Chapter 5

How Society and Schools Shortchange Girls and Boys

with Dolores Delgado Campbell

There are strong similarities between sexism and racism. Both teach role relationships that leave one group in a subordinate position. Both are primarily expressed through institutional arrangements of privilege for some and oppression for others. Both are forms of violence: individual and collective, psychological and physical. Just as previous chapters described how African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, among others, are harmed by low expectations, being female also leads to subtle forms of tracking—even by female teachers.

Amott and Matthaei (1991) argue that gender, like race, is as much a social as a biological category:

Gender differences in the social lives of men and women are based on, but not the same thing as, biological differences between the sexes. Gender is rooted in societies’ beliefs that the sexes are naturally distinct and opposed social beings. These beliefs are turned into self-fulfilling prophecies through sex-role socialization; the biological sexes are assigned distinct and often unequal work and political positions, and turned into distinct genders. (p. 13)
The school site is a stage on which gender roles are developed in our society, and thus schools contribute to the assignment of unequal status and work opportunity in our rapidly changing economy. Schools serve as "gatekeepers" providing opportunity to some, but not to all.

Between 1983 and 1992, the press, elected officials, and corporate advocacy groups conducted a national debate, loosely termed the "educational reform movement," concerning the role and future of public education in the United States. The leading "experts" in this debate avoided discussions of race, class, and gender issues whenever possible. In 1992, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) issued a report, How Schools Shortchange Girls, that responded to the avoidance of gender issues:

The absence of attention to girls in the current educational debate suggests that girls and boys have identical educational experiences in schools. Nothing could be further from the truth. Whether one looks at achievement scores, curriculum design, self-esteem levels, or staffing patterns, it is clear that sex and gender make a difference in the nation's public elementary and secondary schools. There is clear evidence that the educational system is not meeting girls' needs. Girls and boys enter school roughly equal in measured ability. In some measures of school readiness, such as fine motor control, girls are ahead of boys. Twelve years later, girls have fallen behind their male classmates in key areas such as higher-level mathematics and measures of self-esteem. (AAUW, 1992, p. 2)

**Tracking Female Students**

For girls, especially middle-class, European American girls, attending school in the United States means getting a head start in the early grades only to be tracked and subsequently held back or diverted into less challenging fields in the higher grades. Recall that in Chapter 1 we defined tracking as a system wherein individuals are identified according to specified physiological, cultural, socioeconomic, or academic criteria and placed in academic course schedules [tracks] designed to fulfill select educational prerequisites, develop a specific skill set, or prepare them for specific careers. Oakes (1985) amplifies this definition:

Tracking is the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes. Sometimes students are classified as fast, average, or slow learners and placed into fast, average, or slow classes on the basis of their scores on achievement or ability tests. Often teachers' estimates of what students have already learned or their potential for learning more determine how students are identified and placed. Sometimes students are classified according to what seems most appropriate to their future lives. Sometimes, but rarely in any genuine sense, students themselves choose to be in "vocational," "general," or "academic" programs. (p. 3)

Tracking of women occurs in our schools despite the fact that the schools are predominantly female turf. For example, women now constitute a majority of all college students and 75 percent of all teachers, concentrated particularly at the elementary school level. In Los Angeles, California, for example, over 70 percent of the
teachers and over half of the administrators in K–6 elementary schools are female (Los Angeles County Office of Education, 1991).

The women in charge of these schools are usually European American. In most elementary schools, girls are not systematically disparaged and criticized for being girls, although they may be disparaged for being lower-class Latinas, African Americans, or Asians. The emotions and turmoil of middle-class European American girls are sympathetically understood by elementary school authorities, both teachers and principals. The female-dominated institution produces female success during the critical early years when the child is defining her own identity and her relationship to learning and schooling (National Education Association, 1990; Sadker, Sadker, & Long, 1989).

**Self-Esteem**

Although racism and sexism both have damaging effects on the oppressed and on the oppressor, their manifestations in the early years of school are often quite different from their adult forms. While the excellent AAUW report argues that positive cross-sex relationships may be more difficult than cross-race relationships, in elementary schools the problem is more complex. This is because families and schools generally are much better at giving young children positive cross-gender experiences than they are at giving them positive cross-racial experiences. Several examples can be seen in the typical home.

Children develop a view of self in their very early years, usually in the intimate and nurturing surroundings of the home. Evidence indicates that children learn both about themselves and about others by at least age 4. Most learning of “appropriate” role relationships takes place under the guidance of females, either in the home or in child care.

When children or adults work in an intimate relationship with another person in a positive environment, they learn to like and respect that person. This equal-status interaction teaches mutual respect (Buteyn, 1989; National Education Association, 1990; Sadker et al., 1989). Almost all little boys have an intimate, trust-building relationship or an equal-status relationship with at least one female—usually their mother. In the early formative years, most boys learn to respect and love their mother or some other female caregiver, such as a grandmother or aunt. Few young boys learn to dominate their mothers. This early relationship should provide a basis for future learning of mutual respect and cooperation in relationships with women.

Of course, this picture does not match the experience of all children. In a home with an abusive or dominating parent, children may learn abusive and dominating patterns. In homes with a single female head of household, boys may still learn respectful relationships. In some such homes, however, boys may fail to experience positive relationships with males. They then may get guidance from television and the streets—both inadequate substitutes for a caring family. However, generally speaking, prior to age 6, most young boys and girls learn to interact with their peers without male dominance. Their early experience of respect and cooperation provides a basis for future equality-based relationships.
While families provide opportunities for cross-gender respect, they seldom provide opportunities for cross-racial respect. Most U.S. neighborhoods, cities, and families are segregated by race and culture. Most of our cities are more racially segregated in 1990 than they were in 1960 (Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997). Too many of our young children do not develop an intimate, loving, caring relationship with persons of other races.

The teaching profession remains female dominated and racially segregated (National Education Association, 1998). As a result, too few young students have a positive relationship with a teacher from a minority culture. The lack of this intimate, perception-shaping experience makes learning mutual respect and cooperation in cross-cultural relationships more difficult. Children learn to fear the "other," the outsider. This fear establishes a basis for future learning of prejudice.

The lack of cultural diversity in the upbringing and schooling of young children hits the children of minority cultures hardest. When African American, Vietnamese, or Latina girls enter school, they enter a new culture, often one where they are regarded as "other," different, and inferior. The shock may be profound. Some of these children may suddenly feel uncertain about themselves and become withdrawn or defensive. Their ability to learn also suffers. Too often failure and frustration in school attacks a student's self-image and distorts her view of her home culture (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Foster, 1994). Young girls (and boys) of color first experience an inferior, castelike status in their neighborhood school.

Entering school is a major, traumatic event in the lives of many girls (and boys) from these cultures. The average African American or Latina student enters school a few months behind her middle-class counterparts in skill development, and falls progressively behind for the next 12 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Although school may not be the primary source of this society's oppressions, it is often the institution where tracking, labeling, and failing first occur.

Oakes (1988) documents the negative results of tracking African American and Latina youths away from college-bound classes and into general classes, homemaking, and business courses. Evidence indicates that Catholic schools track Latinas less than do public schools (Oakes, 1985).

**Research on European American Girls**

School failure and intrusion are substantially different for European American girls than for members of racial and linguistic minorities. Studies by Sadker et al. (1989) and others (which focus mainly on European American girls) show that gender-based bias in school is significant and powerful. Some schools still track girls to mothering roles and boys to college. By high school, girls tend to score lower than boys on some math and science measures. Since these courses are prerequisites for entrance into traditionally male, well-paying careers, a society such as ours that promises equal opportunity should not accept these scoring differences.
In the primary grades, the oppression of girls takes different forms. The average girl enters school academically ahead of boys her age and remains ahead (as measured by grades and test scores) through the elementary grades (AAUW, 1992). The research collected by the AAUW is excellent, but the recommendations are limited substantially to European American girls. The major problems of school achievement for these girls occur after they leave the female turf of elementary schools. A multiracial perspective on gender and student achievement leads to quite different conclusions for students of color.

Unlike students of color, young European American girls normally do not come to school and encounter a new environment run by “others.” These girls go from a usually female-centered home culture to a female-centered school culture. Schools and teachers have positive expectations for them. Young, middle-class, European American girls do not encounter the substantially destructive attacks on their gender that young minority children (male or female) encounter on their culture. When students share class, race, and gender with the teacher or the counselor, they are usually encouraged to “become the best they can be.” Female students from a minority culture often encounter the oppression of race and class in school.

Fortunately, gender-role stereotyping in schools is decreasing, but it remains a problem (AAUW, 1992). The efforts to reduce gender stereotyping among teachers create new questions about school achievement across cultural groups.

It is boys who lack role models for the first six years of schooling, particularly African American, Latino, and Asian boys. While European American girls benefit from their female-centered primary school experience, children of color—particularly boys—fail. It is boys who encounter the most conflicts, receive the most punishments in school, and most often get placed in special education and remedial programs (Sadker et al., 1989).

The positive school experiences of girls begin to change in adolescence. The teenage years in our society are a time of redefining self and roles. Young girls and boys who were once self-confident now search for new identities. Earlier self-definitions shift. For many teenagers, belonging to a group becomes a major goal. Young people look to their peers for guidance through these difficult and troubling years.

Schoolgirls, at least those European American girls studied, suffer significant declines in self-esteem as they move from childhood to adolescence:

A nation-wide study commissioned by the A.A.U.W. in 1990 found that on average 69 percent of elementary school boys and 60 percent of elementary school girls reported that they were “happy the way I am”; among high school students the percentages were 46 percent for boys and only 29 percent for girls.

The A.A.U.W. survey revealed sharp differences in self-esteem among girls from different racial and ethnic groups. Among elementary school girls, 55 percent of white girls, 65 percent of black girls, and 68 percent of Hispanic girls reported being “happy the way I am.” But in high school, agreement statements came from only 22 percent of white girls and 30 percent of Hispanic girls, compared to 58 percent of black girls. However, these black girls did not have high levels of self-esteem in areas related to school.... Obviously, self-esteem is a complex construct, and further study of the various strengths and perspectives of girls from many different backgrounds is needed in order to design educational programs that benefit all girls. (AAUW, 1992, pp. 12–13)
Young girls who excelled in elementary school may begin to falter as they enter the middle grades (6 through 8). Particular concern has been expressed by teachers over the falling grades of girls in science and math (AAUW, 1992). One apparent reason for this is that young boys are often more assertive in class than girls, and receive more teacher attention, both positive and negative. Gilligan (1982), in her groundbreaking work, *In a Different Voice*, hypothesizes that many girls acquire feminine ways of learning and relating to others that are distinctly different from the behavior described as universal to boys and girls by psychologists. In critiquing prominent theories of moral behavior, she states, "While the truths of psychological theory have blinded psychologists to the truth of women's experience, that experience illuminates a world psychologists have found hard to trace" (p. 62). Another researcher, Tannen (1990), describes differences in communication styles learned by boys and girls.

The writing and research of feminist authors also provide important insights into classroom differences. Tavris (1992) systematically examines the research on differences between males and females and finds many assumptions and assertions to be overgeneralized beyond the available evidence. Her book, *The Mismeasure of Woman*, provides an excellent analysis of overinterpretation from limited data, criticizing work in learning styles and brain activity, as well as Gilligan's assumptions about value orientations and relationships. We must assume, until proven otherwise, that gender differences do not explain or cause differences in school achievement; these differences can be attributed to how teachers and schools treat children (Tannen, 1990; Tavris, 1992).

Research by Dweck and her associates suggests that girls may learn "helplessness" in math based in part on teacher expectations and on how teachers respond to and evaluate student work. Teachers of either gender could unknowingly concentrate their responses to girls in a way that discourages intellectual effort, particularly in math (Dweck, 1977).

The most recent data we have is from the 1994 for reading and 1996 for mathematics National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This collection of test results from around the nation indicates that girls significantly outperform boys in grades 4, 8, and 12 in reading (Campbell, Donahue, Reese, & Philips, 1996); and lag 1 to 3 percent behind boys in grades 4, 8, and 12 in math (Reese, Miller, Mazzeo, & Dossey, 1997).

It is in middle school, as adolescents, that many girls crash into cultural expectations, an emphasis on looks, and a perceived lack of power. While most girls make it through adolescence and redefine themselves and their gender roles in healthy ways, too many end up with severe emotional problems.

In middle school and high school, when young women have a peak concern with appearance, some experience harassment for their looks and others are harassed because they avoid sexuality. Peer pressure can lead to drug use, early sexual relations, and leaving school. School can be a harsh and difficult world to negotiate. Depression and eating disorders are frequent introductions to crisis. Young women need coaches and support during this time (Pipher, 1994). We discuss this further in Chapter 6.
Feminist researchers have developed the concept of “silenced voices” among students. Fine (1993), in her study of a major New York City high school, found that systematic “silencing” of girls’ voices (by not respecting their opinions) helped teachers to preserve an ideology of equal opportunity while in fact the schooling practices reinforced inequality. Fine’s research offers dramatic examples of the conflict between what some teachers want to pursue as democratic goals and the reality of public school experiences.

At the high school level, teachers’ discomfort with discussion of sexual issues prevented the school from serving as a source of valid and valuable information, so girls turned elsewhere, to the streets, for information. When schools refuse to deal with the urgent issues of young women—contraception, sexuality, and so on—some women choose to leave school (Fine, 1993).

By high school, girls begin to make career choices. Influenced in part by the ideology of movies, television, teen magazines, and popular culture, some young women learn to prefer nonacademic, unchallenging classes. They come to regard intellectually rigorous classes as “untefeminine.” Faludi (1991) describes this as an “undeclared war” on women and feminism, arguing that some current counseling practices continue to track girls to become nurses rather than doctors, legal secretaries rather than lawyers, elementary school teachers rather than college professors. In their immaturity, some young women dream they can escape work by becoming models or movie stars. The American Association of University Women reports that between 40 percent and 50 percent of female dropouts leave school because they are pregnant (AAUW, 1992). Their childcare responsibilities sharply limit their future economic opportunities. Later, deprived of a quality education, they will find themselves laboring long hours doing unfulfilling work for low pay in a gender-stratified workforce.

The Lure of the Beauty Myth

Many girls and young women become preoccupied with their personal image and their relationships with others. Later, by high school, this becomes the “beauty and romance” myth. Television and popular media teach that a girl can achieve success, defined as marriage and wealth, by becoming beautiful and shrewdly using her sexual powers.

Wolf (1991) discusses the destructive effects of the beauty industry and its ideology. As she describes in The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women, the myth is that girls do not need to prepare for a career; they can just be beautiful and become a model, a star, or at least a mother. (The male equivalent of this myth is to plan to become a major league sports figure and make millions of dollars.)

This belief in a magic alternative to hard work misleads both young women and men, but the beauty industry is built on it. Our communications media—especially television and popular magazines—are saturated with the assertion that beauty, popularity, and acceptance can be bought. Wolf argues that girls’ self-esteem may be predicated on being admired by boys, usually for their physical beauty or sexual availability.
Many young girls work hard and diet hard in pursuit of physical beauty. Girls who succumb to this myth feel secure only when they have a date or when they establish their value in relationship to a boy. Powerful advertising sells the myths of beauty and romance. Television also sells a current culture of assertive, at times irresponsible, sexuality that successfully competes with school culture. Television, film, and print media and the culture of consumerism shape teenage girls’ worldview more than does their school experience. For many, the shopping mall is the campus of choice.

Adolescent Sexuality

Sex and gender orientation are significant issues to many adolescents. Their identities and social roles are frequently in transition. The school curriculum needs to include discussion of these vital issues. Discussion and analysis of teenage sexuality plays an important part in students developing their own identity.

A young woman who is clear about her sexuality is knowledgeable and capable of making important decisions. Young people who are troubled and uncertain about their sexuality and their gender identification are subject to many conflicting pressures from peer groups.

In *Fateful Choices: Healthy Youth for the 21st Century*, Hechinger (1992) gives numerous examples of school-based health clinics providing important information to young adolescents. Although conservatives have attacked such clinics as interfering in the parents’ role, the authors of the present text believe that it is better to not have 11- to 14-year-old girls getting pregnant and encountering sexually transmitted diseases. We prefer that young women grow beyond 16 before having children. To make it through adolescence without birthing children requires that young women and men clarify their own views on sex and sexuality and that they be taught adult decision-making skills.

Adolescence is a time of high risk. Peer pressure to participate in sexual relationships at a young age has grown significantly in the last 20 years. Young women need self-confidence and support from others to protect themselves from the peer pressure and the sexual harassment they encounter in school.

When questioned, young women report that the peer pressure to engage in sexual activity, by both boys and girls, and their own desire to love someone and to be loved leads to sexual behavior and pregnancy (Hechinger, 1992). Early pregnancy and childbirth lead many to leave school and face subsequent lifelong poverty. For some, early pregnancy is an introduction to a life of abuse and behavioral problems that are then passed on to their children.

Not all young people become interested in sex at age 11, or 12, or 14, or even 16. Interest in sex is a result of a complex series of social, psychological, biological, and cultural events. In our society, in which television, magazines, and movies regularly define being female primarily in sexual terms, many young women suffer undue pressure to "grow up" fast, to have breasts, to have a boyfriend, and to become sexually active. Many young people are pressured to be sexual—and to be
sexually active—while they would still prefer the safety of early adolescence. Girls and boys, particularly in middle schools, deserve the support of empathetic teachers, counselors, and parents in their times of changing identities.

Sexual behavior, particularly by the very young, has severe consequences. Sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise. AIDS due to unprotected sex and drug abuse presents a serious crisis. Sexual education could be included in several areas of the curriculum, including literature, science, health education, and social studies. English literature classes, for example, could use stories or poems dealing with teenage sexuality. Role playing of peer pressure and writing journal entries can further explore these themes.

Assisting Young Women

Women teachers, with their own role identity clear, can assist young women by serving as mentors, encouragers, and providing a sounding board for young women's role and gender questions. Teachers, counselors, coaches, librarians and nurses have opportunities to establish trusting and helping relations with these young women. If a teacher acts in a trusting and friendly way, and respects students' confidences, she will attract students who are looking for support, a smile, and a person with whom they can talk. Often a teacher's small gestures of encouragement and expressions of interest and support can change a student's direction (Figure 5.1). (See also the discussion on coaching in Chapter 7.)

Teachers can be the first to notice such crisis signs as bulimia or anorexia, and to ask for the assistance of the school nurse or counselor. Teachers can bring out into open discussion the commercial overemphasis on looks, dress, and being thin that

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<th>Figure 5.1. A Teacher Inspires a Student</th>
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<td>Maria's family moved, so she was forced to change schools in sixth grade. She was shy, and insecure about her abilities. Her new teacher, Miss Vernon, taught both English and Spanish classes. She was gentle and encouraged Maria's comments, even though Maria spoke softly and avoided attention. Miss Vernon smiled and encouraged her with comments, a touch on the shoulder, and support. One day Miss Vernon stood next to Maria's desk and handed her an English paper with a large gold seal on it. She smiled and said, &quot;Maria, you are a smart girl.&quot; Maria felt warm, glowing, and proud. This small event continues to inspire Maria to this day. She went on to college and is now a teacher herself. Whenever she faces a difficult problem, a confusing assignment, she remembers the encouragement and the faith that Miss Vernon had in her.</td>
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endangers some young women's lives. Many adolescent girls respond to their natural body growth with an unwarranted fear of weight gain.

Young girls are dieting and skipping meals far too often for good health. Schools cannot change the commercial media's emphasis on the "perfect" image, but they can promote a healthy balance of personality development, learning social skills, good health, and physical fitness. Friendly teachers can advise young women on dress and makeup, to counter the sometimes bizarre messages of magazines and television, helping students to develop healthy self-confidence.

The feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s affected many teachers' views of themselves and of their roles as advocates for young girls. Weiler (1988) argues that feminist sociologists constructed a new way of looking at school success and girls' resistance. Her work offers a detailed analysis of how several women teachers experienced gender issues. These teachers were committed to working with their students to challenge traditional gender roles. They each had a strong sense of social justice and drew from their commitment in selecting teaching strategies. Many believed that they themselves had suffered professionally as a result of the prior generation's rigid gender roles. In this study each teacher's own sense of self, her view of her own relationship to feminist goals, was an important factor in her selection of instructional strategies.

Sexual Orientation

Friend (1993) argues that our schools and society have "a systematic set of institutional and cultural arrangements that reward and privilege people for being or appearing to be heterosexual, and establish potential punishments or lack of privilege for being or appearing to be homosexual" (p. 211).

Adolescents face many crises of identity. Some young people, about 10 percent, face a conflict between their emerging sexual preference and the socially approved norm (Friend, 1993). Deciding on or accepting a sexual orientation other than the socially approved one involves a number of social, psychological, and personality conflicts. Recognizing homosexual preferences can provoke crises in students' lives. Students who acknowledge and exhibit homosexual behaviors are often subject to assault, harassment, and violence in school. Violence toward homosexual students is a major problem for some students, and deserves to be dealt with in the same manner as other hate crimes (Friend, 1993).

When students face such troubling decisions as whether to acknowledge or hide their sexual preferences, they need to talk with adults, with teachers and with counselors. When the curriculum silences any student voices, and omits coverage of sexual orientation issues, the vulnerable students are left on their own. Failing or leaving school, or even considering suicide, are among the consequences of some schools' unwillingness to stop sexual violence. In addition to protection, students need opportunities to think and rethink their emotions, feelings, and decisions. Human relations lessons on name calling and homophobia provide opportunities for
students to explore identity conflicts (see Chapter 6). It is helpful if there are community agencies or support groups that can help them think through these issues.

Divorce in families due to parental sexual orientation conflicts also can cause crises in young people. A divorced parent in a gay or lesbian relationship can trigger an identity crisis for children that requires support and often counseling.

**Limited Choices for Non-College-Bound Women**

Until recently the typical U.S. high school has had little to offer non-college-bound female students in the way of technical and professional preparation. Business courses, for example, offered little more than secretarial training.

The conservative school reform movement (1982–1992) sought to reestablish a common academic curriculum for all students in high school. Schools concentrated their time, energy, and funds on improving academic programs. Opportunities for college-bound students improved. But in their emphasis on academic excellence, these reformers neglected vocational preparation—a critical omission at a time when job opportunities and the skills needed to take advantage of them were rapidly changing. Thus the post–high school opportunities of non-college-bound students became more restricted than ever (Weis, 1988, 1990).

In 1994, the U.S. Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (PL 103-239) to encourage states and local schools to develop new, high-technology programs to help students move from school to employment. The law “sunsets” in 2001, when it assumes that the states will have developed and implemented their own programs.

School-to-work programs offer preparation for the new knowledge-based economy to students as part of their high school and community college preparation. Well-developed programs motivate students to remain in school by providing them with workplace experience and introducing them to the adult world of work (Figure 5.2). School-to-work counselors assist students to explore new, emerging industries for their career choices.

Teachers can assist students in taking advantage of school and work opportunities by sharing their own life histories and by encouraging young women to get a good education. Young women 16 to 18 years old often look mature and dress in an adult manner. Many even engage in adult sexual behavior. Yet their consciousness of the reality of the working world remains underdeveloped. Feminist scholarship argues that girls benefit in school from assistance in developing self-confidence, rather than relying on beauty images. Girls should receive praise for their intellectual work, not for their conformity and obedience to marketed images of women. All young women need to be encouraged to pursue a well-rounded, rigorous education. Female teachers sharing experiences from their own lives validate the experiences of younger women. Sharing adds a mature view to questions of career choice and sexual role. In Chapter 6, we present further suggestions and strategies on developing positive self-esteem.
Noemi was a troubled teenager. She daily considered leaving school. She was sexually involved and feared that she was pregnant. Her group of friends were into drugs, gang activity, and frequent petty crime. Her grade-point average was 1.5, and she missed more than 20 days of school each semester.

Then, a school-to-work counselor got her a position working in food preparation and catering. The work schedule forced her to be on time and to improve her cleanliness habits. Entering the world of work gave Noemi a feeling of maturity, an exit from her adolescent troubles. Her circle of friends changed as she worked daily and met new people, many of them more mature and with a sense of purpose.

She says, "I feel that I am more prepared for work than the college-bound students. I work in a real hospital, with real patients, employees, and customers. Every day I am learning something new.

"For me, getting an education now means more than just going to school. This program (School to Work) has really helped me to focus. Now I want to finish high school and go on to college."

The new high-skills economy demands that students acquire both academic knowledge and workplace skills. School-to-work placements help students to earn money and to see the immediate application of their school courses. Worksites provide interesting, relevant, and paid experiences to encourage young women toward further training, two-year colleges, and quality entry-level jobs. Often work placement is a major motivation for students, and effective programs provide a guided transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Gender, Race, and Class

The importance of gender issues can change from one generation to the next, and is culture specific. It is often difficult or impossible to separate race, class, and gender discrimination, because the oppressions interact with each other. Research on the school behavior of girls and young women of color has been notably absent, even in the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1992) report. Most researchers have assumed that young girls have similar experiences across cultures.

Women of color have gained university positions and political leadership in recent decades and have turned their research skills to documenting the conflicts faced by African American, Latina, and working-class girls in schools. Weis and Fine (1993) have documented some of the ways young women face and react to sex education in high schools, collecting powerful essays that begin to move beyond the more restricted early research boundary of European American women.
A particular concern has been voiced concerning the destructive impact on African American children, particularly boys, of common public school practices such as negating children's home cultures and using biased assessment methods, usually carried out in elementary schools by female European American teachers. Researchers King, Foster, Ladson-Billings, and others have documented several basic issues facing African American girls and boys in classrooms in *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base* (Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994). They have suggested characteristics and tendencies in the African American culture that teachers can use as background information to reduce the cultural conflicts in the classroom and to improve student achievement.

The predominantly European American teaching profession needs such research to begin to understand the diverse classroom roles of girls and boys within specific cultures. For example, young Latinas who succeed often have supportive parents, particularly mothers (Gándara, 1995). These insights support the importance of schools offering programs to develop parental support for education and for attending college. For example, successful programs of uniting mothers and daughters have developed in San Antonio, Texas, and in the *Adelante Latina* conferences in California (Gándara, 1995).

One persistent social myth is that women do most of the work in the home and men do most of the work outside the home. Amott and Matthaei (1991) provide a multicultural history of how farm and working-class women have labored for wages in increasing numbers since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the United States in the 1840s. The great historical and social events of the twentieth century—the Great Depression (1929–1939), the shift from a rural to an urban society, the worker shortages caused by World War II—brought even more women into the paid labor force. More recently, the economic stagnation that began in the 1970s has produced a dramatic increase in the number of middle-class women entering the paid workforce (Figures 5.3 and 5.4). While over 50 percent of all women of color have been in the paid labor force since the 1950s, since the 1970s over 50 percent of all women over age 16 have worked for wages (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). According to the AFL-CIO

More women are working than ever before. And they're looking for solutions to the problems of juggling work and family, making ends meet and finding respect and opportunity on the job. . . . Over the past century, women workers have grown steadily in number and as a proportion of the workforce.

- The number of working women has grown from 5.3 million in 1900 to 18.4 million in 1950 and to 63 million in 1997.
- Women made up 18.3 percent of the labor force in 1900, 29.6 percent in 1950 and 46.2 percent in 1997. (AFL-CIO, 1998, n.p.)

In the United States, many women of color must assume extra responsibilities to protect and advance their community's interests. African American women, for example, are often looked to as the centers of strength and the source of leadership within their communities. Because they are regarded by the macroculture as less threatening than African American men, African American women may be less
impeded and more accepted as they assume positions of responsibility in their communities or seek career advancement in the professional world. West (1993b) describes the fear of black men and the acceptance of African American women as in part a result of "psychosexual racist logic." Yet many African American women are well prepared for their role as economic providers. Many African societies had strong female leadership. Slavery forced a matri-focal family structure on the African American community. The women of many African American families have drawn strength from this long tradition of female leadership.

Latinas share many of the racially based economic burdens of African American women, including the responsibility to care for the elderly and for extended families. Strong female leadership was also common in many Mesoamerican societies prior to the Spanish conquest. Currently, matri-focal family structures have developed in Mexico in response to the migration of millions of male farm workers to labor in U.S. agricultural fields. Most Mexican American and Latino families in the United States remain patriarchal, similar to those in the dominant European American society (for more on this complex issue, see Gándara, 1995; Ramirez & Castañeda, 1974; Váldes, 1996). Girls and young women have paid a price for this continued
patriarchy, lagging behind African American women in entrance into college and professional schools until the 1990s (Amott & Matthaei, 1991).

The oppression of African American, Latina, and some rural European American women has taught them to work in cooperative communities. Families take care of the elderly, care for children troubled by divorce and abandonment, and take extended family members (cousins, aunts, etc.) into their homes. In these communities, women serve on school—parent advisory councils and keep churches functioning. Women are the primary social service providers in these communities.

School curricula should acknowledge and recognize the extensive contributions of women to the community’s health. The female-centered home and community provide a rich and extensive breadth of background knowledge on which to build an educational curriculum. Moll, Vélez-Ibáñez, and Greenberg (1992) assert that children gain when classrooms draw on this community knowledge and use it to advance literacy instruction. Multicultural education is important in this context because curriculum and literacy efforts should give more emphasis to women’s contributions to provide role models for female students and to counterbalance the devaluation of women by the media and by the patriarchal traditions of the macroculture.

While European American women have attended colleges since the 1840s and African American women have had access to the traditionally black colleges that rose up in the South after Reconstruction, substantial numbers of other women of color did not gain access to higher education until the 1970s. The development of both ethnic studies and women’s studies on campuses has opened new doors of scholarship and expression. In a pioneering work, This Bridge Called My Back (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), women of color speak eloquently about the nature of male and female roles and the issue of male domination within their respective communities. In Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, hooks (1994) offers several powerful essays on how race, class, and gender interact in the classroom.

An outpouring of African American, Latina, Native American, and Asian women writers has redefined women’s sphere in the United States to include women of color. Amy Tan, Gloria Anzaldúa, Maya Angelou, bell hooks, Olivia Castellano,
Paula Gunn Allen, Wilma Mankiller, Marian Wright Edelman, and others provide insights into the diverse voices and insights of the many peoples of our nation.

**Affirmative Action: Again**

Affirmative action programs since the 1970s have been effective in promoting women and in breaking down traditional rigid gender roles in many universities. Currently, college-bound students benefit from changing work opportunities and the victories of the feminist movement. There are now more women doctors, lawyers, and college professors than ever before. In 1994, women received 38 percent of medical degrees, compared with 9 percent in 1972; 43 percent of law degrees, compared with 7 percent in 1972; and 44 percent of all doctoral degrees, compared to 25 percent in 1977. Women now make up the majority of the students in U.S. colleges and universities and make up the majority of recipients of master's degrees (Women's Equity Resource Center, 1997).

Women's studies, apprenticeship programs, and mentoring have opened important new opportunities. Title IX (1972) describes the federal commitment to equal gender treatment in matters of federal assistance:

No person . . . shall, on the basis of sex, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to, discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance . . .

As a result of the passage of Title IX in 1972, the role of women and girls in education has changed substantially. Title IX prohibits sexual discrimination and sexual harassment in educational institutions receiving federal funds. The act prohibits discrimination in recruitment, educational programs, activities, financial aid, counseling, athletics, employment assistance and other school functions.

Special programs provide additional counseling and encouragement for Latinas and African American women to attend college. Well-educated young women are choosing careers as doctors, attorneys, and politicians. As yet, however, the benefits and advantages of the feminist revolution of the 1970s are less apparent in the school lives and career opportunities of the 50 percent of women high school graduates who do not go on to college.

**Women's Story in the Textbooks**

Although feminist scholarship has made strides in the university, this progress is only beginning to have a significant impact on public school textbooks. Tetreault (1989) and Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) have written about the invisibility and fragmentation of women's history, particularly women of color, in literature and text illustrations.

Some progress is being made. Publishers have started to delete linguistic bias and to use gender-neutral terms. States are requiring that texts move beyond depicting women in stereotypic roles. The National Women's History Project has developed excellent new materials to overcome this invisibility.
Students seem to develop self-esteem and a sense of being socially centered when they see their role models in books and other educational materials. Women's literature, history, and sociology assist female students in evaluating their own experiences and traumas. Readings in these areas can help young women gain perspective on the pressures of surrendering self and goals for temporary status and temporary relationships. Social history and popular histories record the extensive participation of women in building our communities, public schools, and social institutions. Readings from the era in which the "cult of true womanhood" was promoted (1800–1860) help students to reflect on how public images and role models can promote profit-seeking rather than developing human potential. Readings from the Progressive Era (1890–1920) help students to see how immigrant women organized unions and (European American) women made significant advances in attending colleges and entering the professions.

The curriculum should be authentic, realistic, and inspirational. Reform requires more than adding a few new heroines to existing textbooks. The writings and speeches of Dolores Huerta, Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm, and others are important additions to the curriculum.

Women students can keep journals to reflect on their own lives. Recording a journal helps young girls through times of doubt and insecurity, as does developing friendships. Teenage girls can learn to accept themselves as they are and build a positive future instead of dreaming of cosmetic makeovers.

Young women also gain from learning about the leadership and activism of women in their communities. Working-class women and women of color have raised families and survived. They have created a positive life for their children. Presenting guest speakers from the community teaches that average, normal people run unions, institutions, and essential community organizations. Guest speakers bridge the gap between the school and adult reality. The curriculum empowers and motivates students when it presents hope and optimism without presenting a superwoman model of accomplishment.

Wilbur (1992) states that a gender-fair curriculum has six attributes:

1. Variation, that is, similarities and differences among and within groups of people
2. Inclusive, allowing both females and males to find and identify positively with messages about themselves
3. Accurate, presenting information that is data-based, verifiable, and able to withstand critical analysis
4. Affirmative, acknowledging and valuing the worth of individuals and groups
5. Representative, balancing multiple perspectives
6. Integrated, weaving together the experiences, needs, and interests of both males and females

Wilbur and the AAUW (1992) report argue that so far no major curriculum reform efforts have explicitly used gender-fair approaches.
The AAUW report offers a list of over 40 action items for change. Individual teachers may pursue the following 13 items from the list (AAUW, 1992):

1. Teachers must help girls develop positive views of themselves and their futures, as well as an understanding of the obstacles women must overcome in a society where their options and opportunities are still limited by gender stereotypes and assumptions.
2. The formal school curriculum must include the experiences of women and men from all walks of life. Girls and boys must see women and girls reflected and valued in the materials they study.
3. School curricula should deal directly with issues of power, gender politics, and violence against women. Better-informed girls are better equipped to make decisions about their futures. Girls and young women who have a strong sense of themselves are better able to confront violence and abuse in their lives.
4. Curricula for young children must not perpetuate gender stereotypes and should reflect sensitivity to different learning styles.
5. Girls must be educated and encouraged to understand that mathematics and the sciences are important and relevant to their lives. Girls must be actively supported in pursuing education and employment in these areas.
6. Existing equity guidelines should be effectively implemented in all programs supported by the local, state, and federal governments. Specific attention must be directed toward including women on planning committees and focusing on girls and women in the goals, instructional strategies, teacher training, and research components of these programs.
7. Local schools and communities must encourage and support girls studying science and mathematics by showcasing women role models in scientific and technological fields, disseminating career information, and offering “hands-on” experiences and work groups in science and math classes.
8. Continued attention to gender equity in vocational education programs must be a high priority at every level of educational governance and administration. Have students discuss how gender roles are changing in their own generation.
9. Testing and assessment must serve as stepping-stones, not stop signs. New tests and testing techniques must accurately reflect the abilities of both girls and boys.
10. Girls and women must play a central role in educational reform. The experiences, strengths, and needs of girls from every race and social class must be considered in order to provide excellence and equity for all our nation’s students.
11. A critical goal of education reform must be to enable students to deal effectively with the realities of their lives, particularly in areas such as sexuality and health.
12. Federal and state funding should be used to promote partnerships between schools and community groups, including social service agencies, youth-serving organizations, medical facilities, and local businesses. The needs of students, particularly as highlighted by pregnant teens and teen mothers, require a multi-institutional response.
13. Child care for the children of teen mothers must be an integral part of all programs designed to encourage young women to pursue or complete educational programs. (pp. 84–87)

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of feminist scholars, educators, and some textbook publishers, self-image and role stereotyping problems for girls continue. Clearly, schools and textbooks are less powerful in their influence than the commercial marketplace is. They are no match for television programs and multimedia advertising campaigns aimed at the youth culture. We are unlikely to make much
progress on this front until large companies and the advertising agencies they hire cease to exploit gender stereotyping for profit.

Teaching for Equity

Teachers may use several strategies to improve the success of girls in school. Cooperative and collaborative learning work well (see chapter 10). Teachers can place students in small groups of six to eight to listen and work together for part of the curriculum.

Girls and young women can be assigned the status of experts on a given topic and make presentations to the class. Students can learn to critique and improve the work of their group. Girls should have equal opportunity to be in charge or to assume responsibility in the classrooms. This generation has many young women who are experts on computers, microscopes and other forms of technology. Effective teachers place young women in high-status positions as appropriate.

Many teachers have found success by emphasizing young women’s verbal and written communication strengths. Girls often do well on assignments of journal writing. Keeping journal records of their observations in science, history, and biology may produce more success for girls. Establishing a positive, trusting relationship with your students is the first step. This is the subject of Chapter 6.

Teachers can encourage girls to keep journals and to read literature about their many adolescent conflicts. They can make close and consistent contact with the home. While home contact is frequent in elementary school, it usually declines in middle and high school. This decline in contact hurts students. Many adolescent girls and boys prefer to build a wall of separation between the home and the school. The break in communication allows them a space of liberty. However, the communication gap separates young women and men from the consistency of support they need from the adult world. Teachers can extend themselves to get to know families. You can refuse to be a party to young people’s attempts to build the wall between school and home.

You can find other excellent teaching ideas at the Web site of the National Women’s History Project (www.nwhp.org/) and at www.edc.org/WomensEquity.

The Counterattack

In 1994, Congress passed revisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the two basic federal programs for schools. The decades of feminist scholarship—particularly the work of the AAUW—led to efforts to strengthen the gender equity provisions of ESEA by allocating some $3 million in new money for gender equity activities. A counterattack was launched by Diane Ravitch, former undersecretary of education during the Reagan and Bush administrations, and other critics of feminist and gender-based research. Ravitch claimed that the proposed allocation “takes as findings of Congress that all these flawed research claims were true”
(quoted in Schmidt, 1994, p. 1). Senator Nancy Kassebaum argued against the legislation, saying that gender inequity claims were "supported only by a small body of research which has questionable findings" (quoted in Schmidt, 1994, p. 16). Finally, Professor Joseph Adelson of the University of Michigan called the AAUW studies "a propaganda machine that does not seem to respond to any contrary evidence" (quoted in Schmidt, 1994, p. 16).

In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, which banned equal opportunity programs in the state. This was a major reversal of gains achieved by women since the 1970s. Conservatives claimed that affirmative action programs amounted to reverse discrimination. Similar legislation was introduced in several other states. Can you measure whether this policy change has affected programs for gender equity in your state?

The counterrattack against claims of gender-based failure in school is growing. Like the attacks on multicultural education (see Chapter 12), critics accuse advocates of gender equity of promoting an ideology. (In the following two chapters, we discuss the role of ideology in shaping research perspectives and educational philosophies.)

This chapter concludes the social-political foundations underlying multicultural education. The emphasis in Part Two shifts to concrete teaching strategies to help empower all cultural groups to seek cultural democracy.

Summary

Schools, particularly elementary schools, are primarily female institutions. Young girls do well in elementary school. Recent evidence in the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicates that girls are doing as well or better than boys in reading in grades 4, 8, and 12, and equal to boys in math in grades 4 and 8.

Gender issues interact with race, culture and class to influence the development of young girls and boys. Gender stereotyping and sexual identity become volatile issues in middle and high school. Girls need supportive teachers to deal with dangerous cultural practices, including sexual behavior and dieting. Students need adult assistance and guidance in these difficult years. Feminist research has been valuable in identifying problems and developing responses for teachers to use in making their classrooms more supportive.

Questions Over the Chapter

1. Define gender-role stereotyping.
2. How does your gender influence how you learn about culture?
3. Girls tend to be more successful than boys in school in grades K through 6, but many begin to encounter difficulties at grade 7 and above. What factors contribute to this change?
4. List some ways schools may track girls. Why is this practice damaging? (Note that tracking's effects may be either negative or positive.)
5. What is the “beauty myth?” How does it negatively impact girls?
7. List four teaching strategies that lead to gender fairness.
8. What is the name of the primary federal legislation requiring gender-fair school policies?
9. What evidence supports the thesis that elementary schools are primarily female “turf”?
10. What are some of the effects of female dominance in elementary schools?
11. What factors contribute to a “crisis of self-esteem” in middle and high schools?
12. Describe your own development of self-identity as you recall your adolescent years.
13. List three strategies to support positive self-esteem among girls.
14. What careers for women do not require a college education? What high school classes or subjects prepare students for these careers?
15. List jobs you have held (including part-time). What high school study prepared you for these jobs?
16. How does the absence of strong female role models from textbooks and curricula affect girls?
17. Name at least three major female authors. As a class, compare and discuss your lists.
18. Name at least two major African American female authors. As a class, compare and discuss your lists.
19. How has sexual responsibility changed in the last decade? What evidence do you have for your conclusion?
20. What behaviors are prohibited by Title IX?

Activities for Further Study of Gender Relationships

1. View the film Union Maids (1977), which illustrates class and gender relationships during the period 1930–1945. Compare these relationships to those of the present.
2. In a small group of students, discuss and summarize the effect of gender relationships on schooling. Report as a team to the class.
3. Invite a guest speaker from the Women’s Studies Department at your local college campus to speak to your class. Compare this person’s ideas to the presentation in this chapter.
4. Invite a Chicana or African American feminist to speak on the relationship between ethnic and feminist struggles.
5. In small groups, describe recent experiences in which you were treated unfairly based on your gender or race. Then share your stories with the entire class.
6. Complete a life history interview with a female over age 40. Share your interview with the class.
7. Compare racism and sexism. How are they similar? How are they different? How does socioeconomic class affect each?
8. In class discussion, predict five major changes in gender role relationships that will take place in the next decade. Discuss how these changes may affect schools.
9. Interview another student. If that student is not going into teaching, what other profession would he or she select? Ask what influences might encourage him or her to select teaching. Share your interviews as a class. Look for patterns in the respondents’ choices.
10. Read the entire report, How Schools Shortchange Girls (AAUW, 1992). Select three of the authors’ recommendations for change. Discuss these suggestions with a person in authority at your school, such as the director of your campus Women’s Studies Program or Teacher Preparation Program. Present the results of your discussion to the class.
11. Make a chart of your class’s grade-point averages (GPA) in grades 1 through 12. What patterns can you detect? Develop a table of class GPAs arranged by race and gender. What patterns do you detect now?
12. Bring four advertisements from women's magazines that promote "the beauty myth." What messages are the ads sending to readers?
13. Ask students in your class who are mothers or fathers to describe the financial difficulties of graduating from college.

14. Describe to the class the reasons for your choice to become a teacher. How did the female domination of the profession affect your schooling and your career choices?

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Teaching Strategies

1. Include the study of power and gender equity in the curriculum.
2. Teach students to recognize and oppose gender stereotyping.
3. Study stereotyping presented in commercial media. Identify what values are being advocated, and develop ways to present alternative values to students.
4. Use self-esteem-building lessons for girls and boys to combat the stereotyping messages of commercial media.
5. Use role playing and role reversal strategies to resist stereotyping.

6. Use a nonracial definition of women's achievements. Include the contributions of women of color.
7. Make the curriculum inclusive, including examples of women in nontraditional careers.
8. Write for and use the excellent materials of the National Women's History Project.
9. Praise and encourage girls for their academic excellence and skills in addition to areas such as neatness and compliance.