Abstract

Sexism has been prevalent in education for such a long time. Although it is not as severe as say sixty years ago, it has not stopped to cease all together. This paper will attempt to rid sexist views that children in grades K-5th might have acquired through school or home. It is at this young age that children learn and acquire sexist views. Although it is not widely known, young girls along with boys are challenged in school with sexist attitudes from not only their peers but also their educators. Once educators rid themselves of sexist opinions and actions, children will have a higher opportunity of succeeding in their future endeavors. Children do and say as they see their role models, and if these same role models rid themselves of sexist behaviors and preferences, children might have a chance in this world. This paper contains various programs and suggestions that may help educators along with parents provide sexist free environments for children.
Preventing Sexism in Education

*Introduction*

This paper will focus on gender discrimination among children primarily in K-5th grade. At such a young age, children are growing up and absorbing their surroundings. If a child grows up in a sexist surrounding, they will most likely be sexist, or not believe that sexism is wrong. Suggestions will also be provided on how to diminish discrimination among children in the school arena. The first article that will be examined will be Thomas R. McDaniel’s article, “The Education of Alice and Dorothy: Helping Girls To Thrive In School.” It gives examples of how girls are looked down upon compared to male students. The article also gives solutions to this problem. The next article, “Gender Stereotyping And Under-Representation of Female Characters in 200 Popular Children’s Picture Books: A Twenty-First Century Update,” focuses on sexism apparent in children’s books. John R. Kazaluna discusses how men and women are represented in the classroom curriculum in, “Sexism in Education.” Gender friendly technology classes are observed in Ray McCarthy’s article, “Beyond Smash and Crash: Gender-Friendly Tech Ed.” The article, "Teaching Children Fairness: Decreasing Gender Prejudice Among Children,” comprises of a study conducted on fifth graders with the program FAIR. The last article that will be explored will be, “Challenging Gender Bias in Fifth Grade.” Which will attempt to educate children on sexist behavior and abolish it from the classroom. Many children have a negative self-image of themselves due to gender role stereotypes. Both female and male children are negatively affected by stereotypes. Therefore, this paper will attempt to give parents along with educators effective suggestions in order to be able to help children, and prevent sexism in education.
Review of the Literature

Children have the right to feel safe and equal toward each other in school. Thomas R. McDaniel's article "The Education Of Alice and Dorothy: Helping Girls To Thrive In School," discusses the issue of girls' treatment in school and possible techniques that can be used to help girls. He goes on by suggesting: “Teachers might begin with an honest assessment of their own attitudes and practices to discover any classroom biases that work against the education of female students” (1994). He explains how both Alice from Alice in Wonderland and Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz both had to find themselves when they were in the alternate universes. McDaniel then states that sexism does occur in the American school system. Girls are treated differently, if not lesser than their counterparts. For example when girls yell out an answer in class, they are told to raise their hands, whereas boys are not scolded. If girls get the sense that their school environment is prejudice toward them; they will feel that the outside world will treat them the same. Teachers have a great part to do with how students treat one another. If they are able to change their sexist ways inside the classroom, children might also rid themselves of sexist views and behavior. They should not be treated differently by their teachers, because when they are out of school, they will feel as if their voice and opinion does not matter.

Growing up reading literature that is male dominant will negatively affect children’s view of men and women’s roles in society. David Anderson's, et al article “Gender Stereotyping and Under-Representation of Female Characters in 200 Popular Children’s Picture Books: A Twenty-First Century Update," goes over some of the many studies that have been done on sexism in children’s picture books. One study showed sexism was prevalent, in award winning children’s books. It then states the results of a study that the authors conducted with 200 children's books that were published from 1995 to 2001. It shows that adult, along with child male characters,
surpass that of female characters with a 1.8:1 ratio. Along with the previous facts, the study showed; female characters surpassed male characters in traditional jobs, boys were also shown 53% more than girls in picture books. Girls were also likely to show more signs of nurturing than boys. The study also shows that male authors were more likely to write a larger number of male characters than that of female characters. However, there were not as many female authors than there were male authors. The following is then suggested; “Perhaps authors consciously or unconsciously resort to subtle sexism because blatant sexism no longer passes unnoticed” (2006). Childrens book authors are able to use subtle sexism because children will not know the difference. Children will simply grow up believing the sexist remarks and behavior in childrens books is the norm. It is the parents and teachers that are able to determine if a certain passage is sexist toward one gender. The article then ends by stating that authors are presenting boys to be more important than girls. Until this ends, parents along with educators have the obligation to choose between books that present boys and girls as equals, and those that do not. Until children are equally represented in literature, there will not be a balance between the two in or around the classroom.

Many teachers, both male and female in the year 1975 believed that the classroom curriculum should feature a higher amount of female contributors. This point is made in John R. Kazaluna’s article, “Sexism in Education.” Kazaluna goes on by stating that of these teachers; 69% of the female teachers had changed the curriculum as to include higher female representation in textbooks along with the curricula, whereas 59% of the male teachers had not done so. The following statement reflects the thoughts of Ahlum and Fralley, “‘School children do not need to be taught the differential status of men and women-they learn it simply by attending school’” (1978). Meaning, that young children learn early on in their childhood what
level men and women are held at in society. For example, if a majority of school textbooks have male authors, children will accept the fact that only men are capable of having published works. However, if children are provided with and learn from textbooks that have an equal representation of both male and female authors; children will learn that gender is not a factor in being able to write a textbook. Children should be taught at an early age that gender does not play a role as to what profession they decide to pursue.

In today’s society, both women and men are able to pursue so many more careers than they were able to sixty years ago. One such career includes the STEM field. Ray McCarthy’s article, “Beyond Smash and Crash: Gender-Friendly Tech Ed,” goes into detail how the new technology education class is helping fifth graders excel in technology and engineering. These classes require students to use their previous attained knowledge in areas such as science, math, and language arts in order to assess and solve problems. Many of the kids create gliders, coaster vehicles, and digital images, to name a few of the solutions. Girls are encouraged to join these classes and continue taking them in the future because women make up less than 30% of all STEM students in college. Although women have come a long way, they still have a long way to go. They can accomplish whatever they wish, however, many need moral support of teachers of parents. McCarthy provides evidence: “Studies have also shown that if a girl in fifth grade feels that she is not good at math, then she will not pursue a career in that field even if she finds success in high school math courses,” (Silverman and Pritchard, 1996). At such a young age, children are unsure of their abilities. If they are put down or told that what they like is not what they should be doing, they will believe it. Children are in need of moral support in many areas in order to accomplish what they wish. Classes such as the technology education and many more programs for children are readily helping kids improve their skills along with opinions of gender
The program Fairness for All Individuals through Respect (FAIR); teaches children how to deal with gender, race, and class issues. The article by Britney G. Brinkman, et al, "Teaching Children Fairness: Decreasing Gender Prejudice Among Children,” has to do with a study conducted on fifth graders with the program FAIR. There were 66 girls and 55 boys that took part in the study, with ages ranging from 10 to 13 years. The students completed three activities that included: hearing a story that had no gender identification of characters, separating toys by setting them inside either a blue or pink box, along with listening to a story of marine animals taking on different gender roles.

Once the study was completed the teachers observed that gender prejudice between the students had declined significantly more than before the FAIR program. Twenty-one students also revealed that they were excluded from activities both at school and home, such as sports. Seven students spoke greatly about experiencing institutionalized prejudice. The children explained that the track coach had different if not lower expectations for girls than that of boys. The girls spoke of not wanting to be seen as different than boys, they could run just as fast as boys. The boys also agreed that girls should be able to play the same sports as boys. One male student believed the following: “Boys can play with dolls if they want to learn how to be a good dad or something” (2011). This child clearly points to the pitfalls of sexism in education. A young boy does not believe that playing with dolls is a taboo, like many adults believe. Children are simply playing with a toy. Once a teacher or parent demands that a boy stop playing with a doll, because it is considered a toy for girls, boys will feel as if they have done something wrong. Furthermore, traditional stereotypes were experienced by six children, with one boy stating he felt pressured to play football, even though he didn't enjoy the sport. Two students still agreed
with many gender stereotypes after the FAIR program. However, twenty-three students
challenged stereotypes after the FAIR program was administered to them. The purpose of these
programs are to educate children and teachers about sexism, and how to abolish it.

Another program that fights sexism is the CD-ROM “Gender Equity in the Elementary
School.” The CD-ROM “Gender Equity in the Elementary School,” was used to help a class of
fifth graders who took part in a year long study of gender equity. Catherine E. Mathew’s, et al.
article, “Challenging Gender Bias in Fifth Grade,” attempts to help children identify and change
sexist behavior in the classroom. At first sight, the children were not able to identify sexist
behavior in or around the classroom. However, after viewing the videos of fair and unfair
situations many children find themselves in, the children were more likely to speak up for
themselves. One girl even described how she had been raising her hand waiting for the teacher to
call on her for quite some time, yet a boy shouted the answer out and the teacher accepted it.
Following the year long study, many children were outspoken about being equals. One girl
suggests: “‘When you’re calling on people, call on a girl, then a boy, then a girl, then a boy
next’” (1997). Children take it to heart when they are dismissed during a lesson. It is as if the
teacher is purposefully ignoring them. Teachers should create an equal balance between boys and
girls in all activities. If children sense that adults have a certain preference over one gender, these
children might grow up having the same preferences, or worse, lowered self-esteem.

Conclusion

Therefore, if these programs are successfully administered, children will be able to
identify and abolish their own sexist ways within themselves. The programs alone will not be
sufficient enough alone; children need teachers to also rid themselves of their sexist behaviors.
Once the educators decide to assess their behaviors towards kids, and decide to change, that is
when children will have an opportunity of a gender equality education. Parents are also able to help children by choosing childrens books that equally represent both sexes. When children grow up with the knowledge that boys and girls are equals in not only books, but professions, they will aspire to join the many women and men that have fought sexism and come so far.
References


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