

## **The Hidden Curriculum: A Quantitative Analysis of Gender Bias in Japanese and Finnish EFL Textbooks**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Past research has extensively attempted to explore hidden curriculums and the messages they convey about women. Few studies, however, have compared the representation of women in textbooks in two developed countries that lay on different spectrums of the gender gap index. Fewer studies still explored this representation from a subliminal and more subtle level. In the present study, I seek to compare the portrayal of women in Japanese and Finnish EFL textbooks with a focus on the quantitative and subliminal aspects. I compare the portrayal of women in the EFL textbooks of both countries against the criteria of the UN Convention for the Elimination of bias in Textbooks to see if the textbooks make efforts to follow these criteria. My findings reveal that there are true attempts for a more progressive and inclusive portrayal of women on the subliminal level in the textbooks of both countries, with the Japanese textbook showing a slightly better representation. I also show that the representation of women does not reflect the situation of women in Japan, while it is in line with the situation of women in Finland.

**Keywords:** EFL textbook, Finland, gender bias, Japan, the hidden curriculum

## **I. Introduction**

In recent years there has been increasing debate, namely in the fields of education and social studies, about the “hidden curriculum”. The hidden curriculum is a term widely used in sociology but also in the fields of linguistics, education, pedagogy, and curriculum design. The hidden curriculum refers to a collection of implicit academic, political, and social messages learned through learning materials, but one that is not overtly intended. Jerald (2006) argues that a hidden curriculum is a curriculum that expresses and represents attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours, that are communicated without open intent. It is a curriculum that indirectly conveys ideological messages that might shape students’ perceptions of various matters. Therefore, it is a focal point for educators and pedagogues to carefully design curriculums in such a way that the learning materials, specifically textbooks in which the knowledge is represented “in factual form” (Kuhi, 2008, p. 65), do not implicitly encode messages that might promote or reinforce biased and discriminatory ideas.

Many studies (Alsubaie, 2015; Clark, 2016) have focused on the hidden curriculum as the principal enactor of gender bias in schools. While the biased representation and the messages transmitted through textbooks are not the only damaging components of the hidden curriculum, since the teachers’ biases and how male and female students are expected to behave are also factors, the textbook remains the main source of such implicit biases (Mills & Mustapha, 2015). The beginnings of research on gender discrimination in curriculums can be traced back to the 1970s. With the rise of the second wave of feminism which sought to increase equality for women in various domains such as sexuality, domesticity, and the workplace, this wave also sought better portrayal and inclusivity for women in fields such as the public sphere and education.

One issue feminists saw as an obstacle for obtaining such equality was the way women are represented in history, media, as well as in educational materials (Alrabaa, 1985; Porreca, 1984). To this end, many calls were made to revise and try to eliminate gender-discriminatory discourse in these domains, with a particular focus on school materials, namely curriculums, as researchers saw them as a place where political and social

practices are manifested (Cincotta, 1978). The reforms feminists researchers tried to implement targeted all aspects of curriculums where gender discrimination can be manifested. More prominently, school textbooks were at the heart of this.

The focus on textbooks is because of how common and widely used they are, and that educators as well as teachers and students often take them for granted in that their content is rarely contested (Blumberg, 2008). Crawford (2004) argues that, in the same way textbooks can be a place for discrimination and instilling stereotypical and biased ideas, they can also be used to expose, challenge, and reverse discriminatory messages. For this particular reason, it was assumed that changing biased discourses in textbooks with more equal, non-stereotypical, and diversified portrayals, especially in the learning materials of younger students who are seen to be more swayable (Beal, 1994), can result in them developing more positive social views. However, despite these attempts, main issues of gender and curriculum, in general, and gender in textbooks, in particular, linger.

These issues mainly revolve around the subliminal representation of women in textbooks. Although recent studies with regard to gender in textbooks (Alkayed, 2020; Alsatravi, 2016; Mechouat, 2017) show quite an improvement in terms of quantitative representation of women in textbooks, on the deeper level of representation, there still remains many forms of stereotypical as well as biased portrayals. That is, for instance, although there are almost as many female characters doing activities in the textbooks as female characters, female characters tend to be represented in stereotypical, traditionally 'female' activities, mainly domestic activities like childrearing and cooking, while male characters are represented in more dominant and public activities (Mechouat, 2017). This type of representation that goes beyond the surface level of representation, is what is referred to as subliminal representation in the sense that it is 'hidden' and more subtle which makes it harder to tackle (Clark, 2016) and thus it has been long overlooked by researchers interested in gender in learning materials.

Research from different countries and in various fields has addressed the issue of gender in the hidden curriculum (Blumberg, 2007; Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Cincotta, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Porreca, 1980; U'ren, 1971). These studies stretching from the 1960s to the 2000s, all showed the biased portrayal of women in textbooks mostly in secondary

roles, as being reserved for the private sphere, and as emotional, while men, on the contrary, were represented as decision-makers and more in the social and public life. These studies also suggested that men not only dominated women but were also noticeably more visible in most curriculums, claiming that such portrayal in textbooks leaves a lasting influence on how students perceive gender.

In the present study, I look at the hidden curriculum in Japanese and Finnish textbooks with regard to their portrayal of gender. In the study I employ a method of qualitative analysis to Finnish as well as Japanese textbooks for gender bias, particularly looking at the portrayal of women in gender roles. I will analyse this portrayal comparatively and critically. Many previous studies (Ebnou, 2022; Laakkonen, 2007; Lee, 2014; Nakai, 2016; Piironen, 2004; Tainio, 2012) on the textbooks of Japan and Finland suggest stereotypical representations of women in many aspects of the textbook, although some recent studies show that this representation is increasingly improving.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **A. Gender in Japanese and Finnish EFL Textbooks**

Fujimoto-Adamson (2006) argues that there exists a firm relationship between the teaching of English and the social, political, and economic events in Japan since the Meiji period. Hence, studying the hidden curriculum in Japanese EFL textbooks can give a glimpse on how gender perceptions have developed in Japanese society. Many recent studies (Clark, 2016; Ebnou, 2022; Nakai, 2016) have shown an increasingly better representation of women, yet the hidden curriculum, and its subliminal messages, have not been given much attention by these studies. My own prior study, Ebnou (2022), investigated the newest edition of the Japanese textbook series “*the New Crown*”, which was published in 2020. In this study I concluded that, although there remains numerical male dominance in terms of visual representations as well as the activities performed, the gap was very minimal, and the *New Crown* series showed noticeable attempts to equally depict women and men. I also drew a comparison with the findings yielded by Ishikawa (2012) and noted that there has been an improvement in Japanese textbooks since that study.

Other studies on Japanese textbooks (Clark, 2016; Lee, 2014), however, suggest a lingering problem of stereotypical representation of women in textbooks. These studies show issues mainly pertaining to the hidden curriculum. Lee (2014)'s findings suggest that, although there are attempts by the Japanese government to improve the portrayal of women, "gender disparities in the forms of female invisibility, male firstness and stereotypical images are still prevalent in the Japanese EFL textbooks examined" (p.2). Male dominance is also still a prevalent phenomenon in Japanese textbooks in that men still lead in quantity despite the improvements made to the textbooks as male firstness is still rampant (Clark, 2016; Ebnou 2022).

Gender bias in Finland, concurrently, has been a topic of interest for Finnish researchers and linguists, namely in recent years. This was not always the case, however, and this topic of research is not as popular as it is in other countries (Tainio, 2012). This becomes clear when looking at the development of the literature regarding gender bias in Finnish textbooks. Indeed, the pioneer study in Finland analysing gender in Finnish textbooks was that of Lahelma (1992). In her study, Lahelma found that women in Finnish textbooks were portrayed more in the domestic domain, as more caring for the family, while men were shown considerably more in the public sphere, as powerful decision-makers. Other studies in Finland at the start of the 2000s (Laakkonen, 2007; Piironen, 2004) demonstrated typical gender bias in Finnish EFL textbooks, namely in images. These two studies, conversely, pointed out that there is an increasing number of depictions that showed a non-stereotypical portrayal of women.

Tainio (2012) reporting on her previous study (Tainio & Teras, 2010), posits that most recent studies of Finnish school textbooks show gender bias and stereotyped images of gender throughout the textbooks. In this study, Tainio analyses 39 Finnish language and literature textbooks as well as conversations between two female teachers who were asked to look at five textbooks and discuss the gender bias in them. She concluded that "although the textbooks for Finnish basic education can be considered informative, rich, and attractive, they naturalize gender bias" (p. 212).

Tainio and Karvonen (2015)'s study is one of the most recent and comprehensive studies on textbooks in Finland. This study used a similar method to that of Tainio's study in

2012. It investigated 59 textbooks for basic education in Finland, also taking into account teachers' observations and comments about gender. They remarked that, although there are traces of change, there is still bias found in Finnish textbooks for basic education. They further argue that, like her previous findings, the analysis of the conversation between the two female teachers showed that when teachers are instructed to observe gender bias in textbooks they can easily identify the existence of such biases and discuss them critically, but that it is "rare for them [the teachers] to talk about girls and boys in terms other than binary oppositions" (p. 125).

The latter two studies seem to entail that the problem is not necessarily with the teachers undermining gender bias in textbooks since they can identify biases if they give it attention, but rather that the problem seems to be that the 'hidden' or subtle nature of the biases in the curriculum, namely the textbook in this case, makes it hard for the teachers to realise the existence of such biases unless they are specifically asked to look for them. Therefore, biases from the textbooks can slip past teachers and subsequently to the students, and since these biases are implicit the messages they hold might be taken for granted and regarded as the 'norm'. This is what Miller and Seller (1990), describing textbook content, referred to as "unstated promotion and enforcement of certain behavioural patterns, professional standards, and social beliefs while navigating a learning environment" (as cited in Alsubaie, 2015, p.125). That is, textbooks can and often are vehicles for normalising and naturalising biased and discriminatory discourses.

The above literature regarding the gradual improvement of gender representation in both Japanese and Finnish textbooks and the implicitness of the hidden curriculum leads to the main point of interest for this study: is there gender bias that is beyond the surface level i.e., is there an implicit treatment of gender that maintains the traditional and stereotypical views about gender and gender roles and that subliminally promotes them? To take this forward, I seek to examine subliminal bias in Japanese and Finnish EFL textbooks and compare them. One question that arises here is why Japanese and Finnish textbooks in particular? In the next section, I explain why these two countries were chosen, and provide an overview of the situation of women in both countries.

## **B. The Situation of Women in Japan and Finland**

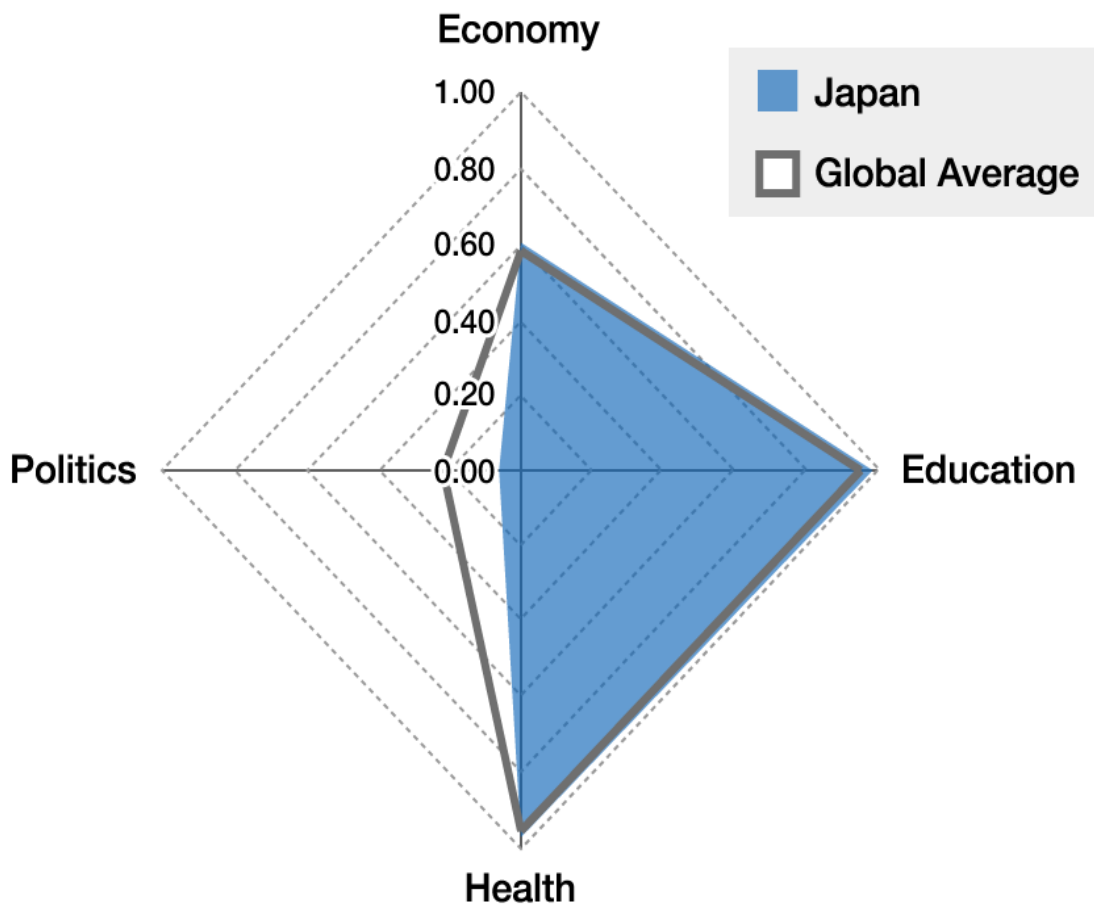
The situation of women in Japan and Finland is on completely different extremes of the equality spectrum. Finland, like its Scandinavian counterparts, has long been known to be a country where women are strongly present in the political and social scenes and where the highest levels of equality between the sexes is achieved in the world (Tainio & Karvonen, 2015). Indeed, the Finnish experience with gender equality is exemplary for many countries seeking more empowerment for women. The gender gap report, which is a yearly report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) about the situation of women around the world, ranks Finland in 2nd place as the most equal country for women after Iceland. The gender gap report ranked 156 countries based on four criteria: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (WEF, 2021). Finland was found to be performing well in all these aspects, contrary to Japan. Of the 156 countries surveyed by the 2021 gender gap report, Japan ranked 120st. This is by far the worst ranking for women among the developed countries. To put this in perspective, the second worst-ranked country after Japan amongst the G-7 countries, which is an organization made up of the world's largest developed economies, is Italy and it ranks 63<sup>rd</sup> compared to Japan's 120<sup>th</sup> position.

In terms of political participation, women in Finland enjoy great representation in the public sphere. Finland was the first country in the world to grant full political rights to women in 1906. The number of women in the Finnish parliament is almost equal to that of men with 47% of the members being women in the parliament that began its term in 2019. A further 12 out of the 19 ministers in the Finnish government are women. In Japan, on the other hand, the participation of women in the political sphere remains limited, especially for a developed country. Only around 10% of parliamentarians in Japan are women, according to the WEF gender gap report. Women in ministerial positions in Japan are represented at a similar rate with only 10% of the ministers being women (WEF, 2021). Finland currently has a female prime minister while Japan has never had a female prime minister in its history.

In terms of economic participation, a large gap between Japan and Finland can also be noted. In Japan, women are employed in 14.7% of senior roles, as measured by the WEF's

economic participation index. This is despite 72% of Japanese women being in the labor force (Kyodo News, 2021). Women also, generally, earn 43.7% less than men in Japan, which is below the world average for the wage gap. For Finland, conversely, 49% of working people in the latest statistic by the government were women (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022). Women earn 17.3% less than men in Finland, which is one of the lowest gender pay gaps in the world. All in all, while Finland seems to have taken great steps in achieving equality between men and women in the larger context, Japan still lags in various fields. Figure 1 below shows the gap between men and women in Japan in different fields as compared to the global average. The figure is based on data from the WEF’s 2021 global gender gap report.

**Figure 1. Japan and the Global Average**



*Source: Nippon.com*



With all this taken into consideration, it is safe then to assume that, although both countries are amongst the most developed nations in the world, Finland has a significant lead over Japan in terms of equality between men and women in different spheres.

### **C. Relevance of the Study**

In this study, I have as a purpose to compare gender from two developed countries with completely distinct cultures on the subliminal level. As the literature has indicated, many studies suggest that, although there is still bias in both Japanese and Finnish textbooks, both countries are increasingly showing improvement in the portrayal of gender. This improvement has however been noted only to be on the quantitative level, and not much attention has been given to the subliminal, hidden aspect of gender portrayal (Lee, 2014; Tainio & Karvonen, 2015). That is, most studies focused on, for instance, how many women characters are portrayed in the textbooks and how many activities they perform as compared to men, but little attention was given to what type of activities are performed and what image does this portrayal convey to children about women. For this reason, in the present study, I attempt to delve into textbooks and qualitatively analyse their depiction of women on a subliminal level to see if there is a hidden curriculum that still projects bias against women. I do so by examining whether the portrayal of women in the textbooks of Finland and Japan follows the goals and regulations for gender equality outlined by the United Nations (UN). It follows from this that the findings will give an insight into whether the portrayal of women on the subliminal level in Finland and Japan correlates with the situation of women in both societies.

I chose Japan and Finland for comparison as they are both developed countries and belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), yet they are very different in terms of their ranking in the gender equality index and are also very different culturally. I also seek to find out if there is what can be called a 'global hidden curriculum' that subliminally promotes bias against women by analysing curricula in two developed countries that share little in common, whether it is in terms of gender equality or in terms of culture and geography. Moreover, this can give a general overview as to whether there is a relationship between the portrayal of women in textbooks and the situation of women in society.

## **D. United Nations Criteria for Gender Equality in Learning Materials**

The United Nations has long been vying for more women involvement and the elimination of all sorts of discrimination against them. The United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which was recognised in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, and the Beijing Platform for Action, which was adopted in 1995, have set criteria for textbooks to follow if they are to promote gender equality. According to these criteria, a textbook promotes equality between men and women if they obey the following six guidelines: 1. females are shown as protagonists; 2. Both females and males are not described according to a stereotypical sexual division of labor/activities; 3. Breakaways from conventional ideas of femininity and masculinity are described positively; 4. topics encourage students to think about sexual discrimination and gender equality; 5. topics encourage students to reconsider various issues close to them from a gender perspective, and 6. topics encourage students to think about female's human rights as a global issue. As an additional purpose, I try to see to what extent these criteria are followed in both textbooks.

## **III. Methods and Materials**

I use a qualitative approach to investigate the hidden curriculum in Japanese and Finnish textbooks. As mentioned in the literature, Japanese and Finnish textbooks do represent women less than men in terms of quantity, that is why my focus is more on the qualitative and subliminal side of the textbooks rather than the quantitative. In detail, I looked at the pictures in the textbooks and tried to interpret what their depiction of women entails. The conversations and the ways women speak as compared to men was also discussed from a critical point of view.

I used a method of textual analysis. Textual analysis is a method used to “describe, interpret, and understand texts” (Caulfield, 2019). It enables analysing the text in all its aspects whether it is the symbolic meaning of the text or the literal meaning. Textual analysis is used in the study in the following manner: each of the four criteria used for analysis in this study (front cover, sports and leisure activities, jobs and roles, and famous

figures) were counted and the number of women, as well as men, quantified. Counting the number of male and female characters in this way allows seeing the frequency of appearance of women as compared to men who, according to previous studies, such as Chick (2006), are often taken as default characters while women almost always appear secondary to them in numbers. After counting the number of male and female characters, I will interpret and discuss the discourse about them in a critical manner. This interpretation of gender discourse is vital in textbook analysis. According to Fairclough (1995), interpretation is an essential part of analytic approaches, and it is defined as the interpreter's views and understanding of what the text means beyond its surface level. Indeed, the latter part, otherwise known as the subliminal study of discourse, is the focus of my study. While the first part of the methodology, i.e., the counting of male and female characters, is concerned with how frequently both genders are represented on the surface level, the second part of the approach, i.e., the interpretation of the discourse about male and female characters, enables diving into the deeper level of representation which, according to researchers, such as Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) and Blumberg (2007), are the real obstacle for normalizing equality between the genders through textbooks.

The textbooks to be compared are the *New Crown 3* from the Japanese textbook series and *Scene Texts 3* from the Finnish textbook series. Both textbooks are the latest editions of the textbooks, produced in 2020-2021. The Finnish textbook is *Scene Texts 3* (referred to as *Scene 3* henceforth) and follows the 2016 Finnish national core curriculum, which is the newest edition of the curriculum for comprehensive schools in Finland. This curriculum was updated from earlier versions with one of its long-term objectives being to “support the realisation of gender equality in society” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2017, p.13). The textbook is widely used in Finnish schools, and it is produced by *Otava*, which is one of the biggest and oldest publishing companies in Finland. This textbook is also used in Sweden under the name *Scene Texts Engleska*, thus this study can, to an extent, give insight into the treatment of gender in Sweden which, just like Finland, ranks quite highly in the gender gap index.

The Japanese textbook is the *New Crown 3*, and it is produced by *Sanseido* publishing company. *Sanseido* is one of only six publishing companies in Japan whose textbooks are

screened and approved by the government for use in Japanese schools. Textbooks that are screened by the Japanese government are supposed to fulfil several criteria including a criterion for content that promotes gender equality (Ishikawa, 2012). The reason for choosing the *New Crown 3* and *Scene 3* is because the age range of students using these textbooks is 12 and 13. This age range is considered by scholars in child development a critical period where students develop a lasting impression of the world around them and a period in which their gender identity and views are formed (Bukatko & Daehler, 2012). Thus, biased portrayal in textbooks that are used by students in this age range can mean they form lasting, biased views about women. And, on the flip side, positive and diversified portrayal can mean students form more progressive and inclusive views about women.

Both textbook publishing companies, i.e. Sanseido for the *New Crown 3* and Otava for *Scene 3*, were contacted about authorization to use the cover photo of the textbook in this study, and both confirmed that no authorization is needed and the photos can be used for research purposes.

#### **IV. Study Findings**

My own study—Ebnou (2022)—showed that there was a total of 564 illustrations in the *New Crown 3* textbook. 53.19% were male depictions while 46.8% were females. This rate shows that there is no overdominance of male representation in this textbook. A similar finding was yielded in Finnish textbooks: although there is a gap between men's and women's representations in terms of number in favour of men (Tainio & Karvonen, 2015), the gap is not exaggerated. It is, in any case, not the number of illustrations that makes bias, but rather the qualitative aspects that can help maintain and promote biases on a subliminal level (Clark, 2016). Generally speaking, both the *New Crown 3* textbook and *Scene 3* have pages where there are only male characters and pages where there are only female characters, although pages for male characters are slightly more numerous. This is an indicator that, at the very least, both textbooks try to follow a gender-fair approach by symmetrically sequencing any male-dominated page with a female-

dominated page (Ishikawa, 2012). The textbook analysis is based on four criteria which are discussed one by one as follows:

## **1. The Front Page**

The front cover of the Japanese *New Crown 3* represents many characters both male and female equally (figure 2). In the forefront of the cover, there is a man and a woman, both dressed up casually. The woman is waving at a unisex character and the man is standing behind her with his hands in his pocket. The woman is shown to be more social as she is the one handling the conversation while the man is portrayed more as passive, standing behind her. This is a reversed portrayal since men are the ones generally portrayed as more social and active, while women are typically depicted as passive homemakers and as mothers (Otlowski, 2015). In the background of the photo, a man is sitting on a bench looking at the sea, and beside him, a woman with a boy holding her hand is standing also looking at the sea. While these two depictions may not mean a lot, the woman with the boy holding her hand sends the message that women are usually the ones responsible for taking care of children.

On the cover of the Finnish textbook (figure 3), *Scene 3*, there are five people hanging out in a park. Three of the five people are men and two are women. The three men are all at the front while the two women are in the back of the photo. One of the women in the back has only her head visible and the rest of her body is hidden by the bodies of two of the men. One of the men is leading the group on what looks like a quest to find something while one of the women is carrying a notebook and taking notes of what they find. This alludes to many previous studies, such as (Lee, 2014), that suggest the portrayal of men as more active and as leaders while women are generally portrayed as passive and as followers. Thus, it can be said that the Japanese *New Crown 3* tries to have a better subliminal portrayal of women compared to the Finnish *Scene 3* in that it breaks the biased stereotype of women being passive while the cover photo of the Finnish textbook maintains it.

Figure 2. The *New Crown 3* Cover Photo

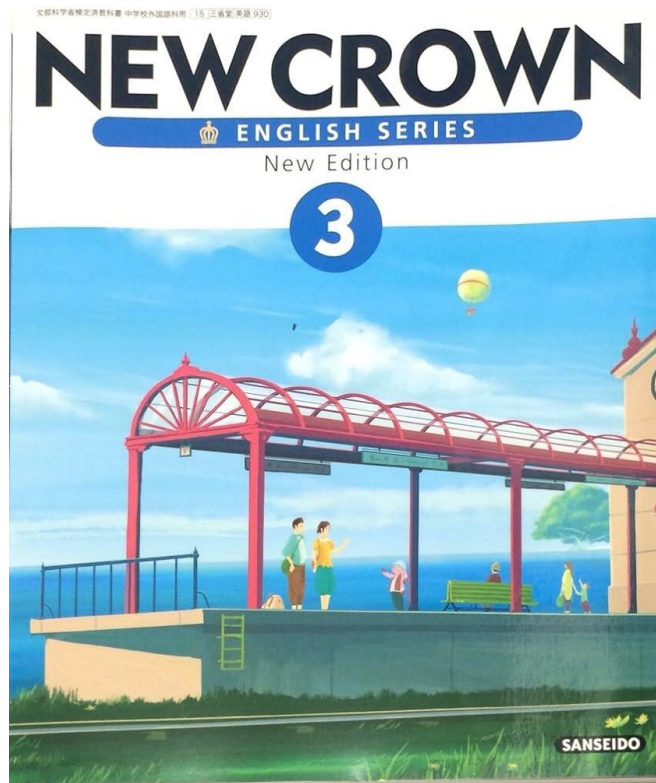


Figure 3. *Scene 3* Cover Photo



## 2. Sports and Leisure Activities

Sports and leisure are among the activities where many stereotypical and biased representations occur. This is due to the gendered nature of such activities: women's and men's roles are traditionally divided into binary oppositions based on their sex, and this, in its turn, dictates what activities are socially acceptable for each of them to engage in (Tainio & Karvonen, 2015). Analysing such activities from a critical point of view then enables seeing to what extent the textbooks try to break away from stereotypes. Table 1 below shows the number of jobs and roles men and women take on both in the *New Crown 3* and *Scene 3*.

**Table 1. Sports and Leisure Activities**

Textbook	Gender	Number	Percentage
Scene 3 (Finland)	Men	115	63.1%
	Women	67	36.8%
The New Crown 3 (Japan)	Men	94	51.6%
	Women	88	48.3%

The table, however, only shows the surface aspect of visual representation. In the more subliminal aspect, the *New Crown 3*, as well *Scene 3*, show many interesting illustrations. The *New Crown 3* shows women engaged in different sports, including judo wrestling, volleyball, biking, skating, soccer, basketball, and tennis. Indeed, many of these activities undertaken by women in this textbook are unprecedented and can be seen as non-stereotypical. Women in Japanese textbooks are typically less involved in sports, as sports have long been considered manly endeavours (Lee, 2014). Some of these sports are particularly interesting. Judo wrestling and soccer, for instance, are sports that involve

much physicality and contact between the individuals, but women are portrayed practicing them which shows a tendency to portray women in sports that are usually considered 'manly'. On the other hand, a sport like *tennis* does not involve much contact and is generally considered a soft sport designated for less powerful individuals (Clark, 2016). Women in the *New Crown 3* are involved in such sports which entails the idea that women can be involved in any type of sports, whether physical or soft. This diversified and inclusive portrayal is among the type of depiction that the United Nations Criteria for Gender Equality in Learning Materials consider a fair representation of gender in textbooks. Thus, it can be argued that in terms of sports and leisure activities, the *New Crown 3* also shows an improvement in the depiction of women which seems to be gradually getting better in recent years in Japan (Nakai, 2016).

The general remark that can be taken from the involvement of women in sports and in the *New Crown 3* is that women and men are shown to be involved in the same type of activities. Indeed, whenever men are depicted doing any type of sport, women are subsequently depicted performing the same type of sports. This demonstrates that the textbook tries to equally portray men and women as equally as possible by using a principle of gender-fair portrayal where depicting women in any activity is followed by the same depiction of men. This is not always the case with leisure activities, however. In page 15, for instance, a man is depicted in a fishing activity whereas women are not depicted in any fishing activity throughout the textbook. There is also a depiction of a man at the movie theatre in page 26 while there are none of women involved in such leisure activity. But these cannot be taken as a biased representation since they are rather infrequent in the textbook, and because there are, conversely, depictions of women in some leisure activities that men do not do such as *hiking* in page 26 and *singing* in a music band on page 80.

For the Finnish textbook, *Scene 3*, there were not many sport activities throughout the textbook. This is due to the nature of the textbook where the topics are more focused on traveling and the introduction of other cultures and countries. Of the few sports that are depicted in the textbook, both men and women are depicted in similar fashions. There is one instance where a man is biking in a park wearing his helmet in page 17 of the



textbook, and also one instance of a woman sitting on a bench in a park with her laptop and her electric bike besides her on page 96. The helmet the man is wearing may imply that men too are delicate and ought to wear protection. This is in opposition with the portrayal of men in many previous studies as strong (Clark, 2016; Mechouat, 2017). On the other hand, the depiction of the woman as owning an electric bike, which is easier to pedal, and the man with a regular bike, implies that women are indeed weaker than men physically.

An interesting depiction in *Scene 3* in relation to sports and one that promotes diversified representation of women is found on page 59. On this page, three women are playing basketball with one of them appearing to dunk the ball into the basket. This is an interesting representation since it entails physical strength of women, which is required in dunking. Men do not play basketball throughout the textbook, but they play soccer which women, conversely, do not play. Moreover, when looking at some of the lessons that involved sports figures, they are rather stereotypical as men dominate these lessons. For instance, lessons on pages 39 and 40 of the textbook talk about *racism* and how many sports figures have taken a stand against it in their respective sports. Yet, all the sports figures shown are men, and no woman was depicted as standing against racism. This shows that, although there is more inclusive representation in *Scene 3*, men still lead representation in sports overall as the primary gender that plays sports.

For leisure activities in *Scene 3*, they mostly revolve around vacations, reading books, listening to music, dancing, and hanging out. Overall, women garner a good representation on the subliminal level. They are involved more than men in traveling, which suggests that women are more active. In one instance on page 61 of the textbook, a woman is shown at the airport on her way to travel while a man is the one at the desk working as a ticket agent. Typically, the roles are reversed with ticket agents traditionally seen as a women's job, and men depicted as more active in traveling (Alrabaa, 1975). Another case where women are given more credit is an illustration on page 32 that shows a boy and a girl watching TV. In the depiction, the boy is holding the TV remote and he is asking the girl information about what is on TV. He asks her various questions about languages in Canada, and she answers which shows women as knowledgeable, a feature

that previous studies showed is missing from textbook representation (Mechouat, 2017). On page 100 as well, both the boy and the girl are walking, and they talk about what they want to do next. The girl points out that she would like to run a marathon, but the boy replies that he is not good at running. The girl then says that running a 42-kilometer is not difficult, only for the boy to say that he would prefer to watch TV and asks her to join him. This exchange is quite progressive on the subliminal level. The girl is more interested in the physical activity of running a marathon, typically a manly activity, and says that running a 42-kilometer marathon is not challenging, while the boy is averse to the idea and says he would rather stay at home and watch a film, which is typically an activity associated with women in textbooks (Alrabaa, 1975).

### 3. Jobs and Roles

**Table 2. Jobs and Roles**

Textbook	Gender	Number	Percentage
Scene 3 (Finland)	Men	33	55.9%
	Women	26	44.0%
The New Crown 3 (Japan)	Men	46	51.6%
	Women	43	48.3%

Jobs and roles performed by men and women are an important aspect of gender textbook analysis that shows whether the roles depicted are stereotypical or portray women in more diverse and non-stereotypical fashions. Table 2 above illustrates the frequency of the presence of men and women in the textbooks. But, and as is the case with sports and leisure activities, it is not the frequency that matters but what these jobs mean on the

‘hidden’ side. It is the analysis of the jobs women engage in, in the textbooks, on a subliminal level that is key to exposing bias against women since many previous studies in textbooks show that women are usually depicted in traditional domestic roles while they are much less present in public and social jobs (Alrabaa, 1975; Clark, 2016; Ebnou, 2022; Nakai, 2016).

For the Japanese *New Crown 3*, women perform a series of jobs and activities that can be considered non-stereotypical. In terms of jobs, women are portrayed as lawyers, politicians, writers, actors, journalists, tailors, doctors, and scientists. These jobs show that women can be involved in jobs that are traditionally considered more ‘manly’ and outgoing. Indeed, studies as early as Alrabaa (1975) consistently showed that there is a sexist and strict division of labor throughout ESL textbooks. Women have been mainly portrayed in domestic or stereotypical jobs, usually in the private. Thus, frequently representing women in a variety of jobs in the *New Crown 3* shows a move towards a more progressive and diversified representation. This representation is also accompanied by the portrayal of men in jobs and roles that are typically reserved for women. For example, on page 38, a man is shown in the role of a housemaker wearing an apron and cooking for a girl at home. In the conversation that accompanies the picture, he says good morning to the girl and asks her if she wants to have some scrambled eggs and juice. In another example, on page 90, a boy is shown waiting at home for his mother to come back from work which suggests that while women work outside, men are at home waiting for them. On the same page, there is also a text about a woman who wishes to be a scientist and find a way to live in space, believing that she will do it someday which shows that women have the determination to achieve their goals.

On the other hand, the *New Crown 3* also has illustrations that stick to stereotypical representation. Women take on roles that men do not. For example, on page 90, there is a woman who is busy knitting while a man, who appears to be her boss, is urging her to hurry up. Similarly on page 89, a male film director appears to be telling a female actor what to do and she follows the orders. These two examples entail that women still need to work under male supervisors who dominate them in the sense that they tell them what they need to do. This point is especially relevant when projected on the observation that

women are not, conversely, portrayed anywhere in the textbook as supervisors over men. Indeed, the issue of women in leading and dominant roles has been one of the most obvious sexist portrayals of women in textbooks (Clark, 2016). In another instance, women were also shown to be less capable than men physically. This instance occurs on page 88, where a girl asks a man, her father, to carry a box for her, implying that women are not strong enough to carry it and need the help of a man to do it.

Overall, and despite the sporadic sexist portrayals, it does seem that there are attempts in the *New Crown 3* to convey positive images about women in different roles and jobs. In many instances, women are shown in roles that are typically male-dominated, and even when depicted in stereotypical roles, men are also shown with them in such roles. For example, there are illustrations where women are shown to be cleaning their houses, but there are also similar illustrations for men doing the same. An interesting example of the equivalent portrayal of men and women in the textbook is found on page 91. On this page, both a man and a woman take care of a child. The woman is bringing food to the child while the man is feeding him. They are both also shown playing with the child on the same page. This shows that childrearing is not only the responsibility of women but also that men need to be involved in it. This gender-fair portrayal of men and women doing the same tasks is indeed what forms the basis of an equal, non-sexist textbook.

For the Finnish *Scene 3* textbook, there is also a diversified portrayal of women, albeit not as much as in the *New Crown 3*. Generally speaking, in this textbook, there are not many types of jobs and roles depicted. Women are most portrayed as journalists. They are also portrayed as doctors, teachers, actors, and librarians. An interesting depiction of women in this textbook is on page 83. In this illustration, a woman is shown as a lumberjack wearing her full work outfit while carving out a tree. On a subliminal level, the job of a lumberjack is a rather ‘manly’ job and is physically demanding so depicting a woman in such a job shows that women, like men, can also do physical and ‘manly’ jobs. Another illustration on page 75 of the textbook shows a woman doctor treating a boy patient. The dialogue that accompanies the illustration entails that the doctor is knowledgeable and caring about the hurt boy who comes to her seeking relief from his pain. A similar interpretation can be made to a dialogue found on page 85 of the textbook

which shows a boy calling a woman, who works in the lost and found department, asking her for help to find an item that he lost. The woman helps him find the item he is looking for and he thanks her for it saying he was foolish to have lost it.

The two above-mentioned illustrations and the dialogues that go along with them imply that women are knowledgeable and resourceful and can be relied on for help. This is exemplified by the fact that the two men came to the women for help, and they received it. This type of representation propagates positive images about women being capable of providing help. On page 81, there is an illustration and a dialogue that represent a mother telling her kid to clean his room and that it should always be clean. This can be interpreted in two ways. The first is that the mother has the authority and power to order the boy to clean his room without her cleaning it for him. The second way this can be interpreted is that the mother is portrayed stereotypically in that she is seen as a homemaker whose only concern is the tidiness of the room. In any case, such representation cannot be said to be overtly biased.

*Scene 3* has two main characters; one is male and one is female. Observation of the textbook shows that the male main character is much more reoccurring than the female character. But this is on the surface level of representation, on the subliminal level it can be said that the representation of men and women is more or less equal. Other than the field of science where men are portrayed quite often as scientists while women are never depicted as such, which can be seen as sexist representation, other jobs and roles taken by women are equivalent to those taken by men. Women, for the most part, do the same jobs and roles as men do. Overall, it can be argued that there are no grave overt biases on the subliminal level of the textbook in *Scene 3*.

#### 4. Famous Figures

**Table 3. Famous Figures**

Textbook	Gender	Number	Percentage
Scene 3 (Finland)	Men	21	80.7%
	Women	5	19.2%
The New Crown 3 (Japan)	Men	9	64.2%
	Women	5	35.7%

Textbooks often allot lessons or sections to famous figures; some are historical, and some are contemporary. The reason for this is so that students can relate to the achievements of these figures, know about their contributions, and be inspired by them. Many textbooks, however, have always represented more men famous figures than female famous figures, namely when they are historical figures (Tainio & Karvonen, 2015). Thus, it is rather vital to look into what famous figures textbooks represent, what they say about these figures on a subliminal level, and if there is enough empowering discourse about them. Quantitatively, there are more male famous figures than female ones in both textbooks as illustrated by table 3. In the Finnish *Scene 3*, the difference is much more significant, however, as women famous figures only make up 19.2% of famous figures in the textbook. On the qualitative side, looking into how important figures are treated in textbooks is essential because when students, namely female students, are exposed to empowering female figures they grow confidence and the idea that they as women are capable of achieving their life goals whatever these goals might be (Alsatravi, 2016).

The *New Crown 3* has much more texts that talk about influential male figures than female figures. This seems to be the norm throughout textbooks because women have always

been underrepresented in textbooks (Tainio & Karvonen, 2015). In the *New Crown 3*, there is a total of nine lessons about important male figures. These lessons are not equated in number with female important figures as there are only five important female figures. In terms of value as well, it can be said that they are not equated in terms of impact because the female figures are not as achieving as the male figures. While the male figures represented have inventions or innovations to their names, the female figures represented are depicted generally as survivors of oppression or unfortunate events. For example, there is a lesson talking about the Japanese tennis player Kei Nishikori, his life, and his achievements. On the other hand, the only female Japanese woman represented is Sadako Sasaki, a victim of the atomic bomb of Hiroshima. The lesson covered her childhood and her sickness as a survivor of the atomic bomb. While it is indeed positive to show her story in light of her impact as a sign of hope and peace, which can be empowering in a sense, it would have been even more empowering if there was a representation of Japanese female athletes that can inspire younger girls who dream of being athletes to counter that of the representation of Kei Nishikori.

The same pattern for famous figures can be observed in other cases. For example, at the end of the textbook, there are empowering quotations from Walt Disney, Thomas Edison, and Charles Chaplin while for the women there are empowering quotations from Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Malala Yousafzai. It can be argued that while the three men are indeed pioneers in their domains having revolutionized them, the three women are more into social activism and humanitarian work. The use of Eleanor Roosevelt to communicate an empowering message is particularly interesting since she is more identified with being one of the first ladies of the United States. The last representation is a text about Rosa Parks which is followed directly on the next page by a text about Martin Luther King Jr. Rosa Parks was an American Activist who is known as the “the first lady of civil rights” and mentioning her impact on the civil rights movement just before mentioning that of Martin Luther King Jr can be seen as a way of highlighting the role of women and promoting woman ‘firstness’, a feature that has long been missing from textbooks (Alsatrawi, 2016).

For *Scene 3*, the bias against female famous figures was relatively more obvious compared to the *New Crown 3*. There were 26 famous figures mentioned throughout *Scene 3* but only five of them were women. This is quite a common representation that portrays women as secondary and not as important as men (Mechouat, 2017). On the subliminal level, this bias is even more evident. There are no lessons that are dedicated to introducing and talking about the five famous women figures mentioned in the textbooks, but rather they are talked merely passingly. Male preferencing is also obvious. Many lessons talk about men, namely about famous male sports figures who took a stand against social injustices and racism. An example of this is found on page 40 where the lesson is about combatting racism and they introduce many famous sportsmen who took a stand against it. These sportsmen are from many different sports including track running (Tommie Smith and John Carlos), American football (Colin Kaepernick), basketball (LeBron James and Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf), and soccer (Neymar and Dani Alves). No women were included in this lesson to show that women athletes, e.g. Serena Williams, have also taken a stand against racism. This underrepresentation of women as famous figures in *Scene 3* can imply two things: the first is that women are not as active as men active in social issues such as racism, and the second is that women are not as involved in sports as men. Both implications reflect a stereotypical view of women suggesting that sports and social activism are male domains.

The women that were mentioned in the textbook, albeit only by mention, are the singer Madonna, the Queen of England, the English author J.K Rowling, the English writer Agatha Christie, and the American Novelist Harper Lee. These women were only mentioned in examples, and no lesson was dedicated to any of them or their achievements as successful women who can inspire young children. The use of the title *Queen of England* but not her name *Queen Elizabeth* is interesting. According to Clark (2016), this falls within female passivity in textbooks where women are dissipated by reducing them to their titles rather than their actual person. For Madonna, J.K Rowling, Harper Lee, and Agatha Christie, their mentioning shows no stereotyping as they were merely given as examples. This can be contrasted to how the male famous figures- Neil Gaiman, James Brown, William Shakespeare, and Herman Melville- were also only mentioned as examples in the textbook.



Besides sports, other domains that represent male famous figures, but not female ones are acting (James Bond), painting (Pablo Picasso), and science (Albert Einstein). There is also mention of the Pope, but no equivalent female religious figure is mentioned. Moreover, a point of interest regarding the visibility of female figures is that the textbook mentions the Finnish President, Sauli Niinisto, a man, but not the Finnish Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, a woman, although the latter is much more known and, in Finland, the prime minister has all the political and executive power while the president's position is merely ceremonial. In similar regard, the textbook mentions George Orwell, the English novelist, and his novel *Animal Farm* multiple times associating it with him but does not mention the name of Suzanne Collins although her novel *The Hunger Games* is mentioned a couple of times. This can be explained by female invisibility which various studies suggest is an area of women's representation textbook designers need to improve (Alsatrawi, 2016; Ebnou, 2022).

## V. Discussion

My analysis of *Scene 3* and the *New Crown 3* has shown that both textbook series show a tendency toward progressive and inclusive representation of women on the subliminal level. My findings suggest that there are attempts to avoid propagating implicit, stereotypical images through a hidden curriculum. However, the Japanese textbook, the *New Crown 3*, showed a slightly better representation of women than its Finnish counterpart- *Scene 3* all things considered. Of the criteria that were looked at, women were shown to be represented in active roles as much as men were. The *front covers* of the textbooks exemplify the textbook makers' attempts to better portray women. *Sports and activities* showed that women are involved in as many sports and activities as men, and the *jobs and roles* performed by women suggest that women can do any sort of jobs and roles even those that have long been considered to be men's jobs and roles. Perhaps the only exception to the subliminal representation of women is in *famous figures*. While the *New Crown 3* shows more inclusion of women as famous figures which younger female figures can relate to, *Scene 3* sticks to a passivizing role for women as there are not many mentions of women as famous figures, and when they are mentioned, it is rather in an undermining fashion.

Projecting the findings of the study on the UN criteria for promoting gender equality in textbooks, it can be argued that these criteria are followed to a large extent which shows that both textbooks attempt to be more progressive in their representation of women, despite some shortcomings. The first criterion of the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is that females need to be shown as protagonists. As was shown, this is done in both the *New Crown 3* and *Scene 3* as both women and men are alternatively shown in different situations where they are protagonists. The second criterion of the UN Convention is that “both females and males are not described according to a stereotypical sexual division of labor/activities”. This criterion was also followed as there was diverse portrayal of men and women in different kinds of jobs and activities that break stereotypes about them, and men were portrayed, at times, in typically female roles such as *cooking* and *childrearing* while women were portrayed in typically male roles as leaders and in sports at times. The third criterion of the UN Convention, that breakaways from conventional ideas of femininity and masculinity are described positively, can also be said to have been followed. The textbooks have indeed had many instances where there are positive breakaways from stereotypes that showed women in a progressive light.

For the fourth criterion of the UN Convention, topics encourage students to think about sexual discrimination and gender equality, it cannot be said that this criterion was followed per se, but this is essentially due to the observation that topics in both textbooks were, broadly speaking, about general topics other than social topics that might bring attention to issues such as gender in textbooks. The same observation applies to criteria five and six of the Convention which revolve around bringing attention to various issues from a gender perspective and encouraging students to think about female human rights. Not much attention was given to these in the textbooks although the few social issues that were covered, namely in the *New Crown 3*, portrayed famous female activists alongside famous male activists while in *Scene 3* there were not many such instances. The latter point is what led me to conclude in the findings that the *New Crown 3* is slightly better in its representation of women than *Scene 3*.

Overall, it can be argued that prior studies, namely on Japanese textbooks, which showed that there is gradual improvement of the representation of women in textbooks in terms of quantity are also followed by improved representation on the more subliminal level, at least as far as the *New Crown 3* and *Scene 3* textbooks are concerned. Despite the need for further improvements, it is clear that there are genuine attempts by the textbook makers of both countries to eliminate bias from the hidden curriculum. The main issue remains, however, that in Japan such empowering representation of women in the textbooks does not correlate with the representation of women in different spheres of the social and labor aspects, contrary to Finland where a correlation can be established. Representing women in various, non-stereotypical roles can indeed be a first step toward equality for women in other domains since it can have a major impact on how children perceive them (Blumberg, 2007).

## VI. **Conclusion**

Albeit the relatively positive representation of women in analysed textbooks, my findings suggest implications for policymakers and textbook designers, on the one hand, and for teachers, on the other hand, in order to maintain this positive portrayal and further improve it. For policymakers and textbook designers, there needs to be more scrutiny on the content of the textbooks so that there is more control over the kind of subliminal messages being passed to the students through the textbooks because the hidden content in textbooks is, in effect, more influential in shaping views and also more difficult to control (Jerald, 2006). This implication is especially relevant since policymakers in both countries- Japan and Finland- state that one of the goals of education is to promote equality between the genders. Indeed, in Finland, one of the stated goals of the country's new curriculum is to support the realization of gender equality in society (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2017), and in Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) declares that one of the main goals of English education in the country is to foster the ability to make impartial judgments (Ishikawa, 2012). It remains, nonetheless, not enough if the efforts of policymakers and textbook designers are not sustained and furthered by the teacher. The teacher, all things considered, remains, the one directly in contact with the students, and hence their role is

vital in filtering out any biased discourse the textbooks might contain. The teachers may point out biases and have students critically think about them and discuss them. This may not only make students think about certain textbook discourse but also encourages them to look at texts with critical eyes. This further entails that pedagogies, especially those concerned with teacher training programs, need to be designed in such a way that trains teachers to deal with possible biases in the textbooks, and how to best guide students through them.

Lastly, and although my present study provided good insight into the treatment of gender in Finnish and Japanese textbooks on the subliminal level, it is not without limitations. One of the drawbacks of the study relates to the methodology used. The main aim of the textual analysis method used was to enable seeing the subliminal representation of gender in the textbooks, this method alone is not comprehensive to achieve so. In this study, while I looked at the frequency of male and female representation first, then at the textual representation, the use of a third explanatory dimension, such as interviews, would have rendered the findings richer and more compelling. Another possible limitation of the study is that I only analysed one textbook of each series. While one textbook might not be representative of the textbook of each country, the two textbooks that have been selected are indeed chosen and approved by the governments of Finland and Japan and hence do hold certain credibility. Future research can benefit from these limitations and improve on them in order to produce richer more data that covers the issue of gender bias in the textbooks of developed countries and how it reflects on their societies.

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