Chapter 10
Gender-Based Discrimination in Childhood and Adolescence

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Abstract Gender-based discrimination, which includes any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms, or biological sex/gender, gender identity, gender expression, or presumed sexual orientation, is prevalent throughout the world and is often directed at children and adolescents. Because childhood and adolescence are particularly vulnerable periods of development, there can be long-term consequences of experiencing such discrimination. In this chapter, we describe gender-based discrimination as it affects children and adolescents, beginning with a focus on how the field has shifted historically and in conjunction with historical and legal changes. We then detail the different types of gender-based discrimination targeting children and adolescents: discrimination at home, school, and media that involves (a) direct or indirect biased interactions targeting individuals, (b) structural biases within institutions, and (c) cultural expressions of stereotypes and prejudice.

Keywords Gender discrimination · Sexual harassment · Adolescence · Childhood

Gender-based discrimination—defined by the World Health Organization (2011) as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms—represents a significant social problem throughout the world. It becomes increasingly problematic when one broadens the definition to include discrimination on the basis of biological sex/gender, gender identity, gender expression, or presumed sexual orientation. Childhood and adolescence are important periods for academic, physical, social, and identity development; when gender-based discrimination targets children and adolescents, the consequences can be recursive and long-term, and can harm academic choices and success, parent and peer relationships, and emotional and mental health (see Brown, 2017 for review). Additionally, with adolescence, as gender and sexuality norms become important,

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the effects of gender-based discrimination may be detrimental for healthy sexual relationships and positive attitudes about the body (e.g., Petersen & Hyde, 2013). In this chapter, we describe gender-based discrimination as it affects children and adolescents, beginning with a focus on how the field has shifted historically and in conjunction with historical and legal changes. We then detail the different types of gender-based discrimination targeting children and adolescents and what those discrimination experiences are across different developmental contexts. It is important to note that the majority of this academic work has been conducted in Westernized countries (e.g., the USA, Australia); however, some research has been conducted in other countries, and we will specifically identify these studies within the chapter.

10.1 Research on Gender Discrimination in Historical and Legal Context

The study of gender discrimination in children has followed the social and political movement for gender equality. In the USA, in 1961, Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women that had been created by President Kennedy. In 1963, the commission issued a report, entitled *American Women,* that documented widespread discrimination toward women and girls. They stated, “Girls hearing that most women find mathematics and science difficult, or that engineering and architecture are unusual occupations for a woman, are not led to test their interest by activity in these fields. Because too little is expected of them, many girls who graduate from high school intellectually able to do good college work do not go to college” (Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, 1963, p. 4).

During this same period, research was beginning to look at how boys and girls were differentially socialized by their parents. One of the first mentions of differential gender socialization was from the book, *Patterns of Child Rearing* (Sears et al., 1957). Specifically, the authors noted that parents withdrew love from girls in response to their aggressive behaviors, whereas they did not for boys. They further argued that relatively higher rates of aggression in boys and dependency in girls was a result of parents rewarding behaviors associated with the child’s gender and punishing the behaviors deemed inappropriate for their gender. The book’s sole female author, Eleanor Maccoby, continued to explore how gender socialization shaped children’s development. Indeed, she edited one of the first books specifically about gender roles entitled *The Development of Sex Differences* (Maccoby, 1966).

Years later, in 2000, Maccoby wrote a reflection about the historical trends in the study of gender development. She pointed out that the early research on gender development was influenced by the American mid-century zeitgeist of behaviorism, and primarily examined children’s gendered behaviors using a stimulus-response principle to assess how “sex-typed” behaviors were reinforced. This observation was empirically supported by a 2011 analysis of gender development research in the journal *Sex Roles*. Zosuls et al. (2011b) documented that most of the research on gender development in the 1960s and 1970s (at least, the research published in *Sex Roles*) concentrated on parents' socialization of boys and girls through different expectations and attitudes toward their children. This approach was ultimately limited, however, because parent socialization practices could not fully explain the high degree of gender stereotypical behaviors among children (Lytton & Romney, 1991).

By the early 1970s, the second wave of the women's movement heralded international attention and critical legislative changes banning gender discrimination, particularly as it related to children in schools. In the USA, *Title IX* of the Education Amendments was passed in 1972 and the *Women's Educational Equity Act* was passed in 1974 to promote educational equity for American girls and women. In the UK, the similar *Sex Discrimination Act* of 1975 was passed. The United Nations issued their 1975 *Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year*, noting that the worlds' governments should ensure, "that co-education be provided at all levels in order that girls and boys may have access to identical curricula and resources…so that they may be able to form a more realistic picture of each other; and that all curricula should be free of sex bias, and should include a critical analysis of sex-role stereotyping." (United Nations, 1976, p. 100).

These public policy and legal trends co-occurred (not coincidentally) with research trends that were also beginning to focus on how gender bias affected children's education (Zosuls et al., 2011b). Two classic examples of the time were *The school's role in the sex-role stereotyping of girls: A feminist review of the literature* by Levy (1972) and *Sexual discrimination in the elementary school* and *Are you guilty of teaching sex bias*? by Myra and David Sadker (1972). Research documented that boys—but never girls—were being asked to run audio-visual equipment; boys' sports were receiving more funding, space, and staff than girls' sports; and boys and girls were directed toward very different career paths by counselors and teachers (Boring, 1973). As Sadker and Sadker wrote in their most well-known book, *Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls,* "From grade school through graduate school female students are more likely to be invisible members of classrooms. Teachers interact with males more frequently, ask them better questions, and give them more precise and helpful feedback. Over the course of years, the uneven distribution of teacher time, energy, attention, and talent, with boys getting the lion's share, takes its toll on girls" (2010, p. 1). Similar findings have been observed in other countries. In the UK, it was noted that "While girls are at school, there are already strong influences at work to restrict their opportunities." (Coote & Gill, 1974, p. 32). In China, Chen and Rao (2011) found that, as early as kindergarten, teachers convey traditional Chinese gender roles (which favor boys over girls) to students; for example, they interact more with boys than girls and let boys be first in line.

Despite this global attention on the gender discrimination affecting girls, the 1973 National Educational Association book, *Sex Role Stereotyping in the Schools*, was explicit about the importance (and limitations) of the new legislation, stating, "Ten years ago sex discrimination was widespread and legal. Today it is widespread and illegal." (Boring, 1973, p. 19). In other words, although the new legislation had firmly positioned the differential treatment of boys and girls as discrimination that was inherently unfair, unjust, and illegal, it was clear from empirical studies that it was still common.

Although empirical studies clearly documented that gender discrimination was occurring in schools, and that parents treated their children differently based on gender, research documenting how children *themselves* perceive gender discrimination is more recent and sparse. For example, in the 1985 book, *Just a Bunch of Girls,* Lesley Holly interviewed British 10-year-old girls in which they stated, "Girls *can* play football but nobody's organized it, so the boys think they should be able to play it more." (p. 56), and "They are much stricter on the boys. They hardly do anything to us." (Holly, 1985, p. 58). Research largely ignored children's perceptions of and understanding of gender bias and discrimination until after 2000. Our own work is one of the first developmental studies to use the label of gender discrimination in reference to children (Brown & Bigler, 2004). This work found that children in elementary school, particularly late elementary school, perceived gender discrimination by a teacher toward a student when contextual information suggested it was a likely explanation, such as when the teacher had a history of gender-biased choices. These perceptions of gender discrimination were related to children's gender attitudes, as children with egalitarian gender attitudes were more likely to perceive gender discrimination than their more biased peers (Brown & Bigler, 2004).

In the 1990s, concepts of gender discrimination targeting children and adolescents moved beyond parents and teachers to include peer-to-peer sexual harassment. In 1991, Anita Hill entered the national conversation when, during his Senate confirmation hearings for the US Supreme Court, she detailed Judge Clarence Thomas' perpetration of workplace sexual harassment. This brought the conversation of sexual harassment to the international stage for the first time. Shortly following this, in 1993, the American Association of University Women conducted the first national survey to examine girls' and boys' experiences with sexual harassment in school (grades 8–11) and published their landmark publication *Hostile Hallways*. Sexual harassment is defined as "unwelcome conduct. . .such as touching of a sexual nature; making sexual comments, jokes, or gestures; displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings, pictures, or written materials; calling students sexually charged names; spreading sexual rumors; rating students on sexual activity or performance; or circulating, showing, or creating e-mails or Web sites of a sexual nature" (Hill & Kearl, 2011, pg. 6). This research found that 85% of girls and 76% of boys experienced sexual harassment at schools. These trends culminated with the US Supreme Court revisiting the scope of the 1970s *Title IX* of the Education Amendments in the case of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1999). In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that the gender discrimination banned under *Title IX* also included sexual harassment at schools. As Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote, school boards are liable when officials are "deliberately indifferent to sexual harassment, of which they have actual knowledge, that harassment is so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it can be said to deprive the victims of access to the educational opportunities or benefits provided by the school."

10.2 Types of Gender-Based Discrimination Affecting Children and Adolescents

The modern study of gender-based discrimination in children and adolescence reflects the complexity of discrimination. Gender-based discrimination as a social phenomenon is complicated because it can be either overt or subtle, and it can occur at multiple levels simultaneously (see Brown, 2017). For example, discrimination can be (a) direct or indirect biased interactions targeting individual children, (b) structural biases within institutions, or (c) cultural expressions of stereotypes and prejudice.

At the most proximal, individual-level, gender-based discrimination can stem from direct interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. These are the easiest forms of discrimination for children and adolescents to perceive, especially when they are overt and face-to-face. These types of discrimination can include exclusion, either from social interactions (e.g., being left out of peer groups) or from opportunities. It can also include unfair evaluations or expectations, such as being graded unfairly by a teacher or given extra chores by a parent. It can include explicit teasing for engaging in counter-stereotypical behaviors or activities (e.g., teasing a boy who takes ballet). At the most extreme, gender-based discrimination involves bullying and physical violence, and is especially likely to be directed toward LGBT teens (e.g., 44% of LGBT teens in the USA are physically harassed at school because of sexual orientation; Kosciw et al., 2008). At the subtler end of the spectrum, individual-level discrimination can include different expectations (e.g., attributing girls' positive performance to extra effort, rather than ability); behaviors reflecting the presumption that certain groups are deviant (e.g., when teachers assume boys are misbehaving and refer them to the office at rates higher than girls); or communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts and feelings of the target (Sue, 2010). This can include adolescent girls who report sexual harassment to teachers, but are told that the solution is to dress less provocatively.

Gender-based discrimination also occurs at the structural or institutional level. Structural discrimination within institutions refers to biases within institutional policies and practices that unfairly restrict the experiences and opportunities of a certain group of individuals (Dovidio et al., 2010). Importantly, structural discrimination can exist even in the absence of individual-level stereotypes or discrimination (i.e., there can be sexism without sexists). For example, policies that ban LGBTQ student organizations, that prevent youth from self-identifying their gender identity at school, or that require that transgender male students use the female restroom (or vice versa) perpetuate structural/institutional-level discrimination. Policies that segregate students into classes based on gender (e.g., carpentry classes for boys or cooking classes for girls) or that require girls and boys to wear gender-specific uniforms also perpetuate structural/institutional-level discrimination.

Finally, there is cultural-level gender-based discrimination. Cultural discrimination is defined as broad, societal-level behaviors guided by "beliefs about the superiority of a dominant group's cultural heritage over those of other groups, and the expression of such beliefs in individual actions or institutional policies" (Dovidio et al., 2010, p. 11). Most simply, this includes cultural expressions of stereotypes and prejudice. One of the most common types of cultural-level gender-based discrimination that is examined is girls'/women's and boys'/men's representation in media and politics, including the underrepresentation of girls in children's literature and the sexual objectification of girls in media.

10.3 Gender-Based Discrimination Across Development and Contexts

Consistent with the history of the field detailed above, most research on gender-based discrimination focuses on boys' and girls' direct experiences in their two most important domains: home and school. Considerably less research has focused on structural and cultural discrimination as it relates to children and adolescents, although those fields are currently attracting greater scholarly attention. In the following section, we detail research on children and adolescents' experiences with individual-level discrimination, namely gender-based discrimination at home with parents, at school with teachers, and at school with peers; then discuss children's knowledge of structural discrimination and cultural discrimination. As detailed below, most of the research conducted on gender-based discrimination affecting children and adolescents documents gender differentiated treatment. Although more limited, when available, we also discuss children and adolescents' *perceptions* of such discrimination.

10.3.1 Gender-Based Discrimination at Home

Children experience gender-based discrimination at home, most often by their parents. This most often includes different socialization practices for sons and daughters (for a more detailed review, see Brown & Tam, 2019). Although research indicates that parents do not differ in how much warmth or control they show their children (e.g., Endendijk et al., 2016; Lytton & Romney, 1991), they do differ in their treatment of boys and girls with regard to toys and play. Parents tend to stereotype certain toys as masculine (e.g., tools and trucks) and certain toys as feminine (e.g., dolls and make-up) (e.g., Peretti & Sydney, 1984; Wood et al., 2002). Subsequently, parents provide their children with gender-typed toys, regardless of their children's actual preferences, and encourage gender stereotypical play (Lytton & Romney, 1991; Wood et al., 2002). Fathers tend to be more rigid about gender-typed play than mothers, and gendered-play is often more strictly enforced with sons relative to daughters. For example, 44% of preschool boys said their fathers would say it was bad if they played with girl toys, whereas only 24% said the same about their mothers (Raag & Rackliff, 1998; Robinson & Morris, 1986).

Parents also often treat girls and boys differently in regard to household expectations. Girls tend to do more chores than boys, and chores are often distributed in gender-stereotypic ways. For example, girls report being in charge of domestic chores, while boys are assigned tasks such as home repair (Etaugh & Liss, 1992). Furthermore, girls may experience stricter rules than their brothers. For example, one boy stated, "My brothers get to go somewhere [and] they come late and don't get punished but when my sister comes late, she gets punished." (Brown et al., 2011, p. 467).

Beyond different play expectations and household assignments, parents can also socialize their children differently based on their stereotypes about their traits, interests, and abilities. This includes the differential socialization of stereotypical emotions, such as sadness and anger. For example, in general, parents are more likely to discuss emotions with their daughters, especially female-stereotyped emotions such as sadness (Fivush, 1991; van der Pol et al., 2015). In contrast, parents stereotype anger as masculine and discuss that more often with sons than daughters (Fivush, 1991; Maccoby, 1998; van der Pol et al., 2015). Consistently, parents have also been shown to be less surprised and concerned by—and punish less frequently—aggressive behavior from sons relative to daughters (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Maccoby, 1998).

Parents also socialize boys and girls differently in accordance with stereotypes about academic interests and abilities. Most explicitly, parents are twice as likely to discuss numbers with boys than girls, and three times as likely to explain science exhibits to sons than to daughters (Chang et al., 2011; Crowley et al., 2001). Further, when asked to complete a science task with their early adolescents, fathers of sons used more cognitively demanding language (e.g., asking conceptual questions, using scientific vocabulary) than fathers of daughters (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003). These differences seem to reflect parents' differential expectations about their children's STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) abilities. When asked about their children's science abilities, parents of daughters tend to report that (1) science is harder for their child, (2) science is not as important for their child, and (3) that their child is not as interested in science compared to parents of sons (Andre et al., 1999; Bhanot & Jovanovic, 2009; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003). Additionally, parents are more likely to attribute sons' success in mathematics to innate ability, but daughters' success in mathematics to hard work (Yee & Eccles, 1988). These stereotypical attitudes are noticed by children, and high school boys are more likely than girls to say that their parents exhibit science-supporting behaviors (e.g., "help you feel better when science is hard" or "look at science websites with you") (Simpkins et al., 2015). When asked explicitly about their perceptions of gender-based discrimination, 15% and 12% of adolescent girls reported that their fathers and mothers, respectively, have made sexist statements about their STEM abilities (Leaper & Brown, 2008).

Lastly, children and adolescents who do not conform to gender stereotypes (i.e., who are not highly typical for their gender) also experience gender discrimination from parents. This gender typicality-based discrimination begins as early as preschool. For example, parents are generally accepting when girls play with boy toys such as tools, but they believe that only girls can play with girl toys like make-up (Campenni, 1999; Wood et al., 2002). Children are aware of these biases, and preschoolers report that their parents would prefer that they played with a same-gender toy versus a cross-gender toy (Freeman, 2007). This pressure from parents to conform to traditional gender norms persists across middle childhood and into adolescence (Corby et al., 2007; Egan & Perry, 2001). In extreme cases, parents may coerce their children into conforming to gender norms. For example, the more gender-nonconforming transgender youth are, the more likely they are to be verbally and physically abused by their parents (Grossman et al., 2005).

10.3.2 Gender-Based Discrimination at School

Most research on gender-based discrimination has focused on differential treatment by teachers or negative comments, teasing, harassment, and exclusion from peers at school.

10.3.2.1 Teachers

Teachers, like parents, have different perceptions of boys' and girls' STEM abilities. Teachers tend to underestimate girls' math abilities and state that boys are better at STEM subjects than girls (Hand et al., 2017; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014). Additionally, teachers tend to attribute girls' success in physics to hard work, whereas they attribute boys' success to inherent ability (Carlone, 2004). Girls are able to perceive these biases and report explicit cases of gender discrimination by teachers (e.g., "feeling as though you had to work harder than male students to be taken seriously" or "hearing negative comments about girls' and women's STEM abilities"; Robnett, 2016). In fact, nearly 23% of adolescent girls report hearing their teachers or coaches make sexist comments about their STEM abilities (Leaper & Brown, 2008). When one adolescent girl expressed her desire to get top marks in a high-level math course, the teacher responded, "Oh I think you have to have a boy brain to do that" (Francis et al., 2017, p. 164).

While teachers may believe that boys are better than girls at STEM subjects, they may also believe that boys have *less* potential for overall school success and are more likely to misbehave in class than girls (Mullola et al., 2012). When asked to rate their students across a multitude of domains, teachers report that boys are higher in distractibility than girls, but are lower in persistence and educational competence than girls (Mullola et al., 2012). Teachers are also stricter with male versus female students, and boys are more likely to be punished or to receive disciplinary referrals at school than girls (Chen & Rao, 2011; Silva et al., 2015). For example, one boy noted, "My friend in middle school, the girl pulled down a boy's pants and she didn't get in trouble. If the boy did it, he would get in trouble," and another said, "One time I missed an assignment and I couldn't make it up. But then a girl comes and sweet-talked the teacher. He falls for it and gives her a make-up assignment" (Brown, et al., 2011, p. 467). This tendency to be stricter with boys than girls is especially pronounced for African American boys (Cogburn et al., 2011; Noguera, 2003).

Beyond the classroom, students also experience gender discrimination from teachers in the domain of athletics. Teachers tend to believe that boys are more inclined toward or skilled in athletics (Garrahy, 2001; Satina et al., 1998), and nearly 30% of adolescent girls report that their teachers/coaches have made sexist comments about their athletic abilities (Brown, et al., 2011; Leaper & Brown, 2008). Boys are also aware of this discrimination against girls, and one middle school boy noted, "My teacher in elementary school wouldn't let girls play dodgeball because they would get hit and cry" (Brown, et al., 2011, p. 467).

Lastly, children and adolescents who do not conform to gender norms also experience discrimination from teachers. For example, preschoolers who display cross-sex play behaviors (e.g., boys who play dress up) are often targets of teacher criticism (Fagot, 1977). Teachers also make discriminatory statements on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation (Buston & Hart, 2001). In a study on sex-education classrooms, researchers observed several instances of overt homophobia from teachers, including teasing boys about being gay, making obscene jokes about lesbian sex with male students, and stating that vaginal intercourse is the only valid form of sex (Buston & Hart, 2001).

10.3.2.2 Peers

Along with teachers, peers play an important role in children and adolescents' school lives. Peers' treatment of each other varies by gender, and this can begin as early as preschool. For example, preschoolers spend significantly more time with same-sex than cross-sex peers (Martin & Fabes, 2001; Powlishta et al., 1993). This preference does not emerge until around 2 years of age, when children learn to label gender, and girls tend to show this gender preference before boys (Fagot & Leinbach, 1993; LaFreniere et al., 1984; Powlishta et al., 1993).

As children transition into middle childhood, this same-sex preference persists (Strough & Covatto, 2002; Zosuls et al., 2011a). Children this age also begin to internalize (i.e., believe or endorse) gender stereotypes. For example, when asked what being a boy/girl means to them and what they like about being a boy/girl, 61% of children gave gender-stereotypical answers (Rogers, 2020). One girl said, "because sometimes when I look at boys they're really nasty and—I don't really like boys' clothes…I like being a girl because girls are pretty," while another answered, “They [boys] always get into fights, always talking bad about other people, getting in trouble in class for talking back to the teacher, um talking in class, being on their phones. . .some girls are bad but not as bad as the boys” (Rogers, 2020, p. 7). Only 13% of the children gave counter-stereotypical answers that explicitly challenged stereotypes (e.g., “People they say that boys can do more things than girls, I do not believe that at all. .. I prove them wrong”; Rogers, 2020, p. 6).

As childhood transitions into adolescence, girls, especially, begin to note peer bias against them in regard to sports and STEM (Brown et al., 2011; Leaper & Brown, 2008). For example, 58% of high school girls intending to major in STEM report gender bias (e.g., “feeling as though you had to work harder than male students to be taken seriously” or “hearing negative comments about girls’ and women’s STEM abilities”) from male peers, and 28% report the same from female peers (Robnett, 2016). Adolescent girls also perceive peer discrimination in athletics, and 54% report hearing sexist comments about their athletic abilities from peers (Leaper & Brown, 2008). Additionally, while adolescents said that athletic ability was the most important predictor of boys’ popularity, the same was not true for girls (Becker & Luthar, 2007; Shakib et al., 2011). Rather, physical attractiveness was the most important predictor of girls’ popularity. This emphasis on girls’ appearance coincides with puberty and may be aggravated by the sudden importance of sexual and romantic relationships (Galambos et al., 1990).

This high degree of gender segregation (e.g., preference for same-sex friends) decreases across middle school and into high school (Strough & Covatto, 2002), when sexual and romantic relationships increase in importance (Galambos et al., 1990). Unfortunately, this increased integration between boys and girls is accompanied by high rates of sexual harassment in high schools (Hill & Kearl, 2011). Various studies have examined the prevalence of sexual harassment in high schools, with up to 90% of girls and 79% of boys reporting being the target of some form of sexual harassment (AAUW, 2001; Hill & Kearl, 2011; Leaper & Brown, 2008). Girls are more likely to report being the target of sexual harassment, while boys are more likely to report being the perpetrator of sexual harassment (Ashbaughm & Cornell, 2008; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Jewell et al., 2015).

Lastly, children and adolescents who do not conform to traditional gender norms are also likely to experience gender typicality-based discrimination by peers. This can begin as early as preschool, where individuals who display cross-sex play behaviors (e.g., girls who play outside in the sandbox, boys who play with dolls) are criticized or excluded by peers (Fagot, 1977). This continues into middle childhood. A study of 5–9-year-old children showed that boys gave “like” nominations to male peers who participated in sports, a stereotypically masculine activity, during recess and gave “dislike” nominations to male peers who participated in role-play, a stereotypically feminine activity (Braza et al., 2012). In a recent study with Chinese 4–9-year-olds, children gave more positive peer appraisals (e.g., preferred being friends with and shared more stickers with) gender-conforming rather than gender-nonconforming children in a series of vignettes (Kwan et al., 2020). This pattern was especially pronounced among older children. Boys were more negatively evaluated for their non-conformity than were girls (Kwan et al., 2020).

As children enter adolescence, this social exclusion often evolves to include verbal and physical harassment from their peers. Adolescents who are highly atypical for their gender often face high rates of peer harassment that range from name-calling to, at the most extreme, being attacked with a weapon (Jewell & Brown, 2014; Kochel et al., 2012; Zosuls et al., 2016). Research suggests that these forms of gender discrimination are most pronounced for boys, who experience both stricter gender norms and harsher consequences for violating those norms than do girls (Carter & McCloskey, 1983; Jewell & Brown, 2014).

10.3.3 Structural Discrimination

Research on children's knowledge of structural discrimination is rather sparse. Most of that research has focused on children and adolescents' perceptions of gender discrimination in occupations and politics. For example, at a concrete level, when elementary school-age children were shown novel occupations performed by either a woman or man, they rated the jobs performed by women as lower in status (i.e., earn less money and are less important) than the identical jobs performed by men (Liben et al., 2001). This understanding does not seem to generalize to an understanding of broader occupational inequalities. Specifically, although women still make significantly less than men and are underrepresented in the upper echelon of corporations, children and adolescents do not perceive substantial status inequalities in the business world (Neff et al., 2007).

There is also research indicating that children, by elementary school, can perceive gender-based structural/institutional discrimination in politics. In the USA, in 2008, Bigler and colleagues (2008) found that 87% of children were aware that men are usually the US president. This decreased significantly in 2016 (following the campaign of the first female presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton), when 74% of children reported that "only men" are usually president (Patterson, et al., 2019). Surprisingly, only 65% of children knew that no woman has ever served as president of the USA. These rates did not differ by gender.

Children also perceived past structural/institutional discrimination. Specifically, half of the American children sampled believed that women were historically excluded by law from being president, and more than half of children perceived that the historical lack of female presidents was due to voter bias and discrimination (Bigler et al., 2008). Consistent with advances in cognitive development, knowledge of gender-based historical structural/institutional discrimination increased with age across middle childhood. Some children perceived *current* structural/institutional discrimination. One-quarter of children (erroneously) assumed that it was *currently* against the law (in 2007) for a woman to be president, and half believed that individual voters would be discriminatory (Bigler et al., 2008). There were differences across age groups, however. Among children under age nine, 35% assumed that it was currently against the law for a woman to be president of the USA, whereas only 7% of children age nine or older did.

Interestingly, knowledge of structural inequalities was related to family socialization, specifically their family's support of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton (Patterson et al., 2019). For example, children from families with high support for Ms. Clinton were more likely to know that men are usually president than were children from families with lower levels of support for Ms. Clinton. Children were also largely unaware of the extent to which women are underrepresented in the US government and lacked knowledge of women in international leadership roles. More than half of children did not know that a woman has been the president of another country (Patterson et al., 2019).

With age, children seem to become increasingly aware of existing societal gender inequalities. Neff and colleagues found that by 13 years old, but not by 9 years old, children in the USA were aware of status and power inequalities in politics (Neff et al., 2007). Specifically, early adolescents perceived men to hold more power and influence in politics relative to women, and girls perceived this inequality more than boys. Perceptions of gender inequalities in politics increased with age, with late adolescents perceiving more inequality than middle adolescents, who perceived more than early adolescents.

10.3.4 Cultural Discrimination

Research has documented cultural-level gender-based discrimination targeting children and adolescents. For example, this is frequently documented in children's books and media. In general, there are differences in sheer representation of boys and girls, as boys are more likely to have a central role in books and more likely to be a part of the title of the book than girls (Tsao, 2008). Further, children's books often have stereotypical portrayals of boys and girls (Tsao, 2008). In a review of award-winning Canadian children's literature, analyses showed that children's books typically portrayed men as protectors, adventurers, and problem-solvers, whereas women were portrayed as homemakers (Taber & Woloshyn, 2011). When children are depicted in the story, they are also portrayed stereotypically. Girls are often shown completing domestic chores, while boys are typically portrayed as more active than girls (and active girls are considered "exceptions"), and girls are often dressed in skirts and dresses even when engaging in activities for which skirts and dresses are inappropriate (Tsao, 2008). A review of fifth grade books showed that male characters are overwhelmingly portrayed as competitive, aggressive, and argumentative (Evans & Davies, 2000). Even in books labeled by researchers and publishers as "nonsexist," although female characters may have masculine characteristics and roles, they typically also maintain traditional female gender roles; additionally, these books very rarely portray male characters with female characteristics and roles (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

Cultural-level gender-based discrimination is also evident in the prevalence of sexualized depictions of girls in virtually all forms of media, such as magazines, video games, music videos, television shows, and movies (e.g., Conrad et al., 2009; Downs & Smith, 2010; Fabrianesi et al., 2008; Gerding & Signorielli, 2014; Hall et al., 2012). Children's television shows frequently portray girls as sexualized by wearing tight, revealing clothing (Lacroix, 2004). A recent study analyzed 10 of the most popular television shows among White and Latina US girls and found evidence of sexualization of female characters in everyone (McDade-Montez et al., 2017). Sexualized images of girls extend beyond media. One-quarter of girls' clothing is revealing or has sexually suggestive writing (Goodin et al., 2011), and popular dolls marketed to young girls wear leather miniskirts and thigh-high boots (see American Psychological Association, 2007). Although no known research has explicitly asked girls and boys about these gender-biased media images, this extensive media saturation does appear to lead girls to increasingly sexualize themselves. For example, research in Australia has shown that girls as young as 4 are already portraying sexualized behaviors, such as wearing makeup and having body image concerns (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

Although little research has asked children and adolescents about their explicit awareness of cultural discrimination, some adolescents may be aware of the links between cultural stereotypes and inequalities. In qualitative research with adolescents (Grossman & Porche, 2014), some girls are able to articulate the links between societal stereotypes and inequalities. For example, one girl noted: "Girls are told [by society], 'Oh girls are less interested in science.' So they're like, 'Well, I'm less interested in science.'" (Grossman & Porche, 2014, p. 711).

10.4 Conclusions

Despite great advances in gender equity over the past 40 years, gender-based discrimination is still prevalent in childhood and adolescence. This discrimination stems from peers, parents, teachers, and society. By early adolescence, children report being teased for not conforming to gender stereotypes or being gender atypical. Whereas boys are more frequently teased for violating masculinity norms, girls in middle childhood are more frequently teased for supposedly poor athletic ability, and by early adolescence, the majority of girls will report being the target of sexual harassment by their male peers. The teasing becomes particularly frequent and intense (often classified as bullying) if the adolescents are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer, and is most dangerous and pervasive if the adolescents are transgender. Teachers also, at times, make negative comments about children's abilities (particularly to girls), make generally negative comments (particularly to LGBT adolescents), and disproportionately punish boys for misbehaviors. Even parents hold differential standards for boys and girls and make discouraging comments about girls' STEM or athletic abilities. Many gender-atypical adolescents perceive parental pressure to be more gender stereotypical, and many LGBT adolescents perceive their parents to reject them when they disclose their sexual orientation. Children are seemingly less aware of broader structural and cultural discrimination, although their knowledge seems to become more accurate with age.

Although considerable research has been conducted, there needs to be substantially more work on children and adolescents' gender-based discrimination. Much of the work on children's understanding of structural discrimination comes from a US context. We need more work in developmental psychology examining these processes in other regions of the world. This is especially true of the societies in which the lives of girls and gender-nonconforming youth remain highly oppressive (Rafferty, 2013). We also need a better understanding of the long-term effects of experiencing gender-based discrimination in childhood in combination with other forms of discrimination such as those based on individuals' race/ethnicity, appearance, religion, or socioeconomic status (Brown, 2017; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Variations in gender norms related to cultural traditions may affect how and when bias is manifested across different ethnic groups, and individuals may be more likely to experience discrimination when they belong to more than one stigmatized group (e.g., Bucchianeri et al., 2013). Future research on children's intersectional identities is needed. As we strive for true gender equity worldwide, future researchers must be mindful of the ways in which gender bias has persisted, the ways in which gender bias has transformed over time, and the ways in which diverse individuals experience gender bias differently.

Spotlight Feature: Children's Appraisals of Peer Gender Nonconformity

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Many adults encourage boys to play with cars and girls to play with dolls, believing that children should engage in gender-conforming activities. Interestingly, when children possess positive traits, if these traits are gender-nonconforming (e.g., a boy being gentle, well-mannered, eager to soothe hurt feelings), adults tend to perceive them less positively (Coyle et al., 2016). Similar to adults, children's appraisals of gender-nonconforming peers are also less positive, and such appraisals are further complicated by several factors. One factor is the peers' gender, with gender-nonconforming boys being more negatively appraised than gender-nonconforming girls (Wallien et al., 2010). Second, compared to feminine characteristics, masculine characteristics are perceived as having higher status in society and higher status members tend to be avoidant of characteristics which are perceived as having lower status (Leaper, 1994). This might explain why boys who show feminine characteristics are usually perceived negatively. Third, there are different domains of gender nonconformity such as appearance, behaviors, traits, gender of playmates, and the appraisals depend on the combination of gender and domain of gender nonconformity. Boys with feminine appearance are perceived more negatively than girls with masculine appearance while girls who prefer masculine play activities are perceived more negatively than boys who prefer feminine play activities (Blakemore, 2003).

Apart from the above gender-related factors, age is another factor influencing children's appraisals of gender nonconformity. Research shows that children, especially younger children aged 5 to 6 years old, are rigid in abiding to the gender norms (Trautner et al., 2005). Some children even act as gender police to correct other children's gender-nonconforming behaviors. As children grow older, they begin to understand that both boys and girls can perform counter gender-stereotypical activities (Signorella et al., 1993). As a result of increasing gender-stereotypical knowledge and cognitive flexibility with age, children might become more accepting of gender-nonconforming peers. On the contrary, research found that older children tend to be less positive towards gender nonconformity than younger children (Carter & McCloskey, 1984). This suggests that children may not naturally grow out of their bias against gender nonconformity despite more advanced cognitive ability to understand the existence of diversity.

Bias against gender nonconformity may be a call for concern given that gender nonconformity is in fact common in the population. Although extreme gender nonconformity that constitutes gender dysphoria may be rare, research found that around 20% of boys and 40% of girls of school age show at least ten gender-nonconforming behaviors (Sandberg et al., 1993; Yu & Winter, 2011). Gender nonconformity is associated with mental health risks, of which poor peer relations may be a key contributing factor (Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2003; Kuvalanka et al., 2017). If children's bias against gender nonconformity can be reduced, it is possible that the psychological well-being of gender-nonconforming children can be improved as well. Research have been conducted to explore ways to reduce gender-based bias. For example, Mundy-Shephard (2015) employed empathy, perspective taking and mere exposure in adolescents and young adults but the intervention could not successfully reduce bias against sexual minorities. Also, Coyle et al. (2016) showed that adults' appraisals of gender-nonconforming children became more positive if these children were portrayed to possess positive gender-nonconforming characteristics (e.g., an independent girl and a gentle boy). Some studies focused on children's appraisals but they emphasized appraisals of sexism (e.g., bias against one gender, usually women and girls) instead of gender nonconformity, for example, by training children to respond to others' sexist comments (Lamb et al., 2009).

A recent study developed an intervention to reduce children's bias against gender-nonconforming peers. This intervention of presenting positive and gender-conforming attributes of gender-nonconforming peers was successful in reducing bias against gender-nonconforming peers in Hong Kong children aged 8 to 9 years old (Kwan et al., 2020). It is suggested that by simply presenting the gender-nonconforming peers with a diverse range of traits (both gender-conforming and -nonconforming, and traits that would be considered positive such as performing well in school), children became more positive towards them. In fact, every individual, including gender-nonconforming individuals, possesses a diverse range of attributes. However, in our daily life, gender-nonconforming attributes can easily draw attention and children may hardly realize that gender-nonconforming children also share many attributes with them in common. By reminding children of the other attributes of gender-nonconforming children, bias was reduced in this study. Interestingly, although the intervention may be said to have worked by reminding children of the gender-conforming and generally positive attributes of the gender-nonconforming peers, it indirectly led the children to perceive those peers' gender-nonconforming behaviors as less wrong (or more right) and to be less aversive of engaging in those same activities. The findings from this intervention opened up a gateway to build a more tolerant future generation from a young age.

Interestingly, the same intervention was not successful in reducing bias against gender-nonconforming peers in Canadian participants (MacMullin et al., 2020). Cultural differences in processing contradictory information might provide a possible explanation. Previous research suggested that when receiving contradictory information, Chinese accept the contradiction and adjust their views by finding a "middle" position between the two opposing views, whereas Westerners are more likely to ignore the contradiction and become polarized in their original views (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). The intervention involves presenting opposing information (i.e., peers possessing both gender-conforming/positive attributes and gender-nonconforming attributes). This may explain why only Hong Kong children adjusted their appraisals and became more positive towards gender-nonconforming peers. These suggested the importance of cultural consideration in devising interventions to reduce bias against gender nonconformity.

Different interventions in reducing bias against gender nonconformity in children can be explored in future studies. Meta-analysis of contact-based interventions suggested that both direct and indirect contact of individuals of different ethnicities showed some success in reducing ethnic bias (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015). Ethnicity and gender are both perceptually salient features and children tend to focus on these features when categorizing people into ingroup and outgroup members (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Intergroup contact theory suggested that interactions with outgroup members can lead to more positive attitude towards the outgroup members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Thus, future studies can explore whether interventions that enhance interactions between children of different gender expressions can potentially reduce bias against gender nonconformity.

There is increasing attention to gender nonconformity globally with research showing increasing prevalence rates in gender nonconformity (Zucker, 2017). Recent studies showed that perception and treatment of gender nonconformity might vary across cultures from early childhood. For example, Hong Kong children showed more consistent bias against gender nonconformity than Canadian children and were more receptive of the particular intervention (Kwan et al., 2020; MacMullin et al., 2020; Nabbijohn et al., 2020). It is worth exploring further how the expression, perception, and treatment of gender nonconformity differ across cultures.

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