“This groundbreaking report has already become a classic.”
—DEBORAH TANNEN

How Schools Shortchange Girls

THE AAUW REPORT

A STUDY OF MAJOR FINDINGS ON GIRLS AND EDUCATION

Commissioned by the AAUW Educational Foundation and researched by The Wellesley College Center for Research on Women
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Authors for Part One were Susan Bailey, Lynn Burbridge, and Barbara Jackson; for Part Two, Lynn Burbridge, Patricia Campbell, Susan Bailey, and Fern Marx; for Part Three, Patricia Campbell and Susan Bailey; for Part Four, Susan Bailey, Peggy McIntosh, David and Myra Sadker, Janice Earle, Margaret Stubbs, and Gretchen Wilbur. Appendix A was compiled by Barbara Jackson.

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In the midst of national education-reform efforts earlier in this decade it became disturbingly apparent to members of the American Association of University Women that girls were not adequately represented or addressed in the wide-ranging discussions and debates taking place throughout the country. Girls, in fact, were nearly invisible.

We knew, based on the work of Carol Gilligan, Myra and David Sadker, and others, that many girls undergo an erosion of self-esteem during adolescence. Studies indicate that most girls in first grade have skills and ambitions comparable to those of boys, whereas girls finishing high school have disproportionately less confidence in their academic abilities than do boys. We wanted to know why—and what role schooling plays in this gap.

Before we could add our voice in a meaningful way, we needed a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of America’s girls and boys. How are girls faring in our nation’s schools? How are they doing in contrast to boys? What happens in the classroom? Is education really equitable?

These fundamental yet challenging questions led the AAUW Educational Foundation to explore what girls experience in school, from the first days of kindergarten to the closing days of high school. In the early 1990s we launched an investigation to find out as much as we could about how girls are taught and how they learn in America’s public schools. We issued a request for proposals for a thorough literature review on the subject of girls and education. After reviewing proposals from researchers around the country, the AAUW Educational Foundation board commissioned the Wellesley
College Center for Research on Women to analyze and synthesize reports and studies documenting the experiences, behaviors, courses of study and learning environments of girls in school.

*How Schools Shortchange Girls — The AAUW Report* is the result of this groundbreaking project. The report reflects more than that 1,300 studies and is credited with drawing national attention to the disturbing evidence that girls are not receiving the same quality, or even quantity, of education as their brothers. By stereotyping women’s roles, popular culture plays a role in shortchanging girls by limiting their horizons and expectations. Unintentionally, schools sometimes follow suit, depriving girls of classroom attention, ignoring the value of cooperative learning, and presenting texts and lessons in which female role models are conspicuously absent.

*How Schools Shortchange Girls — The AAUW Report* explores issues that are often hidden from view and highlights a problem of national proportions and consequence. This book not only addresses the problems but offers the groundwork for solutions, outlining recommendations to help ensure that girls and boys are both encouraged—and given the tools—to maximize their potential.

For more than a century AAUW has tackled tough education end equity issues by studying, then acting. AAUW’s first national study, undertaken in 1885, provided sufficient evidence to dispel the popular myth that higher education was harmful to a woman’s health. In the 1990’s *How Schools Shortchange Girls — The AAUW Report* show us how girls—tomorrow’s women—are faring during their formative school experiences.

A well-reasoned call to action, this book underscores the necessity of shared responsibility for the education of our nation’s youth. The information presented here is spawning a heightened sensitivity to the needs of girls. The Ms. Foundation, for example, credits AAUW’s research and the work of Carol Gilligan and others for helping to inspire its national “Take Our Daughters to Work” Day. Gender equity provisions written into Goals 2000: Educate America and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, both passed in 1994, likewise were influenced by AAUW’s seminal research.
What is needed to further the futures of our children and our country? Concerted awareness and action on the part of students, parents, teachers, and administrators will enable us to provide the best education possible for all girls and boys. We need to help each and every student reach beyond stereotypes to learn the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills so crucial in our increasingly complex and demanding world.

Our country cannot afford to have half its students shortchanged in school. By the year 2005, women will make up 48 percent of our work force. To remain competitive in the global economy, we need to build the skills of all our children. If we shortchange girls, we shortchange America.

Alice Ann Leidel
President
AAUW Educational Foundation
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