

School and Gender

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In the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations." (Sadker, 1994)

Abstract- Today, we are living in a time that is marked by debates and discussions regarding equal pay for both the genders, abolition of sexism and calling out of sexist incidents. Hence, one can say that the different spheres and environments seem to be improving for the female sex. But few archaic methodologies and concepts still surround the definition of femininity, masculinity and its expectations. Amongst these changing times, one aspect that is incessant for the ideal development of both the genders is a healthy school environment.

Index Terms- changes, gender, impact, school

I. INTRODUCTION

Young kids begin to develop their gender identity from 2-3 years. Since then, there are primarily three factors that influence the understanding of what gender is and how it should be manifested in the public sphere. These three factors include school, home environment and the media. One of the earliest notions that are ascertained to the students is that one has to choose the types of clothes, toys and objects depending on their gender. Also, while based on one's appearance, one might belong to either the male or female enunciation, but one might not identify with the same. However, for the sake of the topic, this paper would be limiting itself to the 'female and 'male' gender only for a broad understanding of the different facets of school and gender.

II. IMPACT ON STUDENTS

School environment

Today, in majority of the schools, small kids are already policing one another on the basis of gender. This is highly ironical as school is a place wherein the idea of a uniform has taken shape in order to maintain a non-judgemental and egalitarian platform.

The outcome of such a hostile school environment is twofold. Firstly, both the genders are discouraged from exploring their potential in a certain niche created for the other gender. Secondly, the ideas of prejudice which we are fighting at a social level, get defeated and manifested again at the grass root level.

Definite differences between the two genders

-We see that from the pre-primary days, boys seem to be more overexcited than the girls. And many do not enjoy

activities that are sedentary in nature until given a solid reason to do so.

-It is essential to consider the pre-puberty and post-puberty changes in all the genders. After the post-puberty stage, the boys end up having an upper hand in all the physical tasks when compared to the females. Moreover, this is the time when both the genders are being exposed to physical sports. Hence, if equal importance on both the sexes regarding sports is not given then it can end up transitioning into a mental block for the girls.

-Another observation is that boys seem to engage in more physical aggression during middle school years than the girls. This is despite any proof that girls are less aggressive than boys.

(Hurst, n.d.)

Discourse between peer groups

There is an ostensible understanding between the peer groups of both boys and girls regarding a certain gender. It is usually regarding the apparent male and female stereotypical traits such as

-Boys are more physical

-Boys need more space to learn

-Boys are not as good at reading and writing as girls

-Girls produce more drama

-Girls tend to multitask better

-Girls will write with more detail (Gender differences in school achievement: The role of self-regulation, 2013)

Such understandings are extremely harmful as they do not consider exceptions and aim to generalise the discourse of gender and its different manifestations in a school and the peer-group environment. Moreover, it sometimes manifests into certain characteristics such as men being strong and powerful and women being weak and dependent.

(Gender differences in school achievement: The role of self-regulation, 2013)

Differences in the classroom

Both the genders are conditioned to learning and modelling the behaviours from their home environments. This includes boys understanding of males being more dominating and their application of the same to get the teacher's attention. Similarly, the women are told to be more polite and non-authoritative (Lakoff, 1973;1975).

Though the dialogue seems to be changing today, but there is still an inbuilt understanding that girls conform more to classroom rules for talking while boys have tendencies not to follow these rules and also to undermine girls. (Sunderland, 2004, p. 97). Moreover, If someone does not fit into these gender boxes, then they are understood to be erring from their gender and further looked down upon. (EACEA, 2009)

Lack of sensitisation

Another thing boys knowingly or unknowingly do is put girls down and harass them. One example of this is boys using sexually abusive language when they talk to and about girls (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999, p. 147) . This is extremely disarming as in this case, the girl has no equal way to retort back as there isn't a tag attached to a boy's promiscuity . Hence, in this arena, girls are more vulnerable to threats and further harassment.

(EACEA, 2009)

III. RESEARCH

Unequivocal research

Male and female brains are different, according to Dr. Jay Giedd of the National Institute for Mental Health. Though male brains are larger than female brains, but the size difference has nothing to do with cognition. Hence, there are no significant gender differences in cognitive abilities. And so they cannot explain the increasing numbers of a certain gender interested in a particular subject and vice-versa. Moreover, claims such as girls wish to please adults more and hence get better grades, are truly from a social standpoint and have no scientific backing whatsoever. (EACEA, 2009)

Many past research suggest that girls are more successful in school than boys. But to counter it, Hartley and Sutton (2013) have recently reported that the perception of girls to be academically superior might lead to the underperformance of boys on tests. Hence, we don't know whether statistics that claim to boys being more susceptible to discipline issues and learning difficulties are true or not.

(Gender differences in school achievement: The role of self-regulation, 2013)

Sociological parameters

But even sociological conditions can have its own contentions. This is because research also shows us that it is difficult to separate innate from learned behaviours. Hence, it is hard to decipher when do the pupil start conforming to their gender and it's existing stereotypes.

Such an example was seen in non-traditional European and American cultures, wherein it was noticed that gender differences were quite pronounced.

(Learning Style Differences)

IV. TEACHERS

What should they do?

Certain research claims that though girls tend to outperform boys, they tend to be overly critical of their performing abilities. (Learning Style Differences) Additionally, many say that girls take failure more seriously than boys, hence use that to fuel their academic performance. This leads to the understanding that teachers should have different teaching styles for both the genders such as being more encouraging and helpful towards the girls while adopting a challenging perspective towards the boys.

(Learning Style Differences)

But even such understandings and actions are flawed as none of them truly see the student as an individual and are finally just a manifestation of the stereotype. Due to these differences, it is imperative for the teachers to get gender differentiation classes before they start teaching, which would equip them with the necessary know-how to accurately decrypt the gender socialization of their students in order to ascertain the individual qualities of the student.

(Learning Style Differences)

Differences in conduct

Einarsson & Hultman write that boys take a lot of energy from the teacher and removes the attention from the girls. (EACEA, 2009) This inevitably leads to girls getting a subordinate role in a classroom. They also have to ascertain to the domination of boys, and are not encouraged to express it to the teacher nor the parents.

The manner in which the teachers talk to the students also varies as when she is interacting with a boy, she acts in a more mature and determined manner, while the girl is retorted to with a low pitch and weak sound. (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, ; Gulbrandsen, 1994,).

Girls- the helping hand?

Girls are also meant to do what they're told and understood to help the teacher to maintain order in the classroom, for example by sitting next to disruptive boys, being a buffer between boys and sometimes help the teacher raise the boys (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984.; Gulbrandsen, 1994, ; Steenberg, 1997, ; Öhrn, 2002, ; Wernersson, 2006,).

Also, boys are never made to sit next to a girl to make her more extroverted. instead of indulging in the former, the girls should be made to indulge in more stimulating work and better assignments.

Similarly, quite often girls are recognised for having worked hard but boys are recognised for being clever (Gulbrandsen, 1994,) (EACEA, 2009)

Boys are expected to be loud, take up more of the physical space in the classroom, bend the rules and need more support for learning and also need more attention . (EACEA, 2009)

If women are to get more influence in society, they need to be listened to at school (Steenberg, 1997,) And the teachers need to put in the required efforts from school itself. They need to start realising the after-effects of gender.

Existence of present inequalities

From the results presented above, we can conclude that boys do dominate in the classroom by getting more questions, more time and attention from teachers. And the girls would turn out to be completely different if they were given the same amount of attention and nourishment. Both the boys and girls should also be made aware that inequalities exist at school (Steenberg, 1997, p. 52)

And it goes without saying that in the long run, both boys and girls would benefit from more equality.

(EACEA, 2009)

V. TEXTBOOK MATERIALS

Gender stereotypes are also likely to be reinforced or weakened by text books and reading material provided in schools. (EACEA, 2009)

Despite performing equally well as boys in most countries, girls tend to have a weaker self-concept in science than males, i.e., on average, girls had lower levels of belief in their science abilities than boys. Yet, both boys and girls are similarly interested in science; and there is no overall difference in their inclination to use science in future studies or jobs. Along with gender, Socioeconomic conditions also needs to be looked at while analysing children who are under-achieving. (EACEA, 2009)

Curriculum differences

The hidden curriculum transmits to children a collection of messages which often reinforce sex stereotyping (Humm 1989). Studies of these more informal relations have been consistent in revealing the dominance of boys regarding the school space they occupy, the teacher-time that they demand, and the influence that they have over the rest of their peers.

Gender representations

Sometimes textbook language favours stereotyped gender roles. Certain examples include usage of terms like fireman instead of fire fighter. It has been found that men appear more often and in a wider set of roles as workers, whereas women are shown mainly in domestic and romantic roles. Also, qualities that are encoded in scientific inquiry such as 'rationality' are associated with masculine way of thinking. Hence, men end up choosing male vocational pathways and female choose certain female ones.

A recent Greek study shows that boys are most likely to use technology for entertainment than girls although there is little gender difference in other reasons for using technology. (EACEA, 2009)

Such arguments have led to the development and demand of an alternative curriculum that can empower girls and make them more welcome to all subjects. (Brickhouse, 2001)

VI. SOCIETY

What is happening?

Today there are many conversations regarding the role of women in our society and ways to encourage it. This has come to the surface owing to the series of oppression that the latter has had to go through over the years. One of the poignant conversations regarding gender include the multitude of things women and men can and cannot do. And till the time the same is propagated and encouraged at a school level, this understanding will keep shaping up in our society too.

Male domination

Today, men still have the leading positions in politics and business, they still make more money than women and are more politically influential. (Berge & Ve, 2000). Whenever such a stark demographic is seen, then it should be looked into critically.

We see that this habit can be traced to the school environments wherein boys tend to get more attention from teachers. However, in the last decade or so, this focus on girls has been criticised as girls perform better academically than boys (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999.; Wernersson, 2006,). The Swedish Education Act states that schools actively and consciously must promote equal rights and opportunities for both sexes. And hence it now becomes a responsibility to transform this unequivocal social dialogue. (EACEA, 2009)

Historical perspectives

Today there are two ways of seeing the gender debate. Over the years, the difference between men and women has often gone unchallenged. For eg- 19th century Europe.

Accordingly, men are physically stronger and tend to see the world in terms of objects, ideas and theories. Women on the other hand mature physically and psychologically at an earlier stage, are more affiliative and nurturing, In a book Males and Females Hutt asserted, that women and men are intrinsically different and that, therefore, these characteristics are not susceptible to change (Hutt, 1972). From this conservative perspective on sex differences, education is seen as a means of socialising and educating boys and girls into their natural and conservative roles as men and women. (EACEA, 2009)

The second, progressive approach, perceives men and women's social roles as shaped largely by influences arising out of history, culture and society, and thus constantly in the process of change as society itself changes

Discourse on sexuality

In order to create an equal and healthy atmosphere in class, the study of the history of sexuality is important in order to understand the range of possible sexual identities available to young people.

This would lead to the students getting less influenced by the desired social roles and more aware of their masculinity or femininity (Butler, 1990) (EACEA, 2009)

VII. SOLUTIONS

Some of the solutions that can be undertaken to make classrooms more egalitarian include the following

1. Eliminate sex-stereotyping in school textbooks.
2. Switch to mixed-sex pairing or single-sex grouping
 - Usually classrooms, seating arrangements etc focus at segregating or rather grouping boys and girls differently. But, it has been seen that boys and girls work better and learn more cohesively from one another if they are made to work on assignments and breaking stereotypes from a young age itself. (Hurst, n.d.)
3. Adopt a growth and not gender oriented school environment.
4. No influx of only female teachers. (Smyth & Darmody, 2007)
5. Teachers should be non-discriminatory
6. All teacher education programmes should have a core module on gender equality.
7. Classrooms should involve parents into the discussion, as they are a social link to the world outside.

9. Specific programmes for certain vulnerable groups of boys and girls .

10. Adoption of an overall national strategy to combat gender stereotypes in career choices and to support young people at school with systematic guidance on gender-sensitivity for study and career. (EACEA, 2009)

11. Need for vocational guidance to address specific gender related career choices (EACEA, 2009)

12. Sex education should include biological as well as emotional aspects of sexuality (EACEA, 2009)

VIII. CONCLUSION

Gender inequality is a concern in many countries, The most common goal policies in education is to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Many European countries are nowadays trying to combat gender stereotyping .Most of them are, however, lacking an overall national strategy. (EACEA, 2009). It is pleasurable to see that the discourse of gender is being looked into in order to analyse the performances of individuals in classrooms. But it still has a long way to go.

There are various instructions and imparting the girls and boys receive from their teachers on a regular basis. Small, discreet actions and words can have different implicit meanings behind them. Furthermore, these teachings forms a part of the culture that we are living in and a reflection of how progressive a certain society is. If we desire indiscriminatory work and home environments, then we need to pay special attention to the ongoing in our classrooms. Moreover, ideal teachers can have a profound effect not just by correcting marksheets but also societies.

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