

Case study 5

Gender bias refers to the systematic and unfair treatment of individuals based on their gender or sex. It involves making assumptions or judgments about people based on their gender, rather than their individual characteristics, abilities, or merits. Gender bias can take many different forms, including discrimination in hiring or promotion, unequal pay for equal work, stereotyping, and harassment. Gender bias can be conscious or unconscious, and it is often deeply ingrained in cultural attitudes and social structures. It can have serious negative effects on individuals and society as a whole, limiting opportunities and perpetuating inequality.

- **Description:** Rachel, an 11-year-old girl loves cars and has just started 6th-grade class. Rachel loves cars and enjoys talking about them! She wants to become friends with her male classmates who are also interested in cars. But her male classmates frequently dismiss her and do not engage in conversations with her, saying that cars are not a "girl's thing" and that, girls only like makeup. As a result, Rachel feels excluded and discouraged from participating in class discussions and has become less confident in her interests.
- **Keywords:** gender stereotyping/gender bias/exclusion

Needs-solutions action plan

Debunking Gender Role Stereotypes

1. Ask students if they believe that boys and girls might each be "right" for or better at certain types of instruments. Project or pass around the photo collage, Boys and Girls Making Music, and reinforce that anyone can play any instrument. Ask students how the trumpet player might feel if someone told her she should switch to an instrument that's more "lady-like," or what the flute player might do if other kids kept teasing, "You're a girl, only girls play the flute."
2. Ask students how people get their ideas about what girls and boys are "supposed to" do or like. For each response, help students to distinguish myth from reality. For example, if students suggest that boys run faster so they are better suited for soccer, or that girls are neater so they are better suited for housework, challenge these ideas by providing examples of girls and boys who contradict these notions. Emphasize those narrow ideas about boys' and girls' roles can be hurtful to others and limit opportunities for everyone.

3. Ask students for examples of interests or activities, besides playing musical instruments, that some people say are “only for boys/men” or “just for girls/women.” Elicit general categories (e.g., toys) rather than specific items (e.g., Barbies). List their responses on the board or a sheet of chart paper. Examples:

toys/games we play

chores we do

colours we like

hobbies/things we collect

clothes we wear

pets/animals we like

TV shows/movies we watch

songs/singers we like

who we play with

jobs that grown-ups have

sports we play

video games we like

4. Have students get back into their small groups and provide each with a large sheet of construction or chart paper and some drawing implements (crayons, markers, etc.). Assign each group one of the topics generated above and ask students to talk about the ways in which girls and boys are set apart (e.g., if the topic is sports, students may discuss how only the boys play soccer during recess and how they don't let the girls join in). After a few minutes of discussion, instruct students to draw a picture depicting what it would look like if girls and boys were not set apart, and to write a caption at the bottom (e.g., “Boys and girls playing soccer together happily in the schoolyard”).

5. Conclude the class. Have each group briefly share its work and hang their illustrations where everyone can see them. Emphasize the idea that attaching a gender to activities or interests is hurtful and limiting.

Boys and Girls Making Music

