

## **Cover page**

**Title:** EDUCATION AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses about the status of women education in present education system and some measures to overcome the lags existing. Discrimination against girls and women in the developing world is a devastating reality. It results in millions of individual tragedies, which add up to lost potential for entire countries. Gender bias in education is an insidious problem that causes very few people to stand up and take notice. The victims of this bias have been trained through years of schooling to be silent and passive, and are therefore unwilling to stand up and make noise about the unfair treatment they are receiving. Departments of education should be providing mandatory gender-equity resource modules to in-service teachers, and gender bias needs to be addressed with all pre-service teachers. Educators need to be made aware of the bias they are reinforcing in their students through socialization messages, inequitable division of special education services, sexist texts and materials, and unbalanced time and types of attention spent on boys and girls in the classroom.*

# EDUCATION AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

## INTRODUCTION

"Until educational sexism is eradicated, more than half our children will be shortchanged and their gifts lost to society." (Sadker, 1994). Gender and education, from a sociological perspective, refers to the idea that the educational system does not offer the same type of opportunities for upward mobility to both genders equally. This is a type of sex discrimination being applied in the education system affecting both men and women during and after their educational experiences.

## GENDER BIAS IN EDUCATION

Gender bias in education is an insidious problem that causes very few people to stand up and take notice. The victims of this bias have been trained through years of schooling to be silent and passive, and are therefore unwilling to stand up and make noise about the unfair treatment they are receiving. "Over the course of years the uneven distribution of teacher time, energy, attention, and talent, with boys getting the lion's share, takes its toll on girls." (Sadker, 1994) Teachers are generally unaware of their own biased teaching behaviors because they are simply teaching how they were taught and the subtle gender inequities found in teaching materials are often overlooked. Girls and boys today are receiving separate and unequal educations due to the gender socialization that takes place in our schools and due to the sexist hidden curriculum students are faced with every day. Unless teachers are made aware of the gender-role socialization and the biased messages they are unintentionally imparting to students every day, and until teachers are provided with the methods and resources necessary to eliminate gender-bias in their classrooms, girls will continue to receive an inequitable education.

Discrimination against girls and women in the developing world is a devastating reality. It results in millions of individual tragedies, which add up to lost potential for entire countries. Studies show there is a direct link between a country's attitude toward women and its progress socially and economically. The status of women is central to the health of a society. If one part

suffers, so whole world, no one is excluded from this great evil.

"Sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations." (Sadker, 1994) In fact, upon entering school, girls perform equal to or better than boys on nearly every measure of achievement, but by the time they graduate high school or college, they have fallen behind. (Sadker, 1994) However, discrepancies between the performance of girls and the performance of boys in elementary education lead some critics to argue that boys are being neglected within the education system: Tragically, female children are most defenseless against the trauma of gender discrimination. The following obstacles are stark examples of what girls' worldwide face. But the good news is that new generations of girls represent the most promising source of change for women—and men—in the developing world today.

The socialization of gender within our schools assures that girls are made aware that they are unequal to boys. Every time students are seated or lined up by gender, teachers are affirming that girls and boys should be treated differently. When an administrator ignores an act of sexual harassment, he or she is allowing the degradation of girls. When different behaviors are tolerated for boys than for girls because 'boys will be boys', schools are perpetuating the oppression of females. There is some evidence that girls are becoming more academically successful than boys, however examination of the classroom shows that girls and boys continue to be socialized in ways that work against gender equity.

It is seen that Teachers socialize girls towards a feminine ideal. Girls are praised for being neat, quiet, and calm, whereas boys are encouraged to think independently, be active and speak up. Girls are socialized in schools to recognize popularity as being important, and learn that educational performance and ability are not as important. "Girls in grades six and seven rate being popular and well-liked as more important than being perceived as competent or independent. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to rank independence and competence as more important." (Bailey, 1992).

Once teachers have recognized their gender-biased behaviors, they need to be provided with resources to help them change. In their study focusing on how the effects of a gender resource

model would affect gender-biased teaching behaviors, Campbell (2000) provided teachers with a self-directed module aimed at reducing gender bias in the classroom. The module contained research on gender equity in the classroom, specific activities to reduce stereotypical thinking in students, and self-evaluation worksheets for teachers. The findings from this study support the hypothesis that "...female students would move from a position of relative deficiency toward more equity in total interactions...." (Jones, 2000) This demonstrates that teachers who are made aware of their gender-biased teaching behaviors and then provided with strategies and resources to combat bias are better able to promote gender equity in their classrooms.

### STATUS OF WOMEN AND HER EDUCATION

Women who have had some schooling are more likely to get married later, survive childbirth, have fewer and healthier children, and make sure their own children complete school. They also understand hygiene and nutrition better and are more likely to prevent disease by visiting health care facilities. The UN estimates that for every year a woman spends in primary school, the risk of her child dying prematurely is reduced by 8 percent.

Girls' education also means comprehensive change for a society. As women get the opportunity to go to school and obtain higher-level jobs, they gain status in their communities. Status translates into the power to influence their families and societies.

Even bigger changes become possible as girls' education becomes the cultural norm. Women can't defend themselves against physical and sexual abuse until they have the authority to speak against it without fear. Knowledge gives that authority. Women who have been educated are half as likely to undergo harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and four times as likely to protect their daughters from it. The Global Campaign for Education also states that a primary education defends women against HIV/AIDS infection—disproportionately high for women in developing countries—by giving "the most marginalized groups in society—notably young women—the status and confidence needed to act on information and refuse unsafe sex."

### WHAT WE HAVE TO DO

Departments of education should be providing mandatory gender-equity resource modules to in-service teachers, and gender bias needs to be addressed with all pre-service teachers. Educators need to be made aware of the bias they are reinforcing in their students through socialization messages, inequitable division of special education services, sexist texts and materials, and unbalanced time and types of attention spent on boys and girls in the classroom. Gender bias is also taught implicitly through the resources chosen for classroom use. Using texts that omit contributions of women, that tokenize the experiences of women, or that stereotype gender roles, further compounds gender bias in schools' curriculum. While research shows that the use of gender-equitable materials allows students to have more gender-balanced knowledge, to develop more flexible attitudes towards gender roles, and to imitate role behaviors contained in the materials (Klein, 1985) schools continue to use gender-biased texts.

## CONCLUSION

Education is the tool that can help break the pattern of gender discrimination and bring lasting change for women in developing countries. Educated women are essential to ending gender bias, starting by reducing the poverty that makes discrimination even worse in the developing world. The most basic skills in literacy and arithmetic open up opportunities for better-paying jobs for women. Uneducated women in rural areas of Zambia, for instance, are twice as likely to live in poverty as those who have had eight or more years of education. The longer a girl is able to stay in school, the greater her chances to pursue worthwhile employment, higher education, and a life without the hazards of extreme poverty.

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