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Gender and curriculum : a case study

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> such a disappointment. She looked
> terrific ..... the sort of girl
> whose hand you wanted to hold ...
> ... that horrible voice could not be
> hers ..... (1972:83)

In this example it is evident that elocution and/or voice modulation are almost as important to the speaker. Here, beauty also implies correct tone of voice as well as the obvious physical attractiveness of the girl in question. Again, it is evident that both inner qualities and outer qualities are at work together in constructing an ideal notion of femininity.

Another dimension of the theme of femininity shows women's so-called helplessness and weaknesses. Women are presented as frail, timid and inadequate. Their physical inadequacy is highlighted, sometimes in relation to its complement, male gallantry. In <u>On With the Apron</u> (1980), the following examples appear:

> A gentleman seats a lady ..... by
> pulling out her chair and then
> pushing it in for her. (1980:195)
> A man will always pass a dish to
> a woman. (Ibid.)

In Legacy of the Past (1960), illustrations show men and boys toiling with cattle and wagons on the trek, while women are shown as mere spectators, standing in the shade of a tree looking on (1960: 160) In Senior Geography (n.d.), reference is made to the "fair sex", though references to women are not many.

(b) WOMEN'S BIOLOGICAL AND DOMESTIC ROLE IN THE FAMILY.

As mentioned in chapter one, it is a truism to say that women everywhere are responsible for childbearing because of their physiology. This serves as a type of legitimation of the prevailing ideology of gender differences. Women's sexuality appears to have a biological origin because women are capable of giving birth. In contrast, men's sexuality is not related to or synonymous with parenthood, so the implication is that different genders will accentuate different tasks within the family. Also, childbearing becomes child-rearing, as will be touched upon later.

In Biology for Std. 8 (1974), the text emphasizes women's biological role as childbearer. Diagrams

almost always show the male body and all people are referred to as "man" or "he", so that the language is decidedly masculine. The only instance where women are depicted is under the section of reproduction. These diagrams are cross-sections of a pregnant uterus (1974:92) and a scheme of ovulation. The only 'female specific' words in the whole text are:

> "daughter cells .... daughter chromosomes." (1974:14)

It could be argued that these references imply an implicit sexism in biology discourse and that the above cells or chromosomes exist in a state of dependency.

The references in the biology text concerning women's anatomy are in relation to menstruation and pregnancy. It could be argued that one implication is that the function of bearing children determines women's biological status; in all the other sections of the biology text women are omitted.

Women's biological part in the family can be developed further; their sexuality has become equated with dependency in the home. In a sense, childbearing becomes child-rearing,

and women are expected to care for the family and be responsible for domestic chores (Salzman-Webb, 1971). Women's lives become limited and restricted because domesticily locates them in the home; therefore marriage. motherhood and femininity can be seen as reinforcing one another.

The functions of child-rearing and maintenance of the home are reflected in the school texts studied. Texts like On With the Apron (1980), promote this notion of women's place being in the home by devoting large sections to home management, nutrition and safety of the family. The following titles appear in the index:

> Meal Planning.
> Food Preparation.
> Cleaning of the House.
> Control of Household Expenses.
> Safety in the Home. (1980)

A woman's part in the family as somebody's wife or mother is stressed in the housecraft text. Under a section on table etiquette the following rules appear:

> The hostess must plan the serving so she can be with her family and guests... (1980:194)

> At any family meal, the mother is
> the hostess. (1980:195)
> At informal meals, the hostess/
> mother may go to the diningroom
> first ..... (Ibid.)

The woman/mother/hostess also provides and prepares the meal. In Vlot Afrikaans (1983) the following examples are found:

> Die vriendelike gasvrou het 'n ....
> ete vir haar gaste berei. (1983:4)
> Ma sal die aandete berei. (1983:18)
> Moeder hoef nie koek to bak nie,
> omdat ..... (1983:22)
> 'Ma, bak asseblief vir one pannekoek.' (1983:36)
> Ek het elke dag gesorg vir kook ....
> alles wat Mammie gedoen het. (1983:102)

In Comprehensive English Practice (1972) the following example appears:

> As a hotel chef, compile a series of
> daily menus ..... (perhaps one of
> the girls in the class could prepare
> food for one of the menus.) (1972:208)

This is an excellent example of sex-stereotyping where the chef is assumed to be male; a girl however,

is asked to prepare the food. A contradiction is evident here because chefs prepare food for wages (and are then assumed to be male) but the implication here is that boys in a class would not want to be involved in the 'feminine' task of cooking. Thus, cooking in the home is seen as a woman's task; it is part of her domestic chores as well as part of her involvement in nutrition for her family.

As portrayed in the texts, responsibilities in the household may be shared but these are shared mainly between the women of the household. Girls are seen appropriately helping their mothers in preparation for the day when they too have responsibilities in their respective homes. Daughters are seen to help the hostess. For example, in the Afrikaans text (1983):

> Die dogters help eers hulle moeder in huis. (1983:21)
> 'Kom help gou om die beddens op te maak', het Anita vir haar suster gesê. (1983:36)
> 'Gaan help Moira met die toebroodjies', het Helen se ma gesê. (Ibid.)

Most texts use sentences that explicitly refer to women as mothers, cooks, menders, housewives and

hostesses. Fathers and sons in contrast are involved in such activities as taking the car to the garage or working on the car, mowing the lawn and fixing things in the home. Also, as the following quotes illustrate, women are not involved or expected to be involved in activities such as helping fathers with particular duties, and males are not expected to do chores with mothers, sisters or wives. Thus tasks are divided along strict gender lines. Vlot Afrikaans (1983) has the following examples:

> Die vader sê vir sy seun ... 'Trek gou my motor uit. (1983:35)
>
> Die vader vra: 'Seuns, kan julle my gou kom help om die onkruid uit te trek? (1983:185)

As mentioned earlier, marriage, motherhood and femininity are tied together, so the question is what about women who are involved in waged work? Most school texts do not refer to women in the workplace at all. On With the Apron (1980) does not touch upon the nature of women's work in the workplace; it implies that women's vocation is in the home:

> ..... (a) course which will equip

> pupils with ..... techniques and pro-
> cedures for the successful running of
> a home and care of members of the family.
> It also seeks to encourage the right
> attitude to household duties .... (1980:Preface)

The housecraft text does not make allowance for any probability that the woman may be involved in waged work. Comprehensive English Practice (1972) does have the following quote, however:

> Of course she had to work hard, both
> in the house and at business ..... (1972:42)

The above reference relates to the dual situation which women are caught up in if they are involved in waged work as well as having to run a home. Regardless of what women do outside the home, they remain responsible for the home and the family. In fact, not only are women involved in a tussle between responsibilities at home and their waged work, their involvement in the workplace is limiting and restricted because the nature of the work is also tied to a notion of femininity and mother-hood. This will be discussed fully in the next theme.

(c) WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE WORKPLACE.

As has already been mentioned in chapter two, women's work in the home and women's work outside of the home are often related ideologically. Appropriate characteristics of masculinity and femininity are evident here because often when women are engaged in the workplace they are doing jobs which are an extension of their domestic role in the home. These jobs are gender-specific and limited, as the following references from the English text illustrate, where the woman is seen as a cook:

'You've never been to see Aunt Clara ..
You've never eaten her egg-and-bacon
pie?' (1972:83)

as a handiworker:

You can knit a sweater by the fireside ...
(1972:248)

as a teacher:

.... my teacher came, she led me into
her room .... (1972:93)

as a barmaid:

.... so was she. There was a cheeky
grin on her face at times and then

the men seemed to like her more ...
(1972:82)

as a governess:
And my governess (did) not make bandages ...
(1972:70)

as a housekeeper:
.... all its familiar objects which
she had dusted once a week for so
many years .... (1972:41)

and as a clerical assistant:
I passed .... at the Blueburg High School
for girls .... I have been employed as a
clerical assistant .... (1972:203)

In the Afrikaans text (1983), women are represented as:

a nurse:
Die matrone versoek die verpleegster. (1983:36)

a teacher and a librarian:
Joan gaan 'n onderwyser word, maar
sy moet liewer 'n (dame wat in die
biblioteek werk) geword het. (1983:98)

and a servant:

Martha, ons ou bediende .... (1983:125)

Examples of clerical work in Vlot Afrikaans (1983) include:

Die bestuurder sê vir sy tikster ....
(1983:36)

Johan het verder studeer, ... en ek
het my handelskursus voltooi ....
(1983:102)

The above quotations are good examples of stereotyping. In the last quotation the manager is a man and the typist is a woman. The male is engaged in further study (in fact the sentence refers to a comprehension passage in which the man is studying for a B.Sc. degree) and the female is doing a secretarial course. By implication, she is not competing with the man in any way.

None of the texts give direct references to women being involved in male-appropriated occupations. However, the English text poses the following questions that challenge existing stereotypes:

Can most things done by boys be
equally well done by girls? (1972:181)

What is your point of view about:

(a) Men pushing prams and changing nappies?

(b) Women doing military service?

(1972:181/2)

Men are vain, but they won't mind women working, so long as they get smaller salaries for the same job.

(1972:299)

The History text, Legacy of the Past (1960), does make reference to Mantatisi, the 'warrior queen', who was a ruthless conqueror and ruler of the Batlokoa tribe, but she is an exception. Generally women do not appear to be active in employment, nor do they appear to be involved equally alongside males. They do not appear as active participants in the work force.

In the Geography text, Senior Geography for Std. 8 (n.d.) the following quotes appear:

> Heavy industry, forestry and mining mainly attract large numbers of unmarried males .....
>
> ..... services, trade and administrative cities attract more females... (n.d.:124)

> As a result of migrant labour ....
> the great responsibility of exploiting
> the country's resources .... rests
> heavily on the women of Lesotho ... n.d.:241)

This is the only reference to women doing any kind of manual labour in a Third World situation. The implication here is that women are only involved in 'exploit(ing) the country's resources' because the men are not there to do it which overlooks women's work in pre-capitalist societies. One illustration shows women serving food to men (n.d. :146) but generally women are not referred to in the text except in the types of examples that have been listed under the regional geography section.

Men's decisive roles in the workplace are very much emphasized in Modern Typing (1976). In fact, no direct references are made to women. By their invisibility (which will be discussed later) it is assumed that the typist's job is of a secondary nature and one or two sentences refer to the typist as being a woman:

> .... the typist has to complete the
> document using all details given to

her ..... (1976:138)

If this is not done the typist will find she is ill-equipped .... (1976:41)

A typist is employed in the world of men. Texts refer to men in positions such as 'chairman', 'manager', 'postmaster' and (male) secretary. All lawyers, resident engineers, administrators, applicants, lecturers and employers are referred to as "he". Men are in positions of authority and the typist is engaged in work which supplements the 'man-in-charge'. She sees to the smooth running of clerical work and makes no major decisions on her own.

It can be concluded that the school texts represent women in gender-specific, limited positions in the workplace. Also, texts reflect that women are involved in vocations that are extensions of their jobs at home and in the family; often these jobs are passive, repetitive and non-competitive.

All these notions echo the concept of patriarchy in which women exist in a state of passivity and dependence. They are subordinate to men who in turn exercise power and control and who are involved in decision making.

(d) HOW WOMEN ARE SEEN IN BROADER SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS.

The research has up to now referred to particular representations of women in texts, namely, their 'femininity', their positions in the home and family and the kinds of work they are involved in. All of these are representations which are explicitly or implicitly referred to in the texts examined.

But there are also questions of the 'invisibility' of women. This can be considered in a number of ways. Firstly, women are often referred to according to their relationship with men; secondly, some texts omit women entirely and other texts refer to women only in particular or gender-specific cases; thirdly, women are 'made invisible' through male-appropriated language; and lastly, negative references are made about women which place them in positions of subordination or ridicule. Each of these points will now be developed.

In certain of the texts viz. Modern Typing (1976), Legacy of the Past (1960), Comprehensive English Practice (1972) and Vlot Afrikaans (1983), women earn their status according to their relationships

with men. The following examples show women referred to as:

> Retief's niece; Farewell's wife; the widow of the chief; his wife the queen; Miss/Mrs (as opposed to 'Ms'); the employer's secretary; wives called 'mother'; housewife .....

Even if some of the above examples of relations are historically accurate, the rule does not apply to men as well. These quotes echo de Beauvoir's notion of 'the Other' (1961). Definitions of reality or references to experiences do not stem from women's perceptions of them. Women are defined and differentiated with reference to men; the situation is not reversed. As seen in the texts men are not subject to titles in marital status and their own positions are not subject to their relations to women. Thus women are portrayed as dependants rather than appearing to stand independently of men.

As seen ealier in this chapter, some texts make little of no references to women. For example, in Biology for Std. 8 (1974) women are referred to as childbearers but they are omitted in the

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