

GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN THE UK



问创
VENTURE



Dinah Bennett OBE FHEA
*Global Lead For Entrepreneurship Education
Women's Economic Imperative*

www.weiforward.org



In 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', a landmark agenda which enshrined 17 global goals (SDG's) forming a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future. These goals are comprehensive and far-reaching, encompassing everything from climate action to poverty alleviation and quality education. One of the targets, (4.5) 'the elimination of gender disparities in education'.

It might appear that the UK has already met this target. Girls and boys have long enjoyed equal access to compulsory education, while enrolment rates for women in higher education has exceeded that of men since 1993. However, behind these positive figures a number of disparities continue to exist. Girls and women are significantly outnumbered by boys and men in areas such as STEM education and sports participation. Gender stereotypes and double-standards are often perpetuated in classrooms, resulting in far-reaching repercussions for girls in later life.

However, there is still much to be optimistic about. As highlighted throughout this report, positive action is being taken across the UK. This report highlights initiatives which challenge many of the existing social and structural barriers which lead to gender disparities in education. By rethinking the ways in which we educate young boys and girls and trying out innovative new teaching practices, schools, educators and organisations have demonstrated the success we can have in overcoming these challenges.

Supporting initiatives such as these is an important part of our commitment at the Women's Economic Imperative (WEI) to empowering women as economic actors globally. WEI was created in response to the Call to Action of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, which helped shed light on a number of realities that exist for women across the world. These include the fact that globally, women are paid 24% less than men on average, and at the same time, spend 2.5 times more time performing unpaid care and domestic work than men. Many of the attitudes and structures that hold women back in the economic sphere stem from education. However, just as education can perpetuate and reinforce prejudices, it can also provide a key to challenging and overcoming them. Throughout the report are a number of positive examples that educators across the UK and beyond can take inspiration from. This document is a call to action, to use the resources in this report to challenge and counteract existing biases, ensuring girls are offered the same opportunity for growth and success as their male classmates.

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Why girls' and women's education?

In the UK, all pupils – regardless of gender – have a right to state-sponsored education and the country enjoys gender parity in primary and secondary education enrolment rates. In 2017, UCAS data found that women were a third more likely to go to university than men.¹ Beyond a steady increase in enrolment rates, achievement patterns show that girls outperform boys. Looking at schools' results, the percentage of girls scoring an A or above at GCSE has exceeded that of boys for every year since the data was first published in 2001, with the difference standing at 6.5% in 2018.²

At first glance, this could be interpreted as evidence that gender parity in education has already been achieved for girls and women in the UK.

However, this formal gender parity obscures the continuing inequalities and biases against girls that continue to exist in today's schools.

Girls are often the victims of societal gender norms that influence and restrict the path they choose to carve out for themselves in the future, and encouraging figures of girls' and women's achievements do not reveal the full complexity of the situation they face in their daily lives. Girls and women face a number of personal, societal and structural barriers which can limit them in a variety of areas including leadership, STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and sports. The growth of social media has also amplified many gender issues.

This report aims to be a valuable tool for teachers and educators who are seeking to have an impact on the lives of girls and boys, and who wish to better understand what goes on in the minds of young people today. Each chapter will look at two major issues facing girls across six areas: leadership, economic empowerment, STEM, sports, social media, and the education of boys. Each chapter examines case studies from schools, educational organisations, and companies that are working to counter these issues. The end of each chapter contains a directory of resources and organisations which can be used by schools and educators to engage with gender-specific issues in their own classrooms.

It is worth noting that while this report offers an introduction to the world of gender inequality in schools, it is by no means exhaustive. It is hoped that schools will use the resources provided in the directory as a springboard into the complex and nuanced issues covered in the report. By further exploring the current dialogue around gender issues, along with their intersectionality with other identity markers such as class, race, sexual orientation, and disability, educators will be able to gain a more complete understanding of the experiences of their different students, and thus be better equipped to combat prejudice and bias in the classroom.

This report covers areas that are intrinsically related to education, either directly or indirectly, but most importantly, they are areas where teachers, educators and schools can significantly influence education practices in order to have a transformative impact on students.

Schools represent a crucial environment and starting point to challenge and change the discriminatory societal norms conveyed by the media, homes and workplaces.

Many wonderful projects exist to address gender inequalities throughout the UK. This report gives teachers the tools to reflect on the initiatives that are happening in their schools and provides inspiration for teachers to have a positive impact on girls' and women's education in the UK.



Leadership

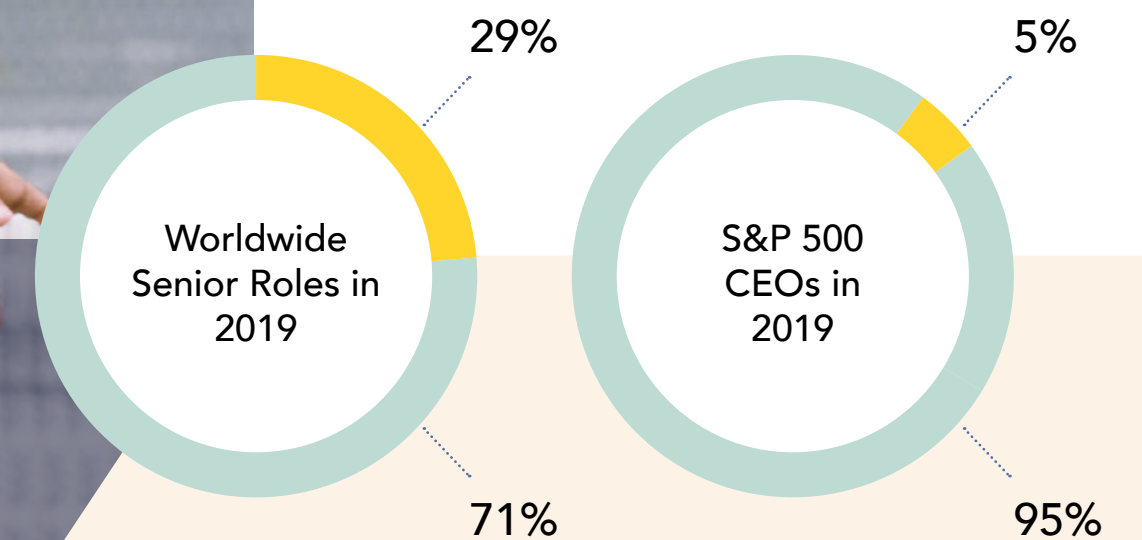
/// Our research into girls' leadership has made one thing quite clear, girls need role models. They are inspired by seeing women in leadership roles and one young woman in the Dominican Republic spoke for many when she talked about the importance of "someone to encourage us."

Plan International 'Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women on Changing the Face of Leadership'

Introduction

Despite positive progress, a stark gender disparity exists in leadership positions. This disparity cuts across all industries in both the private and public sector. The proportion of senior roles held by women worldwide was 29% in 2019, with this number shrinking to just 5% when looking at S&P 500 CEOs.³ Worldwide, only 18% of governmental ministerial positions are held by women, while women represented just 6.3% of international leaders.⁴

The dearth of women in leadership positions cannot simply be explained away by a lack of leadership aspirations. In a survey from Plan International, 76% of girls and young women reported that they aspired to be a leader in their country, community or career.⁵ Rather, a number of other factors are at play, including gender-stereotypical perceptions of leadership qualities, self-censorship, systemic barriers and lower levels of confidence in women. Though some of these challenges fall outside of the scope of schools, there is still much that educators can do to challenge students' perceptions of leaders and help redefine what a leader looks like.

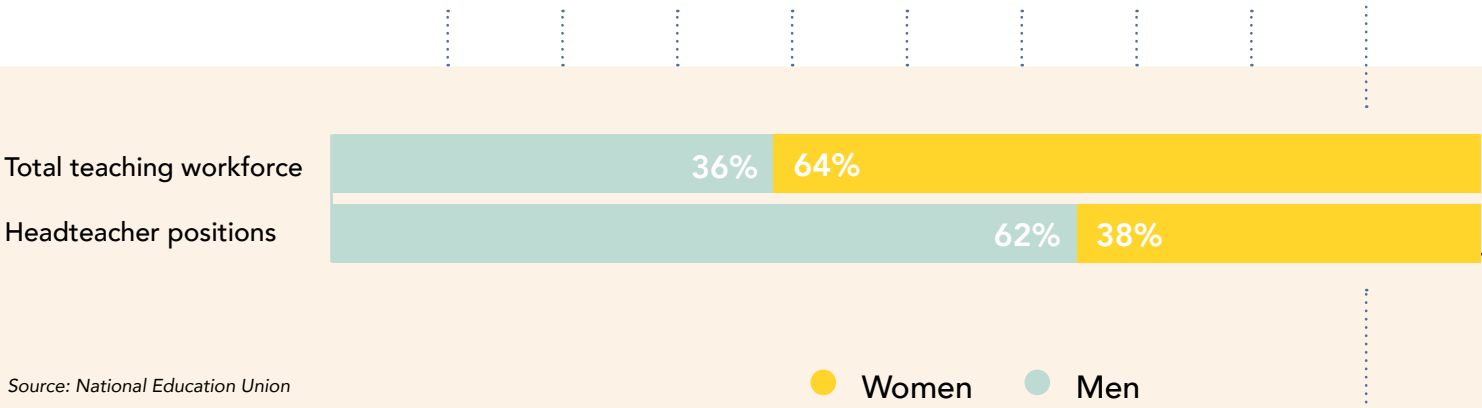


● Women ● Men

Source: Catalyst

The education leadership gap

Although women make up the majority of the teaching workforce, this is not reflected in the number of women in headteacher positions. In secondary education in the UK, women account for 64% of teaching positions, but just 38% of headteacher positions.⁶ For girls, this repeated pattern of male prevalence in leadership positions crystallises the idea of a glass ceiling.



The ‘glass ceiling’ is a metaphor used to refer to the invisible barrier that keeps women from progressing in a profession.

Working to increase the number of female leaders in schools could go a long way in changing the preconceptions male and female students have about gender and leadership. Research has shown that having female leaders as role models can have a strong impact on girls’ perceptions of their own capabilities. One leadership study found that 86% of women reported that seeing more women in leadership ‘encouraged them to get there themselves’.⁷

Furthermore, seeing more female staff in leadership positions could help to break down stereotypes that students may have about what characteristics a leader should have. Studies have shown that the characteristics people typically associate with leadership are often stereotypically masculine, such as ‘forceful’, ‘dominant’, ‘assertive’ and ‘competitive’.⁸ The ‘role congruity theory’ proposes that a group will be positively evaluated when its characteristics align with its typical social roles.⁹ As stereotypically female characteristics do not align with those associated with successful leadership, women can often experience prejudice when striving for leadership positions. Those with more stereotypically feminine traits may be perceived as unfit for leadership, while those exhibiting traits that are associated with successful leadership may be perceived as too masculine. Exposing students from a younger age to leaders who do not necessarily display the stereotypically masculine traits associated with leadership would help broaden people’s perceptions about leadership, and could help reduce prejudicial attitudes in future generations.

Unconscious bias

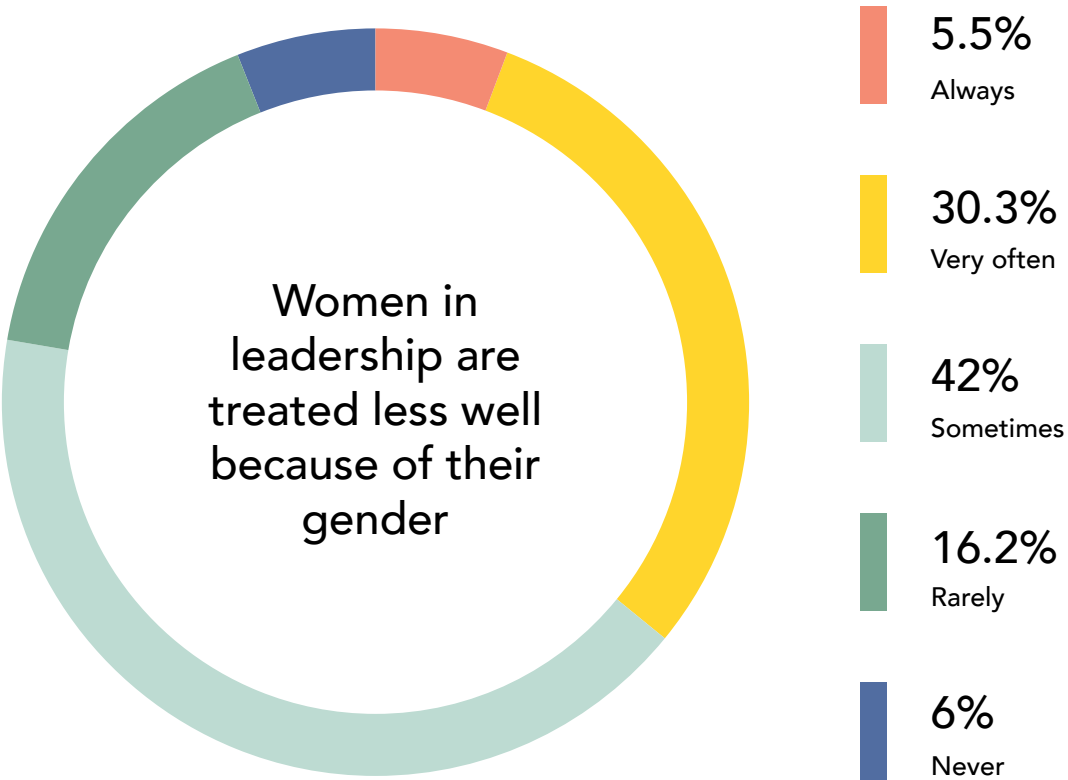
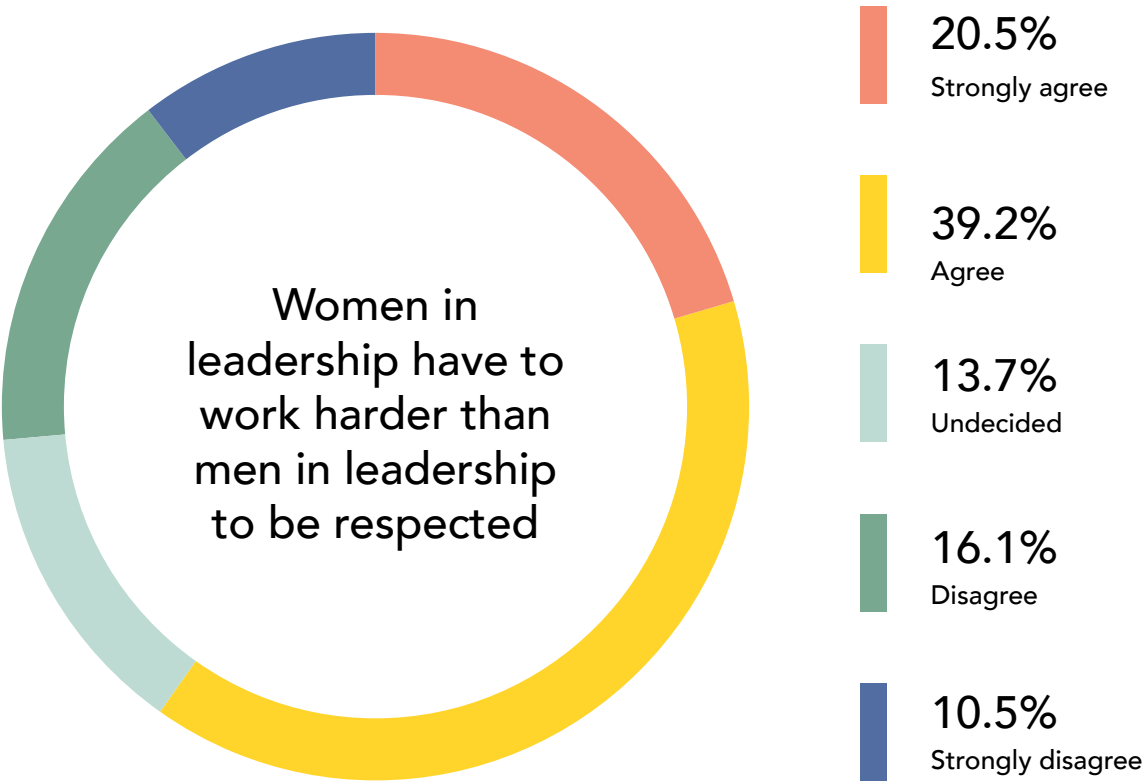
Psychologists have long documented the concept of unconscious gender bias, wherein people’s interactions with men and women are shaped by unconscious preconceptions about how a person of that gender should behave. When women, for example, exhibit traditionally ‘masculine’ traits that are associated with leadership, they might be seen as breaking social norms, and thus be received more negatively than their male counterparts who exhibit the same traits. Whereas a man leading a group might be commended for being ‘decisive’, ‘ambitious’, or ‘assertive’, a woman might be criticised as being ‘abrupt’, ‘aggressive’ or ‘unfeminine’.¹⁰ A number of studies in the US have demonstrated the way unconscious bias can play into how teachers interact with male and female students. In these studies, it was found that teachers would spend two thirds of their time talking to male students, and were more likely to interrupt girls, while allowing boys to talk over them. While boys would be encouraged to seek deeper answers, girls were rewarded for being quiet.¹¹

With these biases in mind, it is unsurprising that confidence levels of boys and girls diverge as they go through school, with students internalising the treatment they receive from the adults in their lives. The EPPSE 3-16 study, for example, found that boys aged 14-16 felt more positive and confident about themselves than girls, despite, on average, having lower test performances.¹²

Leadership is often associated with stereotypically masculine descriptors, such as: ‘assertive’, ‘forceful’, ‘dominant’, and ‘competitive’. These are more likely to be viewed as characteristics of a successful leader than stereotypically feminine traits, such as: ‘affectionate’, ‘compassionate’, ‘warm’, and ‘gentle’.

Even when girls and women are confident about their own ability to progress in their career, they are often less confident that their work place will allow them to do so. A study from Think Future, which surveyed 20,000 undergraduate students, found that 58% of female respondents felt that their gender would impact their career progression or future pay, compared to 28% of male respondents.¹³

In a Plan International Survey of 10,000 girls regarding leadership, when asked if they agreed with the following statements, girls' responses were



Source: Plan International

Case studies

Mentoring programme for prospective heads of schools

gsa.uk.com/2017/07/girls-schools-launch-new-leadership-scheme-develop-women-headteachers

In July 2017, the Girls' Schools Association, the Association of State Girls' Schools, and Bright Field Consulting launched a mentoring scheme as a means of reducing the gender leadership gap in UK schools. The scheme paired state and private school teachers together with a mentor from a non-education sphere, including the worlds of business, the justice system, public service and the military. Mentors were chosen from fields outside of education in order to address the growing need for teachers to possess business and finance management skills when holding headship positions. Prior to the scheme, participants underwent personal profiling, allowing Bright Field Consulting to match mentees with the most appropriate mentor.

Through the scheme, mentors shared wide-ranging leadership skills and expertise, and participants were given practical operational and emotional support, coaching, and the opportunity to network. Teachers met with their mentor once per term over two years, while also meeting with their private/state school counterpart to discuss the experience. In addition, participating teachers worked on a local community project as a means of encouraging future cooperation between private and state schools. An impact assessment of the 2017-2018 cohort found that of the 63 women who had taken part, four had become head teachers and six more had received promotions.

Future Female Leaders

www.ventureeducation.org/projects

The Future Female Leaders initiative, launched by UK-China education company Venture Education, is an eight-week mentorship programme for female high school students at international high schools across Beijing. The scheme was set up with the goal of connecting young girls with role models who could nurture leadership ambitions. Through the scheme, girls participate in interactive workshops with female leaders from six different industries: media and communication, education, international relations, food and beverage, corporate, and entrepreneurship. The workshops feature personal stories from the mentors, real-world, industry-related tasks, and opportunities for questions, reflections, and feedback.

The programme takes into account the recommendations laid out by the UK's Gatsby Benchmarks to 'actively tackle... assumptions about what are appropriate jobs for girls and boys, black or white, rich or poor.'¹⁴ By providing workshops led by female mentors from a variety of industries, the programme hopes to expose girls to the wide array of leadership opportunities they could pursue, empowering them to realise their full potential and strive for top jobs in all sectors. In addition to this, Future Female Leaders incorporates a philanthropic dimension to its programme, where proceeds are donated to Educating Girls of Rural China, a charity that empowers women in rural regions of Western China to escape the cycle of poverty through education.

Directory

#Girl2Leader is a global initiative launched by The Women Political Leaders that aims to encourage girls (ages 14-17) to consider a future in leadership and politics by connecting them with inspiring female politicians.

Fearless Futures provides equality and leadership programmes that target young people in schools and leaders in the workplace. The eight-week long Peer Power Programme brings together girls from Y9 to Y13 to learn about, discuss and challenge the seemingly invisible normative messages that shape their experiences.

Girls' Schools Association (GSA UK) encourages high standards of education for girls and promotes the benefits of being taught in a largely girls-only environment.

Women Leading in Education: Regional Networks. The UK government has appointed nine schools across the UK to represent and lead their regional network in projects to inspire and guide women for leadership careers in education, as part of their government priority to increase the number of women in leadership positions.

Aurora is a leadership programme for self-defining women, launched by AdvanceHE to address the lack of women in Higher Education. A multi-faceted initiative, it includes conference-style development days, mentorship and self-directed learning through online resources.

Breaking the Mould: Challenging Gender Stereotypes. The UK's National Union of Teachers worked with five primary schools for two years to challenge traditional gender stereotypes in nursery and primary classrooms, publishing a series of resources including lesson plans, worksheets and drawing activities.

Girlguiding offer mentorship and workshops developed to increase awareness of self, boost confidence and self-esteem, raise aspirations and improve body image through mentoring programmes such as 'Big Sister' intervention programmes. Their annual Girls' Attitudes Survey gives an insight into how girls feel about a range of issues and emerging pressures, especially about women in leadership positions.

WOWwoman is a campaign from Girlguiding Scotland which celebrates inspiring role models in order to empower a new generation of girls and young women to aim high.

'Women and Higher Education Leadership: Absences and Aspirations' is a report by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, which explores the causes and implications of gender imbalance in the education sector.

Action points for schools and educators

1

Be mindful of your words

Challenge gendered words that further perpetuate gender stereotypes: for example, 'bossy' when referring to a girl instead of 'assertive'; 'soft' instead of 'caring' for boys.

2

Recognise that leadership comes in many forms

Be aware of, and aim to foster, the strengths of individual students.

3

Make female leadership more visible

Expose young girls to a diverse range of leadership role models by inviting inspiring female speakers to school in order to help students expand their aspirations.

Start by setting a good example

Reflect on your own school's staff leadership gender gap and think about what you can do to address it.

Give everyone a voice

Create a supportive classroom environment with rules and structures in place which help to ensure that girls and boys are given equal time to talk and share their unique perspectives.

4

5

Economic Empowerment

Financial attitudes are shaped as early as five years old, and gender stereotyping through the stories we tell our children and popular culture plays a key role in shaping attitudes towards key issues such as finance. Ensuring that both boys and girls can see empowered female characters is important in building confidence and understanding of what girls can achieve independently.

Laverne Antrobus, Child Psychologist, 2018

Introduction

A multitude of gender disparities can be observed in economic and financial life. Perhaps the most often cited example of economic inequality is the gender pay gap - in 2018, the median hourly pay (excluding overtime) of women was 9.6% less than that of men in the UK - but examples extend far beyond this.¹⁵ Women are less likely to study personal finance, less likely to ask for (or receive) a pay rise and less likely to own investments.¹⁶ In the realm of entrepreneurship, women are less likely to believe that they possess entrepreneurial skills, less likely to start their own business and less likely to receive funding if they are made up of an all-female team.¹⁷

A number of underlying factors for these issues can be traced back to childhood and education. Numerous research studies have demonstrated how beliefs held about gender roles and money can have a significant impact on the way adults prepare children for their financial futures. Outdated views associating masculinity with the role of 'the breadwinner' can lead to parents subconsciously neglecting the economic education of their daughters, while simultaneously encouraging their sons to explore areas such as investment or entrepreneurship. These views, in turn, can be internalised by young women and men, affecting confidence levels and solidifying stereotypes that create barriers to female success.

Women are less likely to

- Women
- Men

Ask for a pay rise



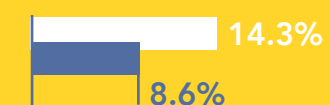
Percentage of men and women who had discussed pay rises with their boss in the last 6 months
Source: The London Institute of Banking & Finance

Own investments



Percentage of men and women who have held an investment product
Source: YouGov

Or start their own business



Percentage of men and women who plan to start up a business
Source: Alison Rose

The financial literacy gap

Numerous studies have illustrated that when it comes to investing, women tend to feel less informed and less confident than men. A 2018 YouGov study into investing highlighted some stark differences between male and female respondents. Overall, 45% of men answered that they would feel comfortable investing some of their money, compared to just 28% of women, while 40% of men felt informed about the pros and cons of investing money, compared to 26% of women.¹⁸ This knowledge and confidence gap is reflected in men and women’s financial decisions. According to one HSBC study, 12% of women in the UK owned investments, compared to 19% of men, while 20% of women didn’t have a personal pension, compared to 7% of men.¹⁹

Girls receive less exposure to financial education both at home and at school.

Average money received by boys and girls from parents

Average money received for helping out around the house



Average money rewarded for good behaviour



Source: Santander, HSBC

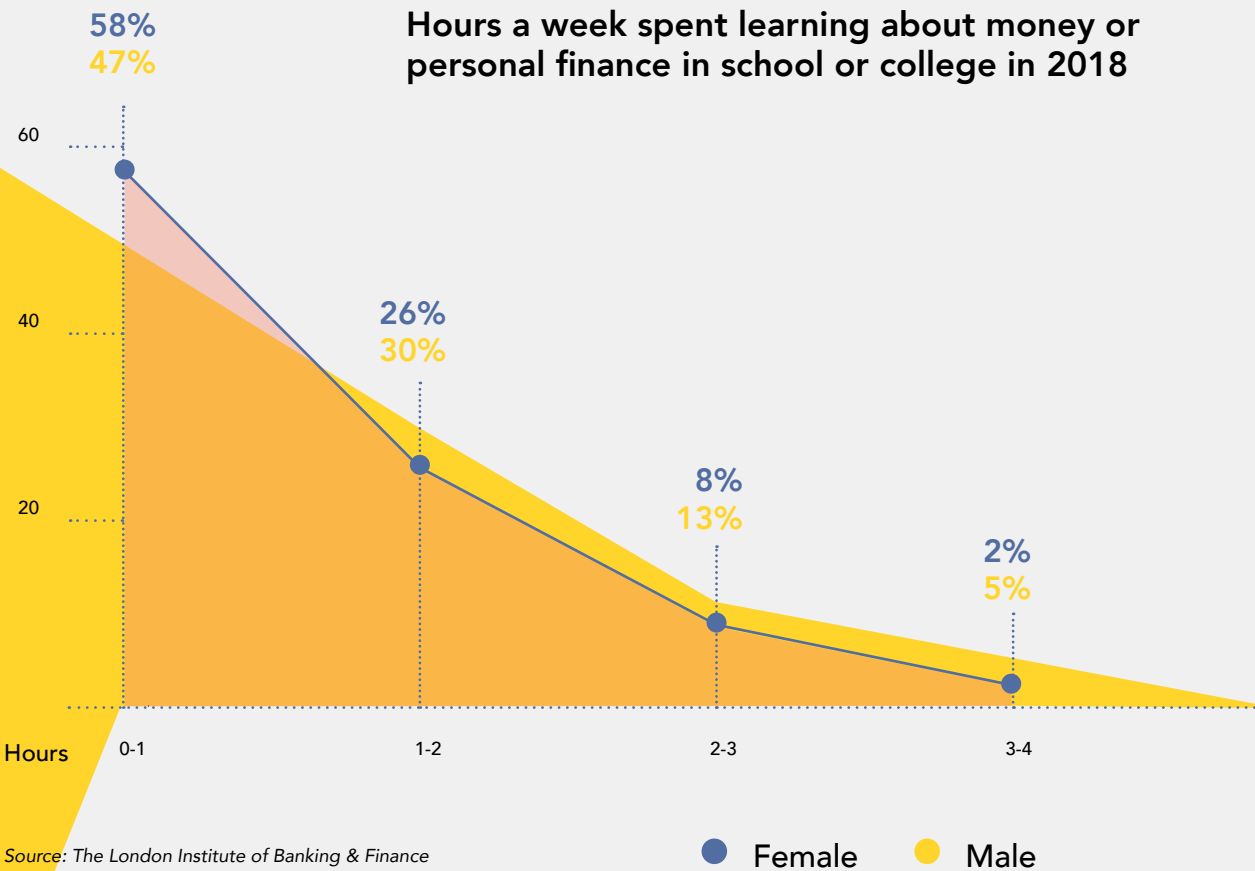
● Female ● Male

Percentage of boys and girls whose parents have spent time talking with them about money



Source: Santander, HSBC

Hours a week spent learning about money or personal finance in school or college in 2018



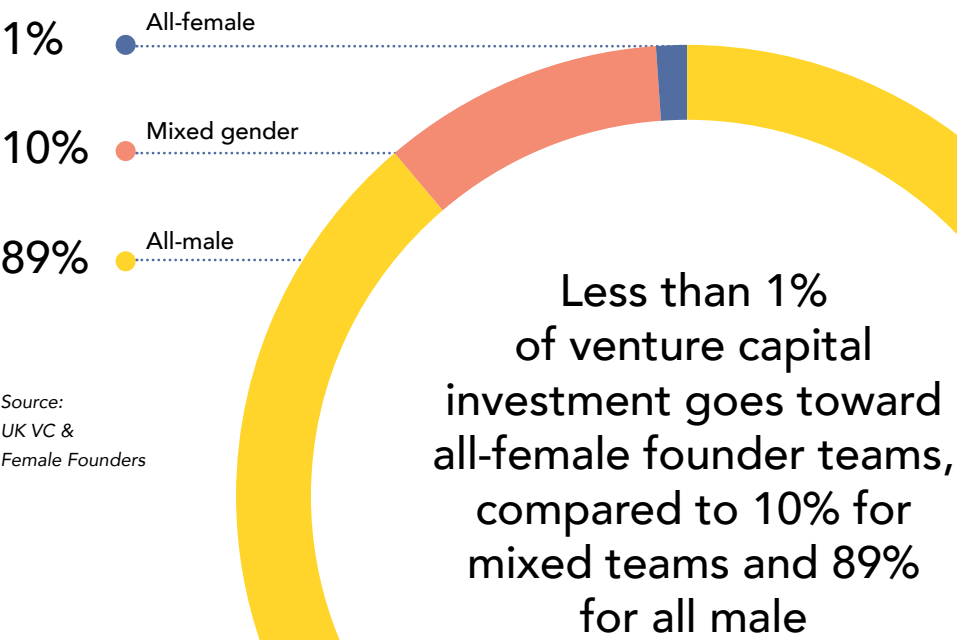
This disparity in confidence with money starts from an early age. An HSBC study of girls and boys found that 64% of girls interviewed felt they didn’t ‘understand’ money, compared to 52% of boys of the same age.²⁰ There is evidence to suggest that this disparity between boys and girls stems from cultural attitudes towards gender and money, in which men are typically seen as the primary earner in households. Though the employment gap between men and women has continued to shrink, and fewer people than ever agree with the belief that ‘a man’s job is to earn money’, when we look at how parents interact with children on the topic of money, it becomes obvious that certain stereotypes continue to persist.²¹ One 2018 Santander study, for example, found that boys generally receive more pocket money than girls, and were more likely to receive higher rewards for good behaviour.²² When it comes to conversations about money, boys were slightly more likely to have received a talk from their parents than girls.²³

Though these biases occur at home, evidence suggests there is not enough happening at schools to counter them. Financial literacy was made a part of the national curriculum in 2014, but according to a 2016 Young Money study, just 40% of schools actually delivered financial education lessons.²⁴ Failure to include financial education within the compulsory curriculum disproportionately affects girls, who, according to the London Institute of Banking & Finance, statistically spend less of their overall class time learning about money or personal finance than boys.²⁵ Without addressing this gap in learning, girls are at risk of falling behind their male peers over the course of their school years and entering their adult lives less prepared for economic independence.

Entrepreneurship

In 2018, there were nearly twice as many male entrepreneurs in the UK as there were female, and in a 2019 survey, just 8.6% of female respondents were reported as planning to start up a business in the next 3 years, compared to 14.3% of male. The 2019 ‘Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship’ highlights a number of factors that play a role in perpetuating low levels of women’s entrepreneurship. In particular, the report draws attention to a gap in perceived bias and perceived ability. Perceived bias was frequently raised as a challenge by female entrepreneurs, who pointed to the fact that women only account for 13% of senior people on UK investment teams and that in 2017, less than 1% of UK venture funding went to all-female teams. In terms of perceived ability, only 39% of women are confident in their capabilities to start a business, compared to 55% of men, despite research suggesting there was no discernible difference in skill sets between the two groups.²⁶

A number of reports have highlighted the positive role that schools could play in fostering entrepreneurial aspirations among young girls and women. An RBS Group report in ‘Women in Enterprise’, for example, argued that ‘starting a business while in full-time education should not be seen as a side-line of extra-curricular activity by young people, but integrated into the core curriculum with the appropriate awards’.²⁷ Similarly, The Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship called on a broader introduction of entrepreneurship in schools to increase awareness in young women and increase confidence in their entrepreneurial skills.²⁸ Even without specifically targeting female students, by giving girls the opportunity to practice entrepreneurial skills themselves, entrepreneurship programmes could help dispel false beliefs some girls have that they are not suited to a life of entrepreneurship. By providing access to female mentors, as well as examples of entrepreneurial female role models, schools would also be able to counter stereotypes that entrepreneurship is more suited to men. In addition to making it easier for young girls to imagine themselves as an entrepreneurs, this could also help counteract negative stereotypes boys have about female entrepreneurship teams, countering potential bias in future interactions.




Case studies

HSBC ‘Fairer Tales’

 www.hsbc.co.in/accounts/financial-education

In order to find out why women weren’t empowered to invest in their future selves, HSBC conducted a survey to examine women’s motivations and intentions concerning investment. Results from HSBC’s own studies revealed that women are more likely to worry about finances, be concerned about the future, and less likely to consider themselves financially knowledgeable. This is reflected in their data, which shows that only 12% of women have investments, compared to 19% of men, and 20% of women had no personal pension of any kind, compared to 7% of men. One way HSBC has set out to challenge gender disparities in investment is through partnering with Emma Dodd to create ‘Fairer Tales’, a book with a modern take on traditional fairy tales. The books were created in an attempt to ‘balance the books’ and address gender stereotyping that exists within the stories we tell to our children. In the new stories, heroines of traditional fairy tales of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel no longer rely on Prince Charming to save them, but instead use their financial acumen to solve their problems. The books can be downloaded for free from HSBC’s website.

The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship

 assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784324/RoseReview_Digital_FINAL.PDF

Alison Rose, deputy CEO of NatWest Holdings and CEO of Commercial and Private Banking, was commissioned by HM Treasury to set out findings and recommendations to encourage female entrepreneurship in the UK. The review identified a gender gap in entrepreneurship that costs the UK economy up to £250 billion. The review also compared the UK to other countries such as the Netherlands, Australia and the US, all of which have initiatives and educational policies that encourage female entrepreneurship and offer support via programmes in STEM, building digital literacy and business acumen, and interactive courses on entrepreneurship which target students enrolled in vocational education. To rectify this situation, the review outlined key initiatives and opportunities which included the proliferation and development of entrepreneurship-related courses in schools and colleges. The report called on private and public sector organisations to come together to produce educational materials aimed at improving financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills and self-belief for young men and women aged 15-18.

Directory

‘Young Persons’ Money Index 2019’ is the latest report by The London Institute of Banking and Finance that examines how financial education is delivered in schools, as well as the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of students in the UK when it comes to money and personal finance.

Young Enterprise is an organisation that aims to create a generation of financially capable young people by providing programmes and resources.

‘Educating the Nation’ is an initiative by Equilibrium that aims to increase financial literacy in schools. They’ve created a book aimed at children in Year 5 in order to help children learn about financial skills while still having fun.

‘On the Money’ is a collection of short stories in partnership with Education Scotland, aimed at helping young people change the way they think about money. The idea is that children will be able to develop their financial capabilities.

MyBnk is a charity that provides financial education and enterprise lessons to UK schools and youth organisations to empower young people to take charge of their financial futures.

Money Zone is a programme offered by Metro Bank to help teach Key Stage 2 pupils financial skills. Lessons are designed to fit into PSHE lessons and are also linked to the national curriculum.

‘Women in Enterprise: A Different Perspective’ is a 2013 report by RBS Group which seeks to understand why women are so under-represented in ranks of UK entrepreneurs and suggests solutions that schools, colleges and universities could explore to address the disparity.

‘The Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship 2019’ is a report commissioned by the UK Treasury with the aim of tapping ‘the huge unrealised economic potential of female entrepreneurs’. The report provides an overview of gender disparities in entrepreneurship and suggests solutions to counter them.

‘Inspiring Female Entrepreneurs’ is a report by CIPD that, using case studies of real female entrepreneurs, seeks to inspire more women to join the world of entrepreneurship.

Girlguiding offers an entrepreneur badge that Girl Guides can earn. In order to earn it, girls need to pick a business role model, pitch their business and finalise their business plan. This helps young girls learn about entrepreneurship.

Action points for schools and educators

1

Provide comprehensive financial education

Ensure all students have access to the same levels of financial education in the compulsory curriculum, understanding that boys and girls may receive different levels at home.

3

Provide role models

Expose students to a diverse range of entrepreneurial role models in order to counter stereotypes that business is just for men.

2

Run entrepreneurship programmes

Give students numerous opportunities to participate in entrepreneurship programmes, allowing them both to practice their entrepreneurial skills and affirm belief in their abilities.

5

Communicate with parents

Have open conversations with parents that raise awareness of how unconscious bias at home can effect financial literacy levels of boys and girls.

4

Use gender-representative teaching materials

Avoid teaching materials that perpetuate stereotypes about gender roles and financial capability.



STEM

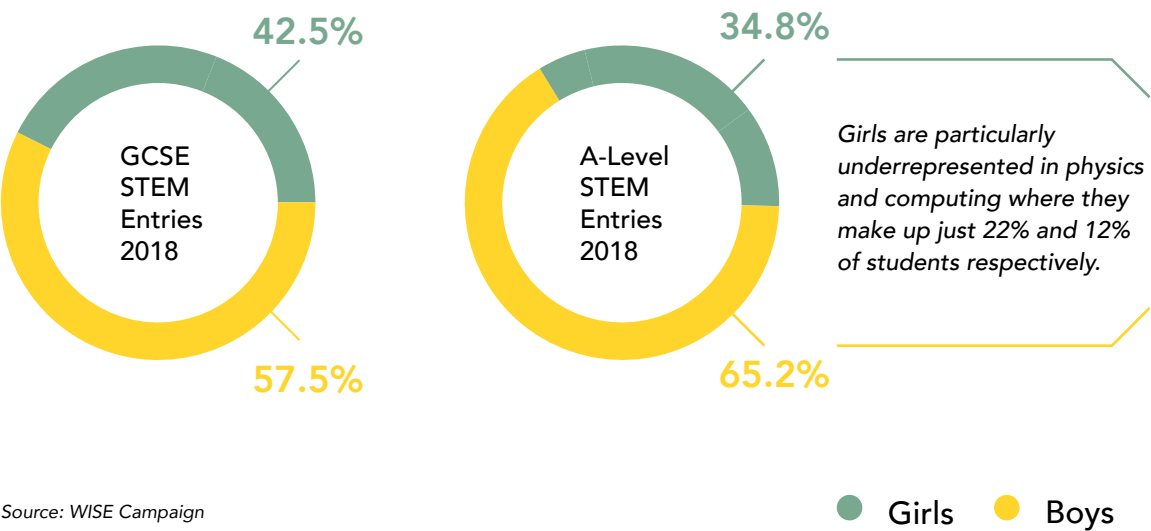
Our research shows that it is harder for girls to balance, or reconcile, their interest in science with femininity. The solution won't lie in trying to change girls. The causes are rooted in, and perpetuated by, wider societal attitudes and social structures. We also need to think about the whole structure of our education system in England, which essentially channels children into narrow 'tracks' from a young age.

Professor Louise Archer, director of Aspires, lead coordinator of TISME

Introduction

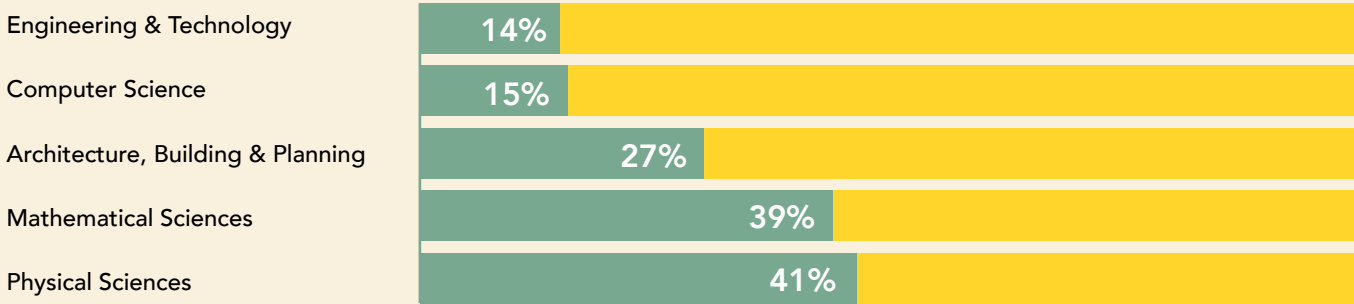
In education, there exists a large gender gap in the likelihood that girls will take science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) classes. While girls perform similarly to boys, fewer of them take these subjects at GCSE and A-level. The proportion of girls in STEM enrolment continues to fall at every step of the graduate ladder and into early career stages and subsequent leadership roles. This phenomenon has been named the 'leaky pipeline', given that the number of women in these fields decreases at each step of the professional ladder. The difficulty of retaining talent is due to a number of structural and institutional barriers that women face when progressing in their STEM-related careers.

Women who do study STEM are also reportedly less likely to pursue a career in the field. The untapped talent of women in STEM amounts to an important economic loss for the UK's industry and economy. In engineering, for example, 'Women in Engineering (2018)' reports that the UK has the lowest percentage of women engineers in Europe at less than 10%, while Latvia, Bulgaria and Cyprus lead with nearly 30%.²⁹ These figures are especially pertinent when we consider the relatively high wages STEM jobs receive: one study reports that salaries are 20% higher than in other fields.³⁰

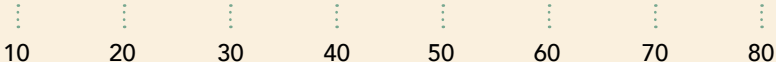


Source: WISE Campaign

At undergraduate level, in 2016/17, women were underrepresented in...



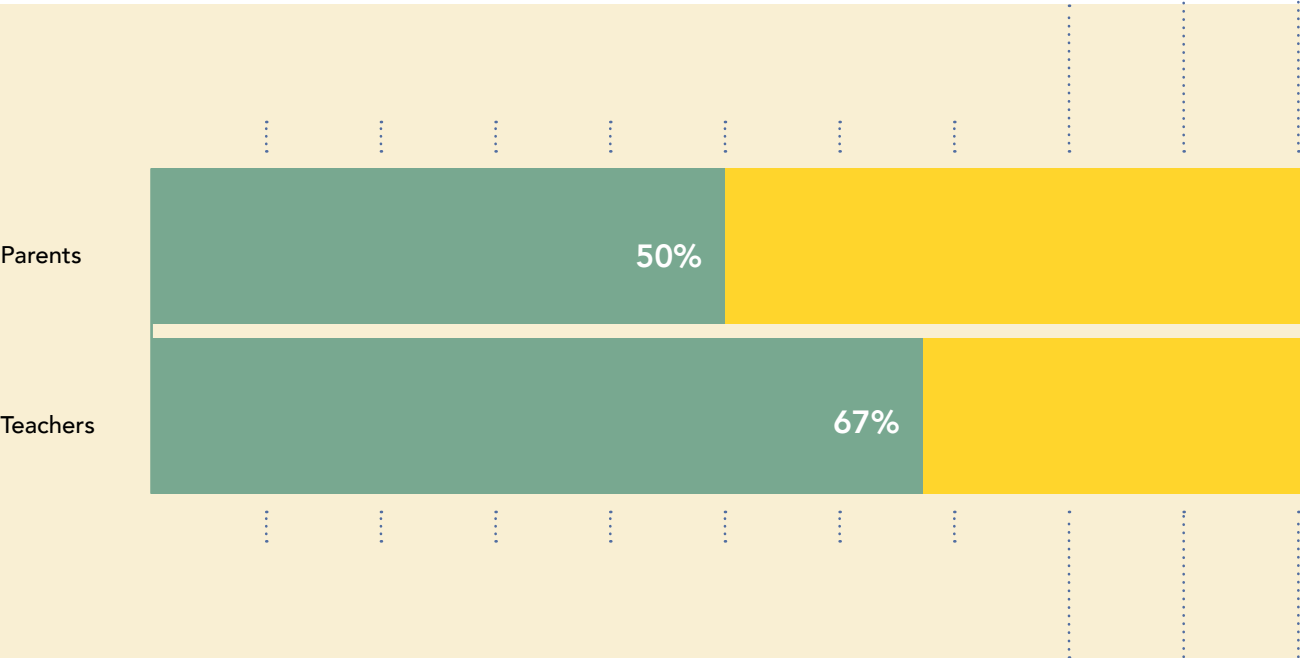
Source: HESA



Dispelling myths

Gina Rippon, Professor of Cognitive Neuroimaging, believes that gender disparity in STEM is in part due to the broader stereotype that women lack ‘visuospatial ability’.³¹ In other words, the female brain is perceived as incapable of processing data in the systematic way that sciences require. While scientifically untrue, this kind of neurosexism has managed to negatively affect young girls’ confidence. Indeed, a 2013 UPMAP survey revealed that 12-15 year-old girls who wished to keep studying physics and mathematics after the age of 16 reported lower confidence levels in their abilities than boys, even though their test scores did not expose any difference in their cognitive abilities.³² This is further evidenced by the fact that girls outperform boys in the majority of STEM subjects at A Level and GCSE, despite being underrepresented.³³ Athene Donald, Professor of Experimental Physics at the University of Cambridge, has also reported ‘an unconscious bias from society’ relating it to the media’s lack of representation of women in these fields.³⁴

50% of parents and 67% of teachers admitted to stereotyping boys and girls about STEM



These misconceptions towards STEM lead many girls to give up STEM subjects in school, because they view careers in technology and science as ‘uncreative’ and ‘too difficult to learn’, according to research by Accenture UK. This research found that 62% of the girls report regretting not studying STEM subjects for longer. The research also found gender biases in parents’ and teachers’ attitudes in STEM, reporting that half of parents and two-thirds of teachers surveyed had admitted to stereotyping girls and boys in relation to STEM, and two-thirds of teachers said they have seen girls drop STEM subjects due to parental pressure.³⁵

Being in the minority

The damage caused by gender stereotypes in STEM is not just limited to the impact it has on the mindsets of teachers and students, however. With fewer girls enrolled in STEM, another phenomenon, defined as ‘social belongingness’, has been shown to occur, with boys and girls tending to be drawn to fields where they see representation of their gender.³⁶

Thus, even if girls are interested in pursuing STEM, or confident in their own ability, they are at risk of being put off as a result of being the minority in a male-dominated field. In a study conducted in 2018 by the UK’s Institute of Fiscal Studies, in collaboration with STEM Skills Fund, 67% of girls agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘STEM jobs are male-dominated’. Male dominance and boys’ behaviour in the classroom were cited as reasons for not pursuing STEM subjects at A-level or university, and this concern was echoed by 68% of teachers in the same report, who agreed that girls ‘don’t want to/feel discouraged from pursuing STEM subjects at A-level because many of their female peers do not’.³⁷

68% of teachers reported that girls

“ don’t want to / feel discouraged from pursuing STEM subjects at A-level because many of their female peers do not.”

Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies

Case studies

Creating a sense of belonging

 www.iop.org/education/teacher/support/girls_physics/resources/page_63821.html

Figures show that female students from single-sex schools are two and a half times more likely to take A-Level Physics than female students of the co-educational system. One Scottish school, spurred on by low enrolment rates and relatively lower scores in physics in the National 5 exams (taken at age 16), experimented by placing all of their female physics students into one class. Unlike previously, where girls would be randomly dispersed into three different teaching sets, all six girls were put into one group with twelve boys, while the other two teaching sets were all boys. The school hoped this would counter the negative sense of belonging and lower levels of confidence that can arise from being a significant minority in class.

Being less of a minority in the classroom, the girls contributed more often in class and displayed more confidence. Furthermore, they achieved high marks on the exam, more in line with their grades in other subjects. At the end of the year, five out of the six girls chose to continue with physics the following year – an increase from previous years for the department.

The Drayson Foundation pilot to address teachers' bias

 www.iop.org/publications/iop/2017/file_69171.pdf

A pilot funded by the Drayson Foundation took place in six schools in the Southeast of England, with the aim of increasing uptake of A-level Physics among girls and decreasing the numbers of girls and boys making subject choices based on gender stereotypes. The pilot focused on addressing gender-aware teaching, language, mindsets, stereotypes and unconscious bias that might occur in the classroom.

The school carried out a number of activities, including lesson observations, professional-development sessions, and provision of resources focusing on gender-neutral language. Discussion of and feedback on gender-aware teaching was also carried out. In addition, the school held whole-school INSET days for training on unconscious bias and wall displays were reviewed to reduce stereotyping in posters. Finally, both year group and whole school assemblies were held to discuss gender stereotyping with the students.

Although the project encountered challenges, such as 'the comparative strength of parental and societal influences', it ultimately proved successful. The number of girls enrolling in AS-Level physics in Drayson schools tripled from 16 to 52 students in just two years. Participating schools also reported a number of positive changes to content and teaching. Pedagogy began to include more girl-friendly and gender-neutral approaches, and imagery around the school was also reported as becoming either gender-neutral or more girl-positive.

Directory

Code First: Girls runs free, in-person, part-time coding courses for female/non binary identifying young individuals across the UK and Ireland, while also helping companies to up-skill their staff, appeal to female tech talent, and increase their public profile as a leading tech employer.

Stemettes promotes the entry of girls into the tech world through a variety of events and activities which cater to different age groups.

WISE provides Business to Business engagement with employers, employees, educators and training providers. They also provide in depth statistics for women in STEM in the classroom, workforce and boardroom.

The Society of Women Engineers empowers women in the field of Engineering through scholarships, networking opportunities and training catered to students, educators and families.

ScienceGrrl provides a voice for women in STEM policy at the national level.

Women in STEAM publishes articles and inspirational stories to encourage women to pursue a career in STEAM.

BAME girls in Engineering, sponsored by UWE Bristol, encourages, motivates and inspires girls of Black, Asian and minority ethnicity (BAME) into the fields of Engineering and Technology, where they are often underrepresented. They also offer opportunities for BAME girls in Year 8 and 9 to visit local engineering or technology employers.

Institute of Physics (IOP) provides reports investigating the gender imbalance of Physics A-level, and on issues around the equality of education.

Girl Geek Scotland is a network and community for those working and studying in creativity, computing, enterprise and related sectors in Scotland.

OneTech supports underrepresented tech founders in London. They help to connect potential founders with opportunities in the London tech scene through action and thought leadership design for underrepresented minorities.

'Through Both Eyes', written by ScienceGrrl, is an engaging and thorough report which analyses the causes of marginalisation of girls in STEM in the UK.

Action points for schools and educators

1

Be mindful of unconscious bias

Training can help to enable teachers to reflect on their practices and manage biases they may not be aware they have.

2

Raise awareness about the issues

Talk openly with your students about the gendered challenges in STEM and encourage them to think about ways to combat them.

3

Dispel myths about gender norms

Actively encourage students who struggle with self-doubt. Boosting their confidence and supporting their progress can have a significant impact on a student's relationship with a subject.

Experiment with single-sex learning environments

Take the opportunity to test the impact of providing girls with all-female STEM classes on participation and results.

Communicate with parents

Find out if typical gender stereotypes are being perpetuated at home, and work with parents to let them know the realities about their children's capabilities and potential.

4

5



Sports

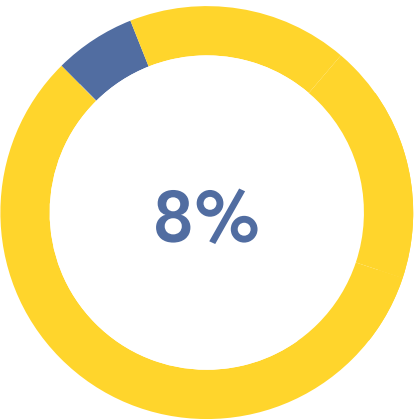
“ Exercise for fun, not beauty...if talking to my daughter about fitness, I keep the conversation body positive by concentrating on how great it feels to run with our dog or master a new karate move. It's not about image. It's about feeling great inside.

Perelandra Beedles (Romper)

Introduction

According to national statistics, obesity rates among adults in the UK have almost quadrupled in the last 25 years.³⁸ Of every thousand 10 and 11 year olds in England, 201 are obese and 142 are overweight.³⁹ Government advice proposes that children should do at least an hour of moderate intensity physical activity per day, but less than a quarter of boys and girls manage this.⁴⁰ Reports outline the low level of physical activity for girls in the UK where, by age 7, girls are already less active than boys, with this disparity widening as they move from childhood into adolescence.⁴¹

Just 8% of girls aged between 11 and 18 are meeting the Chief Medical Officer’s recommendation of one daily hour of activity - half that of boys. Furthermore, obesity rates are higher in girls, with 44% of girls aged between 11 and 18 either overweight or obese, compared to 36% of boys.⁴² In sports participation and other physical activities, significant differences exist in the rate at which girls and boys engage in sports and other physical activities.



Just 8% of girls aged 11-18 meet the recommendation of one hour of daily physical activity

Source: Girls, Inspired

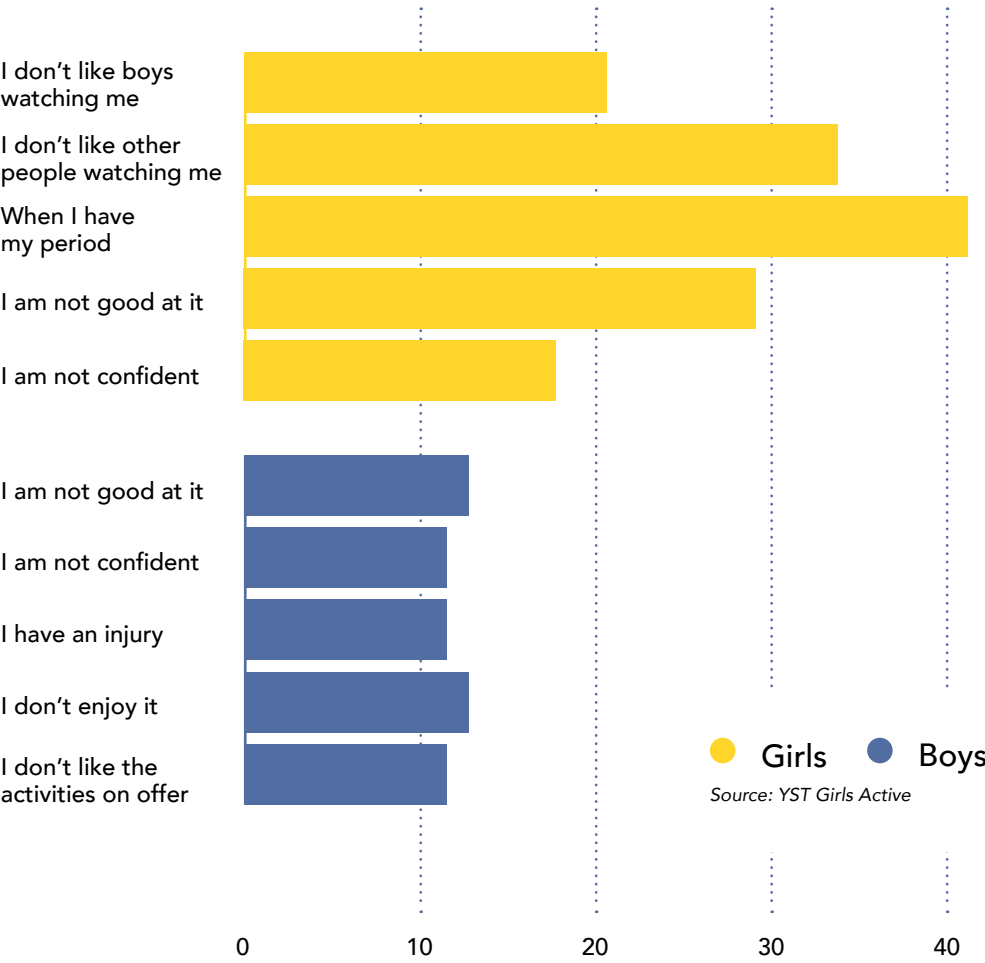
Girls’ participation in sports is often hindered by personal, social and structural barriers. In schools, some girls describe not having the same opportunities to play sports as boys, and girls’ sports teams often do not have the same funding as boys’ teams. Girls’ confidence can drop significantly during puberty, which could be one factor in girls’ participation in sports during this period. One survey found that just one in three girls aged 7-16 felt confident exercising, compared to nearly half of boys. In the media, a lack of women in sports and less coverage of women’s sports perpetuates the idea that girls do not have the ability to be successful in sports. With just 19.5% of UK elite sportswomen surveyed labelling school sport for girls as ‘inspiring’ and just 10.6% reporting that they gained their love of sport from secondary school, there is clearly significant work that can be done by schools to push for and inspire higher participation levels in sport.⁴³

Personal barriers

Puberty is the stage where girls start to have a negative outlook on sports and physical activity. This time marks both a period of changes in their physical appearance, as well as the time students transition from primary to secondary school. Participation in PE and sport among girls sees a sharp decrease during the transition from primary to secondary school, with disruption to friendship groups and declining body confidence both affecting girls’ participation.⁴⁴

Furthermore, a 2018 Girls Active report found that 27% of girls don’t take part in physical activities because they don’t like being watched, while 21% of girls don’t due to lack of confidence. The report also found that competitive PE lessons generally appeal less to girls than boys. These factors affect the relationship girls have with physical activity, pushing the idea that sport in general is not a relevant part of their daily life.⁴⁵

When asked what stops them taking part in physical activity inside school, boys and girls aged 14-16 answered:



Social and structural barriers

Girls can also often face social and structural barriers when accessing sport. The UK’s Equality Act 2010 permits single-sex sports, but stipulates that it is unlawful discrimination for a school to treat one gendered sports team less favourably – for example, by providing a boys’ hockey or cricket team with much better resources than the girls’.⁴⁶

Despite this, according to Girlguiding, only 43% of schoolgirls are offered the same sporting options as boys. Rugby, football and cricket tend only to be offered to boys, while girls tend to be offered dance, gymnastics and netball.⁴⁷ Even if girls want to participate in traditionally ‘masculine’ sports, a large proportion of schoolgirls do not have the option to do so.

Social stigma is another common barrier that prevents girls from participating in sports. According to the Women’s Sports Foundation, ‘discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity of female athletes persists’, and girls in sports may experience social isolation and negative performance evaluations. This idea of gendered sports is further perpetuated by the media. Women athletes are targets of attitudes and prejudices around their appearance and sexuality, with adjectives such as ‘too unfeminine’, ‘too masculine’ or ‘too powerful’ being attributed to them with negative connotations.⁴⁸

Case studies

This Girl Can

 www.thisgirlcan.co.uk

This Girl Can is an award-winning national campaign that is working to make equal the gender gap in sport. First launched in 2015 and funded by the National Lottery, the campaign advertisement aired on TV and online, and was later followed by outdoor and social media advertising, including the Twitter hashtag #thisgirlcan. It was created as a response to a 2014 Sport England’s Active People Survey, which reported that two million fewer women participate in sports than men, despite more than 75% of women aged 14–40 expressing that they would like to exercise more.

This Girl Can guides women and girls on ways to stay active, offering tips on how to do so when adequate infrastructure is missing. Activities such as ‘stair workouts’, ‘school runs’ or ‘home object workouts’ promote the idea that physical activity is truly accessible to anyone in any circumstance. In their campaign, girls and women of all ages, races, class, religions and body types showcase and share their experience on how they have found their preferred physical activity/sport, recounting the struggles and obstacles they had to face, and how they overcame them.

The first advert was viewed 100 million times on TV and is said to have helped around three million British women become more active, contributing to a reduction in the sporting gender gap from 1.75m to 1.3m. Sports England reports that more than 1.6 million women started or re-started exercise after seeing the first phase of the campaign, with the second phase persuading a further 1.6m women to start exercising and 2.8 million women to become more active.

‘Sport for all’, St Mary’s School Cambridge

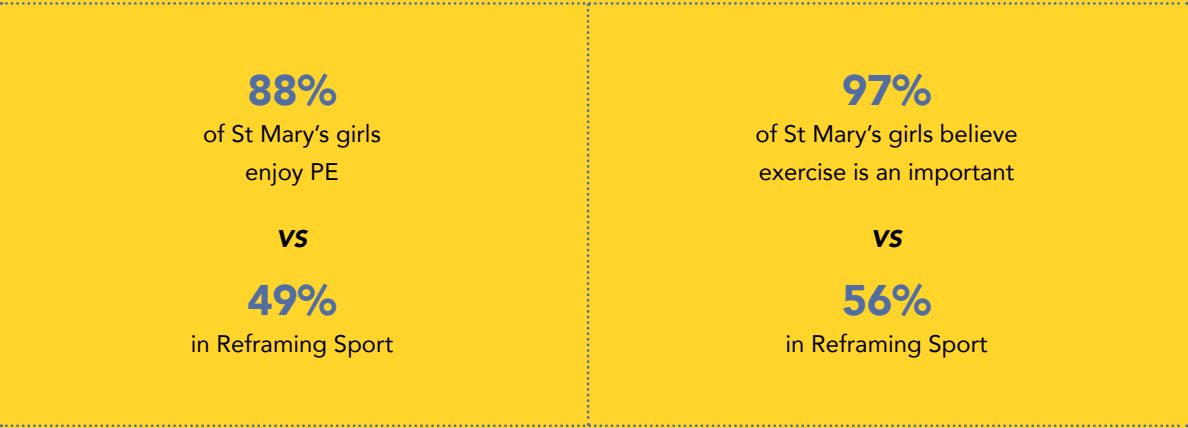
 www.stmaryscambridge.co.uk/senior-school/school-life/sport-for-all.htm

Sport at St Mary’s School Cambridge, an all-girls school, is shaped by their ‘Sport for All’ policy, which encourages students to lead a healthy lifestyle, by making PE and extracurricular sports a popular and important part of the curriculum. Central to St Mary’s School is the emphasis on enjoyment and choice. Whether it is having students join an extra-curricular club, participate in a competitive sport, or simply find a physical activity that they enjoy, St Mary’s School believes that student participation in sport reflects individual abilities and choices. Therefore, girls are free to pursue sports that they are passionate about. In addition, the school integrated Women in Sports UK’s 8 principals for success into their curriculum, namely:

NO JUDGEMENT	INVOKING EXCITEMENT	CLEAR EMOTIONAL REWARD	OPENING EYES TO WHAT’S THERE
BUILDING EXISTING HABITS	GIVING GIRLS A VOICE AND CHOICE	CHAMPIONING WHAT’S IN IT	EXPANDING THE IMAGE OF ‘SPORTY’

St Mary’s School Cambridge ‘sports for all’ policy proved effective, as evidenced by the students’ attitudes compared to those expressed in a UK national survey from ‘Reframing Sport’.

According to the school,



Directory

Women in Sport is a highly involved organisation that is actively working to promote girls and women's participation in sports, in partnership with Sport England.

Go Where Women Are is a report from Sport England providing practical information on how to improve girls' and women's participation in sport.

Helping Women and Girls to Get Active: A Practical Guide is a guide from Sport England, This Girl Can, and I Will If You Will, providing suggestions and tips to encourage women and girls to get more active.

Puberty & Sport: an Invisible Stage – The Impact on Girls' Engagement in Physical Activity (August 2018) is a report by Women in Sport and Sport England that gathers qualitative research from girls aged 12-16 years who are going through puberty, in order to find out what key barriers and issues girls face during this time.

Girls Active is an initiative launched by Youth Sport Trust, a national children's charity, and is focused on helping schools and teachers through consultation and leadership to understand what motivates girls to take part in PE, sport and physical activity, in order to make the necessary changes to make sport more accessible.

Muslim Women's Sport Foundation is an organisation that aims at increasing the involvement of Muslim women in sports, without compromising their religious and cultural values.

I Will If You Will is an initiative of the Council of Bury, funded by Sports England, aimed at encouraging girls and women to participate in sport.

Girls, Inspired is a campaign that was launched by The Telegraph to help close the gender gap in sport and inspire physical activity in schools across the UK and Ireland.

Telegraph Women's Sport (TWS) is a new editorial initiative that aims to transform the profile of women's sport and its visibility in the media.

Action points for schools and educators

1 Create equal opportunities and funding

Ensure girls' and boys' sports teams have the same opportunities and funding, as it is unlawful discrimination to treat gendered sports less favourably.

2 Celebrate all sporting achievements

Ensure that sporting achievements are celebrated equally between genders, rather than emphasising the successes of boys in schools.

3 Breakdown discriminating stereotypes

Challenge sexist bullying which allows certain gender stereotypes to continue to have an effect on how women who participate in or are successful in sports are made to feel about their femininity or sexual identity.

4 Be sensitive to physiological changes

Be aware of and understanding that teenage girls go through significant bodily changes. They also begin to manage periods, and it's important to be aware that these are experienced differently by individuals, affecting some girls more than others.

5 Encourage body positivity and physical activity

Introduce challenges to encourage physical exercise outside of the classroom: for example, the 'Couch to 5k Challenge' from the NHS, with a focus on how activity makes you feel as opposed to how it makes you look.



Social Media

“ Women have used the rise of social media platforms as an opportunity to express their individualism and diverse strengths... selfies are used to share their identities that would not have been possible before. But with the birth of this creativity and self-expression, we’ve also seen the growth in abusive online behaviour.

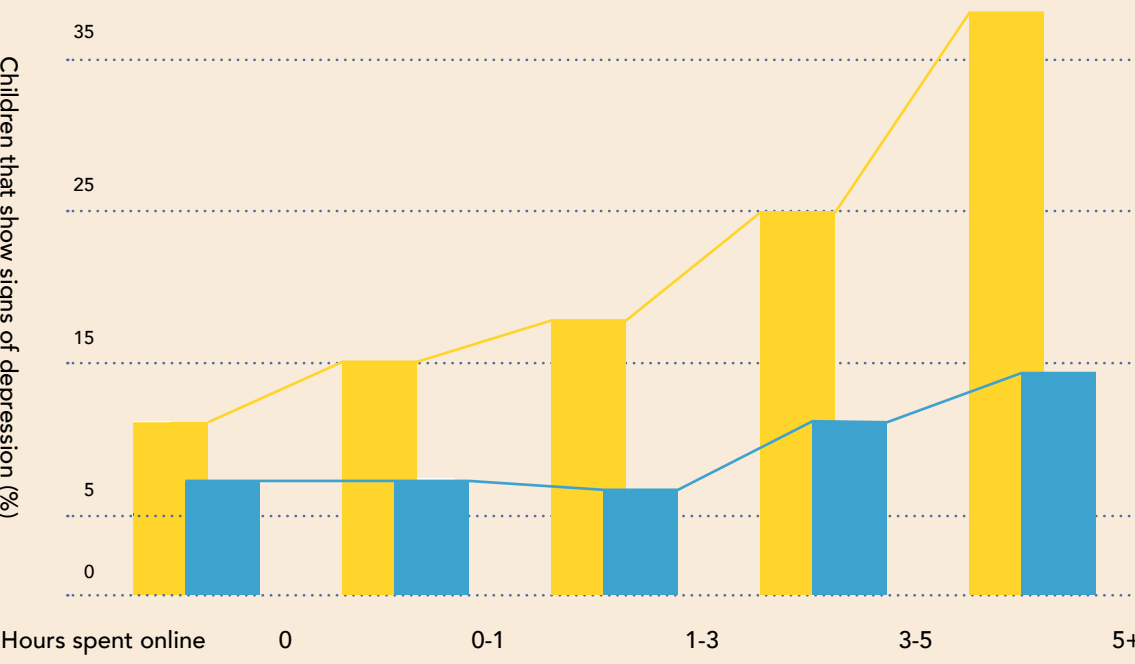
Rimmel London Beauty Cyberbullying - Expression Repression White Paper

Introduction

The online world can be an inspiring and empowering place for young people, and social platforms are becoming an integral part of daily life for many. Social media can play a positive role in helping young people to foster and sustain relationships, and can also be an important place for learning creativity and self-expression. Furthermore, the internet can be a platform for young people to start to shape their political opinions, participate in public debates, and be an important source of emotional and social support.

However, it is critical to understand the other – not so positive – side of the internet. Studies suggest that there exists a correlation between young people’s use of the internet (particularly of social media) and their self-esteem and mental health, which can later affect their physical health.⁴⁹ The impact social media use can have on mental health is especially pertinent when one considers the way girls and boys navigate the online world. While there is no gendered access to the internet among children, boys tend to show a greater preference for gaming, and girls are more likely to engage in online communication.⁵⁰ As a result of this, girls are often at higher risk of exposure to online harassment and bullying, as well as to the misrepresentation of women that is rife on social media, and can have a have long-lasting effects on their self-esteem.

Almost 40% of girls who spend more than five hours a day on social media show symptoms of depression



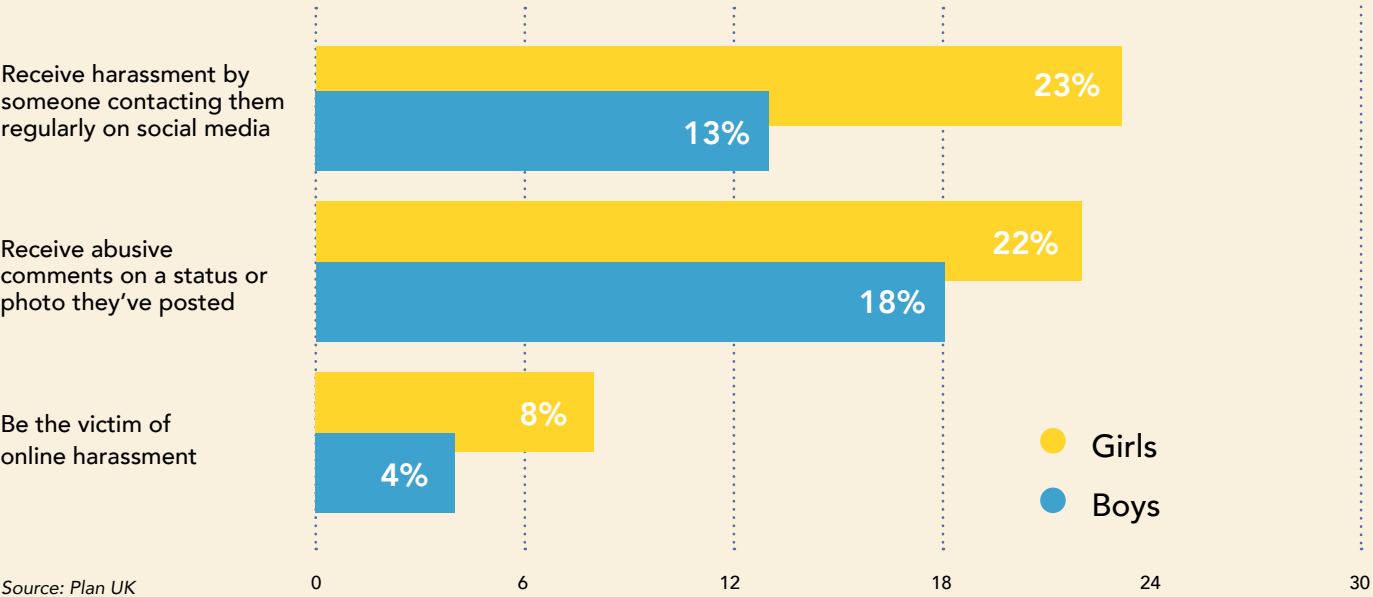
Source: UK Millennium Cohort Study, 2019

- Girls with depression
- Boys with depression

Bullying and harassmt on the internet

Figures show that girls are more prone to experiencing online harassment, bullying, and abuse on social media.⁵¹ Plan UK have compiled a number of statistics which highlight the disparities in the number of boys and girls who experience harassment.

According to these figures, girls are more likely than boys to:



Alongside the sea of harassmt and cyberbullying girls receive online, women and girls are often subject to interactions which denote sexual connotations, often instigated by young men. These dynamics are often influenced by gender dynamics within peer groups, as well as gender norms from popular culture, further perpetuating sexist double standards.

Protecting online users’ safety in the digital world is an important task that families and schools must better evaluate. As reported by Plan UK, girls view the online world as a source of risk and anxiety, but also of pleasure and necessity.⁵² In order to protect girls’ rights to lead a digital life, it is necessary to promote safety and equality without restricting their access to the online world, both by working with students to combat harassment and bullying, and providing girls with the appropriate resources and systems to deal with cyberbullying if they encounter it.

Girls are more likely:

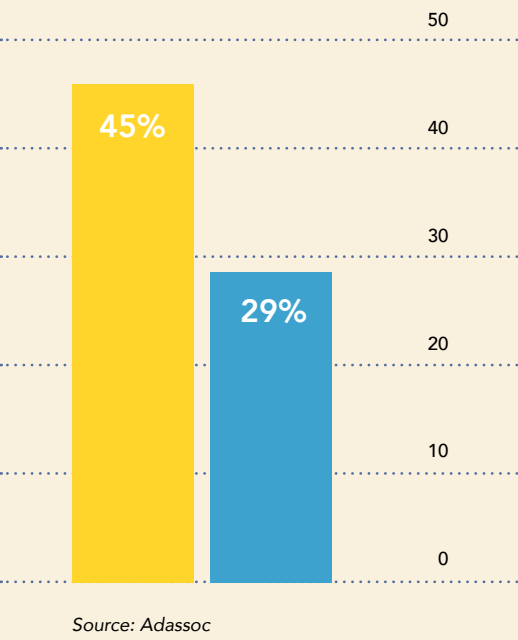
- To experience ongoing **cyberbullying**
- To be **more vulnerable** to different kinds of risk, especially chatting to people online that they don’t know
- To be **asked for personal details**
- To be disturbed by violent or offensive **pornographic content**

Media representation of women and self-esteem

Representation of women in the media has been the subject of much attention in recent years. Images of women in mainstream media (TV, magazines or advertisements) have often been accused of linking a woman’s self-worth to her appearance. A 2015 advert, depicting a thin, attractive woman clad in a bikini, with the slogan ‘Are you beach body ready?’ prompted concerns over portraying unrealistic and over-sexualised female body ideals. Another 2019 advertisement was banned for perpetuating stereotypical gender roles, as it showed a male astronaut in a space station and a woman sitting next to a pram, caring for her child. Mindful of the role of advertisement in society, the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has released new restrictions this year for media, in order to combat stereotypes that ‘can lead to unequal gender outcomes in public and private aspects of people’s lives.’⁵³

● Girls ● Boys

Percentage of boys and girls who say social media makes them feel they have to look or act a certain way



Many of the issues present in traditional forms of media also occur in social media, where young people are exposed to a barrage of images, many of which perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards through filters and editing. Media apps such as Instagram can also reinforce the idea that one’s self-worth is defined by external beauty, quantifying this concept with the ‘like’ button that shows the success of a post by the number of people who like the image. Indeed, studies have shown that just viewing Facebook for a short time can have a tangible effect on body image concerns in young girls, with one study finding that girls expressed a heightened desire to change their appearance such as face, hair, and/or skin after spending time on Facebook.⁵⁴ These figures are of particular cause for concern when we consider the body image issues many young girls already experience during adolescence, including increased concerns about weight, and concerns about physical changes resulting from puberty.⁵⁵

- **Images of girls and women in the media are often stereotypes that are negative, limiting and degrading, and impact both how women perceive themselves and how others see them as well.**

Source: Anti-Defamation League

Case studies

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty



www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns.html

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is a campaign that aims to feature and celebrate real women of all different ages, sizes, ethnicities, and hair colour, type or style. The campaign challenges the beauty status quo and offers a broader, more 'democratic' view of beauty. The campaign is inspired by Dove's brand vision of 'a world where beauty is a source of confidence, not anxiety'. Dove's mission is to ensure that the next generation grows up enjoying a positive relationship with the way they look – helping young people raise their self-esteem and realise their full potential.

Launched in 2004 by Unilever, the campaign has included advertisements, videos, workshops, sleepover events, the publication of a book, and the production of a play. A number of resources are also available for parents, teachers and youth leaders, tackling topics such as 'media pressures', 'competing and comparing looks', and 'teasing and bullying'. To date they've reached over 40 million young people with their self-esteem focused educational programmes and are aiming to reach many millions more.

Rimmel London 'I Will Not Be Deleted' Campaign



www.rimmellondon.com/en_gb/beautycyberbullying

'I Will Not Be Deleted' was created in response to the fact that 115 million online images are deleted every year as a result of cyberbullying. The campaign aims to allow young girls to feel free to express themselves on social media without fear of backlash. Partnering with The Cybersmile Foundation, Rimmel London has worked with the support of celebrities including Cara Delevingne and Rita Ora to tackle cyberbullying, in order to allow young women to express themselves online without receiving negative backlash.

Through the campaign, Rimmel aims to create an online space for young people to share their experiences, as well as launch an online, artificially intelligent, multilingual 'CyberSmile Assistant' which will recommend approved local resources, helplines, and organisations for those affected by beauty cyberbullying. Rimmel has also produced a short film in which women discuss their experiences of bullying, and has produced a research paper with results from 11,000 girls and women aged 16-25 worldwide.

Directory

GlobalGirl Media develops the voice and media literacy of teenage girls and young women, aged 14-22, by teaching them to create and share digital journalism designed to improve scholastic achievement, ignite community activism, and spark social change.

BBC series #LikeMinded is a series of articles and educational videos that explore the correlations between social media and our state of mind, while providing tools and tips on how to moderate our exposure to social media.

Girlguiding offers mentorship and workshops, which have been developed to increase awareness of self, boost confidence and self-esteem, raise aspirations and improve body image through mentoring programmes such as 'Big Sister'. Their annual Girls' Attitudes Survey gives an insight into how girls feel about a range of issues and emerging pressures.

Taking action on body image is a UK Government toolkit for understanding body image and what influences one's perception of it.

Stereotypes of Girls and Women in the Media is a classroom resource developed by the Anti-Defamation League. It is a useful resource for teachers looking to tackle the topic of stereotypes of girls and women in the media.

The Cybersmile Foundation is a charity committed to tackling all forms of digital abuse and bullying online.

'Reclaiming the Internet for Girls' is a campaign from Plan UK which aims to make the internet a safer place for girls.

Rimmel London White Paper: Beauty Cyberbullying – Expression Repression is a report outlining the effect of cyberbullying on girls and women.

'Depictions, Perceptions and Harm: A report on gender stereotypes in advertising' is a report by the Advertising Standards Authority researching the effect of gender stereotypes in advertisements.

'You can't live without it: Girls' Rights in the Digital World' is part of a larger report **'The State of Girls' Rights in the UK'**. This chapter focuses on the pressure and harassment girls receive from social media.

Action points for schools and educators

1 Address bullying in the internet age

Cyberbullying should be taken as seriously as in-person bullying.

2 Promote discussion around the issues

Create a safe space for young people to have open discussions and encourage debates in the classroom on topics such as beauty filters, stereotypes portrayed in the media, or what happens on the internet.

3 Empower young people to tackle challenges

Teach students how to safely navigate social media. This includes the dangers of sending personal pictures, and how to deal with harassment and unwanted attention. Make sure students know their rights online, and how to preserve them.

4 Raise awareness about online profiles

Hold workshops with young people to remind them of the permanence of things posted on the internet. Try running each other's names through a search engine to ensure privacy settings are on.

5 Engage students in offline activities

Encourage students to spend time without their phones at lunch and break times, and inform them about the dangers of too much online exposure.

Boys

“ The discussion around gender and gender roles in society is one of the most important currently occurring. To be able to engage young boys in this conversation and allow them to think about what it means for them, their friends, and their family is hugely important in developing a more cohesive gender equality.

Chris Barton, the Good Lad Initiative

Introduction

Gender equality should by no means be seen as exclusively a ‘women’s issue’, and the inclusion of boys and men in conversations is essential for bringing about full and comprehensive change to existing systems. Decades of attempts at addressing gender inequalities through programmes and policies that aimed at advancing and empowering girls and women have often occurred without paying much attention to examining masculinity; how boys are raised to become men; the negative impact that the concept of masculinity can have on boys and girls; and the ways that institutions and culture support the same inequalities that we are trying to mitigate.

Recent events like the #MeToo Movement have highlighted the magnitude of inequalities in our society and the inability to address gender inequality as a cultural problem. The one-sided focus on gender equality addresses only one part of the problem, which renders any progress partial, leaving the same power dynamics unchallenged and allowing for phenomena such as the normalisation of sexual assault and harassment to persist.

It is important for educators and schools to consider masculinity and to reflect on the roles that schools, as socialising institutions, can play in shaping the conceptualisation of masculinity and gendered patterns of power. Schools’ educational programmes for girls and women have been successful at encouraging and preparing girls for new and expanded roles in society, whether in the field of sports, in school subjects that are traditionally perceived as masculine, or by taking up leadership roles. Schools also have a responsibility to work to redefine boys’ ideas about masculinity and the role of men in society, which will, in turn, combat sexist language and behaviour, sexual harassment, toxic masculinity, and lad culture.

Toxic masculinity refers to over emphasis of ‘toxic’ aspects of masculinity such as physical strength, dominance, violence, suppression of emotions and devaluation of women.

Toxic masculinity and lad culture

Toxic masculinity refers to over emphasis of ‘toxic’ aspects of masculinity, such as physical strength, dominance, violence, suppression of emotions and devaluation of women.⁵⁶ These characteristics often manifest themselves through ‘lad culture’, characteristics of which include heavy alcohol consumption, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic ‘banter’ and a pack mentality. This behaviour is often rooted in the way that masculinity is portrayed in the media, popular culture and even in textbooks and other curricular resources.⁵⁷ At university, this type of behaviour has caused concern among student unions, the media and the UK government, which has committed to carry out a review to decide if misogyny should be treated as a hate crime.⁵⁸

Toxic masculinity and lad culture have been shown to produce a number of negative effects on both boys and men, as well as the women around them. It can encourage the suppression of emotions, with expressing vulnerability being seen as un-masculine, preventing men from speaking out about their mental health or getting the help they need. Not only can this have fatal consequences – male suicide rates are consistently higher than female suicide rates in the UK - but it can also result in men using other outlets for their emotions, including aggression and violent behaviour.⁵⁹ This in turn can impact the way that men interact with women. A 2013 report by the National Union of Students (NUS) found a strong link between lad culture and sexual harassment, and in 2014, the Annual Report of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator identified sexual harassment and lad culture as an emerging issue of concern.⁶⁰ Indeed, a survey by The Student Room has found statistics which provide a ‘clear indication that the incidence of rape is more likely in the student population than in the general population’.⁶¹

Lad culture has also trivialised these issues of harassment, with ‘banter’, jokes, and ironic use of language around the subject perpetuating the normalisation of sexist and misogynistic behaviour. A recent scandal at Warwick University saw the exclusion of five male students for their conduct on a group chat, especially for ‘rape jokes’.⁶² Without work being done to try to combat toxic masculinity and lad culture, there is a risk these attitudes will carry into adulthood and into the workplace. Fighting dangerous gender norms requires the participation of men who are committed to being allies in the fight against gender inequality, by critically reflecting on their own behaviour, language and actions (or inactions). Schools have a crucial role in tackling toxic masculinity, lad culture, and dangerous gender norms. In the paper ‘Challenging toxic masculinity in schools and society,’ Kathleen Elliott suggests more diverse examples of men and masculinity must be provided to all ages and grade levels to encourage young people to explore the complex aspects of their own identities. Teachers can model respect for all genders and sexualities, demonstrate vulnerability, express emotions, sensitivity, and empathy, and create learning spaces and opportunities in which all their students can do the same.

Harassment and sexism

As it has been established, aspects of toxic masculinity and lad culture can encourage attitudes which lead to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is highly prevalent in schools, and it is gendered: the majority of cases involve boys targeting girls. Sexual harassment is the unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that violates, intimidates or degrades someone and helps create a hostile or offensive environment. It can include verbal, non-verbal or physical acts, such as sexual comments or unwanted touching.

In 2017, UK Feminista and the National Education Union commissioned the Institute for Employment Research to examine the students’ and teachers’ experience of sexism in school. The report ‘It’s just everywhere’ revealed widespread sexual harassment, as well as sexist behaviour, language, and stereotyping.⁶³

These statistics highlight that sexual harassment, sexist language, and gender stereotyping are commonplace in school settings. However, despite this, many teachers report feeling unsupported and ill-equipped to respond – over a quarter (27%) of secondary school teachers say they would not feel confident tackling a sexist incident if they experienced or witnessed it in school.⁶⁴ Therefore,

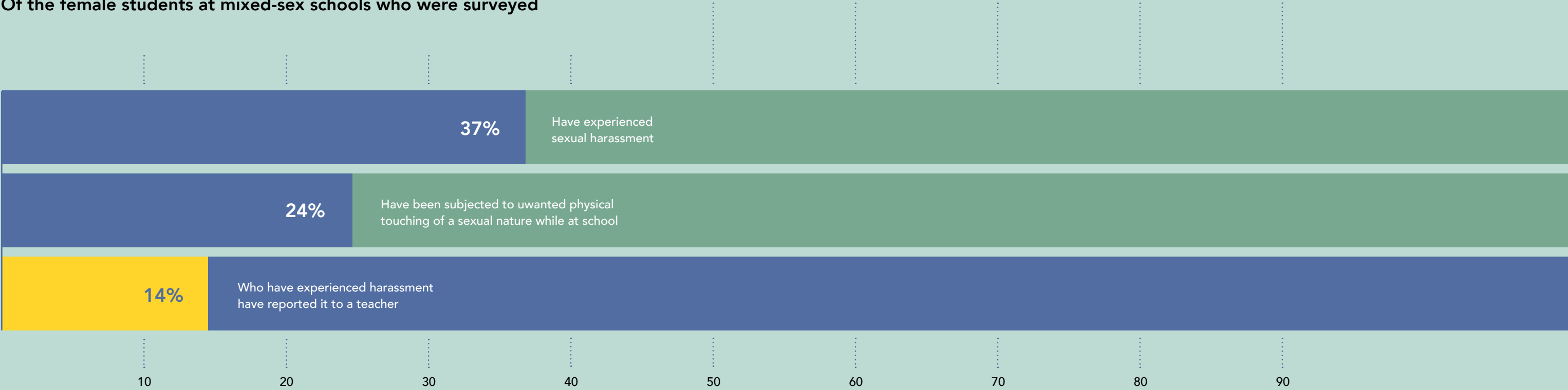
it is necessary for schools and educators to foster a safe environment where discriminatory behaviour and practices are not allowed to happen in the first place. In 2018, the House of Commons Library released a report updating guidance on how schools can best respond to sexual harassment.⁶⁵ All schools in England must have a child protection policy in place, including measures relating to protecting children from sexual harassment, whether from staff members or their peers. Better implementation of these guidelines will help staff handle matters more appropriately and feel more confident doing so.

Sarah Lasoye, National Women’s Officer for the National Union of Students (NUS) in 2018 to 2019, believes there is a need for a more explicit and direct conversation about these issues, starting from effective Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in UK schools and colleges, stating:

In order to tackle sexual harassment at its root, our education system urgently needs to equip students with the language to describe their experiences. We also need to create environments that encourage students to report, and not normalise unhealthy behaviours. What is most striking to me is the woeful lack of consistent and effective SRE in UK schools and colleges. My work with Further Education students has compounded my belief that we need spaces - from as early as primary school - for children and young people to actively imagine healthy gender relations, so that ultimately, we can create the culture we wish to see.

Sarah Lasoye
2018-2019 National Women’s Officer for the NUS

Of the female students at mixed-sex schools who were surveyed



Source: National Education Union and UK Feminista

Case studies

The Good Lad Initiative

 www.goodladinitiative.com

The Good Lad Initiative is an organisation that provides interactive workshops at schools, universities and workplaces to engage and challenge its participants in the way they think about gender and masculinity, and what it means to be a man in the 21st century. The goal of their workshops is to make participants aware of the differences that exist between their actual values and the harmful values that seem to prevail in some groups. It provides them with a safe space to reflect on the norms they hold and create new ones. It challenges them to use their social capital to be responsible and active agents of change. The initiative aims to educate students on topics such as consent, gender, sexuality, and sex.

The initiative reports that over three quarters of participants found that the workshops gave them a chance to reflect on their own values and actions and challenge group norms, and that they felt better equipped to act positively in complex gender situations. Eight out of every ten participants stated that they would recommend the workshops to another team or university.

Gender-neutral teaching

 www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2017/33/no-more-boys-and-girls

No More Boys and Girls (BBC, August 2017) is a two-part BBC programme which documents a 6-week experiment in gender neutrality, carried out with one Year 3 primary school class in a primary school on the Isle of White. The documentary seeks to answer one simple question: 'What would happen to a classroom of seven-year-olds if they weren't treated differently as boys and girls?'

Psychometric tests at the start of the experiment showed that boys were less able to show their emotions, but more confident in their abilities, while girls had lower self-esteem and a lesser ability to process numbers and shapes. Girls believed that boys were 'better' than them and 'better at being in charge', while boys said that 'girls look after the child and boys do lots of cool stuff' and 'men are more successful because they could have harder jobs.' In the experiment, all possible traces of gender differentiation were removed for a term, from the books the pupils read and the toys they played with, to the way teachers addressed them, in order to test if 'typical gender differences' would decrease. Indeed, one of the first observations noted was one teacher's use of gendered 'pet names', who would call the girls 'love' or 'darling' and the boys 'mate' or 'fella'. The children were introduced to a group of professionals who challenged their ideas about gendered jobs to broaden their perspective on what girls and boys could do and achieve, and were exposed to positive but simple messages around the classroom such as 'Girls are Strong; Boys are Strong; Boys are Sensitive; Girls are Sensitive; Girls are Clever; Boys are Clever'.

The experiment proved to be successful, with girls' self-esteem improving significantly to only a 0.02% difference with boys. Meanwhile, the boys' ability to describe their emotions improved, as well as their behaviour.

Directory

A Call to Men (UK) works with communities and educators to facilitate conversations and provide education on methods and strategies to prevent sexual assault, violence and discrimination on college campuses.

UK Feminista designs training workshops for teachers to successfully tackle sexism and guides them into taking a whole school, sustainable approach to the promotion of gender equality. It also provides workshops for young people to educate and empower them on issues relating to gender equality.

Women's Campaign of the National Union of Students (NUS) is an NUS Women's campaign, which represents female students around the country and works to defend their rights.

Sexpression:UK is an independent charity with the goal of empowering young people to make decisions about relationships and sex by running informal and comprehensive RSE in the community.

'Challenging toxic masculinity in schools and society' by Kathleen Elliott (2018) is a book which discusses the contours and consequences of simplified, toxic forms of masculinity in schools and society.

Revolt Sexual Assault raises awareness about the nature and extent of sexual assault experiences by students in the United Kingdom, and works with universities to try to address this issue.

HeForShe is a campaign from UN Women which aims to encourage everyone to be part of the conversation about gender equality, not just girls and women.

'Changing the Culture' is a 2016 report by Universities UK which outlines recommendations to combat sexual violence, harassment and hate crimes at universities.

'That's what she said: Women student's experiences of 'lad culture' in higher education' is a report by the National Union of Students (NUS) which investigates women students' experiences with lad culture and the impact it has on their educational experience.

'Young Women Lead Committee – Report on Sexual Harassment in Schools' provides a starting point for action which should be taken to combat sexual harassment in schools, written by YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement.

Action points for schools and educators

2 Shift perceptions of masculinity

Expose boys to holistic and varied perceptions of masculinity.

1 Appreciate the power of language

Challenge degrading language used by boys about girls and be mindful of your own. Terms like 'darling' or 'man up' might seem harmless, but can actually have an impact on the way students see themselves.

4 Have protective policies in place

Schools must ensure that they have a comprehensive policy in line with the new government report to ensure that teachers are trained and prepared to deal with allegations of sexual misconduct appropriately.

3 Be a role model

Male teachers have an important responsibility to be a good role model to young boys.

5 Ensure comprehensive sex and relationship education

Schools must have important conversations about consent and respect, and challenge ingrained attitudes that encourage harassment or violence towards girls and women.

Conclusion

The ways in which gender interacts with a young person's experience of school are complex, varied, and far-reaching. Stereotypes about skills and intelligence have been shown to permeate the way in which girls are educated in areas such as leadership, STEM, and sports. Unconscious bias from educators and peers not only discourages girls from pursuing different career paths, but can have a devastating effect on confidence and self-esteem, with some girls internalising negative and limiting perceptions of their own abilities. Unequal representation in male and female role models only serves to exacerbate this, crystallising certain perceptions boys and girls may have about what they could and should aspire to be in the future. Meanwhile, societal preconceptions about gender have left girls disproportionately at risk of experiencing bullying and harassment, both on and offline.

Many of these issues are so deeply embedded in our society and culture that they have often been overlooked, or simply accepted as the norm. As such, educators and parents alike can often be under-informed about the challenges young girls face, or ill-equipped to deal with these challenges in a meaningful way.

However, as this report has highlighted, there is a wide array of UK organisations that have already carried out a number of innovative initiatives to begin addressing some of the gender disparities in education. These initiatives include a variety of approaches, from carrying out staff training and providing students and staff with access to resources and learning materials, to running workshops with students and trying out new experimental methods of learning.

Education is an essential part of a young person's development, where their opinions, attitudes, and outlook are shaped and cultivated. While an inspiring teacher or a deeply-rewarding class project can spur a student on to explore new paths or pursue certain interests, a discouraging teacher or unfair system can close doors and narrow potential.

Equipped with the resources and case studies above, it is the responsibility of schools and educators to take action. Only through reflecting on their own practices and working to implement changes, can schools begin to root out ongoing instances of sexism. Ensuring future classes of boys and girls are afforded equal opportunities and support to realise their full potentials, whatever they may be, is a crucial first step towards a future that is truly equal.

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This report was researched and written
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ventureeducation.org
contact@ventureeducation.org



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