological influence is thus facilitated in a way that denies the school-going youth exposure to alternative opinions while at the same time lacking the relevant knowledge or experience to challenge the information provided. As a result, they could potentially regard the contents of the textbook as indisputable fact. In this way, textbooks serve to legitimise and perpetuate existing ideologies, social relations and the *status quo* of the dominant and most powerful gender group.⁴⁷

44 MW Apple, "The culture and commerce...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...* pp. 22-39; S Foster & K Crawford, "The critical importance of history...", *What shall we tell the children?...*, pp. 1-23; CE Sleeter & CA Grant, "Race, class, gender and disability...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109.

45 DR Olson, "On the language and authority...", S de Castell, A Luke & C Luke, *Language, authority and criticism:...*, pp. 233-244; MW Apple, "The culture and commerce...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...* pp. 22-39; MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 1-21.

46 DR Olson, "On the language and authority of textbooks...", S de Castell, A Luke & C Luke, *Language, authority and criticism: ...*, pp. 233-244.

47 CE Sleeter & CA Grant, "Race, class, gender and disability...", MW Apple & LK Christian-Smith, *The politics...*, pp. 78-109.

Conclusion

A study done by Fournier and Wineburg in the United States in which learners were asked to draw pictures representing pilgrims, a Western settler and hippies yielded some telling results. Of the 136 pictures produced by boys, only eight portrayed female figures. Seven of these showed men and women together and only one portrayed a woman alone. The girls who participated produced a total of 153 drawings in which 58 were of men, 35 of women and the remaining portrayed men and women together. This kind of representation of the past showed that in girls' minds, women are indistinct figures who needed men, while in the perception of the boys, women were virtually invisible in history.⁴⁸

This kind of result, according to Tetreault, is because history as a body of knowledge in itself, tends to exclude women.⁴⁹ The solution is therefore for all involved – academic historians, the producers of textbooks and society in general – to reconceptualise the roles and activities of women in history. The implications of this should be, firstly, that women should be more fully represented in the historical content covered and secondly, that the language used in history textbooks should not present the narrative from an exclusively male perspective.

Until this happens, the impressionable youth will be exposed to history textbooks, the most commonly available and dominant teaching aid, that foreground men as competent, capable and independent in the world. Women on the other hand will continue to be presented as extensions of men, functioning in a reproductive role within a domestic context with little ability to contribute significantly to past and present society. In other words, girls and boys will continue to be taught a segregated vision of society, similar to that of the racially biased history books of the past, in which people were depicted as having genetically determined social roles and places. The way forward should be to move towards a history which includes women amongst other marginalised groups. Such a history will include the experiences of men and women in history equally and fairly and would hopefully when the research done by Fournier and Wineburg as outlined above be repeated yield a more gender equitable result.

48 JE Fournier & SS Wineburg, "Picturing the past...", *American Journal of Education*, 105 (2), 1997, pp. 160-185.

49 MKT Tetreault, "The treatment of women in U.S. history high school textbooks: A decade's progress", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 10 (3), 1982, pp. 40-44.