

Gender Bias

While the past few decades have seen an improvement in the treatment of females in classroom methods and curricular materials, it would be premature to declare victory and dismiss issues of gender bias. Today, our girls **and** boys remain the victims of gender stereotypes in text and resource materials. They are also victims of unintended or sexist behaviors by educators. Often teachers reflect varied expectations for children, based on a student's gender, class, race and ethnicity. Most teachers care deeply about the youngsters in their rooms. They are confident that they treat all their students the same. However, many teachers who analyze their own attitudes and behaviors discover the subtle and pervasive nature of gender inequity in the classroom.

Some biased behaviors in the classroom:

- * Usually males receive more teacher questions than females.
- * Minimal wait time for females' answers
- * More frequent follow-up questions with males
- * Uneven ratio of student/teacher interactions: # of responses male to female = 7:3
- * Males are also more likely to call out or act out, demanding and receiving teacher attention.
- * Segregated seating patterns reinforce unequal teacher attention. About half of America's classrooms are characterized by gender segregated classrooms
- * Boys are more likely to be called up to the front of the room to do demonstrations (for example a science demonstration)
- * Boys are more likely to be disciplined than girls, even when the misbehavior is identical
- * Girls are more likely to be praised for the appearance and neatness of their work
- * Females often stereotyped into clerical role because of neat notes
- * Teachers are more likely to offer boys specific feedback on their work – including praise, criticism and remediation
- * Boys are more likely to receive attributions to effort and ability, teacher comments giving them confidence that success and competence is simply a matter of applying themselves
- * Girls are often told, "It's okay, as long as you try." For example, a teacher may take the litmus paper from a female student and "does" it for her, but talks a male student through the correct use of litmus paper
- * School textbooks and supplemental resource materials tend to be filled with male protagonists and stories
- * More positive feedback and remediation to males
- * Males are allowed to speak over females

Based on the Viewing Guide by Phyllis Lerner and David Sadker WGBY 57 Springfield, MA

Indicators of Gender Bias

Many teachers participate in gender biased actions without realizing it. It is an unconscious act that has many effects on the students in a classroom. Here are some questions teachers can use to reflect upon and analyze gender biased behavior and identify if it exists in their classroom.

- Who do I call on when hands are raised in class: boys or girls? Do I address them in the same manner?
- Do I equally scold both genders when problems and issues arise in the classroom?
- Do I distribute classroom duties equally or do I contribute to the stigma that girls should clean and boys should deal with technical issues?
- Do I ask higher level questions of each gender?
- Do I have the same expectations of all of my students?
- Do I provide equal amounts of help, feedback, encouragement and praise?
- Do I use gender free language in the classroom?
- Do I interrupt one gender more often than the other?
- Do I use examples of both genders when teaching a lesson? Is the text I use contributing to gender biased actions?

Tips on Avoiding Gender Bias in the Classroom

Many classroom teachers are unaware of gender bias in the classroom. Some suggestions for avoiding gender bias in a classroom:

Use inclusive language. "You guys" may be a popular way of addressing groups, but it's an example of gender bias.

Make sure expectations are the same for all of your students. Both genders can succeed at math, science, language arts and reading.

Use examples that are gender balanced. If there are none in your textbooks, do some research to find some.

Avoid stereotyping jobs for students such as having girls clean up and boys carry things.

Screen books, posters and other instructional materials for gender balance.

Try to put girls and boys in non-traditional situations, such as the placement of girls first in this sentence. Isn't it normally boys, then girls?

Make the classroom atmosphere one where both girls and boys are encouraged, questioned and reinforced.

Actively integrate groups by not allowing self-segregation.

Never use gender to group students.

Model gender balance by what you say and do.

Apply classroom rules fairly for both boys and girls.

Allow wait time of 3-5 seconds before calling on or responding to students