Order is restored. Then Stephen, enthusiastic to make his point, calls out.

**Stephen:** I think Lincoln was the best president. He held the country together during the war.

**Teacher:** A lot of historians would agree with you.

**Mike** (seeing that nothing happened to Stephen, calls out): I don’t. Lincoln was okay, but my Dad liked Reagan. He always said Reagan was a great president.

**David** (calling out): Reagan? Are you kidding?

**Teacher:** Who do you think our best president was, Dave?

**David:** FDR. He saved us from the depression.

**Max** (calling out): I don’t think it’s right to pick one best president. There were a lot of good ones.

**Teacher:** That’s interesting.

**Kimberly** (calling out): I don’t think the presidents today are as good as the ones we used to have.

**Teacher:** Okay, Kimberly. But you forgot the rule. You’re supposed to raise your hand.

The classroom is the only place in society where so many different, young, and restless individuals are crowded into close quarters for an extended period of time day after day. Teachers sense the undertow of raw energy and restlessness that threatens to engulf the classroom. To preserve order, most teachers use established classroom conventions such as raising your hand if you want to talk.

Intellectually, teachers know they should apply this rule consistently, but when the discussion becomes fast-paced and furious, the rule is often swept aside. When this happens and shouting out begins, it is an open invitation for male dominance. Our research shows that boys call out significantly more often than girls. Sometimes what they say has little or nothing to do with the teacher’s questions. Whether male comments are insightful or irrelevant, teachers respond to them. However, when girls call out, there is a fascinating occurrence: Suddenly the teacher remembers the rule about raising your hand before you talk. And then the girl, who is usually not as assertive as the male students, is deftly and swiftly put back in her place.

Not being allowed to call out like her male classmates during the brief conversation about presidents will not psychologically scar Kimberly; however, the system of silencing operates covertly and repeatedly. It occurs several times a day during each school week for twelve years, and even longer if Kimberly goes to college, and, most insidious
of all, it happens subliminally. This micro-inequity eventually has a powerful cumulative impact.

On the surface, girls appear to be doing well. They get better grades and receive fewer punishments than boys. Quieter and more conforming, they are the elementary school's ideal students. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is the school's operating principle as girls' good behavior frees the teacher to work with the more difficult-to-manage boys. The result is that girls receive less time, less help, and fewer challenges. Reinforced for passivity, their independence and self-esteem suffer. As victims of benign neglect, girls are penalized for doing what they should and lose ground as they go through school. In contrast, boys get reinforced for breaking the rules; they are rewarded for grabbing more than their fair share of the teacher's time and attention.

Even when teachers remember to apply the rules consistently, boys are still the ones who get noticed. When girls raise their hands, it is often at a right angle, arm bent at the elbow, a cautious, tentative, almost insecure gesture. At other times they raise their arms straight and high, but they signal silently. In contrast, when boys raise their hands, they fling them wildly in the air; up and down, up and down, again and again. Sometimes these hand signals are accompanied by strange noises, "Ooh! Ooh! Me! Me! Ooooh!" Occasionally they even stand beside or on top of their seats and wave one or both arms to get attention. "Ooh! Me! Mrs. Smith, call on me." In the social studies class about presidents, we saw boys as a group grabbing attention while girls as a group were left out of the action.

Another way to observe in a classroom is to focus on individual children and record and describe their behavior for an extended period of time. Here is what we found when we watched two children for a forty-five-minute class. Perhaps you will see yourself in their behavior. Maybe you will see your son or daughter.

The fifth-grade boy sits in the fourth seat, second row. Since there are more than thirty other children in the class, getting the teacher's attention is a very competitive game. Watch how he plays.

First the boy waves his hand straight in the air so that the teacher will select him from the surrounding forest of mainly male arms. He waves and pumps for almost three minutes without success. Evidently tiring, he puts his right arm down only to replace it with the left. Wave and pump. Wave
and pump. Another two minutes go by. Still no recognition. Down with the left hand, up with the right. He moves to strategy two—sounds: "Ooh, me. C'mon. C'mon. Freeze. Oooooh!
Another minute without being noticed. Strategy three: He gets out of his seat, stands in front of his desk, and waves with sound effects for another thirty seconds. He slumps back into his seat, momentarily discouraged. Five seconds later there's the strategy-four effort: He holds his right arm up in the air by resting it on his left as he leans on his elbow. Three more minutes go by.

"Torn." His name. Recognition. For a brief moment he has the floor. The eyes of the teacher and his classmates are on him, the center of attention. He has spent more than nine minutes in his effort to get a half-minute in the sun. Post response: He sits for four quiet minutes. Then up shoots the arm again.

There is another student in the same class on the other side of the room, a little more toward the front. She begins the class with her arm held high, her face animated, her body leaning forward. Clearly she has something she wants to say. She keeps her right hand raised for more than a minute, switches to the left for forty-five seconds. She is not called on. She doesn't make noises or jump out of her seat, but it looks as though her arm is getting tired. She reverts to propping the right arm up with the left, a signal she maintains for two more minutes. Still no recognition. The hand comes down.

She sits quietly, stares out the window, plays with the hair of the girl in front of her. Her face is no longer animated. She crosses her arms on the desk and rests her head on them, which is how she spends the final twelve minutes of class time. Her eyes are open, but it is impossible to tell if she is listening. The period ends. The girl has not said a word.

When we videotape classrooms and play back the tapes, most teachers are stunned to see themselves teaching subtle gender lessons along with math and spelling. The teacher in the social studies class about presidents was completely unaware that she gave male students more
attention. Only after several viewings of the videotape did she notice how she let boys call out answers but reprimanded girls for similar behavior. The teacher who taught Tom and the silent girl did not realize what effort it took to get attention. Surprised and saddened, he watched on videotape how his initially eager female student wilted and then faded from the activities of the classroom.

In our workshops for educators we call boys like Tom "star students" or "green-arms." Teachers smile with weary recognition as we describe students whose hands are up in the air so high and so long that the blood could have drained out. Our research shows that in a typical class of twenty-five students, two or three green-arm students may capture 25 percent of the teacher's attention.

Most students are not so salient. Rather, nominally involved, they are asked one or two questions by the teacher each class period. Even though nominal students don't wave arms and make birdlike noises, they do exhibit their own distinct patterns. If you were a nominal student, you can probably remember the following from your own school days: As the teacher approaches, you tense. The question is asked. Your shoulders rise, your adrenaline pumps, and your heart pounds so loudly that the teacher's voice is barely audible. You answer. Correct! You exhale with relief. The teacher's shadow and cologne move on. You've paid your dues. If the teacher asks you another question, you're likely to think, "He's picking on me."

When teachers ask students to read aloud one after the other down the row, one paragraph after another, nominal students count ahead and practice their paragraph silently. Can you remember industriously working on an impending passage only to have the student in front of you flub his, leaving you to stumble over unknown literary ground? If you can picture yourself in this scene for at least part of your school career, you were probably a nominal student.

In the typical classroom we found that approximately 10 percent of students are green-arms and 70 percent are nominal. Who's left? The remaining 20 percent, about four or five students in most classrooms, do not say anything at all. Of course some boys are shy and some girls are assertive, but we found that male students are more often stars and female students are more often stilled. One researcher found that for every eight star-boys there is only one star-girl.

Boys cast in starring classroom roles are often high achievers. Bright boys answer the questions, and their opinions are respected by
the teacher. Low-achieving boys also get plenty of attention, but more often it's negative. No surprise there. In general, girls receive less attention, but there's another surprise: Unlike the smart boy who flourishes in the classroom, the smart girl is the student who is least likely to be recognized.  

When we analyzed the computer printouts for information about gender and race, an intriguing trend emerged. The students most likely to receive teacher attention were white males; the second most likely were minority males; the third, white females; and the least likely, minority females. In elementary school, receiving attention from the teacher is enormously important for a student's achievement and self-esteem. Later in life, in the working world, the salary received is important, and the salary levels parallel the classroom: white males at the top and minority females at the bottom. In her classroom interaction studies, Jacqueline Jordan Irvine found that black girls were active, assertive, and salient in the primary grades, but as they moved up through elementary school, they became the most invisible members of classrooms.

The "Okay" Classroom Is Not

As part of our work at The American University, we supervise student teachers. At one of these supervisory sessions a young woman, one of the most talented in our teacher preparation program, confronted a sexist incident:

The teacher flicks on the overhead projector, and a poem in the shape of a seesaw draws the third graders' attention. Another transparency and a new image, this time in the shape of a candy bar. The children giggle and whisper. More images—a kite poem, and even one looking like a giraffe. The youngsters are captivated.

"What do these poems have in common?" the teacher says to open the discussion. Through skillful questions and explanations she teaches concrete poetry and motivates the children to write their own poems. "What are some topics..."
you might want to write about?" The third graders are eager to share their ideas: Trucks. A cat. Dogs. TV. My doll.

"That's so dumb." A boy's comment breaks the collegial brainstorming. "I bet all the girls will draw girly Barbie dolls."

"Not me," a girl shoots back. "I'm doing a horse poem."

Not about to let sexism mar her lesson, this teacher confronts the comment. "There's nothing wrong with dolls. A lot of girls and boys like to play with them, which is nice because they learn how to take care of people that way. Not all girls like dolls, just like not all boys like football. Now me—I like teddy bears. [The children laugh.] I'm going to write my concrete poem about a teddy bear."

As the class settles down to write, the teacher walks from desk to desk giving reactions and offering suggestions.

First stop, a boy's desk (twenty seconds): "That's good. I like the way you use describing words."

Second stop, a boy's desk (two minutes; the teacher kneels so she can be eye to eye with the student): "You can't think of anything to write about? What are some of your hobbies?" (There are several more questions about hobbies, and then the boy's interest is sparked and he begins to write.)

Third stop, a boy's desk (fifteen seconds): "That's great! A deck of cards. I never would have thought of that."

Fourth stop, a boy's desk (two minutes): "Tony, this isn't right. It's not supposed to be in straight lines. A concrete poem is in the shape of something. (More discussion that is inaudible. Tony seems to have gotten the idea and starts to write.)

Fifth stop, a girl's desk (four seconds): "Okay."

"I was so nervous. I can't believe that boy's comment about the doll," the student teacher said, shaking her head as she talked with us after the lesson. "How do these kids come up with this stuff? Did I handle it well? What do you think?"

We assured the student teacher that she had handled the doll incident skillfully. Many instructors would not even have picked up on the comment, and even fewer would have challenged it. Ironically, even as
this talented beginning teacher confronted the sexist comment of one of her young male students, she inadvertently doled out insidious gender lessons herself.

In our studies of sexism in classroom interaction, we have been particularly fascinated by the ways teachers react to student work and comments because this feedback is crucially important to achievement and self-esteem. We found that teachers typically give students four types of responses.

Teacher praises: “Good job.” “That was an excellent paper.” “I like the way you’re thinking.”

Teacher remediates, encouraging a student to correct a wrong answer or expand and enhance thinking: “Check your addition.” “Think about what you’ve just said and try again.”

Teacher criticizes, giving an explicit statement that something is not correct: “No, you’ve missed number four.” This category also includes statements that are much harsher: “This is a terrible report.”

Teacher accepts, offering a brief acknowledgment that an answer is accurate: “Uh-huh.” “Okay.”

Teachers praise students only 10 percent of the time. Criticism is even rarer—only 5 percent of comments. In many classrooms teachers do not use any praise or criticism at all. About one-third of teacher interactions are comprised of remediation, a dynamic and beneficial form of feedback.

More than half the time, however, teachers slip into the routine of giving the quickest, easiest, and least helpful feedback—a brief nonverbal nod, a quick “Okay.” They rely more on acceptance than on praise, remediation, and criticism combined. The bland and neutral “Okay” is so pervasive that we doubt the “Okay Classroom” is, in fact, okay.

In the scene above, boys received not only more instruction but also better instruction. Two boys were praised, a response that promotes their confidence and self-esteem, and alerts them to what they do well. Through constructive criticism, another boy learned that he was not completing the assignment accurately, and he corrected his mistake. The teacher gave another boy remediation, helping him develop ideas for his poem. The only feedback given to a girl was bland and impre-
When teachers talk with boys about appearance, the exchanges are brief—quick recognition and then on to something else. Or teachers use appearance incidents to move on to a physical skill or academic topic. In the scene just described, the teacher used the bracelet incident to talk about size, shape, and color. In another exchange, a little boy showed the teacher his shiny new belt buckle. Her response: "Cowboys wore buckles like that. They were rough and tough and they rode horses. Did you know that?"

When teachers talk to girls about their appearance, the conversations are usually longer, and the focus stays on how pretty the girl looks. Sometimes the emphasis moves from personal appearance to papers and work. When boys are praised, it is most often for the intellectual quality of their ideas. Girls are twice as likely to be praised for following the rules of form. "I love your margins" is the message.

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**The Bombing Rate**

"How long do you wait for students to answer a question?" When we ask teachers to describe what they do hundreds of times daily in the classroom, their answers are all over the map: One minute. Ten seconds. Five seconds. Twenty-five seconds. Three seconds.

Mary Budd Rowe was the first researcher to frame this question and then try to answer it. Following her lead, many others conducted wait time studies and uncovered an astonishingly hurried classroom. On average, teachers wait only nine-tenths of a second for a student to answer a question. If a student can't answer within that time, teachers call on another student or answer the question themselves.

When questions are hurled at this bombing rate, some students get lost, confused, or rattled, or just drop out of the discussion. "Would you repeat that?" "Say it again." "Give me a minute. I can get it." Requests such as these are really pleas for more time to think. Nobody has enough time in the bombing rate classroom, but boys have more time than girls.

Waiting longer for a student to answer is one of the most powerful and positive things a teacher can do. It is a vote of confidence, a way of saying, "I have high expectations for you, so I will wait a little longer. I know you can get it if I give you a chance." Since boys receive more
wait time, they try harder to achieve. As girls struggle to answer under the pressure of time, they may flounder and fail. Watch how it happens:

"Okay, class, get ready for your next problem. Mr. Warren has four cash registers. Each register weighs thirteen kilograms. How many kilograms do the registers weigh altogether? Linda?"

The teacher waits half a second. Linda looks down at her book and twists her hair. She says nothing in the half-second allotted to her.

"Michael?"

The teacher waits two seconds. Michael is looking down at his book. The teacher waits two more seconds. Michael says, "Fifty-two?"

"Good. Exactly right."

Less assertive in class and more likely to think about their answers and how to respond, girls may need more time to think. In the real world of the classroom, they receive less. For female achievement and self-esteem, it is a case of very bad timing.

**Different Worlds**

This chapter began with time-lapse photography, a series of frames frozen to reveal the hidden meaning in snapshots of classroom life. If the camera were to go beyond the classroom and take pictures throughout the school, here is what they would reveal:

**Snapshot #1** An all-girl line and an all-boy line thread through the hall to recess.

**Snapshot #2** Leaving the library, a single caterpillar line crawls along—its first half all female, its second half all male.

**Snapshot #3** An anti-Noah's Ark line travels through the hallway two by two, without a single male-female pair.

**Snapshot #4** At a long rectangular lunchroom table a group of fifth and sixth graders eat lunch together, black and white, Hispanic and Asian. Every child is male.

**Snapshot #5** Another group of fifth and sixth graders eat lunch together. This table is also racially mixed, but the gender barrier does not break down. The group is all girls.

The camera leaves the building and, still snapping a picture a minute, pans the playground.

**Snapshot #6** A large all-male soccer game is in play. It stretches out to take over most of the schoolyard.

**Snapshot #7** Several girls and a few boys climb on the jungle gym and play on the swings.

**Snapshot #8** A few girls jump rope at the edge of the schoolyard.

**Snapshot #9** In an adjoining grassy area four girls crouch by a puddle to sail paper boats.

If you look again at the photos but substitute white and black for male and female, the segregation screams out. There are two separate, alien, unequal nations, two separate societies that are walled off by gender but left undisturbed. A racial inequity would be unacceptable, but a gender inequity is not even noticed. We must freeze the action to even see the divisions. A separate boy world and a separate girl world is just education as usual. Many of us were schooled in these gender-divided worlds, and it didn't seem to hurt us. Or did it?

**Boy Bastions—Girl Ghettos**

Raphaela Best spent four years as an observer in an elementary school in one of Maryland's most affluent counties. She helped the children with schoolwork, ate lunch with them, and played games with them in class and at recess. As an anthropologist, she also took copious notes. After more than one thousand hours of living with the children, she concluded that elementary school consists of separate and unequal worlds. She watched segregation in action firsthand. Adult women remember it well.

A college student recalled, "When I was in elementary school, boys were able to play basketball and kick ball. They had the side of the playground with the basketball hoops. Another college woman remembers more formal segregation. "I went to a very small grammar school..."
At recess and gym the boys played football and the girls jumped rope. All except one girl and one boy—they did the opposite. One day they were pulled aside. I’m not exactly sure what they were told, but the next day the school yard was divided in two. The boys got the middle and the girls got the edge, and neither sex was allowed on the other’s part.

A third grader described it this way: “Usually we separate ourselves, but my teacher begins recess by handing a jump rope to the girls and a ball to the boys.” Like the wave of a magic wand, this gesture creates strict gender lines. “The boys always pick the biggest areas for their games,” she says. “We have what’s left over, what they don’t want.”

“When it’s recess time,” an elementary school girl observed, “the boys run to the closet and get out the balls and bats and mitts and other stuff.”

“Does the teacher ever say anything about the boys taking all the balls?” we asked her.

“Never.”

“Would you like to play ball in the big area of the playground?”

“Sometimes I would like to. And sometimes girls do play kick ball, but mostly not. This is just the way it is in our school.”

Every morning at recess in schoolyards across the country, boys fan out over the prime territory to play kick ball, football, or basketball. Sometimes girls join them, but more often it’s an all-male ball game. In the typical schoolyard, the boys’ area is ten times bigger than the girls’. Boys never ask if it is their right to take over the territory, and it is rarely questioned. Girls huddle along the sidelines, on the fringe, as if in a separate female annex. Recess becomes a spectator sport.

Teachers seldom intervene to divide space and equipment more evenly, and seldom attempt to connect the segregated worlds—not even when they are asked directly by the girls.

“The boys won’t let us play,” a third grader said, tugging at the arm of the teacher on recess duty. “They have an all-boys club and they won’t let any girls play.”

“Don’t you worry, honey,” the teacher said, patting the little girl’s hair. “When you get bigger, those boys will pay you all the attention you want. Don’t you bother about them now.”

As we observed that exchange, we couldn’t help but wonder how the teacher would have reacted if the recess group had announced “No Catholics” or if white children had blatantly refused to play with Asians.

Raphaela Best observed the children over four years, and the walls of gender segregation grew higher and more entrenched. In the first grade little boys hid out in the restroom. By the second grade the boys’ restroom had become the site of club meetings. Grade three saw the emergence of a highly structured all-boy organization, the Tent Club, with its own rules, rituals, and secrets. By the fourth grade the Tent Club was a force to be reckoned with, one that dictated peer relationships and popularity; it even challenged the authority of the teacher and principal. But not once did an educator ever think to challenge the fairness of the all-male club.

Raphaela Best found the lunchroom to be another area of increasingly formal segregation. In the first grade boys and girls sat together, talking and playing. By second grade they sat at the same table, but it was as if an invisible line had cut it in half, with girls on one end and boys on the other. By the third grade the boys burst into the cafeteria at a dead run to claim their male-only table.

Barrie Thorne, a participant observer in elementary schools in California and Michigan whose students are mainly from working-class families, captured the tiny incidents that transform integrated classes into gender-divided worlds: “Second-grade girls and boys eat lunch together around a long rectangular table. A popular boy walks by and looks the scene over. ‘Oooh, too many girls,’ he says, and takes a place at another table. All the boys immediately pick up their trays and abandon the table with girls, which has now become taboo.

Although sex segregation becomes more pervasive as children get older, contact points remain. School life has its own gender rhythm as girls and boys separate, come together, and separate again. But the points of contact, the together games that girls and boys play, often serve to heighten and solidify the walls of their separate worlds.

“You can’t get me!” “Slobber Monster!” With these challenges thrown out, the game begins. It may be called “Girls Chase the Boys” or “Boys Chase the Girls” or “Chase and Kiss.” It usually starts out one on one, but then the individual boy and girl enlist same-sex peers. “C’mon, let’s get that boy.” “Help, a girl’s gonna get me!”

Pollution rituals are an important part of these chases. Children treat one another as if they are germ carriers. “You’ve got cooties” is the cry. (Substitute other terms for different cultures or different parts of the country.) Elaborate systems are developed around the concept of cooties. Transfer occurs when one child touches another. Prepared for such attack, some protect themselves by writing C.V. (cooties vaccination) on their arms.

Sometimes boys give cooties to girls, but far more frequently girls
are the polluting gender. Boys fling taunts such as “girl stain” or “girl touch” or “cootie girl.” The least liked girls, the ones who are considered fat or ugly or poor, become “cootie queens,” the real untouchables of the class, the most contaminating females of all.

Chasing, polluting, and invasions, where one gender attacks the play area of the other, all function as gender intensifiers, heightening perceived differences between female and male to an extreme degree. The world of children and the world of adults is comprised of different races, but each gender is socially constructed as so different, so alien that we use the phrase “the opposite sex.”

It is boys who work hardest at raising the walls of sex segregation and intensifying the difference between genders. They distance themselves, sending the message that girls are not good enough to play with them. Watch which boys sit next to the girls in informally sex-segregated classrooms and lunchrooms; they are the ones most likely to be rejected by male classmates. Sometimes they are even called “girls.” A student at The American University remembers his school lunchroom in Brooklyn:

At lunch our class all sat together at one long table. All the girls sat on one side, and the boys sat on the other. This was our system. Unfortunately, there were two more boys in my class than seats on the boys’ side. There was no great social embarrassment for a boy in the very hierarchical system we had set up in our class than to have to sit on the girls’ side at lunch. It happened to me once, before I moved up the class social ladder. Boys climbed the rungs of that ladder by beating on each other during recess. To this day, twenty years later, I remember that lunch. It was horrible.

Other men speak, often with horror, of school situations when they became “one of the girls.” The father of a nine-year-old daughter remembered girls in elementary school as “worse than just different. We considered them a subspecies.” Many teachers who were victims of sexist schooling themselves understand this system and collaborate with it; they warn noisy boys of a humiliating punishment: “If you don’t behave, I’m going to make you sit with the girls.”

Most little girls—five, six, seven, or eight—are much too young to truly understand and challenge their assignment as the lower-caste gender. But without challenge over the course of years, this hidden curriculum in second-class citizenship sinks in. Schools and children need help—intervention by adults who can equalize the playing field.

The first step is for parents and teachers to question education as usual. A Milwaukee teacher recalls when she finally understood she was questioning too little and accepting too much:

As I walked my assigned area of the playground on a recent Monday, I looked at the boys playing basketball on the far end and the girls huddled or walking in small groups along the side. No one was fighting or swearing, so I figured it was a good day. And then I caught myself. No, all was not well because I knew that some of the girls huddled in the groups liked to play basketball. So why weren’t they playing? And what was I doing about it? Why did I allow a “might-makes-right” playground where the boys decided where they would play and with whom, which in practice meant no girls on the basketball or soccer teams. What was the hidden message I was giving to the girls on the playground? That the boys decide, and that’s that?

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**Male Magnets**

We are often asked to talk to classes about sexism in school. In one recent visit to a sixth grade, a thoughtful African-American girl talked about how baffled she was by boys. “What thoughts go on inside their heads?” she asked. Her classmates began to giggle until they realized her question was completely honest. “No, I mean it. I know they don’t think like I do. Something different goes on inside their heads, but I can’t figure out what it is.” Her sincerity drew in others:

“Yeah, guys are totally different. They’re like aliens.”

“When I go to the movies and something sad happens, I cry. But a guy doesn’t cry. It’s not that they have different feelings. They don’t have any feelings.”

“I don’t think that’s true. They have feelings, they just don’t let anyone know it.”

“Girls are strange, too. We don’t get them at all,” one boy said, getting the boys into the discussion.

A popular African-American male student addressed his reaction di-
rectly to the girls in the classroom: "You don't talk about normal things like we do. All you talk about is hair, and makeup, and what to do if you get your period."

Several students glanced up quickly to catch our reaction to this taboo topic. But the boy was not after shock effect; he was being honest, too. We were struck by the confusion of these eleven-year-olds. They did not understand one another because they had so little opportunity to really interact. We asked the sixth graders to look around their classroom and see if they noticed anything that might lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. The classroom was arranged in eight groups of four. Half the class was minority, and Asian, Hispanic, and African-American children sat with one another and with white children in the groups. The students were surprised to see that not a single group was integrated by gender. We have found that sex segregation in the lunchroom and schoolyard spills over into the classroom. In our three-year, multistate study of one hundred classrooms, our raters drew "gender geography" maps of each class they visited. They found that more than half of the classes were segregated by gender. There is more communication across race than across gender in elementary schools.

We have seen how sex segregation occurs when children form self-selected groups. Sometimes the division is even clearer, and so is the impact on instruction.

The students are seated formally in rows. There are even spaces between the rows, except down the middle of the room where the students have created an aisle large enough for two people standing side by side to walk down. On one side of the aisle, the students are all female; on the other side, all male. Black, white, Hispanic, and Asian students sit all around the room, but no student has broken the gender barrier.

The teacher in this room is conducting a math game, with the right team (boys) against the left team (girls). The problems have been put on the board, and members of each team race to the front of the room to see who can write the answer first. Competition is intense, but eventually the girls fall behind. The teacher keeps score on the board, with two columns headed "Good Girls" and "Brilliant Boys."

The gender segregation was so formal in this class that we asked if the teacher had set it up. "Of course not," she looked offended. "I wouldn't think of doing such a thing. The students do it themselves." It never occurred to the well-meaning teacher to raise the issue or change the seats.

Here is another segregation episode, this one involving affluent independent school students during a swimming lesson.

The pool is divided by a rope into two lap lanes. No one has tested the children or divided them by ability to make faster and slower lap lanes, but all the girls are in one lane and all the boys in another. Although many of the girls swim as fast or faster than the boys, gender alone created the division.

A male teacher and a female teacher supervise the swimming. The male teacher stands at the end of the pool directly in front of the boy lane. He gives boys suggestions and advice as they come across the pool: "Good stroke, Tom." "Sean, watch your breathing." "Michael, don't forget to kick." "Tim, bend your arm forty-five degrees, like this." The boys find these comments helpful, so they call out questions and clamor for more attention. "Is this it?" "Look at my stroke and tell me if it's good." The female teacher comes over to the male side of the pool to help answer the avalanche of male requests.

Meanwhile, the girls talk to each other, splash, jump up and down to keep from getting cold. Finally, too bored to wait for more directions, several start swimming to the other end of the pool. Others follow. Not a single girl has received instruction on how to improve her performance.

In our research we have found that gender segregation is a major contributor to female invisibility. In sex-segregated classes, teachers are pulled to the more talkative, more disruptive male sections of the classroom or pool. There they stay, teaching boys more actively and directly while the girls fade into the background.
The Character(s) of the Curriculum

At a workshop on sexism in the curriculum, we asked participants, "Have you ever read the book I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl?" Since most of the teachers, principals, and parents had not read it, we showed it to them. I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl! is for very young children. One page shows the jobs and activities that boys can do, and the following page shows what is appropriate for girls. The book announces that boys can be doctors and shows a large male cartoon character with a stethoscope around his neck.

"What do girls do?" we asked the audience.

"They're nurses," the parents and educators chorused as one. They may not have read this book, but they seemed to know the plot line. A little girl nurse pushing a wheelchair is drawn on the page.

"Obviously a case of occupational stereotyping with the girl receiving less of every kind of reward including money, but do you notice anything else?" we asked. Most of the people were puzzled, but a few spotted the subtlety: "Look at how little the girl is." When we showed both pages at once, the boy doctor, a cartoon version of Doogie Howser, towered over the girl pushing the wheelchair.

The next page shows boys as pilots. "What are girls?" we asked.

"Stewardesses," the audience called back. A cartoon girl with a big smile and a short skirt carries a tray of drinks. The audience chuckled as several people remarked, "Look, her underpants are showing." "A little cheesecake for the younger set," someone joked as the next picture emerged, a boy drawn as a policeman.

"What are girls?"

This one had the group confused. "Mommies?" "Criminals?" "Crossing guards?" "Meter maid?" They found it. A tough-looking female figure is shown writing out a ticket for an obviously miserable motorist caught in a parking violation. "She looks as if she's had a steroid treatment," a teacher joked. "She's very big this time." The images continued: boys as those who eat, and girls as the ones who cook; boys as the builders of homes, and girls as the ones who clean them. The picture accompanying the caption about cleaning is that of a smiling cartoon girl pushing a vacuum cleaner. She and the cleaning machine are drawn very large because there is so much work to do. This image upset the audience. "Oh, no," several groaned. Others hissed and booed.

The next caption identified boys as the ones who fix things.

"Girls break things," the audience chorused back. But this time the author had outsmarted them. "Break" was too active. The parents and educators tried other stereotypes: "Girls clean things?" "Play with things?" "Buy things?" "Girls cry over things?"

"These are great responses, but they're all too active."

"Girls watch boys?" an astute parent suggested. She was on to something. Several studies have shown that in basel readers the activity girls are most often engaged in is watching boys in action. They look at boys play baseball, admire them as they perform magic tricks, wave good-bye from behind windows as boys leave for adventure. But in this case even "watch" was too active. The audience was stumped.

"Girls are things?" a young woman burst out. She had actually outdone the author, so we displayed the page: GIRLS NEED THINGS FIXED. The smiling stationary figure is holding the wheel of her doll carriage in her hand. She isn't doing anything with the wheel, she is just standing there beside her tipped-over vehicle, clearly in need of male help. The audience groaned, but the pictures went on with boys shown as inventing while girls are described as using things boys invent. Accompanying this description is an illustration of a girl lying in a hammock and reading, thanks to a lamp invented by a boy. "Who invented the cotton gin?" we asked. Several people from around the room answered, "Eli Whitney." Like Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison, this name is one of the staples of American education. "Has anyone ever heard of Catherine Littlefield Greene?" The parents and teachers were silent.

We told the story of the woman who, after the death of her husband, Nathaniel, who had been a general in the Revolutionary War, met Eli Whitney. A Yale-educated tutor, Whitney devised a model for the gin while working at Greene's Mulberry Grove Mansion. But his design was flawed; although seeds were pulled from the cotton, they became clogged in the rollers. It was Kitty Greene who came up with the breakthrough idea of using brushes for the seeds. The concept of the machine was so simple that copycat gins sprang up on other plantations. To pay for lawsuits during the fierce battle for patent rights, Kitty Greene sold her estate. It wasn't until seven years later that Eli Whitney won full title to the cotton gin.

"Why wasn't the patent taken out in both names?" a history teacher asked. It was an excellent question, and in the answer is an important lesson for children. At a time when it was unseemly for women to write books (many female authors took male names), it was especially unlikely for a lady to claim an invention. Textbooks tell the story of the names registered in the patent office, but they leave out how sexism and racism denied groups of people access to that registry.
again quiet and well mannered, as if listening to a sermon in their place of worship. But were we getting through? We had no idea.

"Thank you for saying those things," said a girl who stopped us as we were leaving. "This isn't the first time the boys have acted like that. It's not everybody, just some. And it only happens when they get in a large group. No one, not even the teachers or the principal, has really taken them on. I'm glad you did it."

Balancing the Books

Few things stir up more controversy than the content of the curriculum. Teachers, parents, students—all seem to be aware intuitively that schoolbooks shape what the next generation knows and how it behaves. In this case research supports intuition. When children read about people in nontraditional gender roles, they are less likely to limit themselves to stereotypes. When children read about women and minorities in history, they are more likely to feel these groups have made important contributions to the country. As one sixth grader told us, "I love to read biographies about women. When I learn about what they've done, I feel like a door is opening. If they can do great things, maybe I can, too."

A few years after Betty Friedan wrote The Feminine Mystique, parents began to take active notice of gender treatment in schoolbooks. The more they looked, the more worried they became. Throughout the 1970s, parents and educators conducted studies to document objectively how men and women were portrayed in the curriculum. Sanctioned by school and society, the curriculum was the first aspect of school that researchers investigated for sexism. It was easy to investigate, and there was no need to use time-lapse photography to stop the action. The messages were already frozen on the textbook pages.

In their 1975 study Dick and Jane as Victims, The Women on Words and Images studied 134 elementary school readers from sixteen different publishers and found the following ratios:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy-centered stories to girl-centered stories</td>
<td>5:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult male characters to adult female characters</td>
<td>3:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male biographies to female biographies</td>
<td>6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male fairy tale stories to female fairy tale stories</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lenore Weitzman and Diane Rizzo identified the elementary books that were used most widely between 1967 and 1972. In second-grade books, girls and women were portrayed in fewer than one-third of the illustrations. By the sixth grade the numbers of portrayals had declined to one-fifth. Minority females, portrayed half as frequently as minority males, were truly invisible.\(^{11}\)

Weitzman and her colleagues next turned their attention to award-winning children’s literature, Caldecott winners from 1953 through 1971. These picture books, chosen as the best of the year by the American Library Association, had eleven times as many boys and men pictured as girls and women. When the researchers counted animals, really people dressed in feathers and fur (Sylvester the donkey, Mickey Mouse), the ratio became a staggering ninety-five to one. In one-third of the award winners, there were no women at all.\(^{12}\) Imagine parents of the 1950s and 1960s dutifully reading award-winning bedtime stories to their children and offering them a womanless world. Picture-book lessons in female invisibility were reinforced daily by the textbooks in school.

When girls and women were included, they were typecast. They looked in mirrors, watched boys, cried, needed help, served others, gave up, betrayed secrets, acted selfishly, and waited to be rescued. While men were involved in 150 different jobs, women were housewives. When they took off their aprons and discarded their dish towels (the actual costume of the textbook housewife), they worked outside the home only as teachers and nurses.\(^{13}\)

Children’s literature and school texts routinely included derogatory comments about being female.\(^{14}\) For example:

- From the Lippincott Basic Reading Series: “Women’s advice is never worth two pennies. Yours isn’t even a penny.”
- From Harper & Row’s Around the Corner: “Look at her, Mother, just look at her. She is just like a girl. She gives up.”
- From Scott Foresman’s Ventures: “We are willing to share our great thoughts with mankind. However, you happen to be a girl.”
- And this poem from the Caldecott award-winning Mei Li:

  “We keep a dog to watch the house.
  A pig is useful too.
  We keep a cat to catch a mouse.
  But what can we do with a girl like you?”

The negative publicity over sexist books jolted publishers. By the mid-1970s many had responded with guidelines so that texts would be fairer and more inclusive. Scott Foresman, Ginn, Macmillan, McGraw-Hill, Harper & Row, and several others pledged recognition of women and minorities, and an end to stereotypes and sexist language. Their guidelines offered recommendations to authors and illustrators on writing gender-fair books.\(^{15}\)

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## Double Jeopardy

We wanted to see how well the newer books were working, so during the spring of 1992 we visited sixteen fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classes in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., and gave students this assignment:

In the next five minutes write down the names of as many famous women and men as you can. They can come from anywhere in the world and they can be alive or dead, but they must be real people. They can’t be made up. Also—and this is very important—they can’t be entertainers or athletes. See if you can name at least ten men and ten women.

At first the students write furiously, but after about three minutes, most run out of names. On average, students generate eleven male names but only three women’s. While the male names are drawn directly from the pages of history books, the female names represent far greater student creativity. Mrs. Fields, Aunt Jemima, Sarah Lee, Princess Di Fergie, Mrs. Bush, Sally Ride, and children’s book authors such as Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume. Few names come from the pages of history. Betsy Ross, Harriet Tubman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Amelia Earhart, Sojourner Truth, Sacajawea, Rosa Parks, Molly Pitcher, and Annie Oakley are sometimes mentioned.

Several students cannot think of a single woman’s name. Others have to struggle to come up with a few. In one sixth-grade class, a boy identified as the star history student is stumped by the assignment and obviously frustrated:

“Have you got any girls?” he asks, turning to a classmate.

“Sure. I got lots.”

“I have only one.”
"Think about the presidents."
"There are no lady presidents."
"Of course not. There's a law against it. But all you gotta do is take the presidents' names and put Mrs. in front of them."

In a fourth-grade class, a girl is drawing a blank. She has no names under her Women column. A female classmate leans over to help. "What about Francis Scott Key? She's famous." The girl immediately writes the name down. "Thanks," she says. "I forgot about her."

As we are leaving class, one girl stops us. "I don't think we did very well on that list," she says. "It was too bad you didn't let us put in entertainers. We could've put in a lot of women then. I wrote down Madonna anyway."

Researcher Adrienne Alton-Lee investigated classrooms in New Zealand to discover the effect of sexist curricula on children. Observing during a unit on the Middle Ages, she found that students were bombarded with three to four male names every minute of class discussion, but a female name was mentioned only once every six minutes. At the end of the unit, interviewers asked what women did during the Middle Ages. Here's a sample of what the students said:

**SAM:** They used to . . . aw . . . can't remember now, they used to um . . . um . . .
**INTERVIEWER:** What about the women?
**SAM:** Walk up and down the castle trying to act beautiful. (Laugh)
**INTERVIEWER:** Trying to act beautiful, you think?
**SAM:** Trying to act so smart.
**INTERVIEWER:** Do they?
**SAM:** Some of them would show off.
**INTERVIEWER:** Sorry?
**SAM:** Some of them did show off.
**INTERVIEWER:** Did show off, did they?
**SAM:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** What for?
**SAM:** I don't know. . . . If they were so good they used to comb their hair so nice and . . .
**INTERVIEWER:** Yes?
**SAM:** And they used to walk up and down, they thought they were great.
**INTERVIEWER:** 'Cos they thought they were great?
**SAM:** Yeah, they thought they were great. And people used to go, "Wow, you're so beautiful." "

The interviews made it clear that when women were left out of the curriculum, the students knew nothing about them. Even worse, without real knowledge, the children filled in the gaps with stereotypes and distortions. The result was a twisted view of half the people and their history.

When a sexist curriculum is compounded by sexist teaching, the damage increases exponentially. In a third-grade language arts classroom, the children were sitting on a carpet, clustered around the teacher who was putting cartoon characters on a felt board. At first glance it was a charming scene, but after looking more closely we could see how biases in curriculum and instruction merged to put girls in double jeopardy.
the girls should go to Miss McNeil [the student teacher]. If you talk very softly and don’t bother anyone, you can read your stories in the hall. The boys will stay in the classroom with me.

This lesson lasted only an hour, but it taught far more than parts of speech. The children learned that Middle Ages men were creative and bold. They wrote songs and fought dragons. They worked as minstrels and knights. Women in the Middle Ages were tiny, beautiful princesses who could not take care of themselves; no other role was shown.

As the lesson progressed, the students were funneled into a narrower vision of the world. First they heard and watched as the teacher validated stereotypes, and then—and this was where the psychological backlash turned truly vicious—they were taught to make those stereotypes their own. The children created their own stories about the pretty passive princess and the big brave knight. They read their stories, their versions of the stereotypes, to one another. If the teacher had schemed to indoctrinate the children in the stereotypes, she could not have done it more brilliantly.

But of course there was much more going on. Donna, Maria, Elise, and the other third-grade girls were not called on as often as John, Antonio, Seth, Mike, Al, Tim, and the other male students. Like the active knight on the felt board, many of the boys in the class were active, too. When the teacher did not call on them, they called out and were praised for their assertive effort. During the entire lesson, no girl called out. Like the passive little princess, their voices were also frozen and unheard. When boys answered, the teacher took the time to offer evaluations in the form of praise. Indifferent and imprecise reactions—“Uh-huh,” “Okay,” or no comment—were reserved for the girls.

The sexist messages continued. When the teacher divided the class, she did it by gender. The girls were allotted second-class space and an inexperienced assistant. There was also a parting shot: The female children were told to read their stories quietly so that no one would even know they were there. The boys were left in control of the classroom and instructed by the real teacher.

The teacher, a female who could have served as a role model for the girls, both accepted and facilitated the male dominance of the classroom. She herself had been a victim of years of sexist schooling and had no idea that she collaborated with a system that stunts the potential of female students. The girls, knowing no better, did not realize that little by little, lesson by lesson, day by day they were being robbed. The student teacher was also indoctrinated into the sexist curriculum and
instruction. She would be licensed to teach the following year, and it is quite likely that she will teach gender-biased lessons in a classroom of her own.

Every day in America little girls lose independence, achievement, and self-esteem in classes like this. Subtle and insidious, the gender-biased lessons result in quiet catastrophes and silent losses. But the casualties—tomorrow's women—are very real.