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Gender Culture Among Students

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Abstract: *The article characterizes gender equality as a value of law in the discourse of anthropological trends. The main components of gender equality are characterized. The right to differences in the aspect of gender approach in law is considered.*

Keywords: *gender, gender equality, the right to differences, gender parity, gender approach, gender symmetry.*

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Introduction

Research shows that investing in girls' education is the single most important investment which developing countries can make toward improving their quality of life. Yet around the world, nearly 300 million school-aged children aren't getting an education, and 60% of them are girls. Of course, education is not simply a means to an end-it is also an end m itself, providing a basis for lifelong personal fulfillment. Many girls will never know this fulfillment. Education for a boy is often seen as a right which is sometimes denied; for girls, is a privilege to be earned. If funds are available after her brothers are educated, if parents' fears about her security and maintenance of traditional values can be met, If the school is not too distant, if she can continue to carry out her domestic tasks, if she doesn't have to marry early, if she doesn't become pregnant, if she does well on exams despite having little time to study-then she may get an education. Few girls can meet these requirements; few boys are asked to. Educators can't solve all of the problems which prevent girls m developing countries from getting an education. But we can address some of the more pernicious causes-for example, the belief held m many countries that girls are less intelligent than boys-and we can make education more relevant to their needs, so their performance is enhanced, they choose subjects which expand their options in life, and they understand their worth as people and as members of their community. This can encourage girls to stay m school, do well, and show the community that is worthwhile to educate them.

Girls' and Boys' Learning: What We Know

What can be done to improve classroom practice and to prepare better learn mg materials for girls and boys? This paper makes a few suggestions. But first, because we are working with many cultures, we need to understand how children everywhere learn and behave. Then we need to look at what we know about differences between the sexes. Children Around the World Do children learn the same way everywhere? This isn't one question.

It's at least four:

- ✓ Are cognitive processes universal?
- ✓ Do children everywhere pass through the same developmental processes when learn mg?
- ✓ Are children taught the same way everywhere?
- ✓ Do people want children to learn the same content everywhere?

Gender differences in the classroom

Gender roles are the patterns of behaviors, attitudes, and expectations associated with a particular sex—with being either male or female. For clarity, psychologists sometimes distinguish *gender differences*, which are related to social roles, from *sex differences*, which are related only to physiology and anatomy. Using this terminology, gender matters in teaching more than sex (in spite of any jokes told about the latter!).

Although there are many exceptions, boys and girls do differ on average in ways that parallel conventional gender stereotypes and that affect how the sexes behave at school and in class. The differences have to do with physical behaviors, styles of social interaction, academic motivations, behaviors, and choices. They have a variety of sources—primarily parents, peers, and the media. Teachers are certainly not the primary cause of gender role differences, but sometimes teachers influence them by their responses to and choices made on behalf of students.

Physical differences in gender roles

Physically, boys tend to be more active than girls, and by the same token more restless if they have to sit for long periods. They are also more prone than girls to rely on physical aggression if they are frustrated (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Both tendencies are inconsistent with the usual demands of classroom life, of course, and make it a little more likely that school will be a difficult experience for boys, even for boys who never actually get in trouble for being restless or aggressive.

During the first two or three years of elementary school, gross motor skills develop at almost the same average rate for boys and girls. As a *group*, both sexes can run, jump, throw a ball, and the like with about equal ease, though there are of course wide significant differences among *individuals* of both sexes. Toward the end of elementary school, however, boys pull ahead of girls at these skills even though neither sex has begun yet to experience puberty. The most likely reason is that boys participate more actively in formal and informal sports because of expectations and support from parents, peers, and society (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Greene, & Basinger-Fleischman, 2005; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). Puberty eventually adds to this advantage by making boys taller and stronger than girls, on average, and therefore more suited at least for sports that rely on height and strength.

Social differences in gender roles

When relaxing socially, boys more often gravitate to large groups. Whether on the playground, in a school hallway, or on the street, boys' social groups tend literally to fill up a lot of space, and often include significant amounts of roughhousing as well as organized and "semi-organized" competitive games or sports (Maccoby, 2002). Girls, for their part, are more likely to seek and maintain one or two close friends and to share more intimate information and feelings with these individuals. To the extent that these gender differences occur, they can make girls less visible or noticeable than boys, at least in leisure play situations where children or youth choose their companions freely. As with physical differences, however, keep in mind that differences in social interactions do not occur uniformly for all boys and girls. There are boys with close friends, contradicting the general trend, and girls who play primarily in large groups.

Differences in social interaction styles happen in the classroom as well. Boys, on average, are more likely to speak up during a class discussion—sometimes even if not called on, or even if they do not know as much about the topic as others in the class . When working on a project in a small co-ed group, furthermore they have a tendency to ignore girls' comments and contributions to the group. In this respect co-ed student groups parallel interaction patterns in many parts of society, where men also have a tendency to ignore women's comments and contributions.

Academic and cognitive differences in gender

On average, girls are more motivated than boys to perform well in school, at least during elementary school. By the time girls reach high school, however, some may try to down play their own academic ability in order make themselves more likeable by both sexes .Even if this occurs, though, it does not affect their grades: from kindergarten through twelfth grade, girls earn slightly higher average grades than boys .This fact does not lead to similar achievement, however, because as youngsters move into high school, they tend to choose courses or subjects conventionally associated with their gender—math and science for boys, in particular, and literature and the arts for girls. By the end of high school, this difference in course selection makes a measurable difference in boys' and girls' academic performance in these subjects.

But again, consider my caution about stereotyping: there are individuals of both sexes whose behaviors and choices run counter to the group trends. (I have made this point as well in "Preparing for Licensure: Interpreting Gender-Related Behavior" by deliberately concealing the gender of a student described.) Differences within each gender group generally are far larger than any differences between the groups. A good example is the "difference" in cognitive ability of boys and girls. Many studies have found none at all. A few others have found small differences, with boys slightly better at math and girls slightly better at reading and literature. Still other studies have found the differences not only are small, but have been getting smaller in recent years compared to earlier studies. Collectively the findings about cognitive abilities are virtually "non-findings," and it is worth asking why gender differences have therefore been studied and discussed so much for so many years (Hyde, 2005). How teachers influence gender roles?

Teachers often intend to interact with both sexes equally, and frequently succeed at doing so. Research has found, though, that they do sometimes respond to boys and girls differently, perhaps without realizing it. Three kinds of differences have been noticed. The first is the overall amount of attention paid to each sex; the second is the visibility or "publicity" of conversations; and the third is the type of behavior that prompts teachers to support or criticize students.

Attention paid

In general, teachers interact with boys more often than with girls by a margin of 10 to 30 percent, depending on the grade level of the students and the personality of the teacher .One possible reason for the difference is related to the greater assertiveness of boys that I already noted; if boys are speaking up more frequently in discussions or at other times, then a teacher may be "forced" to pay more attention to them. Another possibility is that some teachers may feel that boys are especially prone to getting into mischief, so they may interact with them more frequently to keep them focused on the task at hand .Still another possibility is that boys, compared to girls, may interact in a wider variety of styles and situations, so there may simply be richer opportunities to interact with them. This last possibility is partially supported by another gender difference in classroom interaction, the amount of public versus private talk.

Public talk versus private talk

Teachers have a tendency to talk to boys from a greater physical distance than when they talk to girls (Wilkinson & Marrett, 1985). The difference may be both a cause and an effect of general

gender expectations, expressive nurturing is expected more often of girls and women, and a businesslike task orientation is expected more often of boys and men, particularly in mixed-sex groups (Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003; Myaskovsky, Unikel, & Dew, 2005). Whatever the reason, the effect is to give interactions with boys more "publicity." When two people converse with each other from across the classroom, many others can overhear them; when they are at each other's elbows, though, few others can overhear.

Distributing praise and criticism

In spite of most teachers' desire to be fair to all students, it turns out that they sometimes distribute praise and criticism differently to boys and girls. The differences are summarized in Table 1. The tendency is to praise boys more than girls for displaying knowledge *correctly*, but to criticize girls more than boys for displaying knowledge *incorrectly* (Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Delamont, 1996). Another way of stating this difference is by what teachers tend to overlook: with boys, they tend to overlook *wrong* answers, but with girls, they tend to overlook *right* answers. The result (which is probably unintended) is a tendency to make boys' knowledge seem more important and boys themselves more competent. A second result is the other side of this coin: a tendency to make girls' knowledge *less* visible and girls themselves *less* competent. Gender differences also occur in the realm of classroom behavior. Teachers tend to praise girls for "good" behavior, regardless of its relevance to content or to the lesson at hand, and tend to criticize boys for "bad" or inappropriate behavior (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). This difference can also be stated in terms of what teachers overlook: with girls, they tend to overlook behavior that is not appropriate, but with boys they tend to overlook behavior that is appropriate. The net result in this case is to make girls' seem more good than they may really be, and also to make their "goodness" seem more important than their academic competence. By the same token, the teacher's patterns of response imply that boys are more "bad" than they may really be.

At first glance, the gender differences in interaction can seem discouraging and critical of teachers because they imply that teachers as a group are biased about gender. But this conclusion is too simplistic for a couple of reasons. One is that like all differences between groups, interaction patterns are trends, and as such they hide a lot of variation within them. The other is that the trends suggest what often tends in fact to happen, not what can in fact happen if a teacher consciously sets about to avoid interaction patterns like the ones I have described. Fortunately for us all, teaching does not need to be unthinking; we have choices that we can make, even during a busy class!

Table 1: Gender differences in how teachers praise and criticize students

Type of response from teacher	Boys	Girls
Praises	Correct knowledge	"Good" or compliant behavior
Overlooks or ignores	"Good" or compliant behavior; *in*correct knowledge	*Mis*behavior; correct knowledge
Criticizes	*Mis*behavior	*In*correct knowledge

Conclusion

This study explores the impact of school gender culture in the United States on boys' and girls' attachment to school and symptoms of depression. We consider multiple dimensions of school gender culture and hypothesize that student subjective well-being is lower in schools with a lower percentage of females, stronger orientations toward marriage, more prevalent contact sports, and a student body that engages more often in fighting and drinking. The hypotheses are derived from theories of gendered organizations, heteronormativity, and hypermasculinity. Analyses of a national sample of middle and high school students in the U.S. from the 1994–95 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health show considerable variation in school gender cultures, and regression

analyses yield some support for the hypotheses. A higher proportion of female students is associated with fewer depressive symptoms among girls as predicted, but weaker school attachment for boys. The results more consistently supported the hypotheses that student well-being suffers in schools where more classmates get into fights or get drunk. Finally, we find no evidence that student subjective well-being is affected by contexts in which marital plans are more prevalent or greater proportions of students play collision contact sports. We find some evidence that school gender composition and school contexts of fighting and drinking are consequential for student subjective well-being. We reject the hypothesis that school levels of marriage orientations and contact sports participation undermine student well-being. Overall, more work is needed in the conceptualization and measurement of school gender cultures.

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