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REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDONESIAN SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. There are many studies related to gender representation in textbooks, but there is still limited research specifically focused on the representation of women in Indonesian social studies textbooks. This study aims to address that gap by analyzing the portrayal of women in three Indonesian social studies textbooks in comparison to the dominant representation of men. The findings suggest that the authors of these textbooks are generally mindful of gender equality and strive to represent both men and women. However, the majority of representations of women tend to be stereotyped, both in images and text. This analysis demonstrates that social studies textbook authors and curriculum designers would benefit from a deeper awareness of the stereotypes that depict unequal gender roles for both women and men. It is essential to avoid gender stereotypes, as social studies textbooks not only provide theoretical and practical knowledge but also convey underlying values such as gender equity.

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INTRODUCTION

Textbooks play a crucial role in shaping gender identity in schools (Yakub et al., 2024). They serve as essential learning tools that teachers use to convey information to students (Zahwa & Syafi'i, 2022). The content presented in textbooks provides a clear guide for what should be taught, along with relevant questions and exercises for student engagement (Krishannanto, 2025). Research by Sadker et al. (2007) indicates that students spend 80% to 95% of their class time utilizing textbooks. This finding aligns with the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 8 of 2016, which recognizes textbooks as primary learning resources critical for achieving both basic and core competencies. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, accredited textbooks are deemed suitable for use in educational institutions. In addition to serving as teaching media, textbooks also function as compilers of syllabi (Prihantoro, 2017).

The use of textbooks in schools is a supporting resource for the learning process, including in social studies, which is compulsory in junior high schools. Given the importance of textbooks in every learning process, ideally, the textbooks used should be fair and gender-neutral learning resources. Textbooks should facilitate gender-related conversations between teachers and students. However, gender bias in textbooks is a barrier to efforts dedicated to ensuring gender equality (Blumberg, 2008; Ma, 2020; Scott & Husain, 2021).

Gender bias in school textbooks has been identified in numerous studies conducted worldwide. Article 10c of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) refers to the elimination of stereotypical concepts about the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging co-education and other forms of education that contribute to this goal, in particular through the revision of textbooks and school programs and the adaptation of teaching methods. Much of the reviewed literature indicates that the roles of girls and women in textbooks are depicted as inferior to those of boys and men (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). Several studies have highlighted the existence of gender inequality in school textbooks. These studies note that the dominance of masculinity over

femininity in a way that perpetuates unequal gender relations while simultaneously consolidating male supremacy through school textbooks (Kostas, 2021). Researchers emphasize that school textbooks are an integral aspect of the curriculum and largely a formal artifact that indicates what educational norms should be transmitted in the classroom (Levtov, 2014). Furthermore, textbooks have the potential and capacity to push girls and boys into certain gender performances (Pillay & Maistry, 2018).

Stereotypically, women are portrayed as playing traditional roles (e.g., cooking or knitting) and as having little say in business or politics (Setyono, 2018; Yang, 2016). Textbook research has similarly demonstrated that women are portrayed as weak, emotional, irrational, passive, and jealous (Namatende-Sakwa, 2019). The findings reveal that, despite being authored by female writers, the textbook still reproduces gender inequality (Hafidhatur, 2024). For example, the stereotype that women are more socially and group-oriented is evident; female students are often depicted in groups of two or three. Conversely, male students are depicted as more competent when working alone. Empirical evidence suggests that women are agents of social change in several disciplines in society (Clark Blickenstaff, 2005); for example, women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives for the 2024-2029 period showed a positive increase, reaching 21.9%, although it is still far from the ideal target of 30% as mandated in the policy affirmation (Rambe et al., 2025).

Several previous studies have indicated that the representation of women is improving in various areas, including textbooks. However, other research continues to provide evidence that stereotypical representations of men remain prevalent. In Indonesia, research on gender portrayals in social studies textbooks is still limited and underexplored. Indonesian social studies textbooks are valuable resources that can promote positive images of women in education, helping to ensure that women have equal opportunities with men. Social studies learning becomes a formal means to voice the importance of gender equality, a reality that must be realized in order to optimize the birth of a strong generation and a golden generation of Indonesia in the future (Azifambayunasti, 2022). In light of these issues, this study aims to present empirical evidence regarding how women are represented in Indonesian social studies textbooks, particularly in the context of the dominant male representations.

This research is grounded in Eastern feminist theory, particularly from an Islamic perspective. Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation with diverse ethnic and religious groups, presents challenges in examining the construction of femininity and gender equality. Being a predominantly Muslim country, Islam plays a significant role in shaping gender identity and equality. In the context of Islam, the term "kodrat" (natural law), borrowed from Arabic and commonly used in Indonesia, is particularly relevant. Kodrat is interpreted as regulating the behaviors and activities of both women and men. Women are expected to embody femininity that values motherhood and traditional female behaviors, while men are encouraged to engage in hegemonic masculinity, emphasizing their roles as fathers (Adriany, 2019). Patriarchal order is a social system that places men as the main central authority figures in social organizations (Mutiah, 2019). Women are often expected to conform to feminine roles based on the premise of nature. Although they may aspire to pursue the same careers as men, societal views rooted in this natural order often portray men as the primary career figures, creating challenges that women are less likely to face.

The development of gender equality in Indonesia includes several important historical milestones for women. Women have been fighting for equal rights long before Indonesia gained independence. Notable figures like Kartini, who is recognized as the first Indonesian woman to advocate for the education of lower-class women, played a significant role in the women's emancipation movements aimed at achieving equal educational opportunities (Porter, 2001; Setyono, 2018). Additionally, Dewi Sartika and Maria Walanda Maramis also promoted and encouraged educational access for women (Porter, 2001; Widodo, 2018). Historical records indicate that during the Dutch colonial period, Indonesian women made several efforts to advance gender equality. These initiatives show that societal norms did not deter these women from participating in public life. Their contributions have significantly improved the quality of

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life for Indonesian women and have opened doors for greater participation in the public sphere (Setyono, 2018; Simorangkir, 2011).

To address the challenges of the 21st century, the Indonesian government has actively supported gender equality by placing women in strategic positions. During President Joko Widodo's administration, nearly a quarter of the ministers were women, and almost one-third of the members of parliament were also women (Setyono, 2018; Siregar & Wahidah, 2007). These actions reflect confidence in women's abilities to contribute to various government sectors that have traditionally been dominated by men. In the context of globalization and digitalization, many women are also being employed in the private sector in Indonesia. Most women occupy significant roles in service industries such as banking and retail (Simorangkir, 2011). Given this evidence, it is essential to continue promoting the concept of gender equality to achieve equal rights in various fields in Indonesia, including science, which has often been male-dominated.

Textbooks themselves are learning resources that can be used by students to fulfill certain learning competencies according to learning objectives (Fitriansyah, 2019). They play a crucial role in social studies education, often serving as the primary medium for teaching and learning in the classroom and the foundation for classroom discussions. The concept of gender in the sample is expressed in the form of images and text with the discovery of the role of injustice between men and women (Taufiq & Choiroh, 2021). Furthermore, study on gender representation in Japanese textbooks highlighted that the "male-first" phenomenon remains a prevalent issue (Lee, 2018). Research in Malaysia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh has also revealed instances of gender inequality and male bias, with women often depicted as passive and introverted in the English textbooks analyzed (Islam & Asadullah (2018).

Consider textbooks to be agents of social change because they spread global values. In addition to their role in facilitating learning through the dissemination of knowledge, textbooks also play a crucial part in education by transmitting norms and values (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). Furthermore, examined the construction of discourse and gender representation in elementary school textbooks using a Feminist Critical Discourse framework (Kostas, 2021). The study found that men are predominantly represented in both images and text. Similarly, that Romanian textbooks also display a dominant representation of men and boys, indicating a lack of visibility for women and girls in both images and text (Cocorada, 2018). These studies suggest that textbooks are generally androcentric and characterized by hegemonic discourses surrounding femininity and masculinity.

In social studies textbooks, research by Dejene (2017) highlights an unfair representation of girls and women. This observation is also supported by Asadullah et al. (2018) and Risman (2018), who agree that women and girls are both underrepresented and stereotyped in these educational materials. Textbooks are described in the literature as crucial tools for introducing gender concepts to children. Consequently, the unequal treatment of women and men, as well as girls and boys, in these textbooks can influence students' thoughts and behaviors in society. Through the content of textbooks, students' ideas are shaped. Asserts that designing textbooks involves selecting values, norms, and representations that promote social cohesion and foster harmonious relationships between individuals and institutions (Dejene, 2017). Therefore, the limited representation of gender in social studies textbooks warrants serious attention, as these materials serve as vital resources for learning.

From birth, both men and women act as social actors. In social psychology, McAdams (2013) refer to this phenomenon as self-presentation in everyday life, highlighting how humans engage in social behavior. This theory posits that men and women present themselves in ways that are visible and accessible to others, often seeking validation or benefits from these presentations. Consequently, everyone plays a role, follows a script, engages in routines, and manages the impressions they create on their audience (McAdams, 2013). The actions of these social actors are frequently represented through visual means, such as self-images, photographs, and drawings.

In the context of visual representation, Leeuwen (2008) has considered three dimensions of how men and women relate in society. These dimensions are social distance, social relations,

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and social interaction. Social distance communicates the interpersonal relationship between the image and the viewer. Thus, distance in an image represents a symbol. The framing of 'long distance' and 'close distance' in an image or photograph conveys different meanings to the viewer, implying 'stranger' and 'one of us', respectively. Therefore, an image in a textbook can meaningfully convey different characteristics and impressions of individuals. Furthermore, the dimension of social relations shows how an image or photograph taken from different angles conveys different meanings. Leeuwen (2008) argues that the angle taken can express two aspects of the social relationship between the visual representation and the viewer; both express power and involvement. Finally, the dimension of social interaction relates to the gaze that emerges from an image or photograph. This has two important meanings: ‘direct gaze’ refers to the person represented looking at the viewer, while ‘indirect gaze’ refers to the person represented not looking at the viewer.

Based on this phenomenon, this study attempts to analyze the depiction of women in Indonesia social studies textbooks, how women are positioned in jobs or professions as well as in various social activities related to women. This textual analysis aims to fill this gap by investigating the representation of women in three junior high school social studies textbooks in Indonesia, while also comparing how men are more dominantly represented. By analyzing the representation of women in social studies textbooks, this study can help raise awareness of the importance of gender equality in the Indonesian education curriculum.

This study aims to encourage more gender-responsive education policies in the development and selection of teaching materials. This is very important because textbooks are the main tool in shaping students' understanding and views of the social world, including their views on gender equality. Textbooks not only function as a source of information, but also as a tool that supports efforts to create a more inclusive society free from gender discrimination. In addition, the Indonesian education curriculum, which increasingly introduces global values such as gender equality, must be supported by teaching materials that concretely reflect these values. Given that education is one of the most important tools for influencing social change, equal representation of women in social studies textbooks is crucial for creating a more just and equal society in the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs textual analysis Fairclough (2003) as a key component of discourse analysis. The term 'text' is used here in a broader context, encompassing visual imagery; this approach is used to uncover and raise awareness of how social events are reflected in textbooks. The use of textual analysis can also reveal inherent assumptions in texts and enhance understanding of their impact, as texts often present implicit assumptions. In this study, textbooks are used as sources that provide language and visual choices that represent women as social actors. In the Indonesian context, women's issues are a crucial aspect frequently discussed not only in textbooks but also in various aspects of life (Lestariyana et al., 2020). Therefore, this study attempts to present social events or practices, as reflected in Indonesian social studies textbooks, to provide a way to understand the important changes we can make to engage women more inclusively in Indonesia and around the world.

We have selected three Indonesian national social studies textbooks for junior high school students (Grade VII, Grade VIII, and Grade IX), titled “Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial SMP/Mts Kelas VII” (Nursa’ban & Supardi, 2023), “Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial SMP/Mts Kelas VIII” (Supardi et al., 2021), and “Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial SMP/Mts Kelas IX” (Satria et al., 2022) published by the Center for Books Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2023, 2021, and 2022 because they were designed in accordance with the National Curriculum and are widely used in junior high schools in Indonesia. Social studies learning resources in junior high schools in Indonesia are diverse, including not only textbooks but also handouts, worksheets, and other texts. Therefore, we focused on nationally used textbooks as the primary social studies learning

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resources because each school is allowed to use additional learning resources beyond the textbooks recommended by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture.

For our textual analysis, we focused on analyzing language texts and visual images depicting female characters in the form of text; photographs; cartoons; and sketches. Furthermore, we calculated the percentage of female representation in textbooks compared to male representation; we manually recorded how many women and men were depicted in the textbooks. To further our analysis, we began a discursive analysis highlighting the visibility of female characters in three textbooks, using several contextual social parameters: occupation; women's social activities and achievements; and female characters doing things that women do. For this reason, we established parameters to describe how female characters are represented in social studies textbooks. To aid our textual analysis, we used the theory of visual representation of social actors proposed by Leeuwen (2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first finding relates to the percentage of gender representation depicted in the three social studies textbooks. Overall, we conducted a quantitative analysis of gender representation by counting the number of language and visual texts presented in the textbooks. Our research revealed that the proportional representation of women (23.91%) was significantly lower than that of men (76.09%), out of a total of 230 images of men and women in the three social studies textbooks; this places male characters as the dominant figures in the textbooks. The results of this quantitative analysis align with the findings of several previous researchers (Elgar, 2004; Kahveci, 2010; Namatende-Sakwa, 2019; Whiteley, 1996). The following table illustrates further findings regarding the representation of women in the three social studies textbooks (Table 1). It is important to emphasize that this study focuses on the depiction of women. We begin further analysis of the discourse concerning the representation of women in the context of social actors (Leeuwen, 2008) including women's work or jobs, activities and achievements, and female characters appearing in matters related to women.

Women Representation at Work (occupation)

In social life, both paid and unpaid work tend to be stereotyped based on gender. Thus, different gender stereotypes are embedded in relation to work. To achieve equality, both women and men must take on social roles, including work (Lestariyana et al., 2020). From a sociological and psychological perspective, Lestariyana et al (2020) argue that certain jobs or positions represent a particular gender. For example, women tend to work in the medical sector (e.g., as nurses) or the education sector (e.g., as teachers), but men tend to work in agriculture and engineering. However, the visual text table above illustrates that various types of jobs are now no longer gender-specific. This shows that women also have the ability to work in sectors previously identified with men.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. (a) A woman who works as a medical worker (Theme 1 class 8 p.31).
(b) A female worker in an electronics factory (Theme 4 Class 8 p.262) (Supardi et al., 2021).

Figure 1 (a, b) below illustrates how Indonesian social studies textbooks represent women in the context of work. The first image (1a) shows a woman working as a medical professional. In the context of the visual representation of social actors (Leeuwen, 2008), this image constructs gender stereotypes, and represents many language choices, such as exclusion; role;

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generic; and individual. The choice of exclusion means that the person shown in the visual image may come from a group such as a nurse, doctor, or medical therapist who works in a medical institution. Thus, she most likely receives a fixed salary for what she does, and she also participates in her community. Examining the generic aspect then reveals the implied meaning that the person should not represent a certain race or ethnicity, even though the image is specifically sourced from an Indonesian social studies textbook, and therefore, the image of the woman shows an Eastern individual. Based on the representation of the language choices presented (Lestariyana et al., 2020).

Table 1. Depiction of Women's Representation in Three Social Studies Textbooks "Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Grade VII, Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Grade VIII, and Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Grade IX".

Unit	Description	Grade (Page)	Women's activities in the Textbooks
Theme 1	Image of female potato farmer	VII/ 17	This visual text informs readers about women's work as potato farmers.
Theme 1	Image of a gas stove for cooking	VII/ 26	This visual text informs that a gas stove is a tool used by women for cooking in household chores.
Theme 2	Female K-Pop Idol Pictures	VII/ 75	Visual texts describe the variety of jobs in the arts that modern women pursue.
Theme 3	Biotechnology laboratory image	VII/ 128	The visual text explains that women can also work as laboratory assistants in a lab.
Theme 4	Image of woven fabric craftsman	VII/ 162	The visual text tells the reader that traditional woven cloth craftsmen are dominated by women.
Theme 4	Household income distribution diagram	VII/ 209	The visual text informs readers that women also have duties in the domestic sphere as managers of family finances.
Theme 4	Image of banking activities	VII/ 212	The visual text illustrates to the reader that apart from being a customer, the job of bank teller is also dominated by women.
Theme 4	Image of work activities at the waste bank	VII/ 220	The visual text illustrates to the reader that social-based work such as waste banks can be managed by women.
Theme 1	Picture of the type of work	VIII/ 31	The visual text informs readers that women also have the opportunity to choose jobs such as traders and medical personnel.
Theme 1	Picture of graduation procession at college	VIII/ 45	The visual text illustrates to readers that women can become leaders in educational institutions, such as becoming Chancellors.
Theme 1	Tea Plantation Picture	VIII/ 74	The visual text tells readers about female tea farmers on a plantation.
Theme 3	Hero Image	VIII/ 143	Visual text and language tell readers that Indonesia has many female heroes, one of whom is Cut Nyak Dien.
Theme 4	Image of a cigar factory after independence	VIII/ 226	The visual text and language tell the reader that after the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, the nation's economy began to grow, one of the reasons being the existence of cigar factories whose workers were predominantly women.
Theme 4	Photo of the President of the Republic of Indonesia	VIII/ 262	Visual text and language inform readers that the Indonesian nation was once led by a female president.
Theme 4	Photo of an electronics factory	VIII/ 271	The visual text depicts female workers in an electronics factory that is usually dominated by men.
Theme 1	World festival event photos	IX /18	The visual text depicts the abilities of women in international competitions as professional singers.
Theme 4	Photos of Pakistani gender equality activists	IX/ 237	The visual text and language inform the reader that there are several figures fighting for gender equality, one of whom is Malala Yousafzai.
Theme 4	Environmental activist photo	IX/243	Visual text and language tell readers that women have a big role as environmental activists who care about sustainability.

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The second image (b) shows young female workers in an electronics factory operating production equipment. The representation of women in this section is supported by text explaining production activities that can encourage exports and imports between countries. These women act as agents who play a role in economic activity. By referring to the context of how women are represented in the workplace, we can build an understanding of gender equality in pursuing careers. Both the visual and linguistic texts in this context demonstrate social practices surrounding how women pursue careers (Lestariyana et al., 2020).

Careers are not limited to specific jobs typically held by women, but can include jobs traditionally held by men (Lestariyana et al., 2020). For example, women can choose careers in the medical field (Etzkowitz & Ranga, 2011) and technical fields, as shown in this visual image, disciplines traditionally dominated by men. On the other hand, career decisions are sometimes based on women's academic backgrounds. Women who pursue higher education have the option of pursuing careers in a variety of disciplines, including technical and STEM fields (Clark Blickenstaff, 2005).

From a sociocultural perspective, these language texts contradict Indonesian nature, which positions women to behave femininely and encourages them to balance nature with work when making career choices. Nature emphasizes that women should not forget their obligations to their families. This requires far greater effort from women than is expected of men (Adriany, 2019). Therefore, this significant challenge presents an opportunity to position Indonesian social studies textbooks as a tool to demonstrate that women can also contribute to male-dominated careers.

Representation of Women in Social Studies Textbooks

The representation of women in the three social studies textbooks, particularly in social activities, is described in general terms. Some visuals of female heroes, for example, are depicted with only a brief explanation of their roles and struggles. However, these female characters are well understood by students as heroes who played a crucial role in the Indonesian nation's struggle, among the many male heroes presented. Furthermore, several images, both photographs and animations, still relegate women to domestic tasks, a common feature of Indonesian socio-cultural life. This is evident in the sentence:

"*This mineral is often used in the manufacture of cosmetics, such as powder."*

"The use of natural gas can be seen, for example, when you cook using LPG (liquefied petroleum gas)" (Theme 1, Grade VII, p. 27) (Nursa'ban & Supardi, 2023).

Both sentences are accompanied by illustrations of a woman applying powder and a woman cooking in the kitchen. This suggests that any explanation of women's domestic habits will automatically be represented by a female figure. However, in the example of using petroleum as fuel, the representation is presented through an illustration of a man riding a motorbike.

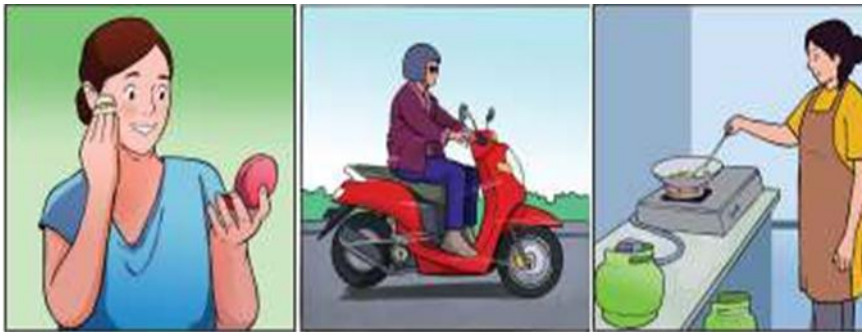


Figure 2. Utilization of petroleum products Theme 1, class VIII p.27 (Supardi et al., 2021).

The image above shows that women are consistently identified with domestic work, while men are depicted as having activities outside the home. Similarly, in other visual texts, particularly in social interactions, men's roles appear more dominant.

In addition to partially presenting representations of women and men, social studies textbooks also contain several depictions of real-life interactions between men and women

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within a family. These depictions include a complete family consisting of a father, mother, and children, as shown in Figure 3 (a, b) below:



Figure 3: Family Representation (a) Theme 1 p.38, (b) Theme 3 p.135, Grade VII (Nursa'ban & Supardi, 2023).

The depiction of family illustrations in Social Studies (IPS) textbooks plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of gender roles in social and family life. The urgency of depicting gender-equal family illustrations in IPS textbooks is significant, as this has a direct impact on students' understanding of equality, the development of critical thinking skills, and changes in attitudes toward gender roles in society. In the image above, both textual and visual analysis attempt to explain to readers the ideal conditions for family interactions, particularly in fulfilling primary needs such as education and the need for nutrition and togetherness. Figure 3 (a) shows the interaction between parents and children saying goodbye before leaving for school. Meanwhile, Figure 3 (b) shows the interaction between families during a meal together Meanwhile, Figure 3(b) shows the interaction between families during a meal together. While neither image directly indicates which role is more prominent than the other, it can be concluded that the visual text attempts to present equality within the family environment.

Based on the overall picture found in this study, women's representation in social activities can be balanced. Women can work in both the formal and informal sectors, just like men, but they can also perform other household duties, such as wives and mothers. However, stereotypes about women's roles are still clearly visible in social studies textbooks in Indonesia, where the percentage of depictions of women and men remains significantly different.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aims to investigate the representation of women in three Indonesian national social studies textbooks for junior high schools. It is important to note that we analyzed the visual texts and language that represent female characters. Based on this textual analysis, this study focuses on providing further understanding of female stereotypes across several textual parameters, such as women's work, social activities, and female characters in relation to women-related issues. Our findings indicate that women's representations in three Indonesian national social studies textbooks (Grades VII, VIII, and IX) are depicted in several language options (i.e., exclusion, inclusion, agentic, generic, and individual) from a social role perspective.

In this context, women can be represented in various ways, such as medical personnel, engineering workers, and so on; however, at the same time, women can be representations of mothers, as is the case with the representation of women in images of family roles. Furthermore, as agents involved in scientific activities, a woman can contribute to social movements and be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her achievements, as was the case with the Pakistani female figure, Malala Yousafzai. This demonstrates that women can contribute equally to the development of scientific knowledge when given the opportunity to choose. Visual representations of social roles also reinforce women's position as individuals who can dedicate their lives to work, support the family economy, and spend leisure time with their families.

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Overall, although gender equality is supported through some representations of female characters and identities, gender stereotypes persist.

The findings of this study demonstrate several ways in which gender stereotypes can present unequal gender roles in social studies textbooks, highlighting the need for textbook authors and curriculum designers to address this. Avoiding gender stereotypes is crucial because social studies textbooks not only provide theoretical and practical knowledge but also convey values such as gender equality. Achieving gender equality remains challenging, as these issues are embedded in cultural and identity phenomena. What we found in Indonesian social studies textbooks predominantly represents masculinity; many representations depict tools, equipment, and so on in relation to men. In other words, there is an inherent identity in any field, including textbooks as a learning and teaching resource. Socioculturally, both women and men have equal opportunities to play diverse roles, which are upheld by the cultural identity of the society.

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