

National Implications: Factors of Gender Biases Impacting Urban Public Students

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ABSTRACT

Urban public students represent a full array of backgrounds and cultures, although their genders are only divided into to categories: male and female. Boys and girls are often mentally separated by teachers and parents. From this separation permeates discrimination and gender biases. Boys are stereotyped as being advanced in math and sciences, while girls are considered to be advanced in liberal arts. Such misconceptions are internalized by students and they grow up feeling they possess limited abilities to excel based on standards set by society, instead of following their own interest and goals. The authors discuss the existence of gender bias and the effect on students and their ability to reach success.

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments prohibits sex discrimination in schools (Tindall, Hamil, 2004). Boys and girls are treated differently from birth and this division transfuses from childhood to school experiences, and into adulthood. Girls are characterized with the color pink and boys are identified through the color blue, this is established at the hospitals at birth and at home when nurseries are decorated with this differentiation in mind. Boys are encouraged to be more physically active and aggressive and girls are encouraged to be more emotionally sensitive (Tindall, Hamil, 2004). It is socially acceptable for boys to play with trucks, cars and building kits, while girls are expected to play with dolls and kitchen sets.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the existence of gender biases and the effect on students and their ability to reach success.

Gender Stereotypes Exist

Gender stereotypes exist and can cause girls and boys to change their interests to adjust to what society expects of them based on gender alone. According to Tindall and Hamil (2004), society undervalues the role of women, and places a higher value on the traditional male role. A study was conducted by Jones, et al. (2000) found the attitudes and experiences of sixth grade students related to science concluded male extracurricular experiences included a variety of tools such as rifles, batteries, fuses, microscopes, and pulleys. Females reported experiences with bread making, sewing, and planting seeds (Tindall, Hamil 2004). Boys tend to be expected to have an environmentally induced advantage in math and science, while girls are expected to excel in language, arts and helping people.

In girls, there is a pattern of attribution of success and failure with respect to science and mathematics, which increases from elementary school to high school. In boys, the opposite is true (Smith, 1992), and they are viewed to excel in mathematics and science and are encouraged to be assertive, curious, questioning, and active. If girls were to exhibit these habits they would be considered obnoxious and bossy. Boys and girls are conditioned into believing they are not capable of succeeding in certain fields. Although this is not true, after years of separation and discrimination, these internalized feelings surface.

Positive role models assist in providing girls in seeing themselves in science careers (Graham, 2001). Teachers should take every opportunity to share the contributions of women in science to their students, being sure to include female science teachers in the school. Research indicates, in spite of a decrease in the transmission of gender stereotypes, stereotypical beliefs related to science persist among students (Tindall, Hamil 2004). These beliefs enter the classroom and drive the expectations of students as well as the beliefs and perceptions of the gender appropriateness or academic domain. Gender perceptions can have a negative influence on males and females. Motivation in females may decrease and their achievement and persistence may decline,

while males may be perceived as having the advantage, a more serious situation may arise.

Teachers Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes

Teachers perpetuate the gender stereotypes in the classroom from preschool to college, by interacting more often and in more detail with boys than with girls (Tindall, Hamil 2004). According to Woolfolk, by the time girls have completed high school, they have received 1,800 fewer hours of attention and instruction than boys (Woolfolk, 1998). Girls typically receive better grades in school and perform better on standardized tests, but boys outperform girls on the SAT in both mathematics and verbal section (Evans, 2002). Although girls receive less teacher interaction, in relation to the SAT scores, boys and girls with the exact SAT score do not do equally well in college: girls do better (Evans, 2002).

Coincidentally, Glazer states, “The new concern about boys follows a decade in which adolescent girls were thought to be suffering a loss in self-esteem and academic achievement in part because teachers gave them less attention than boys. Now, it is the boys who are falling behind and more likely to be in remedial classes, to be suspended and to drop out of school” (Glazer 2000).

Black Males Spend More Time in Special Education

According to the American Council on Education, the Education Trust, and the Schott Foundation, black males spend more time in special education, spend less time in advanced placement or college prep courses, and receive more disciplinary suspensions and expulsions than any other group in United States schools today (Varlas, 2005). A persistent achievement gap exists between black boys and their peers (Jordan, 1998). In 2004, The Schott Foundation stated more black males receive a GED in prison than graduate from college. Experts tracking black boys in schools cite inattention to gender learning styles, misinterpretation and abuse of zero tolerance policies, negative peer pressure, and lack of commitment to create a culture of care and nurturance for black boys (Varlas, 2005).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, gender biases exist in schools as they can define the future of a child's life. In this article, we reviewed the existence of gender biases and its effect on students and their ability to reach success. There is no physical rationale proving one gender is smarter or more intellectually inclined, therefore boys and girls can be represented more equally in sciences, math and literal arts. There may be a measurable difference in physical strength, but mental barriers could actually create a physical restraint as well. Finally, boys and girls deserve an equal chance at success; therefore teachers, parents and society may be creating a glass ceiling preventing students from achieving their fullest potential. Gender differentiation may be engrained in the minds of young children creating a society of students afraid to follow their true dreams because of an unacceptable gender bias.

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