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# **Gender bias in textbooks: a hidden obstacle on the road to gender equality in education**

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# GENDER BIAS IN TEXTBOOKS: A HIDDEN OBSTACLE ON THE ROAD TO GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

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## I. INTRODUCTION.

### A. The Gender Equity Goals in Education and Their Importance

Goals matter so let’s begin by quoting some remarkable ones verbatim (UNESCO 2003:27):

- Goal 5 of the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Goals (2000) calls for “Eliminating **gender disparities** in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving **gender equality** in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.”
- Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 is to “Promote gender equality and empower women,” and its Target 4 is: “Eliminate **gender disparity** in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.”

The road to those goals began at the EFA conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. It drew world attention to achieving Universal Primary Education and closing the gender gap in education. By then, evidence was emerging about the cornucopia of benefits gained by educating girls. They encompassed the girl, her family, her future children, her community and the wealth and well-being of her nation (Blumberg 1989). No negative impacts were encountered. Female education, for example, was found to be a powerful contraceptive – at a time when evidence revealed high fertility to be inversely linked to national income growth (Hess 1988). And all but one (#5) of the following 8 benefits claimed for girls’ education had been empirically related to lower fertility: (1) a later age of marriage; (2) increased contraceptive usage; (3) lower fertility [itself]; (4) dramatically reduced infant and child mortality; (5) improved child nutrition and general family health; (6) greater participation in the waged, modern sector labor force; (7) higher earnings, and (8) increased national development as measured by GNP (Blumberg 1989:xviii-xix).

By 2000, when these EFA and MDG goals were adopted, even more benefits had emerged, e.g.: In a 100-country study, Dollar and Gatti (1999) learned that a 1 percent increase in the share of females with secondary education raises annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percent. Also, if the gender parity gap in the regions where it remains largest – Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa – had fallen at the same rate as in East Asia during 1960-1990, their per capita GNP would have grown by 0.5-0.9 percent more per year (Klasen 1999).

But timely achievement of even the easier goal of closing the gender gap in *access* will be a challenge. At least 70 countries fell short of gender parity in primary education by 2005 and 24 are considered unlikely to achieve gender parity in either primary or secondary school by 2015 (UNESCO 2006). Consequently, it’s now clear that the chances of reaching the more ambitious EFA goal of gender *equality* in education by 2015 are remote at best.

Nonetheless, the *statement* of the goals and targets, and their backing by almost all segments of the international community, provides a momentum that has not previously existed for progress (Colclough 2007). And the rate of progress has been palpable since the adoption of these goals and measures at the turn of the century: despite some “off-track” countries, there has been a very widespread rise in *gender parity in enrollments*. Also, girls’ *achievement* is growing: in a number of mostly middle- and high-income countries, girls are maintaining their edge in reading while making progress toward closing the gap in mathematics and science (Ma 2007).

## B. Obstacles – in Plain Sight and Hidden – on the Road to Gender Equity in Education

However, the obstacles that still abound along the route to full gender equality in education remain just as important to consider as the goals themselves.

Some of the stumbling blocks to achieving gender parity and, ultimately, equality in education are quite visible. As noted, they tend to be concentrated in the three regions of South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East-North Africa, especially in low-income countries there. One analysis of 16 such countries, 14 of them in sub-Saharan Africa (Wils et al. 2005), revealed two disturbing patterns: First, concerning educational *quality*, only 37.44 percent of boys and 33.25 percent of girls were able to read by the time they completed primary school. Second, concerning *gender equity*, the fact that girls lagged behind in reading, their strong suit, is another indicator that gender equality in education is unlikely to be achieved by 2015 or in a reasonably short timeframe thereafter in the most severely “off-track” countries.

In the face of these chilling statistics, the problem of gender bias in textbooks (or the related issue of gender bias in curricula and teachers’ treatment of students) appears less urgent.<sup>1</sup>

Still, even if not a crisis, such gender bias has consequences. Specifically, this paper makes a two-fold basic argument: (1) Gender bias in textbooks does matter, and (2) It turns out to be one of the best camouflaged – and hardest to budge – rocks in the road to gender equality in education. The paper also argues several additional points: (3) Gender bias in textbooks is far more widespread geographically than the remaining gender gap in parity noted above. (4) Additionally, gender bias in texts involves a common pattern: studies from the full gamut of developing and developed countries find that females tend to be greatly underrepresented and both males and females depicted in such gender-stereotyped ways, that girls and boys’ visions of who they are and what they can become are constrained. (5) Linked to this, in many countries, is gender bias in formal curricula, so that girls are led away from mathematics and science and into gender-stereotyped courses of study; meanwhile boys remain disadvantaged and relatively unaided in reading and language skills in countries where they are behind in these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> This is despite the fact that the 2007 Education for All report (UNESCO 2006:2) identifies “stereotypes [that persist] in learning materials and, too often, [differing] teachers’ expectations of girls and boys” as two issues that negatively affect gender equality. Earlier, the 2003/4 EFA volume had proclaimed that “Full gender equality in education would imply that girls and boys are offered the same chances to go to school and *enjoy teaching methods, curricula and academic orientation unaffected by gender bias*” (2003:17, emphasis added).

Indeed, all these biases and their effects are part of the “hidden curriculum” (Stromquist et al. 1998). To this must be added the often gender-biased texts used in teacher training, as well as the reinforcement of gender-stereotyped attitudes that this inculcates among teachers.

The final result of all this bias can be a sizeable, even if largely unnoticed, impediment on the road to gender equality in education. Many girls seem to be navigating around this almost invisible obstacle and the taken-for-granted gender stratification and role system camouflaging it. But we have no way of knowing how much faster and easier their progress might be if they didn't have to deal with this hindrance in the first place. And we have no way of knowing if that statistic about girls' weaker performance in reading in the poorest school systems is affected by the additional discouragement of encountering gender bias in learning materials and teachers.

The gender biases beneath the camouflage began to be exposed around 1970-71, when activists and/or educators, mainly in the U.S., started to systematically document them. They used content analyses of textbooks and other more qualitative methodologies. Soon the effort to expose and ameliorate gender biases in textbooks (and, sometimes, in curricula) spread around the world.

What is striking about these far-flung studies is how similar their findings turned out to be:

- Whether measured in lines of text, proportion of named characters (human or animal), mentions in titles, citations in indexes, and so forth, females were underrepresented.
- Moreover, both genders were shown in highly gender-stereotyped ways in the household as well as in the occupational division of labor, and in the actions, attitudes and traits portrayed. (To wit: women were accommodating, nurturant drudges; girls passive conformists, and boys and men did almost all the impressive, noble, exciting and fun things and almost none of the caring, or “feminine” acts or jobs.)
- Almost everyone who has done comparative research on gender bias in textbooks has reached essentially the same conclusion. For example Ikuko Anjo Jassey in Japan found:

Virtually all of the studies concluded that textbooks have not adequately reflected the range of women's roles and occupations in the real world. In general, it seems gender biased images remain strongly present in school textbooks throughout the world (Jassey 1998:88).

The high level of consistency of the findings has affected the presentation of results in this paper: there will be no detailed table summarizing dozens of very similar studies. We started this project with an elaborate coding scheme so that we could do a “meta-analysis” of the existing literature on gender bias in textbooks. Soon we saw that almost all content analyses were telling essentially the same story, with minor variations – regardless of (1) the country/region in which they had been carried out; (2) its income/level of development; (3) the level of instruction covered (from primary through secondary to teacher training); (4) the subject matter (children's general readers to specialized books on mathematics, science, social studies, etc.), or (5) the date of publication (although a generally slow reduction in gender bias is discernible in the typical “second generation” study conducted at least a decade after the “first generation” research). Accordingly, we've decided to present the argument in prose exposition.

Its jumping off point is that **textbooks cannot be ignored**. Why not? Consider the following statistics:

- Sadker and Zittleman (2007:144) cite research “that students spend as much as 80 to 95 percent of classroom time using textbooks and that teachers make a majority of their instructional decisions based on the textbook.”
- And a Canadian study found that the average teacher uses textbooks for 70 to 90 percent of classroom time (Baldwin and Baldwin 1992).

Moreover, textbooks also reflect curricula. And both textbooks and curricula tend to be expensive enough to overhaul that most poor countries don’t undertake a “clean sweep” major revision in the absence of significant regime change (Benavot 2007) – and/or outside funding. Below, we will see that there have been more sources of funding available to identify gender biases in learning materials than to undertake the more costly work to revamp them. People have not been known to demonstrate in the street or march to the presidential palace demanding the elimination of gender bias in educational materials. Nor should they be expected to do so: both curricula and textbooks reflect the larger gender stereotype and stratification system (Stromquist et al. 1998), and the taken-for-granted invisibility and inertia that this creates. As the old Chinese proverb asks, “does the fish know it swims in the ocean?” To return to a dry land metaphor, it is time to strip the camouflage off the hidden obstacle of gender bias in learning materials. Only then can it be seen for what it is, analyzed and, hopefully, pushed off the road.

Organization of the paper. Section II presents illustrative studies from three “majority world” countries: Syria, India and Romania. All three are at different points on the trajectory to gender parity and equality in education but, once the camouflage is stripped away, all reveal a similar pattern of gender bias in their textbooks. Section III presents a case study of what has happened vis-à-vis gender bias in textbooks in the U.S. from the early 1970s to the present. Among its findings are that (1) it takes passion and free labor and/or support from donors or the state to empirically establish gender bias in textbooks (and curricula), and (2) it takes considerably more funding to reform them. So Section IV “follows the money.” It considers two examples from developing countries: (1) The Ford Foundation support that led to documentation of gender bias in Chinese textbooks at most educational levels (as reported in two special issues of the journal, *Chinese Education and Society*, in 2002-2003), and (2) a brief look at the World Bank support, at a much higher level of funding, that introduced explicit components – aimed at reducing gender bias in textbooks, curricula and, often, teacher treatment of girls vs. boys – into large-scale education projects. Section V looks at different paths from studies to action in selected developing countries, focusing primarily on Latin America and the Caribbean. Then, Section VI looks briefly at the Nordic countries – especially Sweden – where reforms of curricula and textbooks appear to have gone the farthest. Finally, Section VII presents the summary, conclusions/lessons learned and recommendations.

## II. DISCOVERING THE CONTOURS OF THE CAMOUFLAGED ROCK OF GENDER BIAS IN TEXTBOOKS: ILLUSTRATIVE STUDIES FROM DEVELOPING NATIONS

Studies dealing with three countries are discussed in some detail here: (1) **Syria**; (2) the state of West Bengal, as well as an overview of **India**, and (3) **Romania**. The studies entail varying levels of quantitative content analysis and qualitative approaches. And the three nations represent three different points on the road to gender equity in education. To illustrate this, the heading for each country includes its male/female Gross Enrollment Ratios (GERs) and Gender Parity Index (GPI) in secondary education (where there is considerable variation among the three nations).

### A. Syria (2004 secondary education GER= 65% for males; 61% for females; Gender Parity Index=0.93 (UNESCO 2006:286-287))

In 1985, Alrabaa published “Sex Division of Labor in Syrian School Textbooks” (no newer work by Alrabaa or for Syria was found but this research merits detailed attention). A total of 28 textbooks used in grades 8-12 were analyzed and found to be male-biased in content and language; indeed, the author concluded that females were derogated and victimized. The books’ annual readership was over 500,000 students and the texts spanned all major subjects.

Alrabaa points out that the bias in these textbooks occurred despite: (1) a 1963 education policy making the preparation and approval of textbooks a highly centralized, mostly state-controlled enterprise (ibid.:337); (2) a 1965 Syrian Government proposal to create a curriculum conducive to sex-role equality, and (3) a 1975 campaign which called upon Syrian citizens to “remove any practice derogatory to the dignity of women.”

In addition to a quantitative study of occupations assigned to male and female characters, a subset of textbooks prescribed in 1979-81 were subjected to a more intensive quantitative analysis of themes and images. The two studies’ main *quantitative* findings are as follows:

- First, concerning prevalence: males proved the leading characters in 75 percent of the 353 lessons analyzed; they also were 87 percent of those portrayed in 54 biographies (ibid.)
- Second, concerning the division of labor: the analysis counted a total of 463 occupations: 84 percent (391) were filled by males and 16 percent (72) by females. The distribution by frequency scores (N = 2,083) is almost identical: 85 percent males vs. 15 percent females. Looking at the specific occupations engaged in by men, there were 89 presidents/kings, 52 soldiers, 44 employees, 43 students, 42 MDs as well as 42 teachers, 30 poets, 28 peasants, 28 writers, and 27 sheikhs (there also were 19 scientists and 19 political leaders). All told, 343 occupations were assigned exclusively to males. In contrast, only 12 occupations were assigned to females: housewives (21) predominate, and teacher and nurse also proved common (ibid.:339-341). Overall, women almost invariably were shown as economically dependent domestic creatures.
- Third, in terms of favorable images: For males, brave was the most common (N=82), followed by popular (75). Rounding out the “top 10” list were strong (54), kind (41), achiever (50), innovative (49), adventurous (48), hard working (44), generous (40) and

educated (39). The list for females included beautiful (42), kind (23 – this is one of only two overlaps in the top 10), loving (20), faithful (19), motherly (19), compassionate (18), generous (17), loyal (17), educated (14 – the other overlap) and dependent (14) (ibid.).

*Qualitative findings:* Additional analyses found that male-centered language was used (specifically, masculine nouns such as “mankind,” and pronouns such as “he”). Thus, male words served as all-inclusive terms for both males and females.

Another analysis looked at traditional sex roles. Males were depicted as “masters” in their homes. They didn’t consult females even on such household-oriented topics as controlling children, let alone on such issues as household budgeting. Females were chastised for disagreeing with the males. Often, they were depicted as fixated on maintaining the household to a high standard in order to make the husband happy (ibid.:343).

Still another topic was “derogation of women.” This was the undertone in many descriptions otherwise praising women for subservience and devotion to domestic duties. Females often were portrayed as manipulative, jealous creatures; as “fussy do-nothings;” as weak, irrational, superstitious, or “despicable” (ibid.:345).

The final topic involved “victimization and acquiescence.” Female sex-role victimization was not infrequent, according to Alrabaa. The author also notes: “The plots of texts project an exaggerated view of male power” (ibid.:346). Alrabaa also found some men portrayed as obsessed by “muscle-bound masculinity,” as well as instances where women who deviated from traditional roles depicted as proper were physically punished (ibid.). Moreover, “the textbooks imply that women should endure an abusive male, accepting his violence as ‘natural’...the female’s silent suffering is highlighted as an inherently good female quality” (ibid.).

Still, Syria’s record on education is closer to EFA gender goals than is that of India, which has made less progress toward gender parity in enrollment. Additionally, India has one of the world’s most skewed sex ratios, an increasingly used indicator of gender discrimination (Blumberg and Holian 2004): 92.7 women per 100 men, vs. 105-106 women to 100 men in developed industrial countries, and even 102 women to 100 men in Sub-Saharan Africa (where women are valued as farmers; they raise up to 80 percent of locally grown food crops (Saito and Weidemann 1990)).

B. India (2004 secondary education GER=59% for males; 47% for females; Gender Parity Index=0.80 (UNESCO 2006:290-291))

A brief 2002 article by Jon Ellis concerning school textbooks in the state of West Bengal is not as sophisticated as Alrabaa’s study in Syria. But the magnitude of gender bias he encountered in the state’s main History and Geography texts (Parts 1 and 2, published in 1992 and 1996, respectively) appears to be about as strong.

Part 1 has 71 pictures of males (76 percent) vs. 22 of females (24 percent), a better record than many. But its discussion of Early Humans wrongly depicts women mainly in subservient roles. [Ellis doesn’t note this but there is considerable gender equality among contemporary hunters and gatherers, and studies have found that women’s gathering often accounts for 60-80 percent

of the diet (this literature is reviewed in Blumberg's 2006 background paper for the 2007 UNESCO Education for All report).]

And Part 2 shows far more extreme gender bias than Part 1: it has 50 pictures of males (96 percent) vs. 2 of females (4 percent). One is shown carrying a pitcher of water from a pond; the other is picking tea. Not a single woman is depicted in the chapter about "Main Ways of Earning a Living." Nor, in another illustration, are any women shown as receiving land titles from a male government officer. Ellis claims that this "is a false view of reality since in West Bengal, numerous households have women as their heads, who hold [titles] in their own name."

The author concludes that the "gender bias against women found in the text and pictures of these books makes them unacceptable for use." He has a particular use in mind: The government was about to expand adoption of these books from class three and four of middle schools throughout the state to a new "city-wide program in Kolkatta" that would provide primary education for thousands of deprived urban children. Based on his analysis, Ellis opposed this.

In India, are such gender-biased textbooks unique to West Bengal? Firoz Bakht Ahmed (2006) takes a national perspective in another brief article. He notes that since 1982-83, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERTS) "has been laying stress on removing gender disparities – specifically emphasizing the elimination of sex stereotypes and sex biases from textbooks." He also concludes that "be it a book on science, social studies, mathematics, English or Hindi, women can be seen fetching water, working in kitchens or cleaning the room...[and that, consistently,] lessons...are male-centric."

He cites a survey by Friends of Education that noted that the average primary school textbook has 115-130 pages and carries 80-100 illustrations. Their study found that "over half of the illustrations depict [solely] men and boys...and only six percent show [solely] women and girls." Analysis of the six mathematics books used in the primary classes showed that men dominate activities representing commercial, occupational and marketing situations, whereas not a single woman is shown as a shopkeeper, merchant, executive, engineer or seller.

Ahmed's overall conclusion is that: "Despite the NCERT having developed a set of guidelines for the elimination of gender stereotyping in textual material and the same disseminated to the authors and publishers, not much has changed."

### C. Romania (2004 secondary education GER=85% for males; 86% for females; Gender Parity Index=1.01 (UNESCO 2006:286-287))

Mihaela Miroiu's 2004 journal article on Romania rounds out this section. Thus far, we have seen that Syria has a slight gender gap in education and India a larger one. As we also have seen, both countries have proclaimed official efforts at the national level to reduce or eliminate gender bias in education and textbooks, although the analyses belie these. Will Romania, where girls do not lag behind in enrollment, have less stereotyped and gender-biased textbooks?

Like its neighbors, Romania has transitioned from a socialist to a market economy. Its gender enrollment patterns also share more similarity with other Eastern European ex-socialist states

than with Syria or India. According to Miroiu's statistics, girls have a small edge on overall enrollment (67.8 percent, vs. 66.5 percent for boys). Specifically, although boys slightly outnumber girls in primary and gymnasias levels, females are 54 percent of high school pupils. And girls get 5.24 percent higher grades, on average. Miroiu also argues that "the education system must overcome the conservatism of the general population" about gender-and-education-related values (ibid.:87). She finds, however, that textbooks are not taking a lead role in this.

First, she defines some terms related to gender, including "gender neutral," which she terms "the tendency to ignore gender differences as being irrelevant and thus to perpetuate stereotypes as they exist" (2004:86). Second, she notes that:

Several studies on textbooks...reveal gender problems. Texts are generally gender neutral but their content is a more significant promoter of gender stereotypes than are curricula (2004:90). The data are striking.

Illustrations show a stark disparity: "of 106 textbooks analyzed, the percentage of the pictures illustrating girls/women is...12.8 percent." While first and second grade textbook pictures depict 24 percent girls/women, the proportion drops steadily to 10 percent by 12<sup>th</sup> grade. (An interesting exception involves book covers: 45 percent contain images of both sexes.)

Content. The overall percentages are less extreme than for the illustrations (other than book covers; see above): of 4,318 human images, 64.8 percent are male, 33.2 percent are female [presumably, gender in the remaining 2 percent could not be ascertained].

But when it comes to depiction of trades and occupations, the pattern is much more extreme. Textbooks for third to twelfth grade contain only 2.2 percent of women working (whereas national statistics for 2004 show more than half of all women to be economically active). Out of 5,620 images, 1,306 contain recognizable trades: 1,290 are performed by men, vs. only 16 by women (ibid.:91). Similarly, only 1 percent of men are placed in domestic situations.

Textbook subject matter. The same basic pattern emerges here – and quite strongly. Of the 16,600 lines and 415 pages analyzed in a primary level language and communication text, only 8 lines featured women in public life and 3 lines men in the home. Of 1,966 problems in mathematics and sciences only 282 contain people – and "none of them are in non-traditional roles" (ibid.:92). The situation is hardly more gender-egalitarian in other disciplines. For example, in Romanian language and literature, the "main characters are all masculine; in history, women are wives and mothers of leaders, and Roma women "simply aren't there;" in arts, there "are only male composers and artists" (ibid.:93).

Authorship. The above results cannot be ascribed to an absence of female authors. In Romania, women write about half the primary school texts (52% of 404 authors), and they comprise 43 percent of the 1,655 authors of high school texts. Moreover, "There is no direct correlation between the gender of the author and the level of gender fairness promoted in the texts" (ibid.).

\* \* \*

This small set of examples should suffice to illustrate the general patterns for the last ~35 years. There are hints that *higher levels of patriarchy* in a society seem to be *associated with more intensely negative depiction of females* (i.e., Romanian descriptions were gender-stereotyped but females did not seem as disparaged). But three other dimensions – (1) underrepresentation of females in words and illustrations, (2) gender stereotypes about occupational and domestic roles, and (3) gender-stereotyped individual attributes and actions – seem equally prevalent across geographic boundaries and levels of patriarchy. In sum, the patterns reveal remarkable convergence over space and time.

### III. DISCOVERING AND COMBATING GENDER BIAS IN TEXTBOOKS IN THE U.S.

Even though the key focus of this paper is gender inequity in learning materials in developing countries, it pays to examine how this issue was discovered and addressed in the United States.

#### A. The Problem is Named and Measured: A Saga that Begins in the Early 1970s

Actually, one earlier study was done in 1946. Child, Potter and Levine (1960) discovered that primary school textbooks often portrayed females rather negatively and stereotypically, e.g., as manipulative. Nothing happened. But around 1970, the “second wave women’s movement” burst onto the scene. And a lot began to happen. In 1971, activist Marjorie U’Ren published a content analysis of “The Image of Woman in Textbooks” in an iconic feminist reader. She analyzed 30 of the newest textbooks adopted or recommended for use in second to sixth grade California schools. (As discussed below, textbook adoption is done at sub-national level in the U.S.; the biggest states, e.g., California and Texas, have a huge influence on what is published.)

U’Ren’s 1971 findings are worth summarizing, since they map out the terrain – and preview the findings – of large numbers of studies that quickly began to follow.

She found that at least 75 percent of the main characters were male, but because stories about female characters were shorter, “the average book devotes less than 20 percent of its story space to the female sex” (1971:318-319). She also found that “many books devote only 15 percent of their illustrations to girls or women” – and that drawings showed a far higher proportion of males than photographs of street scenes (ibid.:326).

Substantively, she found stories about girls to be duller. They are shown as subordinate to brothers or doing uninteresting things and receiving no recognition even for those accomplishments. Concerning adult women, in none of the 30 books did a mother suggest a solution to a family crisis – fathers came home and took over. In one book, Madame Curie is depicted as a mere helpmate for her husband’s projects, and in the illustration, she is shown peeping over her husband’s shoulder while he engages a male colleague in serious dialogue (ibid.:323). U’Ren also documents a picture of adult females shown in subordinate, housewife-type activities (“textbook writers seem to have reduced all females to a common denominator of cook, cleaner and seamstress” (ibid.:327)) – rarely even driving cars. The only contemporary woman depicted as a professional is a young female scientist described as engaged in a project she was assigned to work on that “was not her own idea” (ibid.:324). In addition to women being shown as not receiving any public recognition, their pursuit of economic empowerment is portrayed negatively (ibid.). And in almost every story intended to be humorous, the butt of the joke is a female. In contrast, boys are depicted doing all sorts of adventurous and interesting activities while males of all ages are shown as strong, with greater mental perseverance as well as moral strength (ibid.:325).

She also discovered that “such textbook stories are quite frequently written by females” (ibid.), another finding that has often been replicated since then. Interestingly, however, U’Ren makes a unique allegation: she claims that textbooks written for coeducation early

in the 20<sup>th</sup> century present a “much more favorable picture” of active and sometimes adventurous or accomplished women than those portrayed after 1930 (ibid.:328). (She attributes this to supposed 19<sup>th</sup> century “rough frontier equality” rather than the peak years of the “first wave women’s movement,” however.)

Also in 1971, some analyses by professional educators began to appear, e.g., Trecker’s study of “Women in U.S. History High School Textbooks,” which covered the most popular 1960s texts and showed an almost total omission of “women of importance.” The next year, Weitzman et al. published an article in a top-ranked sociology journal quantifying gender bias in picture books for pre-school children. From that point on, studies multiplied quickly (see Hahn et al. 1985).

### B. New Legislation Changes the Underlying Climate Concerning Gender Equity in Education

In 1972, “Title IX” was passed. This was a broad proscription against sex discrimination in any U.S. government-funded education program or activity. Its most famous provisions involve opening up female participation in athletics. Title IX did not specifically prohibit gender bias in textbooks. But it did prohibit gender stereotypes in career counseling, or materials aimed at recruiting males and females into different careers. Specifically, institutions had to “ensure that recruitment practices, classroom treatment, assignments, facilities, career assessment tests, career counseling, and evaluations are free from sex stereotypes” (Zittleman 2007:84). Title IX never was funded at a level that would have permitted widespread enforcement of its many provisions. Nevertheless, it helped change the climate in the United States. (Similarly, the EFA and MDG goals and targets adopted 28 years later would do the same at the international level.)

Then, in 1974, the Women’s Educational Equity Act was passed. It specifically provided funding for research and training to help schools eliminate sex bias. Hitherto, insufficient money had been a big constraint in institutionalizing a more gender-equitable approach to education.

### C. Activists Measure Textbook Bias and Spur the Adoption of Codes and Standards

In fact, once Title IX was passed but even before the 1974 funding bill was adopted, a strong activist/volunteer effort arose to curb gender bias in textbooks. Newly energized feminists put pressure on both large, important states and textbook publishers to reform their ways. Texas is one of the most populous states but it is generally conservative in its culture, so the efforts of Texas feminists to tackle gender bias in textbooks are all the more noteworthy.

In a telephone interview, Frances Hicks (2007) provided an insider’s view. When she became involved, she was a mother of three (one in the Texas public schools) who had decided to pursue higher education. She enrolled in community college and became the president of her local chapter of NOW, the National Organization for Women. She soon became active in grassroots efforts by a coalition of feminist organizations trying to weed out bias in textbooks. Their campaign began in 1972, when the “second wave women’s movement” was reaching new heights.

Hicks described what happened in 1973-4. Pressured by the campaign, the Texas State Board of Education already had responded by adopting a Proclamation, paragraph 6-2 of which called for

textbooks to “present men and women participating in a variety of roles and activities, including women in leadership and other positive roles with which they are not traditionally identified. Illustrations and written material shall present goal choices and life styles for girls and women in addition to marriage and homemaking. Economical, political, social, and cultural contributions of men and women, past and present, shall be presented objectively” (Press Kit 1974).

On September 11, 1974, the feminist groups presented their protests at hearings on textbooks held by the Texas Education Agency. This was a follow-up to their August presentation of over 400 “Bills of Particulars” written by 147 women and 3 men activists concerning textbooks being considered for adoption for the next five year period. These were forwarded to the publishers, who, by Texas law, must reply to each in writing; later hearings were to resolve these objections.

The activists had analyzed all new textbooks, covering kindergarten through twelfth grade, being considered for adoption by the Texas Education Agency. They undertook a content analysis, counting the number of males and females in illustrations, and the roles depicted for each gender. They also coded whether females were watching or doing. In addition, they cited egregious quotes from the books and analyzed each in a two-column format. Here are two brief examples, one from a Teacher’s Manual for a reader and the other from a science textbook:

Quotation from Textbook

Activists’ Analysis

“It is obvious that the lovely princess would have a difficult time finding a husband; no man would want a wife who could outdo him in so many ways. Josefa is wise enough to understand...that her ability may prove her undoing...”

J. B. Lippincott Co., Basic Reading-L, Manual, p. 2

“...men will have to know about nuclear power. And girls will be needed to work as stewardesses on the giant submarines.”

Houghton Mifflin Co., Serendipity, p. 357.

The Teacher’s Manual accepts without comment the situation that the conventional courtship relationship in this story requires both the man and the woman to deceive each other and themselves.

O brave new man-made world, where men are men and women are girls; where men know about power and girls are “needed” as servants.

In a handout prepared for a protest before the Textbook Selection Committee on October 1, 1974, the activists noted some (now-familiar) patterns of bias:

- Their analysis revealed an average of three men or boys to every woman or girl; in some books it was 10:1 or more. Moreover, the ratio widened going from first to twelfth grades (the same phenomenon noted in the Romania analysis, above).
- They also found an almost total lack of work roles for women,<sup>2</sup> who were almost always portrayed as wives and mothers, and had characters that were both passive and menial.
- They wrote: “it is rare...to see a warm, comforting mother, but not rare to see a shrewish one, a confused one, or an incapable one...There is also hostility toward women to be found...If a story character is contemptible, ridiculous, fails in endeavor, or lacks human dignity, you can expect the character to be female. Males make derogatory remarks about women in selection after selection. It is nearly unheard of for the reverse to be shown.”
- But they also noted that books varied in levels of sexism and that some publishers already “have made changes in the direction of fairness” (“Introduction” 1974).

(Frances Hicks continued her activism on this issue through the 1970s. She finished her Ph.D. and became an academic. In the late 1980s-early 1990s, she served on an official State of Virginia task force that examined gender bias in textbooks. By that time, she found that the problem had become institutionalized, and was being addressed by paid education professionals rather than activist volunteers.)

More generally, although textbooks are usually adopted at the state level and supplied by schools, there is more centralization than might be inferred from the fact that the U.S. has 50 states. As noted, it is the large ones that have more clout. Moreover, the textbook industry is more centralized than the states. So in order to assure sales to their main (large state) markets, publishers were willing to adopt codes and standards that, in theory, would reduce (if not eliminate) the problem of gender bias in textbooks.

Furthermore, the same activist “second wave women’s movement” that brought pressure to bear on textbook publishers and their associations concomitantly lobbied the different professional associations (e.g., the American Psychological Association and the National Council for Teachers of English) to promote gender equity in a variety of ways. Consequently, in the 1970s and 1980s, both textbook publishers and professional associations:

issued guidelines for nonracist and nonsexist books, suggesting how to include and fairly portray different groups in the curriculum. As a result, textbooks became more balanced in their description of underrepresented groups; but problems of biased instructional material persist (Sadker and Zittleman 2007:144).

What about progress since then? Even though recent content analyses of textbooks that measure the proportion of materials involving women and girls find only modest rates of improvement, their indicators almost never measure *intensity*. Today, it would be exceptional to find as sexist

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<sup>2</sup> In contrast, by 1970, fully half of U.S. women 18-64 were in the labor force (Oppenheimer 1973).

a comment in a children's textbook as that about men=nuclear power; "girls"=stewardesses on giant submarines. This introduces the topic of "second generation" research.

#### D. Measuring the Pace of Progress: Second Generation Studies

By the 1990s, various "second generation" studies began to analyze the persistence (or not) of gender bias in a variety of substantive fields. Most showed modest improvements (sometimes very modest indeed). Three sets are reviewed here: (1) high school history texts, both U.S. history and world history; (2) children's illustrated books, and (3) teacher training textbooks.

History. First, Clark et al. (2004) carried out a quantitative study that looked at six high school-level American history textbooks from each of three decades: 1960s, 1980s and 1990s.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the first 1970s academic study of textbook bias in the U.S. covered the same subject (Trecker 1971); she had found that 1960s texts omitted almost all women of importance. Thirty-three years later, Clark et al. found fairly moderate – but statistically significant – improvements: women had been only 4.9 percent of names in indexes in the 1960s, but 12.7 percent in the 1980s and 16.3 percent in the 1990s. The study's five other indicators also showed the same mild-to-moderately positive pattern. The authors conclude that the depiction of gender has improved modestly since the 1960s. They credit the feminist movement and earlier studies (e.g., Trecker 1971; Tetrault 1986) for the gains.

Next, Clark et al. (2005) turned to world history texts used in American high schools over the same three decades. They again chose six top texts from each decade and used six indicators. This time, four of the six indicators increased a small but statistically significant amount. For example, the proportion of women in the books' indexes increased from 3.2 percent in the 1960s to 5.9 percent in the 1980s to 10.6 percent in the 1990s. Note, however, that all rates for world history were below those for U.S. history books; in fact, the 1990s world history rate still fell below that found in 1980s American history texts, and only four of six indicators rose. Clark et al. again attribute the gains to the feminist movement and earlier studies but they add women authors as another possible reason: the only world history book with a female first author, Ellis and Esler (1997), had the highest – but still moderate – scores on mentions of women.

Children's illustrated books. Davis and McDaniel (1999) replicated Czaplinski's (1972) analysis of 1940-71 winners of the Caldecott award for children's illustrated books. They analyzed 1972-1997 data. Characters were 63 percent male/37 percent female for 1940-1971. The comparable figure for 1972-1997 was 61 percent male/39 percent female – a scant 2 percent rise. The statistics for "characters portrayed through pictures" actually tilted further toward males: they were 52 percent in the earlier period but had risen to 60 percent in the later period. The statistics on proportion of females [merely] appearing in pictures rose, however, from a low of 19 percent in the 1960s to 31 percent in the 1970s to 36 percent in the 1980s and then 35 percent in the

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, they compared the 2002 edition of Boorstin and Kelley with their earlier 1992 text (which was in the 1990s sample). The 1992 volume had been skewered in Sadker and Sadker's *Failing at Fairness* (1994) for scanty inclusion of women. Clark et al. found no improvement between 1992 and 2002: the index showed only 11 percent women both times. They also note that Sadker and Sadker had asked hundreds of high school seniors to name 20 famous women in American history; the average student could name only 4 or 5.

1990s. Overall, however, the pace of change in picture books for young children is even slower than in the history books aimed at high school students.

Three other studies of children's picture books echo similar findings: Crabb and Bielawski (1994) analyzed gender-stereotyped use of material culture – household artifacts vs. production artifacts – in Caldecott Award books, 1937-89. They found females associated with the former and males with the latter, with no change over time. Hamilton et al. (2006) analyzed 200 books: Caldecott award-winners for 1995-2001 and best-sellers for 1999-2001. They used the analysis scheme pioneered by Weitzman et al. (1972) and also divided characters into children vs. adults. They found nearly twice as many male as female title and main characters, and male characters appeared 53 percent more times in illustrations. Although women's occupational roles had broadened somewhat over earlier studies, occupations were gender stereotyped. Nor did a comparison of their sample to 1980s-early '90s books reveal reduced sexism. In 2005, Anderson and Hamilton had used the same 200-book sample to study mothers vs. fathers. They found fathers underrepresented, and depicted as ineffectual/withdrawn parents when they did appear.

Teacher training textbooks. Zittleman and Sadker (2002) followed up the classic Sadker and Sadker (1980) study of gender bias in teacher training materials. (This is important because other studies show that teachers develop “gender blindness” to biased texts if they have not been given gender sensitization instruction.) The 1980 study analyzed 24 leading teacher education texts: 23/24 devoted less than 1 percent of their content to women's contributions or challenges and 8/24 didn't even mention the topic of sex bias. Several actually promoted gender stereotypes.

The restudy involved 23 textbooks published from 1998-2001. Using the 1980 study's evaluation methods, they found progress to be “minimal” and “disappointing.” The average percentage of women-related coverage rose to 3.3 percent. The introductory texts averaged 7.3 percent, but the 16 methods books (for reading, science, mathematics and social studies) averaged only 1.3 percent. Social studies offered the most coverage (2.5 percent) and reading texts the least (0.3 percent). But despite the quantitative data showing that textbooks are far from gender-equitable, they also found that “today's textbooks are less offensive than those published more than 20 years ago.”

All in all, then, it appears that the *intensity* of bias is diminishing: the most egregious and blatant examples of sexism seem to have disappeared or been muted, even though the numbers certainly have not improved dramatically.

#### E. The Scorecard on Gender Bias in Specific Content Areas: The 2007 *Handbook of Gender Equity in Education*

In 1985, Sue Klein edited the *Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity through Education*. Among the problems it highlighted was gender bias in textbooks spanning different subject areas, as well as in curricula. Now, the second edition (Klein et al. 2007) provides an update. Aside from the continuing work of Sadker and colleagues (e.g., Sadker et al. 2007), none of the chapters includes a classic content analysis of gender bias in texts. Rather, the subject matter chapters discuss different gender equity issues; mention of gender bias in textbooks/curriculum varies from nil to substantial. The following chapters illustrate the range.

Let us begin with the two excellent chapters on “Gender Equity in **Mathematics**” (Lacampagne et al. 2007) and “Gender Equity in **Science, Engineering and Technology**” (Burger et al. 2007). Unfortunately, their virtues do not include any discussion whatsoever about gender bias in textbooks and they contain only the most oblique of references to curricula. This is ironic, since they treat the fields where women still remain the most underrepresented both as students and as employees. From 1966-2001, the proportion of females receiving a bachelor’s degree has been going up in all fields surveyed except two: (1) mathematics (which has slid below the 1966 level of 33.2 percent and the 1985 highpoint of 39.5 percent to 31.8 percent in 2001, per Table 13.1 in Burger et al. 2007:257), and (2) computer science (where the percentage of women receiving bachelor’s degrees declined from 28.6 percent in 1994 to 27.6 percent in 2001, though the number of women increased (ibid.:256)). Neither chapter considers the fact that textbooks may still be contributing to gender stereotypes about women’s unsuitability for such pursuits. It is a missed opportunity that the mathematics and science chapters did not even consider the topic.

Turning to “Gender Equity in **Communication Skill**” (Taylor et al. 2007), the authors note that the 1985 *Handbook* chapter on the issue made four principal recommendations to enhance the competence of both males and females. One was that “reading materials should portray females and males in non-stereotypical situations, including reading as something that males can do and high-level thinking as something females can do.” Progress on this recommendation seems to have been slight: In the 2007 chapter, the authors still devote a section to “gender bias in communication curriculum and learning materials.” Their literature review finds such results as:

Sixteen of the 17 public-speaking texts analyzed by Hanson (1999) pictures men in power positions more frequently than women and all of the texts pictured men more frequently in photographs, a finding replicated in Gullock et al.’s (2005) examination of the 2002 ten best-selling public-speaking texts...Hanson...found that the mean number of pages devoted to discussing gender issues was 7.26, fewer than 5 percent of the pages. The near-absence of women as speakers, writers, and theorists in public communication materials...leaves intact the privileging of men’s activities with very little attention to the gender implications” (2007:292-293).

In short, a field in which women are better represented than in mathematics and science-engineering and in which girls perform better than boys by most measures is once again found to give females short shrift in textbooks and curricula.

The final subject area is **social studies**, and the 1985 and current chapters make for an interesting comparison vis-à-vis gender equity. The first substantive discussion in the 1985 chapter (Hahn et al.) was under the heading, “Inadequate Textbooks.” The section presented a literature review of research (from 1971-1982) documenting the underrepresentation and stereotyping of females in social studies textbooks. Also discussed were the new guidelines being adopted by publishers and the new supplementary materials that were being produced (mainly by activist groups). Dissemination of the new curricular materials and continued curriculum reform were seen as the needs for the future. But in the final section, it was noted that, whereas “in the 1970s, federal funding was an impetus that helped bring about curriculum revision,” in the future it would be local school systems, state education agencies and private foundations that would be the source of support. The implication was that the federal funding party might be ending.

The 2007 chapter (Hahn et al.) makes explicit that it did. In the “Introduction” section, the authors note: “The dramatic decline in federal funding for research and curriculum development focused on gender equity over the last 20 years has contributed” to a pattern of sporadic and ebbing attention to gender (2007:335). This underlines the fact that revision of textbooks and curricula to reduce gender bias is an expensive undertaking. Given the decline in levels of federal funding flowing from the Women’s Education Equity Act of 1974 and in free labor from feminist activists as the crest of the “second wave women’s movement” receded, the slow pace of change found in the 1980s-1990s “second generation” studies is more understandable.

The tone of the 2007 chapter is much less optimistic than in 1985: “despite the years of advocacy in literature and practice, we found remarkably little empirical evidence to show that social studies has become more gender equitable” (ibid.:336).<sup>4</sup>

Instead, new issues have emerged that have “marginalized gender equity initiatives” (ibid.:337). These include:

- (1) the “high-stakes testing movement” (see footnote for an explanation);<sup>5</sup>
- (2) the “attention to multiculturalism [that] has overshadowed [or subsumed] gender;”
- (3) the commonly held belief that gender equity has been realized;
- (4) the return of the “boy problem in education” [e.g., poorer reading performance, lower high school graduation rates, declining enrollments in post-secondary education, etc.] (ibid.), and, ironically,
- (5) social studies departments in high schools becoming even more male-dominated now than before the passage of Title IX, since female athletes need coaches and many schools reserve social studies jobs for (mostly male) coaches (ibid.:352).

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The main conclusion of this section is that in the U.S., where the problem first was named and studied, there has been more progress in reducing the worst examples of sexism in textbooks and curricula (i.e., the “intensity factor”) than in increasing the relative – and less stereotyped – representation of women. Nonetheless, many people (wrongly) think the battle has been won. And now newer issues receive the funds that once might have gone to expensive efforts at revising textbooks and curricula in order to reduce gender bias.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, the 2007 chapter cites only a few recent content analysis studies of gender bias in textbooks.

<sup>5</sup> This entails new standardized tests and heavy penalties to schools (loss of funding) and students (denial of diplomas) for failing scores. The result, often, has shifted classroom time to a desperate race to get pupils’ scores high enough to pass.

<sup>6</sup> One last point: Sadker (n.d.) offers a useful list of seven forms of bias that can be used to assess instructional materials. These are reproduced in Appendix A.

#### IV. FOLLOWING THE MONEY: SUPPORT IN IDENTIFYING AND COMBATING GENDER BIAS IN TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULA IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

##### A. Research (and Development of Some Pilot Materials) in China, with Ford Foundation Help

The Ford Foundation in China had a reputation for strong leadership in gender issues in the period surrounding the turn of the millennium. In October 2000 it funded an ambitious effort by 20 researchers to (1) investigate and document gender bias in textbooks at all levels of sub-tertiary education, and then (2) develop and disseminate some educational plans, activities and reference materials based on gender equity. The results of the research phase are unusually accessible because one of the products was the publication of two special issues of the journal, *Chinese Education and Society*, in 2002 and 2003. The former encompasses pre-primary and primary levels, and the latter includes junior middle school and adult literacy learning materials.

The editors of the first special issue (Shi and Ross 2002:3) begin by discussing the policy context for achieving gender equity in schooling. First, they note, in May 2001, the State Council passed a Program for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010). It included the following:

- The primary objectives of women's education shall be incorporated in the state's plan for education, and
- Social gender awareness shall be incorporated into training courses for teachers during the reform of courses, educational content, and teaching methods.

Second, they add, the Council also ratified a Program for the Development of Chinese Children (2001-2010). It declared:

- Awareness of gender equality shall be incorporated in the contents of education.

Research methods included both quantitative content analysis of textbooks and classroom-based investigations. The first volume begins with kindergarten (for 4-year-olds) and extends through elementary school (the focus of almost all the studies). The content analyses of textbooks reveal the usual patterns:

- Males are disproportionately overrepresented, and females appear most often in reading materials for very young children. The proportion of male characters rises from 48 percent in books for 4-year-olds to 61 percent in books for 6-year-olds. Even here, however, where most stories focus on family life, gender-stereotyped roles are reproduced (Liu 2002).
- Chen and Chen (2002) document an analogous picture in the new five-volume series of mathematics books used in elementary schools. First, males are almost two-third of those depicted. Second, males are 74 percent of those in stimulating activities, whereas females are 70 percent of those in passive activities. The usual gender role stereotypes are present in full force: courageous, independent, ambitious and sometimes naughty boys, vs. passive, obedient, neat, cooperative girls.
- Yi (2002) analyzes social studies texts. The following is not surprising: 100 percent of scientists and soldiers are male, whereas 100 percent of teachers and 75 percent of service personnel are female. Males dominate the public sphere and females the private sphere. In fact, one woman who was one of the most influential leaders of the Chinese

Communist Party – and state – is depicted twice: (1) mending Premier Zhou Enlai’s clothes, and (2) bringing an umbrella to a guard on a rainy day.

- Guo and Zhao (2002) analyze the 12-volume elementary language textbooks. Females are only about a fifth of the historical characters portrayed and the usual male/female stereotypes render them dull and lifeless in comparison with the vibrant males.

Also, not surprisingly, teacher-pupil and peer interaction followed the same stereotypes, to girls’ disadvantage, in several classroom-based articles.

The editors’ authorship in the second special issue (2003) was reversed: Ross and Shi. But the findings – which, in this volume, cover junior middle school and adult literacy education – generally show the same patterns that emerged at the pre-primary and primary levels. One new element is discussed, however: a mismatch between the curricula, which are gender-biased, “and the actual life experiences of women and men and girls and boys in China’s diverse and rapidly changing communities” (Ross and Shi 2003:3).

- The first substantive article in this special issue is historical rather than quantitative. Wang (2003) goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, examining the last days of the Qing dynasty. He also looks at the Republican China that followed, until its fall in the late 1940s to the victorious Communists. The end of the Qing marked the beginning of articles urging girls not to have their feet bound, citing the harm it causes. A 1907 Qing text was titled, *Mandarin Language Textbook for the Liberation of Girls*, and its illustrations include women getting together to unwind their foot bindings, as well as schoolgirls with unbound feet playing vivaciously. But that is as far as it goes: the family/public sphere roles are depicted in the usual stereotyped fashion for females vs. males. In Republican China, by the 1920s and 1930s, especially after the Japanese invaded, women were asked to take on modern knowledge and work in addition to their usual roles. This was represented in a dialogue between the independent, outward-looking Mrs. Zhang and the home-bound and content Mrs. Qin. In the final years before the Communists won, two literatures competed – the urban-based “petty bourgeois ladies” of the Kuomintang-held areas, vs. the bold, vigorous, sturdy working women of the rural-centered revolutionary bases. The Communist triumph in the late 1940s brought the slogan “women are able to hold up half the sky.” It laid the foundation for their becoming much-needed labor power and helped their status.
- Zhang (2003) describes how students in the second year of junior middle school gave contradictory descriptions of their mothers, their teachers, and the women in their Chinese language texts. Concerning their mothers, half (12/24) disliked career mothers and favored the traditional role. Another 7 (29 percent) favored combining both roles; the remaining 5 (21 percent) favored career women-mothers. But students overwhelmingly favored a “strong female” for a teacher – and disliked the nurturing housewives in their texts, finding them out of synch with modern family life.
- Zhao (2003) also finds conflicting views of gender roles in English language teaching materials for junior middle schools. Although both boys and girls are shown in self-chosen activities, the subtle message is that “good girls” shine at home and at school.
- Teachers also propagate stereotypes, Song finds in her 2003 study of science teachers: Fully 71 percent of teachers who read a description of a student with a male

name rated him as a good science student, whereas, when the same description was used but the student was given a female name, only 20 percent of teachers rated her as a good science student.

The Ford Foundation project also supported a conference in 2001 to present summaries of the findings. The editors note that some of the audience was skeptical of the extent of gender transformation the presenters were advocating. But others, they point out, greeted the interpretations with interest. (They do not report any enthusiastic endorsement.) Finally, the initiative also resulted in the development of 49 sets of non-biased primary and secondary school teaching materials, covering 20 subjects. These were pilot tested during the fall of 2002. The overall findings show, however, that China's road to eliminate gender bias in textbooks and curricula will not be a short one, despite an official state policy of achieving gender equity in education.

### B. The Larger-Scale Girls' Education Interventions Promoted by the World Bank

The Ford Foundation funding produced important empirical results. They clearly document a problem with gender bias in textbooks at most levels of Chinese education. But the editors' introductions to the two special issues of *Chinese Education and Society* convey not even a hint that any major program or project was to be launched to attack the now-revealed problem. (The only action outcome seems to be the 49 sets of new teaching materials.) The Ford Foundation is one of the best-endowed of the major donors but it is the World Bank that is often called the "500-pound gorilla in the world of development." What is the Bank's record like vis-à-vis girls' education?

Between 1990 and 2005, the World Bank mounted a total of 372 education sector initiatives, on which it spent well over \$25 billion. Just over one-fifth of this was spent on 82 projects with specific gender components or an exclusively female clientele (Tembon 2007).

Concerning female schooling, no other donor appears to come close. Specifically, two categories seem to account for most of the expenditures on girls' education:

- (1) "Infrastructure." This helps increase educational *access* – and entails mainly constructing/rehabilitating schools and classrooms, and, to a smaller extent, activities such as building separate latrines for girls and boys (they help keep girls in school).
- (2) "Learning" interventions. These include efforts aimed at (1) increasing the numbers of female teachers (mostly in places where even primary school teachers are largely male); (2) curriculum and textbook reform (more relevant to this report); (3) provision of textbooks and other educational materials, and (4) gender sensitization of personnel. In the first half of the period, 1990-1997, a higher proportion of the "learning" interventions were dedicated to increasing female teachers and gender sensitization of personnel. In the second half, 1998-2005, the proportions aimed at those two categories dropped while initiatives to provide educational materials rose to take up much of the difference.

In fact, some large-scale education initiatives – including five in Nepal, Bangladesh, Chad, Guinea and Ghana that totaled over \$300 million – had explicit components or activities aimed at eliminating gender bias from curricula and/or textbooks. Given this scale of effort, it is clear that

the extent to which the World Bank continues its special efforts on behalf of girls' education – and its specific activities to reduce gender bias in curricula and texts – will have a large footprint.

Next, let us examine some of the paths that have been proposed or taken in various developing countries to get from studying the problem of gender bias in learning materials and curricula to actually taking remedial action. Much of the focus here is on Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that has not received much attention to this point.

## V. GENDER BIAS IN TEXTBOOKS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: DIFFERENT PATHS FROM STUDIES TO ACTION

To put the problems with gender bias in textbooks and curricula in larger perspective, we already have seen how widespread this form of sexism turns out to be and how similar its manifestations. The pace of progress, according to the evidence presented to this point, might be better described as “snail-like” than speedy. Stromquist (2007) summarizes her many years of studying sexist bias in learning materials and curricula as follows:

Most evidence from developing regions comes from content analysis of textbooks. The majority of these studies indicates that there have in fact been efforts to remove sexual stereotypes from textbooks and that significant changes have occurred in the use of illustrations and a sex-neutral language; less progress has occurred in the funding and development of content favorable to the creation of positive identities among women... (ibid.:36).

The funding issue already has been raised in Section IV. Elsewhere, Stromquist (1997) discusses funding as part of what she calls “three levels of response” to female inequality in education. The *first level* she treats is essentially access and ameliorating the conditions that prevent girls from physically attending school (e.g., distance, lack of culturally appropriate sanitary facilities, and absence of flexible scheduling). Governments have proven willing to invest their funds on access programs, and so have most multilateral and bilateral donors. (In fact, this is the basis of the “closing the gap” goal of Education for All.) The *second level* aims to provide females with the opportunities to reach the same types and levels of education as their male counterparts. “This would include removing from textbooks sexual stereotypes and images that convey inferior or passive views of women” (ibid.:60). Here, Stromquist concludes that, quite often, governments engage in second-level strategies only when supported by international assistance (ibid.:61).<sup>7</sup>

The problem with international assistance is that it tends to come in the form of relatively short-lived projects and one of the lessons learned of development is that the projects function best when there is strong, committed leadership. When the funding ends or the leader leaves the post, momentum, and sometimes the gains themselves, are lost. Are there instances where governments have picked up this “second level” issue of gender bias in texts? What happened?

### A. Case Studies of Government Initiatives Concerning Gender Bias in Latin American Texts.

There have been some noteworthy instances in Latin America where government educational policy or initiatives tried to reduce gender bias in learning materials and curricula. But the four case studies presented here show a mixed set of outcomes.

-- As described by Muñoz Cabrejo (2006), in 2000, during the Fujimori government, **Peru** developed a Plan for Equality of Opportunities for Women and Men (PIO, based on its title in Spanish). One of the sectors of the PIO involved education and it proposed five objectives. The fourth called for eradicating sexist content in teaching. The PIO was elaborated by the Women’s

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<sup>7</sup> The third level is not relevant to this report.

Ministry (PROMUDEH) and covered the period 2000-2005. Unfortunately, no working group ever was constituted to achieve the actions called for in the PIO – including eliminating “sexist content” in teaching materials. Part of the problem was that the Minister of PROMUDEH who initiated the plan left. Then, the next Minister of PROMUDEH redesigned the plan in a more transformative manner (for 2003-2010). This caused Peru’s conservative Catholic Church to oppose it as a dangerous attack on traditional Peruvian moral values. Soon a third, far more conservative Minister replaced the one who had redesigned the PIO and aroused the ire of the Church. Under the third Minister’s watch, all references to a “gender focus” were eliminated in favor of a focus on the family. In sum, no synergy emerged that moved Peru closer to ending sexist content in textbooks, curricula and classroom practice. This was despite the fact that the gender plan aligned with the objectives of the Ministry of Education, as well as the goals of the various international treaties and conventions Peru had signed on education as well as gender.

-- There are similarities here with Stromquist’s analysis (1997:81) involving gender and education in **Argentina**. In 1992, a new education law introduced the principle of equal opportunity and the elimination of “discriminatory stereotypes in educational materials.” The initiative was under the National Program for the Promotion of Women’s Equal Opportunities in Education (PRIOM). PRIOM revised the curricula at primary and secondary levels to include gender content (e.g., women whose contributions might not have been included in previous learning materials), as well as a critical examination of gender-based discrimination and social practices (Bonder 1994:19, cited in Stromquist 1997:82). But just as the curriculum was going to be disseminated at the national level after extensive pilot-testing, it was attacked by conservative parents supported by the Catholic Church. PRIOM was criticized as being anti-family and the government finally adopted a gender-neutral curriculum advocated by the Church.

-- In **Brazil**, there are a number of “cross-connections” between gender policies and education policies involving textbooks and curricula. For example, the 2001 National Education Plan (PNE) mandated by the constitution mentions gender only in certain specific points but textbook stereotypes is one of them: if a text contains gender or race/ethnicity stereotypes, it is considered discriminatory (Vianna and Unbehaum 2006:136-137). Previously, in 1995-1997, Brazil had adopted “National Curriculum Parameters” (PCN) and, unlike the cases in Peru and Argentina, a gender focus was included without controversy – although it seems to have been interpreted largely in terms of sexual orientation. In any event, gender was to be a cross-cutting issue throughout the curricula adopted by states and municipalities.

The PCN stressed textbooks as critically important in Brazilian education, and the Ministry of Education (MEC) reviewed studies of how women appeared in those books. The MEC research concluded that “various analyses have demonstrated that in the majority of the textbooks...the woman is presented only as a housewife and mother, while the man participates in the world of work beyond the household and never appears in situations of affection with his children or doing housework” – and that this clearly constrained what roles each gender was to play (MEC 1997, Vol. 1, p. 104; in Vianna and Unbehaum 2006:172; material in quotes is my translation).

Finally, Chapter 2 of the 2004 National Plan of Policies for Women (which also addressed race) is entitled, “Inclusive, Non-Sexist Education.” One of its five objectives is to guarantee a non-discriminatory education system that does not reproduce stereotypes based on gender, race and

ethnicity. It also calls for textbooks to be free of discriminatory content based on gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Despite all these “cross-connections,” no data were found citing a (resulting) decline in gender bias in texts and/or curricula.

-- Araya (2006) presents a detailed case study of **Costa Rica** government initiatives to promote gender equity. These include attempts to reduce gender bias in texts as well as to change male-female enrollment patterns in gender-stereotyped curricula. Initially, national laws and policies made no reference to gender and education (e.g., the 1949 Constitution’s Title VII on “Education and Culture”). But by the 1990s, this had changed: gender discrimination was mentioned as something to be eliminated. By this time, also, laws had been passed specifying and guaranteeing explicit human rights for women (e.g., the 1995 Law against Sexual Harassment in Employment and Teaching).

In fact, Costa Rica ratified CEDAW in 1984. Its Article 10 calls for the elimination of all stereotypes concerning masculine and feminine roles at all levels and forms of education. But not a single concrete action followed from the ratification. It wasn’t for a lack of data: Araya (2006) notes that in 1987 Andree Michel had developed a methodology for analyzing gender bias/stereotyped images in textbooks. It stimulated a series of studies over the next six years that documented the prevalence of gender stereotypes in teaching materials. These analyses also showed that it was necessary to eliminate the sexist language that was found to be endemic.

Some progress was made during the late 1980s-1990s: the notoriously sexist *Paco y Lola* readers were eliminated from public primary schools and have become increasingly rare in private ones. Other textbooks were modified to increase representation of females and somewhat reduce sexist portrayals. But often the changes were “timid” (Araya 2006:180) because the textbooks in question passed through multiple departments, offices, consultants, etc. Thus, an illustration of a woman cultivator might well end up as an illustration of a man cultivator. The new series, “Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” was supposed to (1) eliminate language and illustrations that reinforced stereotyped gender roles, and (2) be made compulsory. But, Araya notes, it failed to be widely distributed. This was because of a Supreme Court resolution granting relief to a group of publishers who claimed that the mandatory adoption violated laws of free competition.

Araya cites a 2002 assessment from INAMU (Araya 2006:181) that ascertained that despite the reforms and changes in teaching materials, many of the textbooks available on the market continued to devalue women and use stereotyped roles, images and language.

In general, Araya found, lofty goals and statements have been far more numerous than actual implementation. Her conclusion is based on her analysis of the 21 components of the new Action Plan for promoting a culture of gender equity in education. Her research revealed that only several components were even on the path to implementation. For example, the production and use of teaching materials with a gender focus was being considered by the High Council of Education. In fact, some of these materials had been produced – but their distribution still was dependent on overcoming a lack of sufficient budget. Also, a pilot program aimed at reducing gender bias in education (e.g., encouraging female and male students to choose non-stereotyped courses of study in technical schools) actually was launched for a year or two. But there seems not to have been any monitoring and evaluation.

In sum, Araya concludes, gender failed to be institutionalized in the public sector, including education, in the 1980s and 1990s. It was not for a lack of plans, projects, objectives and other initiatives. Rather, two factors are almost always mentioned among the reasons: when a dedicated leader who had promoted the program in question left her/his post, and/or when funding for the special initiative – often from international sources ranging from UNESCO to the European Union – ended, the initiative soon fizzled out.

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To conclude this heading, all the case study authors note that the continued implementation of the various actions promoting gender equity in education that they analyze depends on the availability of resources and the preservation of these policies by subsequent governments. It would seem that government support for a “second level” issue such as gender bias in learning materials is precarious for various reasons. Continued funding always seems to be one of them.

#### B. More Research on Gender Bias in Textbooks in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Given the strength of the feminist movement in most countries in both Latin America and the Caribbean, it is not surprising that a considerable amount of content research on gender bias in textbooks has been carried out in the region. The findings are worth reviewing for two reasons. On the one hand, some of the Latin American studies are not the work of activists: they seem to have been generated by just the sort of “second level” support that is discussed above (and that paid for the Chinese research discussed in Section IV). On the other hand, there is one intriguing exception in the Caribbean to the otherwise almost carbon-copy results found in all the research discussed to this point: one author’s books that feature strong women.

In **Latin America**, a number of studies have found the usual patterns of gender bias in textbooks from the 1970s into the new millennium. Perhaps the earliest study was in Chile (Magendoza 1970 – a year before the publication of the content analyses by the U.S. activist U’Ren and the academic historian Trecker); another study in Chile was by Ochoa (1983; it seems that both Magendoza and Ochoa are men). Also in the Southern Cone, Wainerman and Barck (1984) carried out a detailed analysis in Argentina (see also Stromquist 1992a).

Stromquist 1989a:164 discusses some UNESCO-sponsored studies that included Peru (Anderson and Herencia 1983), as well as Zambia (Tembo 1984). She also mentions a study in Brazil by Pinto (1982) and a 1979 Colombia study by Silva “notable for its exhaustive analysis.”

More recently, as mentioned above, Araya (2006:176) notes Michel’s 1987 development of a content analysis methodology for researching the incidence of stereotyped images. This methodology inspired a number of studies, including Gonzalez (1990) and Montes de Oca y Rosales (1993).

Then in 1991, UNIFEM launched a sub-regional project for Central America that was aimed at producing teaching materials free of gender stereotypes. It resulted in various studies that proposed different ways of reducing sexism in primary education (e.g., Paredes et al., 1994; Centro Nacional para el Desarrollo de la Mujer y la Familia 1997; Ibarra 1997, and see also UNICEF/UNIFEM 1990).

Finally, studies of gender bias in textbooks have continued to be done in Latin America after the turn of the millennium, including Araya (2001) in Costa Rica and Beisiegel (2001) in Brazil. In short, in contrast to the United States, where few recent quantitative content analyses were encountered, this research tradition seems to be on-going in Latino countries.

Turning to the **Caribbean**, boys' secondary school completion rates lag behind girls' in much of the region and it even has been claimed that teachers favor girls, to boys' disadvantage. But the women in these countries experience the usual occupational segregation and wage gap found elsewhere. Are their textbooks also in keeping with world patterns?

Bailey (2003) examined the educational system in Jamaica in terms of gender sensitivity and also reported on earlier studies that had explicitly studied gender bias in textbooks in the region:

- King and Morrissey (1988) analyzed 20 Caribbean secondary school textbooks in history, geography and social studies. They found that women were invisible in most of the texts and relegated to subordinate or menial roles when they did appear.
- Two different authors analyzed literature texts in 1989. Ayodike found few images that challenged the prevailing stereotypes of females; to the contrary, damaging concepts of women were being projected. But Pollard found that books written by one particular author defied the pattern and conveyed the strength, wisdom and courage associated with Caribbean women. (In fact, Caribbean women long have been known for economic autonomy as well as, more recently, for gender parity in education.) Still, this is a very rare finding.
- Bailey also discussed one of her own studies (Bailey and Parkes 1995), which covered language arts texts used in Jamaican primary schools. It showed that not only were both girls and women underrepresented in these books, but that both males and females were depicted in traditionally gender-stereotyped behaviors.
- Whitely published a study of science texts in 1996. His results showed the usual imbalance of adults in the illustrations, favoring males, but a gender balance among young people depicted.
- The most recent study in Bailey's review (Drayton 1997) examined Caribbean English textbooks and found not only patriarchal, but also Eurocentric, bias.

In other words, all books analyzed, bar those of one author, showed an almost identical pattern of gender bias that marginalizes girls and women. Results such as these make the case for an **impact study** of gender bias in textbooks quite compelling. For example, would strong female students in the Caribbean have gone farther occupationally, and ended up in less gender-stereotyped fields had they not been subtly affected by gender bias in textbooks and curricula?

The only evidence unearthed so far about the effects of such bias involves a more male-dominant society than those of the Caribbean and does not extend beyond teachers' attitudes and conduct. Specifically, Kenyan results reported by Lloyd (2005) show that girls were more harmed by teachers' gender bias. In addition, Lloyd et al. 2000 had found that indicators of teachers' negative treatment of girls were linked to a higher dropout rate for Kenyan girls but not for boys (even when controlling for family variables and measures of school quality). More generally, a

study by Appleton (1995) found girls were adversely affected by negative teacher attitudes toward them but that boys were not. Would impact studies that focused on gender bias in textbooks reveal similar patterns? If so, would these be worldwide or country-specific?

The final section (VII. Conclusions and Recommendations) will discuss the need for impact studies of the sort that would answer the intriguing “so what?” question about the effects of biased learning materials and treatment on females’ futures. To conclude the present section, however, let us discuss an author who has found ways to neutralize the potentially harmful impact on girls of even the most biased learning materials.

### C. A Study of Gender Bias in Indian Textbooks and Grassroots Exercises to Counter It

Kalia (1986) has produced an apparently unique study by combining a quantitative content analysis of textbooks used in Indian schools with “you can do something about it” exercises. These exercises can be carried out by students, teachers and even parents. Earlier, in 1979, she had content-analyzed 21 English and 20 Hindi texts used by students throughout five of the most populous places in Northern India (the most patriarchal region in the country): Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi (Kalia 1979). Under India’s centralized system, the texts had been prepared by one of two agencies: NCERT (the National Council of Educational Research and Training) and the Central Board of Secondary Education.

The content analysis, also discussed in her 1986 book, shows the usual pattern: men were the dominant figures in 75 percent of the lessons, and fully 87 percent of the biographies (47/54) were of men. Male-exclusive language was used to signify all of humanity. Worse, “men routinely abused and violently beat women in many lessons” (1986:2). Of 465 occupations in the texts, women were completely excluded from 344 (74 percent). She argues that this “hidden curriculum” in textbooks molds children’s gender-related values, especially if reinforced by the teacher.

Each later chapter then tackles a particular aspect of the sexism found in textbooks: (1) language, (2) stereotyping as a form of sexism that permeates many spheres of life, (3) sex role imagery, and (4) occupational roles. Each chapter also is replete with exercises that can be done jointly by a teacher and her/his students, or by any other reader. The exercises are too numerous to make this a reader-friendly volume but the basic idea of turning biased material on its head by easily posed questions or easily undertaken activities harks back to the “do it yourself” activism of the 1970s students and educators who confronted the large states and the principal publishers in the U.S. on the issue of sexist textbooks. They did it “on a shoestring.” So can Kalia’s readers.

In summary, in this section we have seen (1) partial attempts by governments in Latin America to deal with the problem of gender bias in textbooks and curricula, (2) the further documentation of that bias by numerous content analysis studies in the Latin America/Caribbean region in a continuing tradition, and (3) an Indian study that combined content analysis with suggestions on how to confront it without funding from anyone. There is one region, however, where the government, the educational establishment and the activists long have been “all on the same page” – and willing to commit resources and time to getting rid of gender bias in the curricula, the textbooks and the classroom: the Nordic nations.

## VI. THE BEST “BIAS BUSTERS”? SWEDEN AND OTHER NORDIC NATIONS

Stromquist (2007:36) argues that the “Nordic countries have been successful in decreasing male stereotypes and improving male parenting skills through various school interventions – an effort that has taken place over close to four decades.” Sweden leads in this and is our main focus here.

The taken-for-granted status of an egalitarian curriculum is clear, especially in Sweden. Eilard (2004, English summary) studied the construction of gender and ethnicity in a new reader used in the first grade of a Swedish multi-ethnic comprehensive school. The main characters, a girl and a boy, are shown interacting with other children, apparently of other ethnic backgrounds. Eilard comments that “the book’s tomboy...is negatively stereotyped in contrast to ‘normal’ girls. She sees the female protagonist taking a “traditional feminine role,” although she doesn’t clarify the particulars. What she does specify is that:

The position of the boys is more flexible and open to variation than...the girls. The boys are allowed to be childish and soft, while the girls tend to be encouraged to [grow up].

Since this would seem to go against all the stereotypes of males discussed to this point, it is quite noteworthy. So, too, is her description of the Swedish curriculum as explicitly promoting gender equity. She concludes that the first grade reader’s well-intended message of diversity nevertheless contains “an implicit educative message including a Eurocentric as well as an androcentric order. Certain parts of the text actually *contradict the vision of equality as articulated in the Swedish curriculum*” (emphasis added).

There may even be a form of deliberate anti-stereotyping in some textbooks, if a study by Carlson (2007) is any indication. She examines “images and values in textbook and practice” in language courses for Turkish immigrants to Sweden (ibid.:125). In a section entitled, “Gender Equality – ‘Swedish’ and ‘Turkish’ Perspectives,” she discusses the “norm of gender equality”:

There actually are no explicit texts in the textbooks pertaining to this sensitive issue. Instead, a norm of “Swedish” gender equality appears more indirectly, for example in descriptions of the division of labor within a family or in descriptions of who works with what in a workplace. The most obvious hints about “equal distribution” in everyday life are perhaps to be found in illustrations of various domestic tasks. A quite common picture of “the modern man” is of a *man wearing an apron while standing at the stove stirring pots or doing house-cleaning*. Wellros (1995) reacted in an article to what she calls “ideologically arranged pictures in [language course text] books.” She maintains that statistics concerning the division of labor in Swedish homes point to a completely different picture from that presented in the textbooks (ibid.:136, emphasis added).

In a nutshell, some textbooks are intentionally going beyond the patterns of Sweden’s relatively gender-egalitarian everyday life. Social science studies do show higher levels of male participation in domestic activities (particularly in Sweden) than in non-Nordic countries. But to what extent do texts go beyond many readers’ lived experience in order to meld the gender-egalitarian curriculum with explicitly anti-sexist didactic materials? The question remains open.

A new draft paper co-authored by a Norwegian and an Australian provides a broader historical perspective. According to Nielsen and Davies (2007), “From Rousseau to the 1950s gender differentiation had been an explicit *goal* of education.” Then, until the early 1970s [and, implicitly, the rise of the “second wave women’s movement”], there was a generation when “boys” and “girls” became “children” or “students,” but – implicitly – these kids were “generic males.” The few pre-1970 studies focusing on gender in classroom interaction criticized female teachers for failing to meet the learning needs of *boys* effectively (Brophy 1985). “During the 1970s, feminist researchers began to make girls visible in the classroom” (Nielsen and Davies). Then, the authors argue, in the 1980s and 1990s, “the focus shifted from analyses of inequality produced through differential treatment and double standards in the classroom to a focus on the active role children themselves play in constructing gendered worlds” (ibid.). The most recent research, while showing the “relative stability in boys and girls’ gender stereotypes and peer relations” (ibid.), now also considers the “new” active girl who does not lose her self-confidence at adolescence (Nielsen 2004).<sup>8</sup>

Sweden, however, goes much farther. A 2004 study of Sweden by O’Dowd shows that, in many respects, its record vis-à-vis gender does seem to be quite different from that of other developed countries. Why? First of all, its commitment to egalitarian relations, including gender equality, goes back to the late 1930s, when a Keynesian economic policy, called the “Swedish model” by its best-known architect, Gunnar Myrdal, was formulated. In 1939, a bill was passed “guaranteeing women the right to their jobs even after marriage and prohibiting employers from firing them on the grounds of pregnancy” (ibid.). Still, this participation took place in a “rigidly gender segregated labor market” (Wikander 1992:201, cited in O’Dowd).

Hirdman (1992, cited in O’Dowd) has traced three eras with respect to gender relations during the last century of Swedish history: the pre-World War II “housewife contract,” the “equality contract” of the heyday of the “Swedish model” (of a fast-growing welfare state), and the “equal standing” (*jamstalldhet*) model that emerged in the 1970s as growth slowed and Sweden increasingly tilted toward a market economy. A number of feminists have argued that the consensual/cooperative/conflict-avoiding climate that accompanied this merely has served to make “male dominance in society less visible.” Yet even the “housewife contract” permitted young, working single women to be men’s equals until they married, gave birth, and then took primary responsibility for home and hearth. The years of the “equality contract” led to widespread expansion of day-care facilities, changing attitudes to marriage and an increase in divorces (Hirdman 1992:215 in O’Dowd).

Still, even in Sweden gender equality is not universal. Since 1976, the slower-growth “equal standing” contract has led to two very different patterns. On the one hand, despite the egalitarian emphasis of the curriculum – and those textbooks showing male domesticity – education and the

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<sup>8</sup> It is an interesting manifestation of the gender stratification system in the United States that the new (1990s-present) discourse and studies concerning failing boys “has aroused much more immediate attention than the discourse of silent and insecure girls in the 1970s and 80s” (ibid.). In the U.S. discussion of “failing boys,” female teachers are again getting a good share of the blame, just as they did in the pre-1970s studies.

workforce remain gender-segregated. Males and females study different subjects and work in different careers and venues – in particular, females are more concentrated in the public sector. On the other hand, the high proportion of women in Parliament (47.3 percent according to IPU 2007) and the Cabinet (~40 percent) presents a more egalitarian face.

To some extent then, the gender-stereotyped side of Swedish education has survived in a country that has embraced gender equality as government policy longer than other European nations. “Here the hidden curriculum, sex stereotyping, preferential treatment, authoritarian teaching models and higher expectations for boys have their impact” (Stromquist 1992b, in O’Dowd).

All in all, what seems to be emerging is an educational system where the curriculum has been reformulated in a gender egalitarian manner and many textbooks have been written to promote a vision of even more equality and less gender-stereotyped domestic and occupational roles than most Swedes encounter in their own lives. To Swedish critics, the glass of gender equality is half empty; to those from more patriarchal countries, it is more than half full – it indeed may be seen as positively brimming.

Finally, what does the latest version of the Swedish curriculum (2006) say about gender equality? First, “equality between men and women” is right near the top of values, just behind “the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, and the equal value of all people” (Sweden 2006:3). Second, the curriculum proclaims, “No one should be subjected to discrimination at school based on gender...” (ibid.). Later, it states that:

the school should actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women...The *school has a responsibility to counteract traditional gender roles* (ibid.:4, emphasis added)

In addition, the curriculum exhorts that all who work in the school should “work...against any restrictions on the pupil’s choice of study or vocation that are based on gender” (ibid:16).

In sum, the official Swedish curriculum promotes a more gender egalitarian world than that revealed by national statistics showing labor force sex segregation and analyses showing subtle gender stereotyping still lurking in some textbooks. Even if the gist of most remaining textbook stereotypes seems to reflect world patterns, what we have here is a different level of *intensity*. Sweden might be on a different planet to a girl in Balochistan Province, Pakistan or in Djibouti or one of the other places where female rights of access to education still are hotly contested by large and influential proportions of the most powerful males.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> But before concluding this section, it is worth summarizing one study that actually found apparently greater gender stereotyping in a Nordic country than in America. Specifically, Finnish basic readers were more gender biased than those from the United States (Hyona et al. 1995). The study is a classic quantitative content analysis that analyzed 12 Finnish and 18 U.S. primers for grades 3-6. Surprisingly, it shows greater gender bias and stereotyping of male and female traits for the Finnish case. There turns out to be a reason, however: the Finnish readers included a much higher proportion of stories drawn from traditional folk tales dating back to the 1800s, set in a rural milieu where male and female roles in agricultural and domestic labor were clearly cut from the old gender-segregated mold. In contrast, the stories in the 18 American readers the authors analyzed were written especially for those volumes, “with an emphasis on a balanced view of gender roles.” As a final conundrum, we are left to ponder if this differing selection of materials was due to the higher proportion of male authors found in the Finnish readers.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Conclusions

1. In summary, this paper looks beyond girls' educational *access* to an issue that may well affect educational *gender equality* – and hence timely fulfillment of the EFA and MDG goals: gender bias in textbooks (and curricula).
2. The paper contends that though gender bias in learning materials is less dramatic an issue than getting girls into schools for the first time, it is consequential: textbooks take up the lion's share of class time for both teachers and students and reflect a nation's curricula.
3. Yet the gender bias in textbooks is hidden in plain sight. Their stereotypes of males and females are camouflaged by the taken-for-granted system of gender stratification and roles.
4. Thus far, the biggest surprise is not finding any impact studies of the effects of this form of sexism on girls – and boys' – patterns of educational and subsequent occupational achievement. Therefore, we have no way of knowing just how big an obstacle gender bias in learning materials and curricula actually may be. We don't know if it more strongly affects those in poorer countries, with weaker school systems, or not. We just don't know.
5. We do know, however, exactly what the sexist bias consists of. Specifically, this paper has examined the relentlessly similar picture revealed by studies of gender bias in textbooks (and curricula) all around the world. Here are some relevant points that have emerged from the content analyses of textbooks since the early 1970s, and the present overview study:

**First**, with respect to prevalence, gender bias in textbooks proves to be more widespread geographically than the remaining gender gap in parity. It also is found in countries at all levels of economic development and at all levels of gender equality, as measured by indicators such as the UN Gender Development Index (GDI).

**Second**, concerning persistence, despite over 35 years of efforts in many nations, gender bias in textbooks will not soon vanish. "Second generation" studies mostly reveal a near-glacial pace of change.

**Third**, and significantly, these re-studies don't measure relative *intensity*, which may be diminishing faster than the prevalence of sexist learning materials. Research on intensity seems called for in future studies/restudies of gender bias in textbooks.

**Fourth**, vis-à-vis content, the uniformity is breathtaking: (a) under-representation of females, (b) use of male words to mean all of humanity, (c) traditional gender stereotypes about the activities of males and females in the occupational sphere and in the domestic sphere, (d) traditional stereotypes about the traits and activities of males and females, and so on. And one finds them, in strikingly similar form, on every continent.

**Fifth**, with respect to change – one of the most defining characteristics of a world marked by globalization, rising uncertainty, exponential rates of technological innovation and rising rates of women earning income (Blumberg 1995) – the big news is that it is largely *absent* in the world of gender-biased learning materials. In particular, most textbooks largely (or wholly) ignore all the changes in women’s position in recent decades:

- One could never guess any country’s actual female (vs. male) labor force participation rate or its distribution of occupations by gender from reading the textbooks in its schools.
- One would have no inkling of women’s rise in (1) income and resulting empowerment (Blumberg 1984, 1988, 2005); (2) organization and activism, and (3) community involvement – despite the fact that these things are happening worldwide.

**Sixth**, with respect to the rate of amelioration of gender bias, it may be described as generally very slow. But this doesn’t take into account several significant developments:

- The survival and spread of research about gender bias in textbooks, mostly content analyses, with some of it done by activists “on their own nickel;”
- Lobbying campaigns by women’s organizations and feminist activists – some of them the same people who did the content analyses – to eliminate this form of sexism.
  - These campaigns have attempted to pressure those who produce and/or purchase the books to commit to standards that eliminate, at minimum, the most blatant bias.
  - While this paper has focused on such campaigns mainly in the U.S. and, secondarily, in Latin America, they also can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., FAWE) and parts of Asia (e.g., the Philippines).
  - But, for the most part, donor initiatives to end gender bias in textbooks have not reached out to these women’s organizations.

6. Another sort of conclusion involves the funding needed to go beyond merely identifying and describing gender bias in textbooks to attempting to reform the whole learning materials/curricular system. Often, this is beyond the reach of a poor country – unless it is involved in a major regime change or has obtained support from a major donor, such as the World Bank. (In fact, it is problematic that without Ford Foundation funding, the Chinese research identifying and delineating the parameters of gender bias in textbooks would have been carried out in as integrated and comprehensive a fashion as proved to be the case.)
7. Yet, up until now, many of the lessons learned from donor funding of education (including girls’ education) have been lost, due to inadequate monitoring and evaluation. All too often, gender-disaggregated statistics are absent, so any conclusions are, of necessity, gender-blind.
8. There is clearly a need for donor efforts to continue with respect to gender bias in textbooks and curricula. But there is also a need for the donors to divide tasks on the basis of their own comparative advantage and resource availability. Activities such as supporting descriptive research about gender bias in learning materials and curricula are much less capital-intensive than sizeable interventions to transform them. But donors’ efforts would be enhanced if they also reached out to the researchers and women’s organizations which are committed to the issue. Already, many of these people and NGOs have developed and tested non-sexist pilot

modules. Others have created exercises that teachers, students, activists, and/or interested parents could carry out to better understand the bias and start to combat it (e.g., the activities found in Kalia 1986).

9. One possible “win-win” outcome would entail these researchers and organizations becoming involved in monitoring and evaluation of donor initiatives vis-à-vis gender biased learning materials and curricula. After all, this is their area of expertise, and they could work with a donor technical expert if a more sophisticated methodology were needed. One definite bonus: they would never forget to disaggregate all their people data by gender – an all-too-common failing in larger education projects that include gender components.
10. Based on the case studies of government efforts in Latin America, another conclusion echoes that of Stromquist, so it is appropriate to quote her version (2007:40):

The evidence suggests that insufficient work is occurring in most national educational systems to modify curriculum content, textbooks, and teachers’ skills and understanding of gender issues. [Institutions such as governments and conservative religious hierarchies] are reluctant to alter curriculum and practices [toward greater gender equity]. [But] despite the weak attention to gender equity in schooling, it may represent the strongest source of counter messages to traditional norms learned in the family, community, and national media.

## B. Recommendations

1. It is **recommended** that, after decades, it is time to move beyond studies that describe gender bias in textbooks to research that evaluates the level and type of impact of such bias on females – and males.
2. It is further **recommended** that this impact research can be carried out with varied techniques that measure various types of outcomes at different points in the educational cycle.
  - Obvious outcomes are completion and transition rates for primary-secondary and secondary-tertiary education, disaggregated not only by gender but also by other relevant planes of cleavage within a nation (rural-urban, social class, race-ethnicity, religion, etc.).
  - There also should be cross-national studies comparing nations at varying development levels as well as degrees of gender inequality (as measured by GDI, GEM, sex ratio, etc.).
  - “Quasi-experimental designs” (Campbell 1966) and “natural experiments” could be useful, too. A development project, for example, could add an initiative to combat gender bias in textbooks in one site/region. Later, educational impact (disaggregated by gender) could be assessed, contrasting the site that got the component with those that didn’t. (This would require that the quasi-experimental and quasi-control sites be similar in relevant background variables and did not differ on other project components they received.)
3. An additional **recommendation** about research is aimed at content analysis, the main technique used to study gender bias in textbooks. We suggest that measures of *intensity* of the biases (e.g., the stereotypes, derogatory depictions of women, violence meted out to females for

violating traditional gender norms, etc.) also be added to such research. This might be especially useful in assessing progress in a “second generation” study, or in measuring differences between more and less gender-unequal societies (e.g., Saudi Arabia vs. Sweden).

4. The final research-related **recommendation** concerns making sure that there is adequate, gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation of any intervention designed to ameliorate gender bias in textbooks and/or curricula.

- It is further **recommended** that donors reach out to researchers and women’s organizations already involved in this content area and incorporate them into the monitoring and evaluation efforts.

5. The first **recommendation** without a research component is that donors should reach out to these women’s NGOs and researchers in their intervention efforts as well. These are the people who often have developed non-sexist materials and curricula; they could provide their expertise in both project design and implementation phases. To date this has been a missed opportunity.

6. There is evidence that teachers’ attitudes often tend to be more unfavorable toward girls than boys, and their treatment of girl students more negative – especially in relatively gender-unequal countries. Therefore it is **recommended** that donors consider innovative, inexpensive ways to provide them with increased gender sensitivity training.

- It is further **recommended** that the place to start this gender sensitization is during teacher training.
- Therefore, it is **recommended** that wherever teacher training includes some form of practice teaching, exercises of the sort designed in such profusion by Kalia (1986) be incorporated into their training. This would mean that even if the curriculum were not changed one iota, teachers would have the ability to “stand it on its head” vis-à-vis gender bias by means of some of the easy exercises she (and others) have proposed.

7. Moreover, it is **recommended** that as countries succeed in achieving gender parity in enrollments, i.e., succeed at *access*, they should be encouraged to tackle – and monitor and evaluate – “second level” problems, such as gender bias in textbooks and curricula.

8. Since the amount of funding for content analysis studies of gender bias is only a fraction of the funding needed to mount a systematic attack on the problem, and different donors specialize in “different parts of the elephant,” it is **recommended** that there be a donor coordination effort, perhaps chaired by EFA professional leadership, to better allocate the various tasks entailed in identifying/describing vs. ameliorating gender bias in textbooks and curricula.

9. Finally, it is **recommended** that reductions in the *intensity* of gender bias in textbooks be considered as a useful indicator of gender equity in society. Stromquist (2007:36) now calls for using decreases in gender stereotypes in learning materials for this purpose. The combination of both might prove even better.

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## APPENDIX A – From the Work of Myra and David Sadker on Curricular Bias

FROM: <http://www.american.edu/sadker/curricularbias.htm>

### Seven Forms of Bias: Some Practical Ideas for Confronting Curricular Bias

Back in the 1970s and the 1980s, publishers and professional associations issued guidelines for non-racist and non-sexist books. As a result, texts of the last twenty years are much improved. Unfortunately, they are far from bias-free. The following seven forms of bias can be found not only in K-12 textbooks, but also in college texts, in the media - in fact, they are all around us. Feel free to explore these definitions with your students, as well as try the strategies suggested.

### Seven Forms of Bias in Instructional Materials

#### **Invisibility: What You Don't See Makes a Lasting Impression.**

The most fundamental and oldest form of bias in instructional materials is the complete or relative exclusion of a group. Textbooks published prior to the 1960s largely omitted African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans from both the narrative and illustrations. Many of today's textbooks are improved, but far from perfect. Women, those with disabilities, gays and homosexuals continue to be missing from many of today's texts.

#### **Stereotyping: Shortcuts to Bigotry.**

Perhaps 'the most familiar form of bias is the stereotype, which assigns a rigid set of characteristics to all members of a group, at the cost of individual attributes and differences. While stereotypes can be positive, they are more often negative. Some typical stereotypes include:

Men portrayed as assertive and successful in their jobs, but rarely discussed as husbands or fathers.

Women as caregivers

Jews as rich

#### **Imbalance and Selectivity: A Tale Half Told.**

Curriculum may perpetuate bias by presenting only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people. Such accounts simplify and distort complex issues by omitting different perspectives.

A text reports that women were "given" the vote, but does not discuss the work, sacrifices, and even physical abuse suffered by the leaders of the suffrage movement that "won" the vote.

Literature is drawn primarily from western, male authors.

Math and science courses typically reference European discoveries and formulas.

### **Unreality: Rose Colored Glasses,**

Many researchers have noted the tendency of instructional materials to gloss over unpleasant facts and events in our history. By ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict, we deny students the information they need to recognize, understand, and perhaps some day conquer societal problems. Examples include:

Because of affirmative action programs, people of color and women now enjoy economic and political equality with (or superiority over) white males.

The notion that technology will resolve persistent social problems.

### **Fragmentation and Isolation: The Parts Are Less than the Whole.**

Did you ever notice a "special" chapter or insert appearing in a text? For example, a chapter on "Bootleggers, Suffragettes, and Other Diversions" or a box describing "Ten Black Achievers in Science." Fragmentation emerges when a group is physically or visually isolated in the text. Often, racial and ethnic group members are depicted as interacting only with persons like themselves, isolated from other cultural communities. While this form of bias may be less damaging than omission or stereotypes, fragmentation and isolation present non-dominant groups as peripheral members of society.

### **Linguistic Bias: Words Count.**

Language can be a powerful conveyor of bias, in both blatant and subtle forms. Linguistic bias can impact race/ethnicity, gender, accents, age, (dis)ability and sexual orientation.

Native Americans described as "roaming," "wandering," or "roving" across the land. Such language implicitly justifies the seizure of Native lands by "more goal-directed" white Americans who "traveled" or "settled" their way westward.

Such words as forefathers, mankind, and businessman serve to deny the contributions (even the existence) of females.

The bias against non-English speakers.

### **Cosmetic Bias: "Shiny" covers.**

The relatively new cosmetic bias suggests that a text is bias free, but beyond the attractive covers, photos, or posters, bias persists. This "illusion of equity" is really a marketing strategy to give a favorable impression to potential purchasers who only flip the pages of books.

A science textbook that features a glossy pullout of female scientists but includes precious little narrative of the scientific contributions of women.

A music book with an eye-catching, multiethnic cover that projects a world of diverse songs and symphonies belies the traditional white male composers lurking behind the cover.

### **Investigative Strategies for Bias Detectives**

Here are several strategies for teaching these concepts in K-12 and teacher education classrooms. Ask students to review school textbooks and identify each

of these seven forms. Then ask them to suggest ways to remove the bias and create more equitable textbooks.

Extend this activity by asking students to identify these forms of bias in college level texts (academic areas as well as teacher education), or in magazines and television programming.

While curriculum bias clearly impacts females and students of color, males can also be victims as well. Using the 7 forms of bias as a framework, find examples that negatively impacts males, and suggest ways to overcome the bias.

Ask students to identify how these seven forms emerge in interpersonal interactions. For example, teachers stereotype when males are asked to help with physical classroom tasks, or fragment by studying African Americans only during “Black History Month”).

