

8-2007

# Minimizing Gender Division in Sixth Grade Classrooms

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Minimizing Gender Division  
in Sixth Grade Classrooms

by

Stephanie R. Schaufelberger

August 2007

A thesis submitted to the  
Department of Education and Human Development of the  
State University of New York College at Brockport  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Education

Minimizing Gender Division  
in Sixth Grade Classrooms

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## **Minimizing Gender Division**

### **in Sixth Grade Classrooms**

#### **Chapter 1-Introduction**

##### Introduction

Teachers have been exploring differences in the way schools respond to female and male students and the outcomes of this different treatment. Although treating students differently because of their gender has decreased in the past decades, the issue still exists. Teachers are constantly finding new strategies to minimize the gender gap and are creating classroom environments that make learning a success for all students.

One way to help eliminate gender division and encourage all students to feel they are a part of the school community is to have them create the class assignments. Hudd (2003) performed research using an exercise where students make up their own syllabus. She found that when she had the class involved in constructing an assignment list, few students failed or performed poorly. The students also learned that their opinions counted and they were directly related to the learning process. Each student learned differently and the teacher was able to see how each individual learned in the most appropriate manner and combined all strategies to make the classroom a positive environment for all students to participate.

All students need to make a transition from elementary to middle school. This transition brings on many new challenges for all students. According to O'Brien (2003), "transferring from elementary to middle school is only one step in a series of challenges girls face that add to emotional, social and academic changes that shape and are shaped by their social classes and gendered identities" (2003, p.249). O'Brien (2003) explored how girls felt emotionally about

moving up into middle schools and found that girls were worried about being themselves in a new school because they were meeting new teachers and students and wanted people to like them. The girls also felt that less was expected out of them because they were no longer role models to younger students. These feelings led to alienation and a high attrition rate. Teachers need to make sure all students are involved in the school environment. According to Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, and Thoma (2003), "It is important for educators to always make each student feel like an important asset in the community and their individuality is a characteristic of which they should be proud" (2003, p.228). If alienation can be prevented at an early age, then the number of drop outs and gang activity would possibly decrease.

Teachers do not alienate students purposefully. Perry (2001) observed, surveyed and discussed gender equity with six elementary teachers and found that all teachers wanted students to feel equal. Perry also found that the teachers agreed they must be aware of their teaching practices to avoid treating genders differently.

While Perry (2001) discussed gender equity with teachers, Garrahy (2001) studied the effects of teachers teaching students as individuals as opposed to as genders. He investigated ways in which teachers diminished or contributed to the gender-differentiated schooling experiences of girls and boys by comparing three teachers' gender beliefs and practices. After reviewing questionnaires given to the participating teachers, Garrahy found that teachers did in fact divide students by gender. Whether by having girls draw mice with bows on their heads or reading stories with female characters only, gender division was prevalent in each classroom. These teachers were teaching gender roles and socialization without even realizing it.

### Statement of the Problem

I believe schools tend to treat girls differently than boys and inadvertently reinforce stereotyped views of girls in terms of behavior, personality, aspirations, and achievement. Boys and girls enter school with equal academic abilities and self-concepts, but girls usually lag behind boys in both areas by the time they graduate from high school (ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 2001). For my project I created lesson plans that taught the history of both important male and female leaders in certain time periods in order to maintain the students' participation in classrooms.

### Rationale

The hidden curriculum, or the issue of gender bias, is not an overt lesson planning curriculum, yet it is the way teachers treat their students in the classroom while they teach the daily lessons. The hidden curriculum is constantly overlooked by faculty when creating lesson and unit plans. Although there are claims that teachers create lesson plans that make learning equal for both genders, students are constantly being divided and treated differently. Biases are often in place when people create lesson plans whether they are aware of them or not. It should be a necessity for faculty and staff to be aware of these unconscious biases, so they could be minimized, if not eliminated. I wanted to be able to teach a curriculum that represents both strong female and male historical figures so both genders will feel confident in the classroom.



### Significance of the Problem

As students move into secondary schools, they experience a different student/teacher relationship as compared to their elementary schools. Rather than having the same teacher over the course of the day, they must adjust to many different teachers and teaching styles and they are placed in classrooms with unfamiliar classmates from the other elementary schools within the district. They are no longer the oldest students that other students try to emulate, they are the youngest and do not feel the importance of being the role model in their school as they had the year before. This new experience can be a stressful one for the student. It is important for the teacher to get to know each student and make the experience a positive one for the new students. The teacher needs to present these students with important female and male historical figures within the curriculum in order to promote participation.

After observing a couple social studies classrooms, I researched how the hidden curriculum affects students' participation. If a student's self-confidence is lowered, he or she will not feel comfortable participating in class. I wanted teachers to be aware of the hidden curriculum so they can alter the way they teach to make the classroom an equal socializing environment for both genders.

To accomplish this goal, sixth grade students were given a survey that reflected their self-confidence dealing participation. The survey also inquired as to whether the students had learned about many male and female figures in the past. Also, two social studies teachers were given questionnaires so that I could learn who they believed participated most in class. At the conclusion of a two month observation period of a sixth grade classroom, a post-survey was

given to determine whether the students had learned about both male and female historical figures and how that may have influenced their participation.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Gender-Based Teaching Background**

The acknowledgement of gender-based teaching occurred during the mid-twentieth century. The 1972 Title IX is the federal anti-discrimination in education law that created a mandate for equal access to educational opportunities. As a result of Title IX, there have been numerous programmatic changes in our nation's schools designed to ensure parity for girls' education and to enhance gender equity in general. Even with this Title IX, schools tended to treat girls differently than boys and inadvertently reinforce stereotyped views of girls in terms of behavior, personality, aspirations, and achievement, which affect their academic and social achievement (Salend, 2005). As a result of these efforts to ensure equality, Spencer, Porche, and Tolman wrote, "We have witnessed significant growth in girls' participation and achievement in math, science, and sports." (2003, p.174).

Spencer, Porche, and Tolman studied the background of gender-based teaching and formulated a research project to examine the impact of their concerted efforts toward making their middle school a more gender equitable environment. The researchers also examined how the gender ideologies may affect the efforts toward eliminating the gender gap. They surveyed the teachers and staff of a middle school (Grades 6-8) and the full seventh grade class of students in one northeastern school district to research the perceptions on regarding the teachers' classroom practices, curricular efforts related to eliminating the gender gap, and the involvement of gender equity initiatives in the school. Eighty-five staff completed the surveys, seventy-eight percent of them female and included new as well as veterans with over forty years experience.

A subset of the seventh grade students (14 boys and 14 girls) participated in classroom observations and also focus groups. These students were part of the classes taught by the teachers with whom the researchers were collaborating. These teachers were selected on the basis of the teachers being identified as highly committed to gender equity. They were actively constructing gender-fair curriculum in their classes, had attended conferences on gender equity and brought back information to their area teaching team. (Spencer et al, 2003)

By studying the results of the surveys, Spencer et al. found that teachers reported gender equity to be a priority in their teaching and expressed pride in their work in providing fair treatment to all students, regardless of gender. According to Spencer, et al., “Without explicit attention to gender gapping, current gender equity efforts may not only fail to ameliorate gender differences, they may in some cases have the unintended consequence of intensifying aspects of them.” (2003, p.1789)

Another study that focused on gender gap was one that centered research on students moving up into middle schools. Middle school subjects often become less interesting and more challenging. (Rizza, 2002) Therefore, teachers need to strategize a way to involve more students in the classroom. Rizza claimed, “Past researchers have argued that schools are inherently unfair to girls, and differences in motivation and achievement are the result of differences in the opportunities and experiences afforded to each group and not to innate gender characteristics.” (2002, p.539) With this information, Rizza created a goal that was intended to help educators and researchers better understand the way in which students perceive gender roles. Armed with that knowledge, Rizza designed instructional and motivational interventions.

Rizza took students from grades 3-8 and surveyed the frequency that students received interesting challenges, choices and enjoyment in the classroom from their teachers. The sample

included 163 classrooms from 24 school districts collaborating with the National Research Center on Gifted and Talented at the University of Connecticut, with females representing forty-nine percent. To ensure that all students answer as truthfully as possible, Rizza had contact persons come in to administer the survey and inform the students that their teachers would not see their responses. The conclusion was that girls found classrooms more enjoyable than boys; therefore gender bias seemed existent in school.

Gender roles have been present in institutions all over the world. Moore (2003) discussed how the school systems were setup for females in Scotland during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His paper discussed how females were generally finished with school at the age of fourteen, unless they went on to boarding or fashion school. Long after the creation of a male school system, a female school system was developed in 1825. Many female-only institutions were introduced including the Edinburgh Institution for the Education of Young Ladies and Queen's College. The schools were prevalent in the big cities such as Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Although the schools were filled with female students, faculty and staff consisted of all males. These teachers were employed at many schools and were well known community members. The teachers were not full time and were often known as visiting masters because they owned schools and taught only a few hours a day at the ladies' institutions. They taught nine subjects: English, French, geography, writing and arithmetic, drawing, piano, singing, dancing and needlework. (Moore, 2003)

Soon after female-only institutions were built, co-education institutions were introduced. At first, the boys and girls were separated by departments known as the academy (girls' only and smaller campus) and Academy (boys' only and main campus). It diminished quickly, however

and many more failed after opening. A women's movement never took place in Scotland.  
(Moore, 2003)

After researching the female-only institutions, Moore (2003) concluded that "These female-only institutions helped females gain more education equality by furthering their schooling past the age of fourteen" (p.269). Scotland created new educational and pedagogical theories to eliminate the existing ineffective method of cultivating women and to guarantee the best education, which is to have boys and girls in the same school receiving the same education. The founders of the ladies' institutions were not trying to give women political, economic, or employment equality. Their purpose was to teach women to be a part of the polite society, to be a companion to a husband and to learn responsibility for family health. Eventually, this movement however did help women to gain more equality in the aforementioned areas of politics, economics, and employment. (Moore, 2003)

Teachers have the responsibility of encouraging gender equality in the classroom. Perry (2001) believed the elementary school classroom is where one of the students' first transactions with adults occurs, other than family interactions. The teachers must be seen as a primary group to promote gender equity in the classroom. Perry explained,

"Teachers do not always recognize the bias used in their own behavior and have not tried to change it. These teachers may remind girls to follow the class rules more often than boys because they believe that it is more important for girls to comply. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to uncover their gender bias and encourage gender equity in the classroom"

(2001, p. 3)

The methods used for researching gender equality that Perry included were observations of elementary classrooms, questionnaires and discussions with classroom teachers. The researcher worked with six teachers, representing grades K-5. They were observed at the start of the research and a checklist was used to note gender equitable/biased behaviors observed. The teachers then filled out a questionnaire indicating their beliefs about gender bias/equitable teaching behaviors. Perry also met with these teachers to discuss observed behaviors in the classroom in hopes to increase awareness of gender biased/equitable teaching practice.

Overall, Perry found the teachers to be unbiased in their teaching qualities of genders. Perry found there was an equal amount of participation allowance from both female and male students by both passive and aggressive teachers. All teachers strongly agreed that boys and girls should receive a teacher's equal time and attention, should follow the same rules, and that teachers should use non-stereotyped instructional materials. These teachers also agreed that they must pay attention to their own teaching practice in order to become aware and change any hidden gender gapping towards boys or girls.

### Example of Gender Based Teaching in the Classroom

Gender stereotypes can be present in the literature teachers present to the class. Taylor's (2003) article dealt with gender stereotypes in popular children's books. He had students in his college sociology class examine text, symbols, characters, use of color, and major themes in each book. The reasoning behind his study was to convince students that society played a big role in directing their behavior and in shaping their lives. According to Taylor, "Students must learn to identify themselves as members of various social categories, including categories related to gender, social class, and race and ethnicity" (2003, p.440). Taylor also described society as

maintaining a different set of normative roles for women and men, which requires them to have different responsibilities and different kinds of work.

Taylor (2003) had students perform a content analysis of gender messages in children's literature by having them read and examine books and record their findings, paying particular attention to the characters and themes that were stereotypical.

After having the students research the children's books, Taylor found that there were three common conclusions. Firstly, the book was only a book and children would not be affected by the gender bias in the books. Secondly, attitudes have changed and more recent children's books possess smaller biases reflecting attitudes about gender. Lastly, the books simply reflect reality. These students believed that gender inequality was prevalent only in the past when actually gender stratification continued to remain apparent in education. Taylor concluded, "Children do learn early on that society has different expectations and standards for boys and girls. However, if they learn the gender code found in books then it could help them from feeling that they should act a certain way." (2003, p.208)

### Effects of Gender-Biased Teaching

The gender gap and the effects of treating genders differently has been an ongoing issue. Existing research supports the problems and the effects of students being divided based on their gender in schools. Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, & Thoma (2003) were interested in how student alienation was found to be a major cause of dropping out of school and poor peer, school-student, and teacher-student relationships.

Brown, et al. examined the relationship between High school students- 114 females and 103 males- and their perceptions of school life. The researchers used a survey designed to

measure constructs of student alienation that was distributed to over 200 students in two high schools of a large, urban school district in the southern United States. They used Bronfenbrenner's (1986) definition of alienation, which was described as having a lack of sense of belonging, feeling cut off from family, friends or school and feeling alone and that no one had the same characteristics as them. The research examined students from diverse backgrounds. They used past studies to review their hypothesis. The expectation of teachers and researchers was that males felt more alienated from society than females did from school, but Brown, et al. actually found that female students experienced greater feelings of alienation than male students

Brown, et al. found there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students' on the feelings of alienation, which indicated that males and females did not experience the same degree of alienation. Males felt this alienation to a greater degree than females. The researchers believed that the male students were not able to converse with female teachers as well as female students could. Overall, results showed that gender was a factor in school that led to students experiencing alienation.

Lai Li performed a study much like Brown and his fellow researchers. Li worked with middle school students to study how gender bias may result in alienation. He claimed if students were treated based on their gender with stereotypical characteristics-that is, females being passive, and males being aggressive- then they would not feel comfortable in the classroom, leading to alienation. For Li's study, he looked at the texts used in the classroom. He used both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis to conduct investigations and analysis of illiteracy-elimination teaching materials in different regions, show the gender perceptions and information these materials give to groups of rural people with low levels of education and in



disadvantaged cultural-resource circumstances, and explain the social influence such materials exert upon the gender roles of groups of people with low levels of education.

After researching the materials used in class, Li found that sixty percent of the protagonists in books were male and only thirty-two percent were female. Li claims, "The reading materials enhance the social role of men and fail to acknowledge women's contributions and development." (2003, p.58) The women felt they were inferior to men and were born below men. The texts also resulted in females feeling they were supposed to be dependent on males. Therefore, Li (2003) believed the rural labor force of China should help females to actively seek knowledge and yearn for more information and skills while pursuing a healthy and civilized life.

Like Brown, et al., Garrahy (2001) studied the way in which teachers diminished or contributed to the gender gap in school experiences of girls and boys. She researched a document written by the American Association of University Women that discussed how inequitable experiences of girls through the lack of representation in instructional materials and curriculum design, silenced voices in classroom conversations and in discriminatory instructional techniques. (Garrahy, 2001) Therefore, she compared three teachers' gender beliefs and their interaction with students in the classroom.

Garrahy used observations and interviews from the third grade teachers in a Midwestern elementary school in a European-American community during a 15-week data collection period. The student population consisted of 426 children in grades kindergarten through fifth and ranged in socioeconomic status from lower to middle class. Garrahy researched if and why educational institutions play an important role in the gender socialization of students. Garrahy believed teachers are role models for these students and do in fact model the way genders are perceived, even if it is subconsciously. The three teachers, all female with teaching experience between

nine and twenty-five years, were aware that the study was on gender socialization in the classroom. Garrahy spent 36 hours with each teacher over the course of a four month period and found that each teacher believed in the existence of a *generic* child, which meant that they did not look at a student by socializing him or her as a boy or a girl. (2001)

During the observations, Garrahy used field notes to record descriptions of teacher and student interactions, seating arrangements, peer interactions, classroom environments, lessons, events, and informal conversations. During these observations, Garrahy found that two of the teachers taught in a manner that benefited boys more than girls, while the third teacher taught in a fashion that was favorable to girls. The two teachers that favored boys had students sit where they chose, so the classroom ended up being rigidly separated by gender. The boys argued all the time, making the teachers spend more time disciplining them and giving them more attention than the girls. Also, these boys were allowed to call out during class without raising their hands, while girls were reprimanded every time they did so. (2001)

Garrahy (2001) also discovered that one teacher made her students color the mouse for a Valentine's Day activity the same sex as they were. The students were gender-bound during this activity. The teacher that favored girls over boys tended to read stories after lunch mainly dealing with characters that were strong females. Therefore, results showed that these teachers who claimed they held a gender-blind position were actually teaching gender roles and socialization.

Transferring from an elementary to a middle school may lead to gender division in genders because of students' lack of confidence because of emotional and social stress. O'Brien (2003) argued that the school choice process is only one step in a series of challenges girls face

that add to emotional, social and academic transitions that shape and are shaped by their social classes and gendered identities.

O'Brien's research paper draws on data from the Research Committee of the Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland from 1999-2001. This research explored female students' perceptions of the transfer to second level schooling over a two year period. O'Brien took the data from the eighty-six female students who left their eight primary schools and scattered to eighteen middle level schools. The girls came from different social classes, schools, and localities. O'Brien claimed that by the time girls moved up into middle level school they were already feeling socially classified by their teachers. The girls were expected to act and dress in a certain matter that portrayed their gender. They were expected to be polite and dress in stylishly.

Through the interviews with the students, O'Brien explored how girls felt emotionally about moving up into middle level schools. He or she found that girls were worried about being themselves in a new school because they were meeting new teachers and new students and wanted people to like them. They felt anxious and feared being bullied by people who would not like them.

O'Brien (2003) concluded that, "During the time of transition from elementary to middle schools, girls experienced a high level of stress and emotionality" (p.260). They were scared to be an individual because they wanted people to like them and the uniform restricted them from standing out and being unique. Many schools practiced the traditional views of femininity and expected them to act in a quiet, polite manner and to dress a certain way. This discouraged the females from having their own identity, which resulted in females feeling alienated from the school. (O'Brien, 2003)

Feelings of alienation may lead to more serious issues. During the middle school years, research has dealt with students' mental health because suicide and violent incidents have increased (Watt, 2003). Watt researched the differences between public and private schools and wanted to prove that private schools do not reduce the likeliness of students committing suicide and being violent.

Past studies examined the influence of family, peer and school characteristics on adolescents' achievements. School characteristics include school facilities, curriculum and teachers' characteristics. Watt's study used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, collected as part of the Add Health Project, which was a large school-based study of the health related behaviors of adolescents in grades 7-12. This data measured a wide variety of attitudes and health behaviors, such as depression, substance use, diet, suicidality (wanting to commit suicide) and violence.

Watt's data included an analysis of the examination of the variables - depression, suicidality, violence social acceptance, and friendship supports as - potential mediating factors in the relationship between school size and sector and mental health outcomes. Watt discovered that one finding of a study supported private schools as an institution. Watt found that private schools are associated with more supportive friendships between females. Watt also found that small schools were associated with lower levels of perceived support among females.

With these findings, Watt concluded that her study did not find that private schools and small schools were clearly beneficial to adolescents' emotional adjustment. Watt also concluded, "Private schools and small schools may actually be detrimental to adolescents' mental health." (2003, p.360)

Spencer (2004) discussed how females were treated differently in middle school and how it affected the way they acted socially and academically. Spencer researched the students who went through the education program after the 1944 Education Act was introduced, but before the 1988 Education Act, which offered equality and opportunity for all students. Spencer believed that the girls experienced a struggle between home and school values in terms of class and gender roles that the girls experienced. Therefore, she discussed how the experience of individual women may be collected, constructed, and analyzed through narratives of their secondary education.

After interviewing the women, she found the reasons why females left school early. For girls, the expectations of society were that they work temporarily until they were married and started a family. There was no reason for them to stay in school because they were expected to stay at home with the family while the husband worked. They described how their schooling system embedded domesticity in the curriculum as the ultimate goal for girls. Spencer showed how women were tolerant of whatever the school system's curriculum offered them and never were able to explore working opportunities. (2004)

Ingolfur Asgeir Johannesson (2004) discussed the prevalence of gender bias in the classroom. Johannesson interviewed fourteen female teachers in Icelandic primary schools. The study was performed in two parts. In the first part, Johannesson interviewed eight teachers twice as intervals of 3 to 12 weeks. He would observe a few lessons before the second interview. In the second part of the study, he interviewed six teachers once. Johannesson found that almost all of them agreed that girls needed help in gaining independence and self-confidence; yet their teaching focused on individual rather than social and gender differences. Teachers learned about a student's strengths and weaknesses and used different strategies to teach each person. They did

not teach males or females differently because of their gender. Johannesson stated, "The interview material suggests that teachers in general do not devote much time to discussing equality and gender differences." (2004, p.36)

Some studies show other socialization agents, such as family that create a gender bias in students, which might result in greater difficulty for some in order to feel equal in the classroom. McHale, Kim, Whiteman, & Crouter (2004) studied links between sex-typed time use in middle schools. They performed a study of how families influenced gender development during their children's middle childhood and adolescence experience. Their study of children's time use focused on their out of school, free time activities. The researchers believed that by encouraging or discouraging children's participation in sex-typed activities, such as girls playing jump rope and boys playing four square, parents helped share children's' beliefs of gender roles.

The two-year study focused on the 103 girls and boys who were firstborn in their family and began the study when the children were about 11 years of age. During the 2-3 weeks that followed, the families were interviewed on the phone every weekday night and twice on weekend nights. The calls were to record the daily activities of the parents and children outside of school. Activities that children participated in were classified feminine, masculine, or neutral. McHale, et al. reported that 11 activities were classified as feminine and 5 activities were classified as masculine.

McHale, et al. found that girls spent more time with opposite-sex partners than boys did. Next, the researchers looked at the time in feminine versus masculine activities and concluded that girls were less sex-typed than boys in their choice of activities. The girls' difference between times in feminine versus masculine activities was smaller than that for the boys'.

## **Chapter 3-Applications and Evaluations**

### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to find a new strategy to minimize the gender gap and to create a classroom environment that makes learning a success for all students. I have made an attempt to find a new strategy in a variety of ways. The next section will explain the methodology used in this study.

### Goals

I began this activity with one main goal in mind. I wanted to find a way to maximize the learning experience for both genders in the classroom. To accomplish this goal, I had to find a strategy to teach a topic that included both female and male historical figures with whom the students could relate. This accomplishment would lead to another goal in mind, which was to increase students' level of participation in class. As students move into secondary schools, they experience a different student/teacher relationship as compared to their elementary schools. Rather than having the same teacher over the course of the day like in elementary school, students must adjust to many different teachers and teaching styles. This may be a stressful time for the students. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to make them feel like an important asset to their classroom. If the teacher treats all students in the same manner and gives both genders equal attention, then the hidden curriculum, that is the way lessons are taught, would be minimized.

### Procedures of Study

I obtained information from numerous sources while completing this research project. Through interviews with three sixth grade teachers, I was able to gain knowledge of students' participation levels. This informal data was used to design the goals of the research project. It was important to use sixth grade teachers because I studied sixth grade students in a social studies environment.

A review of the current and relevant research surrounding gender bias provided additional information. This review gave me the necessary background knowledge to complete the research. I combined information about the background of gender-based teaching, an example of gender-based teaching in the classroom, the effects of gender-biased teaching, and a strategy to eliminate gender-biased teaching.

The sixth grade students in four social studies classes were used to get formal data for my research project. I first used my observations from teaching these students for the first four months of the school year to observe the gender division, that is how each gender acts in the classroom, and participation levels of both genders. As a substitute teacher, I used the standard lesson plans of their permanent classroom teacher.

### Target Group

In my discussions with the social studies teachers, they all agreed that the males in the classrooms held higher participation levels. The teachers also agreed that the curriculum was based around male historical figures.



The females were used as the target group in my research project. Teachers agreed their participation level needed to increase. Therefore, I wanted to make females' confidence levels my main focus. Two sixth-grade classes were surveyed, but my desired outcome was to determine whether the females' participation level increased due to more female historical figures being used in the curriculum. The participants were forty-eight students who completed and returned a signed permission slip that explained the thesis.

### Instruments of Study

After I decided females would be the main focus of my research project, I designed three instruments of study with hopes of increasing females' participation level in the classroom.

I interviewed teachers, surveyed sixth graders, and observed the sixth grade classrooms of a suburban middle school. First, I interviewed three social studies teachers to discuss the participation and confidence levels of the students. I also asked the teachers to discuss their curriculum in regards to which historical figures are their main focus (see Appendix A).

I used a pre-survey (see Appendix B) to find how students rate their confidence and participation levels and also to find how many historical figures (male and female) they were able to list.

Next, I used observations of the classes to view students' participation during a two month period (see Appendix C). During the observations I introduced and taught the students about an equal amount of male and female historical figures. During the lesson plans, I noted who raised their hands to participate and also who asked questions by recording a tally under the appropriate gender category.

The development of unit plans with an equal amount of male and female historical figures was accomplished by researching the two eras that needed to be taught in the classroom as part of the district's curriculum. The two eras were Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome. The curriculum was taught in the same manner, except for the addition of more female historical figures.

After the teaching and observations, the students were given a post-survey (see Appendix D) to determine if students' participation and confidence levels had increased due to the new teaching strategy.

### Role of Researcher

In this study, I took on the role of the researcher. This role consisted of many responsibilities. Firstly, the research question had to be determined. Secondly, I had to take on the role of an observer. My responsibility was to observe all of my students. Through the observations I was able to focus on student behavior and participation in the classroom environment.

Another responsibility was to create a curriculum that included an equal amount of male and female historical figures. With this new curriculum I was able to observe the differences, if any, in students' participation and confidence levels.

## Chapter 4- Results

### Pre-Survey Responses

The pre-survey was intended to identify whether or not the students were aware of both female and male historical figures. The students were also surveyed as to their opinions of which gender participated the most in class. Lastly, they were asked which gender of historical figures interested them most. Forty-eight sixth grade students completed the pre-survey: 24 male, 24 female students.

Table 1 represents the twenty-four male student responses to each of the survey questions. The survey questions are listed on the left, while the answers from the males are listed on the right. The average is listed of how many male and female historical figures were listed. The percentage of students who answered yes/no or male/female was calculated for the four questions. Results of the pre-survey for both male and female students can be found on the next page.

**Table 1: Student Pre-Survey Responses**

Question	Male	Female
List of historical male figures (average)	5	3.72
List of historical female figures (average)	1.4	0.73
Do you like to participate in class?	YES: 80% No: 20%	Yes: 100% No: 0%
Who do you think gets called on more in class?	Males: 20% Females: 80%	Males: 45% Females: 55%
Who do you learn more about in S.S.?	Males: 100% Females: 0%	Males: 100% Females: 0%
Would you like to learn about an equal number of male and female historical figures in class?	Yes: 80% No: 20%	Yes: 91% No: 9%

According to Table 1 above female and male students listed more male than female historical figures, but both genders identified more male historical figures. All females like to participate in class (100%), whereas eighty percent of male students like to participate in class. Although both females and males agreed that females got called on more in class, a larger number of males (80%), than females (55%) felt that females participated more in class. All females and males, felt that they learned about more male figures than female figures in the classroom, which is shown in their lists of male and female historical figures as well. Although the majority of both genders would have liked to learn about an equal amount of male and female historical figures, there was a slightly higher amount for female respondents (+11%).

## Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire was given to the two social studies teachers who taught the two sixth grade classes surveyed. When asked what gender participated more in class and why, both teachers answered, "Males." One teacher said the reasoning was because she thought boys were more outspoken during class, where as the girls kept to themselves. The other teacher commented that boys were more confident in the classroom. Both teachers agreed that more male historical figures had been taught in class. The teachers did believe that the participation would become more equal if the same amount of male and female historical figures were taught. They both thought females would gain more confidence in the classroom by learning about positive female figures.

## Observation Results

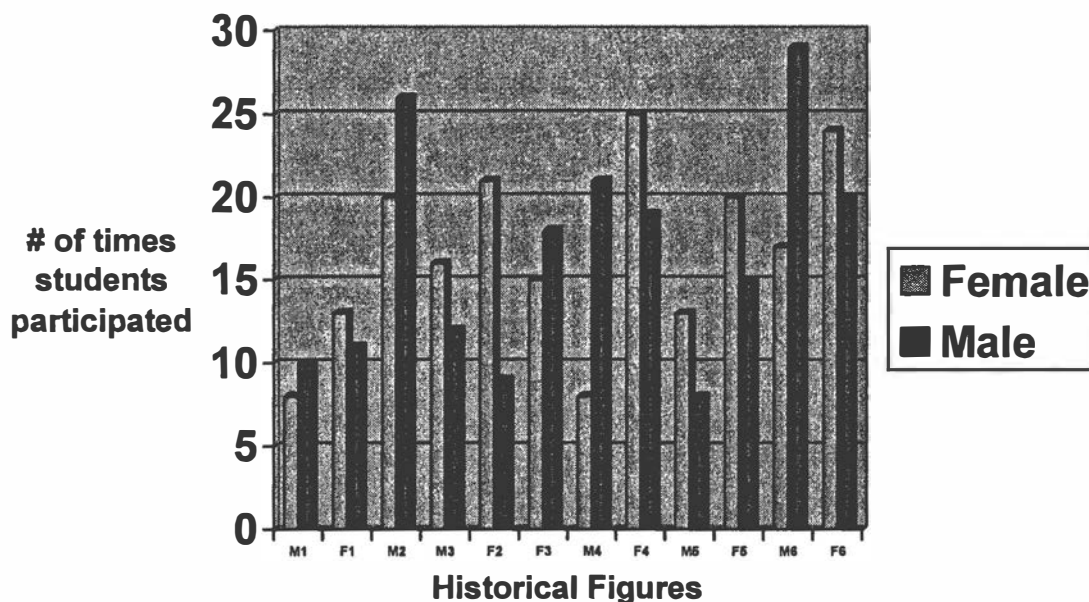
Observations of both classes were conducted in order to identify whether males or females participated the most in class. Observations occurred during two social studies units: Ancient Rome and Ancient Egypt. The two units lasted a total of six weeks. I included an equal amount of male and female historical figures in the lesson planning. When I taught the units I had a checklist to tally which gender participated during which historical figure lesson activity. Participation included both answering questions and asking questions or making comments about the historical figure. Each time a student participated, I made a tally mark under the appropriate historical figure column.

I combined the results of the two classes and I used a bar graph to represent which gender participated the most for each historical figure taught. I gave each historical figure a number for

spacing reasons on the graph. Refer to Appendix C to see the names of each historical figure.

Results of my observations can be found in Table 2 shown below.

**Table 2: Participation of Students for Male and Female Historical Figures**



According to Table 2 above, results from the student participation of observations indicated that students participated the most when their same-sex historical figure was being taught. There were a few exceptions. When Ra (M3) and Augustus (M5) were introduced, more females (16 times) than males (12 times) participated in class, even though both are male historical figures. Also, males participated more than females did during the Isis lesson, which is a female historical figure.

Table 2 also shows the total for each gender participating. On average, females participated a total of 82 times during male historical figure lessons with an average of 13.7

times per lesson. During female historical figure lessons, females participated a total of 118 times, with an average of 19.7 times per lesson. Males participated a total of 106 times with an average of 17.7 times per lesson for male historical figures. During the introduction of female historical figures, males participated a total of 92 times with an average of 15.3 times per lesson.

Overall, males and females participated about the same amount of times (females participated 200 times and males participated 198 times). However, females participated more during female historical figures than male historical figures by 36 times. Males only participated 14 more times during the same sex historical figure lesson plans.

### Post Survey Results

The post-survey was intended to identify whether or not both male and female students learned about the different gender historical figures introduced during the unit. The day of the survey, students were missing, leaving 22 male and 21 female students to survey. They were asked to list both male and female historical figures. The students were able to respond to whether or not they enjoyed participating in class during the past two units. Table 3 shows the average number of historical figures listed, along with the percentage of the number of students who liked to participate during the units and which gender the students believed participated more during these units. Table 3 can be found on the next page.

**Table 3: Student Post-Survey Responses**

Question	Male	Female
List of historical female figures (average)	3	4.5
List of historical male figures (average)	4.56	3.23
Who do you think was called on more in class during two units?	Females: 90% Males: 10%	Females:60% Males: 40%
Did you like participating in class during two units? (average)	Yes: 70% No: 30%	Yes: 100% No: 0%

According to Table 3 above, the students most frequently listed the same gender-oriented historical figures as themselves. Just like the pre-survey, both males and females agreed that females participated more in class. However, a larger number of males (90%), than females (60%) felt that females participated more in class during the given time period. Both females and males listed more female historical figures after learning about the past two units. Males listed 1.6 more female historical figures and females listed 3.77 more female historical figures. According to the pre and post-survey, males felt that more females participated during the past two units (10% more). Female beliefs on participating during the pre and post-survey remained steady (5% more during the past two units). Compared to the pre-survey, the same amount of females enjoyed participating (100%), but less males enjoyed participating during the Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece units (80% enjoyed participating in class according to the in the pre-survey; 70% enjoyed participating in the past two units according to the post-survey).



## Chapter 5- Results

The results of the pre-survey did not support an overall belief that females' participation and self-confidence levels were low. The female students' participation levels were very high. In addition, females held the belief that males and females participated in class equally. Males, on the other hand, felt a little differently towards participation. A smaller percentage enjoyed participation and the majority of the male students felt that females participated more frequently in class. However, both male and female students agreed that more male than female historical figures were taught in the curriculum and the majority of students did want to learn about an equal amount of female and male historical figures.

Although the male students felt females participated more in class, participating teachers claimed males participated more. The teachers did think that the female students were more soft-spoken and the male students were more enthusiastic when participating during class. After being in the classrooms before teaching the two new units, I did determine that the male students were participating more.

During the observations of the Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt units, almost an equal amount of female and male students participated. For the most part, the students participated the most when the same-sex historical figure was being taught. It was good to see the female and male students learning about more female historical figures because much of it was new material for all students. During the lessons, I asked if the students had heard of the female historical figures and found that most of them had not. I heard from the female students much more and they were asking many questions and were very involved in the discussions on female historical figures. Males seem to be consistent with their participation both before the new units were

being taught and during the new lesson plans. I felt both genders were involved in the discussions and they all seemed to be interested in the curriculum.

The female students' participation level remained high after the new unit was taught. However, when asked to list female historical figures, both male and female students were able to increase their numbers after being taught the two units containing equal amounts of male and female historical figures. Although observations showed that almost an equal amount of female and male students participated, males once again felt females participated more in class. In the post-survey, males believed an even greater amount of females than males participated. The reasoning could be the result of the male students recognizing that the female students were participating more during the new curriculum. The female students did have an increase in participation, but the genders did equally participate.

In order to obtain the goal of greater female participation, the results demonstrated that there is a need for more female historical figures in the social studies curriculum. An equal amount of the students participated in the classroom during the new gender-based curriculum. The students learned more about female historical figures, which led to a higher level of knowledge in the specified gender. In the two units, both genders were able to label more female historical figures than the total number of historical figures ever learned by the students in the past. I believe that teaching about an equal amount of male and female historical figures does generate a higher level thinking classroom with both genders giving equal feedback and learning about important historical figures who have impacted our world in the past.

If I were to perform the research again, I would first be sure to revise the surveys. I found it was hard for students to list the historical figures because they often forgot the names of many of them. Next time I would write a list of historical figures and have students answer if

they have heard of or learned about them before. That would be beneficial for me because it would allow me to observe students' prior knowledge on what teachers have taught them in the past. Secondly, I would add more questions for the teachers to answer in the questionnaire. Not only would I ask about participation in the classroom, but what historical figures are presently being taught in the curriculum and how the teachers feel about teaching with an equal amount of female and male historical figures.

A limit to the study was that the students' teachers were all female and it would have been interesting to see how the students answered the surveys if one class had a male teacher and the other a female teacher. I believe it could be possible for the students to feel differently about participation with a different gendered teacher in the classroom.

I believe further research should be conducted on the impact of gender-based teaching throughout the whole school year to determine whether there is a difference between students' confidence levels from the beginning of the school year to that at the end of the school year. I could teach the original curriculum during the first half of the year, then change the curriculum to gender-based and observe the effects.

I conducted this study with a few objectives in mind. First, I wanted teachers to be aware of the hidden curriculum so they could alter the way they teach and make the classroom an equal socializing environment for both genders. I also wanted to research how the hidden curriculum affects students' participation in the classroom. Finally I wanted to observe if female students' participation increased due to gender-based teaching. I found that females liked to participate more than boys in both the gender-based and regular curriculum units. From observations, I found that an equal amount of students did participate when I taught gender-based units, whereas the male students participated more in the regular curriculum. I also found that by teaching

gender-based units, both female and male students learned more about female historical figures while learning about an equal amount of male historical figures.

Conducting this study has increased my awareness of male students' perceptions of the classroom. Although there was an equal amount of participation, male students did not feel that way, which is a future concern. I believe that all students need to feel equal in the classroom in order to give their best effort. I do believe it is important to teach about an equal amount of male and female historical figures to help motivate both genders to reach their goals of participating and feeling more confident in the classroom. If students learn about great leaders of both genders, they will benefit from history. Both genders have positive same-sex historical figures who have made a difference in the past, which could lead to the students feeling more confident in achieving their goals and an easier transition for all students into the middle school environment.

The study confirmed for me the importance of gender-based teaching. Before, the students could barely recall any female historical figures, but at the end of the revised units, both genders could name at least a few females, as well as male historical figures. I believe all teachers should take gender-based teaching into consideration when creating their unit plans. It is beneficial for all students to learn about an equal amount of female and male historical figures because it gives females role models to emulate and males the knowledge that there are females that have had many achievements.

I will now use my findings in order to create gender-based lesson plans for sixth graders in the hopes of introducing more historical figures in the curriculum and to keep all students' self-confidence and participation high. In the future, I hope I will be able to voice my beliefs with my faculty and staff to create the best environment for both male and female students. I do

believe gender is an issue to take into consideration when teaching. No gender should be stereotyped and teachers should be sure that all students are treated as individuals.

**Appendix A**  
**Teacher Questionnaire**

1. What gender do you think participates more in class? Why?
  
2. Are there more male or female historical figures taught in class?
  
3. Do you think that classroom participation would become more equal between genders, if an equal amount of male and female historical figures were introduced during lessons? Why or Why not?

**Appendix B  
Student Pre-Survey**

Circle one:           MALE                           FEMALE

List the names of historical male figures you have learned about in school.

List the names of historical female figures you have learned about in school.

Do you like to participate in class? (circle one)           YES                           NO

Who do you think gets called on more in class? (circle one)   MALES                   FEMALES

Who do you learn more about in Social Studies? (circle one)   MALES                   FEMALES

Would you like to learn about an equal number of males and females in class? YES NO

## Appendix C Participation Checklist

Gender	King Menes (M1)	King Hatshepsut (F1)	King Tut (M2)	Ra (M3)	Ma'at (F2)	Isis (F3)	Julius Caesar (M4)	Julia Caesaris (F4)	Augustus (M5)	Livia (F5)	Apollo (M6)	Minerva (F6)
<b>Male</b>												
<b>Female</b>												



**Appendix D**  
**Student Post-Survey**

Circle one:     MALE                   FEMALE

List six historical male figures from Ancient Rome and Ancient Egypt

List six historical female figures from Ancient Rome and Ancient Egypt

Who do you think was called on more often to participate during the past month? (circle one)

MALES           FEMALES           EQUAL

Did you like participating in class during the Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome units? (circle one)

YES           NO

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