

The issue of gender inequality is one which has been publicly reverberating through society for decades. The problem of inequality in employment being one of the most pressing issues today. In order to examine this situation one must try to get to the root of the problem and must understand the sociological factors that cause women to have a much more difficult time getting the same benefits, wages, and job opportunities as their male counterparts. The society in which we live has been shaped historically by males. The policy-makers have consistently been male and therefore it is not surprising that our society reflects those biases which exist as a result of this male-domination. It is important to examine all facets of this problem, but in order to fully tackle the issue one must recognize that this inequality in the workforce is rooted in what shapes future employees and employers-- education. This paper will examine the inequalities in policy, actual teaching situations, admission to post-secondary institutions, hiring, and job benefits and wages. It will also tackle what is being done to solve this problem and what can be done to remedy the situation.

The late 1960s brought on the first real indication that feminist groups were concerned with the education system in North America. The focus of these feminist groups captured the attention of teachers, parents, and students. At first the evidence for inequality in schooling was based on no more than specific case studies and anecdotal references to support their claims but as more people began to show concern for the situation, more conclusive research was done to show that the claims of inequality were in fact valid and definitely indicated a problem with the way that schools were educating the future adults of society. One of the problems which became apparent was the fact that the policy-makers set a curriculum which, as shown specifically through textbooks, was sexist and for the most part still is.

Textbooks are one of the most important tools used in educating students whether they are elementary school storybooks or university medical textbooks. It is therefore no surprise that these books are some of the most crucial information sources that a student has throughout their schooling. Many studies have been done examining the contents of these books to reveal the amount of sexism displayed in these educational tools. The results clearly show that gender inequality definitely runs rampant in textbooks some of the sexism subtle and some overt. To begin with, it is apparent that historical texts show a distorted view of women by portraying them unfairly and inaccurately and neglecting to mention important female figures, instead opting to describe their sometimes less influential male counterparts. Elementary and secondary school textbooks are also guilty of gender bias.

In elementary and secondary school textbooks, sexism takes many forms. Boys predominate in stories for children; they outnumber girls 5 to 2. When girls are present in texts, they are almost always younger than the boys they are interacting with, which thus makes them foils for the boys' greater experience and knowledge-- a situation commonly referred to as the 'nanny sister syndrome.' Girls are shown to be far more passive than are boys and to engage in fewer activities. In fact, sometimes grown women are portrayed who rely on small boys (often their young sons) to help them out of difficulty. (Fishel and Pottker 1977. p. 8)

Surprisingly it is not only these hidden forms of sexism that appear in textbooks.

One study found sixty-five stories that openly belittled girls (two were found that belittled boys). Another study pointed out an instance where Mark, of the Harper & Row 'Mark and Janet' series, states: 'Just look at her. She is just like a girl. She gives up.' Male characters said, in another story, 'We much prefer to work with men.' This type of material on the treatment of girls would seem to have little

social or educational value, and its widespread use is difficult to understand. (ibid, p.8)

In the long run, the ideas put in students heads through textbooks, perhaps through the lack of female role models, can affect the choices they make in the future with regards to employment.

Actual teaching situations are also prone to sexism. For the most part teachers do not try to be sexist but, for sociological reasons, can not help it. For the sake of this paper, it will be assumed that these situations occur mostly in co-educational schools, but single sex schools are in no way immune to the same problems. A perfect example of society's male-dominance interfering in education unintentionally is when teachers assign projects to their students. The teachers may hand out lists of acceptable topics ranging, in a history class for example, from fashion to transportation. The teachers then give the students a choice as to which topic they would like to do the project on. The underlying problem with this is that girls tend to choose what could be considered more "feminine" topics while the boys will choose the more "masculine" ones. "Offered to the pupils as free choice, such selections are self-perpetuating, leading to the expected choices and amplifying any differences there may have been in attitudes." (Marland 1983, p. 152) The reason for this could be that society, through the media and other modes of communication, has pre-conceived notions as to what issues are "male", "female", or unisex.

Another example of how females are prone to gender inequality in the classroom is during class discussion and also what the teacher decides to talk about in the class. Classroom behaviour is a major focal point for those who identify examples of inequality. There are many differences in the way that females and males present themselves at school. It is apparent that in classroom situations males talk more, interrupt more, they define the topic, and women tend to support them. It is generally believed in our society that this is the proper way to act in classroom situations, that males have it "right" and females don't, they are just "pushovers" and don't have enough confidence. This, however is a big assumption to make. Some research has been done in this field that could, however, begin to refute this stereotype. It is frequently assumed that males use language which is forceful confident and masterful (all values which are regarded as positive). Females on the other hand, it is assumed, use language that is more hesitant, qualified, and tentative. One can look at the example of the use of tag questions, which are statements with questions tagged onto the end such as "I'm going to the store, all right?" It is obvious that if the above assumptions about the use of language were true, this hesitant, asking for approval type of question would be more frequently used by women. ". . . studies were carried out to determine whether women used more tag questions than men. It was found that they did not. Betty Lou Dubois and Isabel Crouch (1975) found that men used more tag questions than women." (ibid p. 100)

The end of high school brings about more obstacles for women on the way to achieving equality in the workplace. One of the most important steps in achieving a high paying, high status job is post-secondary education. It is apparent that even today women are being encouraged to follow certain educational paths. This is shown very simply by the fact that even here at Queen's University, men vastly outnumber women as both students and faculty members in such programs as Applied Science, while women greatly outnumber men in the programs of nursing and concurrent education. Women have historically been encouraged to enter into what could be considered "caring professions" such as nursing, teaching, and social work. This is shown very crudely in the book *Careers for Women in Canada* which was published in 1946 and written by a woman. The book devotes almost 200 pages to pursuing careers in such fields as catering, sewing, being a secretary, interior decorating, the arts, teaching, and nursing while it only allocates 30 pages to medicine, law, dentistry, engineering, optometry, and more combined. The following quote clearly illustrates the beliefs of the more liberal people of that time. "Some women have

specialized in surgery. There can be no doubt but that a capable woman may operate very successfully on women and children, though it is doubtful whether a man would call in the services of a female surgeon except in an emergency. (Carriere 1946, p. 234) Although much has improved since the 1940s, the enrollment numbers in university programs clearly indicate that women still have a long way to go before gender is not an issue.

After choosing a career path, women enter the workplace with a disadvantage. They have the same financial responsibilities as men with regards to supporting families and themselves and much of the time they have an even heavier burden because there are many women in today's society who are single mothers. Given that there is no question that the need for money is identical it can, therefore, be concluded that there is a major problem with the wage structure in today's jobs. The wage gap clearly shows that society as a whole puts more value on the work of males than on the same work done by females. The facts that have been displayed above showing that education is itself a sexist institution perhaps explain why there is this inequality once schooling is finished. The fact that textbooks show males as being more successful than females, that teachers set assignments which reinforce gender stereotypes and sex roles, the fact that "masculine" behaviour is reinforced while "feminine" behaviour is condemned, and the fact that women are encouraged to choose certain career paths all validate the claim that the gender inequality in employment situations can be directly related to the way that children are educated.