

## **The Role of Schooling in Constructing Gendered Identities**

Bernadette L. Dean, Rahat Joldoshalieva and Abid Hussainy

**Abstract:** Many research studies show that schools play an important role in constructing gendered identities of girls and boys in western contexts. In Pakistan, there are research studies on the construction of gender in textbooks but studies on the role of schools are either unreported or unavailable. To address this gap in the literature, an exploratory study was carried out in public sector schools in the urban and semi-urban areas of Karachi. The findings indicate that the inter-relationship of the structure of schools, the official curriculum, teaching and learning practices and teacher beliefs result in a gendered division of labor, gendered bodily and disciplinary regulations, gendered control of space, bodies and behavior, and teaching to perceived gender differential characteristics which serve to develop gendered identities of girls and boys.

**Keywords:** gender, gender identity, gender and schools, Pakistani schools

### **Introduction**

A considerable amount of children's time is spent in schools. Thus schools are important sites for the construction of children's identities, especially their gendered identities. Of the considerable research on the role of schools in constructing gendered identities of children, much has focused on the analysis of gender in textbooks. These studies indicate that regardless of the country of origin of the textbooks, males are dominant; and the description of roles, relationships and personal characteristics are more favourable to males than to females (Centre for English Language Education Commission, 2001) Analysis of Pakistani textbooks have indicated similar results (Dean, in press; Saigol 2004; Mattu & Hussain, 2004; Ali 1993; Shah, 1985). A few studies have also been conducted on the role of teaching and learning practices in the construction of gendered identities (Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Witt, 2001; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Acker,

1994). Most of these studies indicate that “Sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different education” (Sadker & Sadker, 1994) and that these experiences have a negative impact on girls’ educational attainment (Younger & Warrington, 1996; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). To the best of our knowledge, there is no reported research on the construction of children’s gendered identities in Pakistani schools. This research study addresses this gap. In this paper the cases of three schools – a government girls secondary school, a private boys primary school and a rural government co-education primary school - are reported. Findings regarding the role each school plays in constructing students’ gendered identities is reported.

### **Research Methodology**

A case study approach using qualitative research method was chosen to explore how schools construct the gender identity of Pakistani students. Ten schools were selected to represent single sex boys, single sex girls and co-education schools in both the government and private schools systems in urban and rural areas of Karachi.

In order to collect data from the research sites, the research team used complementary research methods. These included ethnographic observations, interviews with the head teacher and teachers, focus group interviews with students, and the analysis of curriculum materials. In addition relevant qualitative data of facilities, enrolment, retention and achievement data were collected through a survey. The tools for data collection were either developed or adapted from other sources (e.g. curriculum gender analysis framework developed by Kabira & Masinjila’s 1997 cited in Leach 2003) by the team so as to ensure conceptual understanding and effective use of the tools by all team members.

The ten schools were equally divided among the five members of the research team. In some cases, two researchers collected data from the school, particularly where schools were too big or where the lead researcher was unfamiliar with the language that was used in the sampled rural schools. The researchers spent four days in each school.

In each school, data was collected through interviews which were audio-taped and later transcribed. Classroom observations that were script-taped and general

observations around the school for which field notes were written. Curriculum, textbooks and school brochures were analyzed.

The researchers analyzed data collected from the research sites. Gender was used as the factor of analysis. While some members used the NVivo program, some carried out a manual analysis. All the data was subjected to a narrative analysis in which codes were identified and themes proposed in each school case. Analytical memos also informed the narrative analysis as did the quantitative data from the school profile form. Following the identification of themes, a report was generated for each school.

We chose only three school cases in this article as the three researchers had completed writing their reports and the cases represented both the different settings: single sex boys, single sex girls and co-educational and both systems, government and private.

### **Case 1: Gendering Identity: The Case of A Girls' School**

The government girls' higher secondary school, Karachi has an enrolment of fifteen hundred girls belonging to the lower-middle class. Of its fifty teachers, forty-nine are female while of the thirteen non-teaching staff only two are female.

The school is purpose-built with large, bright and airy classrooms. Besides the classrooms, there are science laboratories, a home-economics room and two computer laboratories. There are a number of offices and a staffroom, separate toilets for teachers and students and a large playground.

The focus of the study is the science section of class nine where each subject is taught by a different teacher. All the teachers transmit information from the government prescribed textbook using the strategy each thinks best suited to their subject. For example, the English teacher uses the read-translate-question format. Students read a section of the text, the teacher translates it into Urdu and asks students to answer factual questions. The mathematics teacher solves the problem on blackboard, explains the algorithm, and asks students to do similar textbook problems. Teaching and learning is so examination focused that all the girls in classes nine and ten are discouraged from participating in any co-curricular activity for fear it would distract them from their studies.

## **Findings**

### **Personality traits: Binary opposites**

Teachers and students used binary opposites to describe the personality traits of girls and boys. Their descriptions indicated that boys are more intelligent than girls; girls are docile and obedient, while boys are naughty and uncontrollable; girls are cooperative and boys are competitive; and boys are self-confident while girls are diffident.

### **Boys are naturally intelligent while girls must work hard to succeed**

The teachers believe boys are naturally intelligent whereas girls must work hard to succeed. They believe that boys' IQs are higher than girls and therefore they learn much more quickly than girls. They claimed, "The IQ level of boys is better compared to the girls... Despite the fact that they live in the same environment, are exposed to the same media and study in the same schools, boys are sharper than girls."

The girls study continuously with complete attention until they know it by heart, but the boys say, 'there are still four days left, we will study on the last day, who needs to study for four days'...I have seen that boys are so intelligent, they have the ability to pick up very quickly.

The teachers' beliefs influenced their classroom practices. They kept girls on task in the classroom, gave them homework and insisted they work hard to achieve good results. In the mathematics classroom while the girls solved textbook problems the teacher walked around the class to ensure they were on task and to check their homework. She admonished those who had not done their homework and reminded them that it was why they did not do well in mathematics. She advised them to, "Do it. Practice it until you can do it blindly. Do not think, 'I will leave it, why do it today.' Do not put it off. Learn it by heart. Practice it at home. Revise it. It will come in the mid term, half yearly and in every exam."

The girls themselves attributed boys' excellent academic performance to intelligence while attributing their own ability to the perceived degree of difficulty of the subjects studied. The girls said

We perform well in Urdu, English, Islamiyat and Biology as they are easy. We do not perform well in mathematics, physics and chemistry as they are difficult.

### **Docile and obedient girls, disobedient and uncontrollable boys**

The head-teacher and teachers characterized girls and young boys as obedient and docile and older boys as disobedient and uncontrollable. Disobedience was waived as implying “mischievousness” or “naughtiness”. The teachers said, “Boys are disobedient by nature. They are always in the mood of fun and games... Because girls are obedient they are easily controllable while boys being naturally disobedient make them uncontrollable.”

Boys are short tempered, they speak loudly and it is difficult to handle them. Girls are docile so they can be handled more easily as compared to boys. Most girls did obey the school’s rules. In the classroom they obediently followed the teachers’ instructions. Obedience even extended to their colleagues who are prefects and monitors. For example, when the monitor ordered three girls to spit out what they were eating, the girls immediately obeyed. Some girls covertly resisted this characterization but other girls ensured their obedience. On a couple of occasions when two to three students remained seated instead of standing up to thank the teacher at the end of the lesson, other girls ordered them to “stand up.”

### **Girls are more cooperative and less competitive than boys**

Girls were described as more cooperative and less competitive than boys. Teachers felt boys competed in all spheres of life while girls were generally cooperative only competing on academic tasks. Teachers relied on this cooperativeness to facilitate learning. They sat a weak girl besides a bright girl so that the bright girl could help the weak girl in her studies and chose bright girls as monitors so they could teach the class and help weak students. The teachers also noted that the girls rely on each other to help in their studies.

We observed the girls sharing their books and stationary and working together to solve math problems. However, we also observed them competing for the teacher’s attention and praise and with colleagues on tests. Teachers encouraged academic competition to make the girls work harder and obtain good marks in examinations.

### **Boys are self-confident, girls diffident**

Teachers characterized boys as self-confident because of their success in curricular and co-curricular activities. Girls on the other hand were described as diffident as they speak “so softly they can hardly be heard,” do not seek help from the teacher and seek affirmation for everything they do.

The teachers in an attempt to maintain complete control of the classroom were so strict that the girls were generally too scared to even utter a word. When a girl finally found the courage to ask a teacher for help she spoke so softly that the teacher had to ask her thrice “what did you say?” However, when the teachers left the classroom these girls were transformed. They talked loudly, discussed the lesson and acted self-confidently. This self-confidence was also demonstrated by some girls outside the classroom when they led the assembly, played the band and monitored colleagues. It therefore came as no surprise, when the girls determined to show their confidence claimed “We are good at everything we do.”

### **Girls as home maker, carers and nurturers**

The teachers' believed gender roles and responsibilities are fixed: men have to earn a living to support the family and women were responsible for home making. Even if girls went out to work it would still be their responsibility to look after the home as women are responsible for the home. A teacher said,

I think girls have more responsibilities than boys because the future of every person, whether they are male or female depends totally on girls...It is their duty to bring up the children. We have to teach girls that you have to be a hard worker, sympathetic and loyal. We have to teach boys that they have to support their family in future so they have to learn to be responsible now.

In order to prepare the girls for their role as home makers they were assigned to clean their own classrooms. Besides cleaning their own classrooms, they occasionally cleaned other rooms as well. A teacher informed us that,

We have a big staff, so when the maid does not come we call three to four girls to make tea for us ... They wash the cups and place them in their correct places. If

sometimes we have to clean our staff room, we ask them to help us in cleaning the room, we also ask them to help us in changing the curtains, cushions, etc. She observed that the girls perform these tasks “happily” and “they enjoy doing it”. However, another teacher pointed out that some girls object when asked to clean. On such occasions she reminds them that “housekeeping is a girl’s basic responsibility.”

With the exception of one girl, all the girls thought housekeeping was a women’s responsibility. They also thought that women must be carers and nurturers. A key factor for wanting to become doctors and teachers was the nurturing and caring role these professions allowed them to play. A girl claimed, “from the beginning it is my interest to serve others...I want to become a doctor because a doctor cares for others.”

Textbook examples and teachers served to reinforce the idea that women must be carers and nurturers. In the English class the teacher taught a lesson entitled ‘The role of women in the Pakistan movement’. The text depicts most of the women in the stereotypical roles of caring and nurturing going beyond this role only in need. Begum Ra’ana Liaquat Ali is stated to have “worked as an honorary secretary and typist to Liaquat Ali Khan (her husband) at a time, when the Muslim League could not afford the salary of a secretary” (p.47). Only in one case is a women shown doing work similar to that of the men, organizing and addressing public meetings. The teacher while teaching reinforced these textbook messages.

### **Disciplinary regulations and practices**

Disciplinary regulations and practices are aimed at controlling the girls’ appearance, conduct and social life. The head teacher insisted that “All girls must wear neat and clean uniforms and their shoes should be polished.” Prefects regularly check whether the girls’ are wearing the prescribed uniform and that it is neat and clean. In the classroom teachers keep surveillance over the girls’ appearance. They order students to “straighten your uniform”, “put your buttons on” and “sit properly”.

The school ensures good conduct by setting up rules and monitoring behaviour both inside and outside the classroom. Classrooms are expected to be quiet places. Thus the teacher at the least sound orders the girls to keep quiet. For example, during a biology lesson the teacher while drawing a diagram on the blackboard stopped at regular intervals

to command, “no noise”, “draw the diagram with me”, “don’t make a noise”, “shhh”. As soon as the teachers leave the classroom, the girls start to move around the class and talk to one another. This disruption is not allowed to last long as the monitors take over. Outside the class prefects keep a strict check on students conduct. While very few girls resisted the control of the teachers, more resisted control by the monitors and prefects.

The teachers not only control girls life at school they also try to control their social life. The large amount of homework seems to be a way of controlling what girls do after school. In addition, teachers discourage them from watching TV especially programs they think are not suitable for girls such as wrestling and movies with sexual content and from mixing with boys as it could lead to immoral behaviour.

Control is maintained by verbal and physical punishments. Teachers berate the girls for talking, not doing their homework and failing tests. Consistent misconduct is punished by asking the girls to remain standing inside or outside the class and occasionally being beaten. All the girls in the focus group accepted the punishments as they felt it was “for the betterment of the students.” They claimed that “when the teacher punishes us, we understand things quickly” and that “the girls come the next day with their homework done and work learnt.”

### **Girls must be morally upright**

Teachers’ believed that the future of the society depends upon the upbringing of girls which they expressed mainly in relation to sexual morality. Teachers and students believed in separation of the sexes because of religious and societal prescriptions. Only need based mixing of the sexes is permissible. A teacher stated,

We (women) only talk to them (men) when we have some work otherwise we don’t... They are good... We have to be good then there will not be any bad incident in our society. On the road or bus if you keep yourself good then, there will be no one to hurt you... There is no need to be friendly with them, you just talk to them when you have work with them because our religion does not allow us to be friendly with males. You talk with them, keeping their position in mind, you don’t talk rudely with a man because he is superior to you, you have to respect him for that. If these things are adopted by every woman then I don’t think any wrong incident will take place.

The girls shared the view that girls and boys should be separated as girls might learn bad habits if they mix with boys. A girl said, “Girls get nasty and involved in bad habits when they become involved with boys.”

In the school there was only one male computer teacher. He never associated with the female teachers. The head teacher was the only one who communicated with him and only when it was absolutely necessary. The fear of sexual impropriety led to both teachers and students suggesting there should be sex segregated schools. The girls preferred girls schools because they felt that if they were in co-education schools they would not do well in their studies as boys would distract them. A girl said, “We prefer learning with girls because we can talk to them more easily than boys ... Boys become very naughty. Girls cannot concentrate when studying with boys, their minds get diverted. We can not adjust with boys.”

However, one girl who had studied in a co-education school presented a much more realistic picture when she said, “Some boys take an interest in their studies but some don't”. Teachers felt, if necessary co-education was alright as long as girls and boys sat separately.

Regarding who should teach them, all the girls felt that they should be taught by female teachers as they “would hesitate talking to any male teacher”; Both teachers and students insinuated that the male teachers’ may flirt or get involved in sexual relationships therefore it was more appropriate for female teachers to teach girls. Teachers felt, that, if required male teachers could teach girls in public arenas like colleges but never in the privacy of the home. A teacher said, “Now a days parents appoint smart male tutors to teach girls. I don’t think that it is right. Teachers should be of the same gender, females should teach girls and males should teach boys...It is different to study in college, girls and boys sit separately while attending the lecture, but when you are at home, then it is better to study with the same gender.”

### **Changing subject preference and career aspirations**

Although the school attempts to socialize students into the society, the society itself is changing. Societal changes result in new realities which schools must prepare students. In Pakistan, one such change has been the growth of business and financial

institution and the need for professionals. As a result most Pakistani schools, in addition to offering students the option to study science, home economics or general courses, now also offer courses in commerce. This school offers students all these options. Teachers and students claimed that in the past most girls chose home economics, but today they are opting for commerce. Teachers and students however, assigned different reasons for the change. While some teachers claimed it was because of the out dated home economics curriculum, the girls claimed it because of job opportunities.

The head-teacher and most teachers claimed that parents encouraged their sons to receive post-secondary education and make a career for themselves but discouraged their daughters from receiving post matriculation education. More important was getting their daughters married. The head-teacher said,

Parents don't take their daughters education seriously. They know that after matriculation she will get married. They have only this concern in their minds. Further education is not important for them.

The teachers, however, observed a difference between the thinking of fathers and mothers with respect to education. They claimed that mothers prepared their daughter to become home makers while fathers of students belonging to an ethnic group wanted the same. However, fathers of girls doing well in their studies were supported in their efforts and encouraged to receive higher education.

If the girls are serious in their studies (meaning girls are doing well) their fathers really support them. If they are not the fathers usually get angry that I am spending so much money for her education, why is she not working hard. The mothers make them do a lot of work at home so she realizes that her daughter doesn't have time to learn.

Fathers are conscious about the education of their children. They visit the school and ask about their performance. Fathers come to inquire about intelligent students, while those who are weak, their mothers usually come.

With one exception, all the girls in the focus group felt their parents would allow them to continue their education and to work.

Teachers in viewing personality traits natural in associating more positive traits with boys than girls and stifling characteristics in a girls personality traditionally attributed to boys, limit the range of gender identities that girls could construct. Further girls subject preferences are changing, they want to make careers in banking and medicine and aspire to live that include the vision of a career and marriage. Fathers are supporting these aspirations in their daughters who do well in their studies. However, teachers' beliefs and teaching and learning practices limit the possibilities of who girls can play become and the roles and responsibilities they can play.

### **Case 2: The Case of The All Boys' School**

This private boys' high school is situated in a semi-urban area of Karachi. Most students come from middle class families from nearby community. Out of a total enrolment of eight hundred and fifty, four hundred and twenty five students study in the primary school with each class having thirty-seven to forty-two students. The school building is spacious with wide corridors and large classrooms. It has computer, physics, biology and chemistry labs equipped with basic facilities, a spacious library, two staffrooms, a health room and well-maintained washrooms on each floor. The school provides facilities such as drinking water, electricity and a canteen. The teaching staff comprises of forty-eight female teachers out of fifty-three.

The focus of the study is one section of Class five. Three of the four female teachers who teach the class were new to the teaching profession and in their youth. The medium of instruction is English, but the teachers as well as students have poor English language skills. Thus, teachers confined themselves to the textbook and students spoke mostly in short sentences. The language barrier limited communication between the teacher and students and among the students themselves. During the study, teachers were engaged in revision of textbook information. In the Mathematics class the teacher organized individual and small groups to solve math problems. The science lessons also relied on textbook information and repetition exercises. In both subjects, teachers persuaded boys to act like a teacher, explaining the content and how to solve mathematics problems to other colleagues. In the English lesson, boys were instructed to write an application, letter and engage in grammar drill exercises. In all three subjects, teachers encouraged individual as well as group competition. In the Islamiyat lessons the teacher

mostly used the recitation method, that is, the teacher asks a question and an individual student answers.

## **Findings**

Boys were characterized as competitive, confident and intelligent by their teachers and themselves.

### **Competitive boys**

Boys were distinguished from girls by their competitive nature. This perception and expectation was nurtured by teachers' practices. Boys competed both individually and in groups. In the mathematics classroom, boys tended to compete individually. They rushed to find the solutions to textbook problems and to be the first to announce the right answers to the class. Individual competition in the subjects was related to achieving higher grades and recognized as position holders. In this regard, the science teacher shared an anecdote, "Sometimes boys cry and get upset if they don't get a position. They ask, 'How come that student got the 1st position? I studied harder than him.'" Teachers' practices further inculcated competitive attitudes in boys. The mathematics teacher announced in the classroom, "Class, your exams are close. Work hard to get positions." On another occasion, the same teacher encouraged the boys to study by having them compete against girls. She said, "The girls told me that they will get positions in mathematics because they are studying hard. If you don't study hard you will not get positions." The boys confidently replied that they would get better results as they were smarter in mathematics than the girls. Competition resulted in boys hiding their work from each other and frequently complaining to their teachers about their colleagues' attempts to cheat. This behaviour was reinforced by teachers who kept reminding the boys not to show their answers to each other. When the teachers organized group work they encouraged the groups to be quick and correct so as to receive better marks. In the science classroom the teacher ranked the group to identify the winner of the task. A dispute over the choice of winner erupted when a group openly disagreed with teacher's allocating the position to another group.

### **Confident boys**

The boys were expected to behave and behaved confidently. Teachers believed that boys were confident and bold stating, “Boys usually don’t hesitate to ask question, whereas girls are sheepish.” This belief was reinforced in teachers’ practice especially when they assigned some boys to act like a teacher in front of the class. Classroom observations revealed that while most boys frequently asked questions about the task and confidently answered questions; some boys neither raised their hands to ask questions nor were called on to answer questions or to act like a teacher. The teacher identified these students as low achievers. Teachers showed a preference for high achievers, calling on them to answer, ignoring their misbehaviour, calling on them to settle the boys down and act as teachers. Hence, boys came to hold as model figures those students who had superior agility and shared some power with teachers and they seemed to expect these as characteristics of a masculine identity.

### **Naturally intelligent but lazy boys**

Teachers believed boys were naturally intelligent as they achieved better results than girls in examinations even though they did not study hard. A teacher shared, “Boys have capabilities and talent but it depends mostly on their willingness and interest. If they are not interested, teachers cannot make them study. If they are interested they do better than the girls.”

Teachers felt that boys are only serious when they are self-motivated or when they are interested in the topic being studied. In this regard, the headmistress noted, “If teachers give tasks to boys they don’t take them seriously. They say, ‘Oh Miss! Take it easy it will be done. The exam is still far. We have the whole session. We can do it.’ But if the task is given to girls, they say, ‘I have to complete it.’ Girls study but boys don’t.”

The boys demonstrated a casual attitude towards their studies. This casual attitude towards learning was seen as a characteristic of the masculine identity.

### **Boys as breadwinners**

The boys understood their main role and responsibility to be the breadwinner and that of girls to stay home and take care of the children. They saw education as a way

of preparing them for this role. A boy stated, "Boys need education to support their children and their education in future but girls sit at home only." This view was also reinforced by the textbook. Textbooks portrayed boys as breadwinners and girls as homemakers in the narrative and illustrations. Women were depicted and involved in household chores such as washing the clothes and cooking and men were depicted as tractor and truck drivers, bankers, inn-keepers and farmers. Dominance of male figures in texts and illustrations communicated the belief that men were active and visible members while women were passive and invisible in the community. Teachers shared this belief as the science teacher stated, "Boys will have to support their families in future. That's why they have to study hard so that in future they have a profession." Teachers' often emphasized the importance of boys receiving a good education and working hard in their studies so that they would do well in examination, go for higher studies and take up good professions.

The boys' perceptions of their role as breadwinners influenced their choice of subjects and the professions they aspired to. Boys chose to study mathematics and science as they aspired to become doctors, engineers, accountants and scientists. A boy stated, "My favourite subjects are mathematics and science because I want to become a surgeon or engineer." Certain professions were chosen because one could earn a higher salary and acquire a respectable status in Pakistani society.

Boys' subject preferences were also supported by their observation of family practices such as fathers or brothers helping boys in mathematics and science, whereas mothers in English, Urdu and Islamiat. Boys related this practice to the kind of jobs their parents did. For instance, fathers or brothers' were thought to be able to help in mathematics and science as they were involved in business that required dealing with calculations whereas mothers in religious study as their role was confined to raising good children by inculcating Islamic values. These beliefs and family practices were further strengthened by textbook images. For example, a pictorial image in the mathematics textbook shows a father helping his son to do a math problem.

This resulted in the core belief that parents invested in their sons' education as a guarantee for their own future. They did not invest in their daughters' education as there

was no direct profit for the family, as daughters would get married and become part of her husband's family.

In addition to their roles as breadwinners, boys saw themselves in the role of leader as well as able to bring pride to the family which further reinforced their significant and exaggerated characteristics of a male child. These beliefs about highly expected roles and responsibilities pressurized boys to succeed in studies and in life. The significance of them being a man was also nurtured by teachers classroom practices. The mathematics teacher addressed the students as "Mr" throughout the lessons.

### **Misbehavior and Punishment Strategies**

In comparison with quiet and well-behaved girls, boys were perceived as naughty and misbehaving. Teachers generally viewed boys' misbehaviour as a natural phenomenon. A teacher stated, "Boys are not careful about their behaviour and attitude. I think it is mostly because of their nature." The boys' misbehaviour ranged from the simple to severe. Simple forms of misbehaviour were talking to each other, while the teacher explained the lesson, making extra noise, cheating from each other whereas more serious misconduct were teasing each other and fighting (kicking, boxing) during recess in the schoolyard.

New and inexperienced female teachers reported more frequent episodes of misbehaviour than senior or more experienced teachers as they were better able to manage the boys. The principal claimed, "New teachers have classroom management problems. They are unable to manage the class due to lack of experience. After a few months they find it easier to manage. This is expected from new teachers. But senior teachers do not face these problems."

The boys themselves admitted that they misbehaved more frequently in female teachers classrooms because female teachers did not punish them as harshly as male teachers did. A boy stated, "Female teachers are very good. They punish us but they don't beat us. They make us *murga* (chicken) and sometimes they ask us to leave the class."

*Murga* (chicken) is a punishment strategy which requires the person to hold their ears while doing sit ups, a strategy peculiar to Pakistani schools.

Observations indicated that in the classrooms of young, inexperienced and attractive female teachers, boys' misbehaviours increased to the point where the teacher became the victim. The boys refused to obey these teachers; instead they passed remarks and laughed at the teacher, making her feel as if there was something wrong with her. A young, inexperienced science teacher shared such a situation. She said, "They laugh at me. Then I feel uneasy about my appearance or clothing. I start looking at myself. I don't know whether they are laughing at my clothes, appearance or how I teach or what I say. They continuously laugh and talk with each other. Then I reprimand them but they don't stop laughing. They never seem to accept my command."

In such cases, teachers called on male colleagues for assistance. The same science teacher stated that she called Mr. A to come and discipline the misbehaving boys. She said, "Boys keep quiet in front of Sir A. He is working as a principal for several years at this school. I think boys respect him because he is a man."

To ensure discipline in the school has put structures in place to prevent and punish misbehaviour. The school has a Discipline Committee which is the highest body responsible for discipline and order at school. The Committee is headed by a male Physical Training teacher and the cadets appointed to it are from among the high achievers. The cadets organize the boys into straight lines during morning assembly; serve as 'watchdogs' during recess time and after school. They are expected to demonstrate good manners and serve as a model for other boys in the schools. They distinguish themselves from the rest of the students by wearing different uniform (wearing badges, white caps) and by reserved and stern behaviour. Several cadets reported pride in their roles as it gave them status and enabled them to exercise in their power. In addition, teachers integrated the disciplinary activities their teaching practices. The English language teacher while teaching the unit "Good manners" cited behaviour codes like 'never shout', 'respect everyone', 'greet elder people', 'wear clean and tidy clothes' as examples of well mannered person. In other cases, they took time from their actual lessons to highlight the value of order and discipline. The Islamiat teacher lectured boys on how to become well-behaving Muslims and quoted verses from the Holy Quran and told stories about the Prophet Mohammad (*PBUH*).

When prevention failed the school resorted to punishment. The severity of punishment depended on the nature of the misbehaviour. Simple forms of misconduct were dealt with by teachers' gazing angrily at misbehaving boys, announcing their names publicly (in the classroom) and silently approaching misbehaving students. More serious cases of misbehaviour involved physical punishment. The head of the School Discipline Committee or cadets executed the punishment. During recess several boys were seen acting like *murgas* (chicken) under the strict observation of the head of the School Discipline Committee for ten minutes.

Hence in general boys constructed stereotypical gendered identities through teachers' beliefs and practices, curricular materials (textbooks), school environment and structures (Discipline Committee) and through peer interactions in the school (in and outside classrooms).

### **Case 3: The Case of The Co-Educational School**

The government primary school is a co-education school situated in rural area of Karachi. Students belong to poor peasant families. Previously this school was a boys' school but as per government policy it became a co-education school. The total student enrolment is one-hundred and fifty-three out of which eighty-seven are boys and sixty-six are girls. Out of eleven teachers in the school there is only one female teacher. With the exception of one female member (a lady councillor), all other members of the School Management committee are male. Records showed that the female member did not attend any of the monthly meetings and did not take much interest except to sign the attendance sheet on the principals' request. The school has three big, generally clean classrooms. It has one toilet which was used by both male and female teachers and the students. The office of the head teacher was also used as a staffroom. As there is no open space there is no playground. Unlike most schools there is no morning assembly as there is no where to assemble the students. All the students, with the exception of three girls who live at a distance from the school, go home during midmorning recess, there being no school canteen.

### **Personality characteristics**

#### **Boys are more intelligent but less interested in their studies than girls**

The teachers perceived boys as more intelligent than girls. The class teacher said, “There is a big difference in the mental level of boys and girls. Boys mental level is higher than girls. When I teach boys, I explain them once how to read and reply. So when they read and learn anything they are able to answer.”

Boys were viewed as intelligent and well-informed because of their interaction with elder people, reading newspaper and exposure to outside environment. In comparison to boys, girls’ were seen as less intelligent and not well-informed as they are confined to their homes, denied interaction with and exposure to the world. This belief, resulted in the teachers encouraging boys to ask questions during their lessons

The girls, however, believed that they were more intelligent than boys as they paid greater attention in the class. The head teacher and English teacher shared similar perception stating that girls paid more attention towards their studies. The belief of the English teacher influenced his teaching practice as he encouraged girls to ask questions first in his classes and encouraged them even when they did poorly on a task. He did not criticize the girls because he was of the view that, “Girls should walk along with boys. They must be helped to improve,” which meant that it was important to build girls’ confidence so that they could do as well as boys in life.

In most other lessons equal opportunity for learning was not provided to all. Classroom observations indicate that girls were called on to answer questions less often than boys. Girls asked questions seldom and when they did ask questions those were not even acknowledged by the male teachers.

#### **Girls are physically weak but boys are strong**

The teachers and students viewed girls as physically weak and boys as strong. On the basis of this perception, girls were given lighter punishment. The head teacher stated, “We scare girls. We warn them to complete their work or don’t be naughty the next time. We do not allow the monitor to beat girls but beat only boys.” Boys also

perceived girls as physically weak. They said, “Girls do not run in the game (race). You know... girls start running but soon loose their energy.”

Because of their perceived physical strength, boys were appointed as school monitors as they were best able to control the class. They were allowing to play cricket and other sports just outside the school. Although the class teacher stated, “Sports develop one’s mind and body and allow individuals to get advantage from every thing.” He noted that “Boys exercise, play football or cricket while occasionally girls ask me ‘Sir can we do some running’ I reply ‘yes, its good to do some running’.”

Like boys, male teachers were viewed as strong. They were viewed as better able to control the class as compared to female teachers. The head teacher observed that, “Male teachers can control the class by using their power but females teachers give up when students make noise and disturb the class”. One of the male teachers also supported this belief claiming that unlike female teachers, the male teacher could catch students from home and bring them to school.

**Girls must be passive, morally and ethically good.**

Most of the teachers expected girls to be obedient, passive and demanded certain moral and ethical behaviour from them. The head teacher stated, “Girls maintain discipline, they respect their teachers by covering their heads and greeting them all the time, they always come neat and clean and they are ethically and morally very good”. The class teacher kept reminding the girls in the class, “You are female; you should talk very nicely and mannerly.”

Some teachers however shared that they were not happy with how girls acted in the class. A teacher claimed, “While teaching, I ask boys to keep quite and they obey immediately. But girls don’t listen. They turn their face away from the teacher and start talking with each other. When I ask not to do so, they say ‘Sir let me talk to her for a moment’.”

Girls believed that “Girls don’t get punishment because they maintain the discipline and sit in good manner while boys do mischief in the classroom.” Boys differed with the view stating,

Girls do shout in the class. Like if a girl is angry, she can order us, 'Give me this or that or give ruler or shopper'. They shout in that way Control is also exercised to regulate students' bodies and behaviours. The head teacher viewed the uniform as a way of ensuring students come dressed neatly and cleanly to school. He was not happy with government directives telling him not to force students to wear the uniform as the uniform allowed him to control student's presentation. While the uniform is a way to control the bodies of all students, in the classroom, girls' bodies are controlled by the male teachers asking them to cover their heads with *duppatas*. This occurred as generally in Pakistani society, girls are expected to cover their head in front of older male family members as a sign of respect.

Official school routines are used to control students' bodies. Each day begins with the teacher taking the attendance of the students in the class. Students have to stand up and say "Yes, Sir" or "Yes Miss" to indicate they are present. While taking the attendance, teachers called out the names of all the boys then those of the girls indicating the superiority of the boys over the girls.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

#### **Girls monitor boys' cleaning**

The traditional gender division of labour was not reflected in the school and class rooms. Inside the school and in the class the boys were asked to serve water and tea to the male teachers. This contradicts what they usually observe at home where women serve the men as they are the authority figure. This was the case because in the Pakistani culture, females should not interact with men other than their siblings, husbands and fathers. Asking girls to serve the male teachers could result in accusations of sexual impropriety or misconduct which the teachers avoided. Apart from serving tea to male teachers, boys had to clean the classrooms. Boys reported that girls kept an eye on them to ensure they cleaned properly and then reported to their teachers. Boys explained that they cleaned because they were more boys than girls in the classes.

#### **Girls' and Boys' subject preferences and career aspirations**

The boys and girls both preferred Sindhi because they found it easy being their mother tongue. Apart from Sindhi, girls reported that they liked Urdu as it allowed them

the chance to read holy poems and holy verses and boys that they liked English. However, an English language teacher believed that girls preferred and performed well in English. Class teacher believed, "Teacher plays a role in developing choices for girls and boys made in the school regarding what subjects they like." Hence, what subject boys and girls liked was explained with relation to the way teachers taught but not related to gender differential preferences.

Boys and girls had similar as well as different career choices. One boy said that he wanted to become soldier to serve his country. Few boys and girls aspired to become doctors in order to treat the sick and poor in emergency. The poverty of their community may have impacted them to take up professions that would serve the community.

When asked to choose who, daughters or sons, they would send to school if they had limited resources, boys chose to send their sons. They explained this decision stating "Boys are very able and they can do anything in the society." This view was supported by their observation of their fathers who had ability to earn money and provide financial support to their mothers in running the house and finance their education. Although boys reported that their mothers helped them in their home work, they did value their mothers' input in their educational development. According to the boys, education was a means to provide opportunity for business and work for boys to support their future families and parents. Contrary to boys' decision to send sons to school, girls chose to send their daughters. They believed that if daughters were sent to schools, they would study hard and do well. However, a girl preferred her son to get education as she believed that he could become a doctor and support her in her old age. Not preferring a daughter to send to school was rationalized by her belief that a daughters' responsibility is to take care of her home after marriage. Thus, she did not see the benefit of educating daughters and thus gave priority to a son's education.

### **Disciplinary regulations and practices**

Disciplinary regulations and practices are based on control of students by the head teacher, teachers and peers and exercised mainly through the regulation of space inside the classroom and of student's bodies and behaviour.

### **Control of space, students' bodies and behaviour**

The class room is a highly controlled and gendered space. The teacher or in the absence of the teacher, the monitor controls the space for both girls and boys. The entrance and exit into and out of classroom is controlled by the teacher and students must seek permission to enter or leave. In addition, the teacher makes boys and girls sit separately and decide who each boy and girl will sit with at a desk. The choice by girls or boys is not considered in this arrangement. Occasionally, both girls and boys resist this control by entering or exiting and changing their seats without the teachers' permission.

### **Gender relationship in the School: Relational construction**

Teachers reported that they had similar relationships with colleagues as relatives like sisters and brothers. Similarly, the teacher-student or student-student relationship was also thought of relationship between family members. Head teacher stated, "We teach [girls] like their brothers and we also teach other students [boys] to behave like their brothers and treat girls as young or elder sisters. We teach students like our own children and treat them equally." The students were also taught to consider their teachers as their parents. However, the observations revealed that the students interacted with the same gender and the interaction between different genders was a rare case. In addition, a female teacher shared that she felt hesitant to work with male teachers, especially in the case when she was the only female working in the school. Head teacher reported that students did not interact with male teachers a lot and in rare occasions, the students came to his office. He believed that students did not share their problems with anybody. However, girls shared that they interacted with the female teacher and accepted her as a sister or mother feeling easy to talk to her. Girls seemed to value the caring attitude of male or female teachers.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

Families, relations with peers, the media and school contribute to the development of a child's identity, that is, who one is and what one becomes. While families are the primary influence on a child's developing sense of identity, once children enter school they are exposed to a range of experiences that become an important component of their developing sense of identity. The study found that Pakistani schools,

like Pakistani society, provide differential opportunities for girls and boys. Teachers and students ascribed mutually exclusive characteristics to girls and boys, the curriculum materials, teachers teaching and disciplinary practices, limit who boys and girls can become as persons and professionals.

In all the schools, teachers and students described the personality characteristics of boys and girls as polar opposites and encouraged the construction of masculine and feminine identities in keeping with these characteristics. The teachers characterized boys as intelligent and girls as hardworking; girls cooperative and boys competitive; girls as diffident and boys as self-confident. Thus, girls were encouraged to pay attention in class and work hard in order to learn whereas boys' were encouraged to ask questions and teach their colleagues. However, as teachers believed the most important task of schools is to ensure boys and girls do well in tests and examinations for this purpose alone, personality characteristics that ensured success such as competition were fostered whereas those that hindered academic success such as rowdiness were suppressed. Teachers used the cooperative nature of girls to encourage learning from one another but encouraged competitiveness (associated with boys) in both boys and girls because it enhanced academic achievement. When girls and boys exhibited personality traits not in conformity with this division, they were seen as aberrations. In the case of girls aberrations were corrected by admonishment and punishment, while in the case of boys they were seen as personality flaws about which little could be done. Most girls, however, realized that the personality characteristics attributed to them reduced their potential and thus resisted these attributions. In the presence of the teacher resistance was covert but in the teachers absence girls overtly resisted these characterizations. Those boys whose behaviour was in keeping with the characterization were provided opportunities to grow and excel while those who were quiet and shy were not provided similar opportunities.

In Pakistani schools, the teachers believe it is their job to transmit their knowledge to the students and students must work hard. Teaching was thus teacher centred, with each teacher transmitting her knowledge to the entire group of students in the class. The main instructional strategy used is the lecture which is often an explanation of textbook content. During lectures girls are expected to sit quietly, listen to the teacher

and do as the teacher orders. Boys are expected to participate actively by asking and answering questions, coming up to the board to solve problem. Boys and girls are disciplined for not paying attention to their studies. Beyond students being unable to do this for long periods of time, it was also observed that both girls and boys challenged teachers control over their behaviour. Both girls and boys used surreptitious ways to disrupt the class; however, boys also overtly resisted the control over their behaviour especially by young and inexperienced female teachers. They laughed at the teacher's comments, did not obey their instructions and roamed about the classroom.

Besides teaching in the classroom, schools also provide opportunity for learning through co-curricular activities. In most Pakistani schools these include sports and the celebration of religious and national festivals. The all girls' and all boys' schools both had large playgrounds. In the all girls' schools young girls are allowed to actively participate in sports, older girls and those studying science (perceived as academically challenging) are discouraged because of safety reasons and to avoid being distracted from their studies. Girls studying less challenging courses are permitted to participate in inter school competitions. The boys in the all boys' school and co-education school were encouraged to participate in sports as this was seen as important to the construction of their masculine identity.

In both the all girls' school and the co-education school teachers tried to control girls' appearance, conduct and social life. This was more prominent in the all girls' secondary school where control was aimed at ensuring moral behaviour largely interpreted in relation to sexual behaviour. In Pakistan, a largely tribal, feudal and patriarchal society, family and society's honour resides in the female body. Relationships between men and women are confined to one's immediate family. Usually women but also men who engage in the relationship that are mostly interpreted as sexual or romantic relationship outside the marital relationship are often killed for dishonouring the family, a practice commonly known as honour killing. Teachers especially of students past the age of puberty feel it their responsibility to ensure girls behave honourably. Behaving honourably involved covering the female head and body in front of males, speaking in low voices indicating docility and submissiveness, not talking to males except when in need and not watching TV programmes with sexual content. Teachers and students

preferred separate sex schools for fear of undesirable sexual relationships among students and between teachers and students of the opposite sex.

Both women and men work to maintain households and communities. Each society however, allocates different roles and responsibilities to women and men according to what it considers appropriate. The roles and responsibilities tend to be different in nature and value. This is the gender division of labour. In Pakistani society women are assigned the role of homemakers and men that of breadwinners. Over time, more women especially in urban centres of Pakistan have taken on the role of breadwinner, often this has been less out of choice than economic need. When they do choose to work the choices open to them are still largely an extension of their nurturing and homemaking roles and in most cases they are still responsible for homemaking as well. However, the issue is more complex. In rural areas, women have always been involved in agricultural labour, however, there too their work is perceived as valueless, seen as an extension of homemaking.

The roles and responsibilities traditionally assigned to men and women in Pakistani society are reinforced by curriculum materials and classroom instruction. Men and masculinity are dominant in the textbooks. The characters are generally male, language is gendered and male perspectives and interests dominant. Textbooks portray boys' in active and productive roles while girls are portrayed in passive and reproductive roles. It is only when absolutely necessary that women can take on productive roles. Though there are generally few illustrations in textbooks, even these mostly favoured boys. Boys are depicted more actively involved in mathematics and science texts than girls reinforcing generally held belief that girls excel in language arts and boys in mathematics and science. Teachers reinforced these textbook messages while teaching. Boys are encouraged to choose science so they can get high paying jobs and status in society while girls are encouraged to study home economics and become teachers, even though they themselves want to study science and commerce to take up high status professions like medicine and finance.

In the all girls' school and co-education school girls and boys played roles that challenged the traditional roles assigned to them. Girls held all the leadership positions and played in the band in the all girls' school while boys in the co-educational school

cleaned the classroom and served tea to the teachers. However, in these contexts the possibilities provided for envisioning and reconstructing new roles and responsibilities for girls and boys was lost. The schools, rather than using these opportunities to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions to help girls and boys construct roles that are more gender fair and developing in them the knowledge, skills and values required to play these roles ignored these opportunities and further strengthened the belief that sustained the traditional gendered roles.

In Pakistani society all occupations are open to boys but not to girls. Schooling is viewed as an opportunity to acquire high status professions for boys and for girls to be able to read and write. Thus in Pakistani society more boys go to schools than girls and boys to better educational institutions than girls. Boys aspire to highly paid jobs so as to enable them to support their own family and their parents in old age. This requires the boys to compete to achieve good grades and teachers to pay more attention to boys in co-educational schools. Due to the female traditional roles as child carer and homemaker, girls are expected to stay home and if need be, take up half day jobs that enable them to work as well as care for the home and family. With teaching in Pakistan being a half day job most see teaching as the profession of choice for women. In the past, girls mostly chose home economics with the few girls envisioning a profession in medicine opting for science. Pakistan's economic development has led to the addition of the commerce group and the shift from management to service industry has opened up opportunities for women like never before. While more girls are choosing commerce to take up jobs in banking and business, teachers are still encouraging them to take up profession traditionally allowed to them rather than preparing them to make their own career choices.

### **Conclusion**

All students, both girls and boys have high expectations from schools. However, teachers' beliefs and the teaching and disciplinary strategies they use limit who girls and boys can become as persons and professionals. Boys, like girls, require being thoughtful, caring and cooperative. Similarly, girls require a good self concepts, and confidence that comes from it. All these are important components of anyone's personality and schools should help both boys and girls to acquire the whole range of person traits. Further, in the

all the schools education was focused on preparing boys for their future roles as breadwinners and girls as homemakers rather than preparing them to choose from the range of professions based on their goals, personality and potential and not their gender alone. However, some girls despite being considered weak and less intelligent continued to enjoy their studies and aspired to be in high status professions, challenging their traditional gender roles.

### **Policy and Practice Implications**

There are a number of policy and practice implications for curriculum, teaching and learning in schools and teacher education. Only a few of the most important are being suggested below.

Curriculum should be designed and textbooks should be written on the principles of gender equality and human rights. This means curriculum and textbooks content should be visionary and change-oriented. Girls and boys, women and men should be depicted in a variety of roles, responsibilities and relationships in content and illustrations and gender neutral language should be used. To ensure the above, all those involved in the design, writing and review process should be adequately gender sensitized and special attention should be given to the representation on these committees which should be gender fair.

With respect to schools, school leaders (head teachers and teachers) and staff should be educated about gender and the importance of schools in promoting gender equality. To make schools gender fair, all schools should have a gender policy (dealing with physical infrastructure, teacher substitution and leave), an implementation plan and monitoring strategies. Teachers should choose textbooks that are gender fair, use a variety of instructional strategies to accommodate different learning needs and styles, and use gender friendly language. Moreover, in their teaching they should be aware of and ensure gender fair examples and avoid gender stereotyping. A teacher should be trained to serve as a counsellor and should guide and facilitate both girls and boys to choose from a variety of careers.

All teacher educators should be gender sensitized through re-orientation courses and Gender in Education should be a core course and cross-cutting theme in all teacher

education programmes. Reflective practice and action research should become the key components of teacher education programmes so that teachers can continue to reflect on and act to improve schools so as to make them gender fair.

### References

- Acker, S. (1994). *Gendered education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Dean, B. L. (in press). Creating subjects for gender apartheid: a critical study of an english language Pakistani textbook. In Rashida, Q. & Rarieya, J. (Eds.), *Gender and Education in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press
- Lynch, K. & Lodge, A. (2002). *Equality and power in schools*. NY: RoutledgeFalmer
- Mattu, A. & Hussain, N. (2004). Class and Gender in School Texts. In (Ed). *The subtle subversion: the state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan*. Islamabad. Sustainable Development Policy Institute. pp.101-109
- Mubarak, A. (1993). *Tareekh aur aurat*. Lahore: Fiction House.
- Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. (1994). *Failing at fairness: how America's schools cheat girls*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Saigol, R. (2004). *Concept paper. A paper presented at UNESCO workshop on gender and curriculum reform*, Islamabad, Pakistan 22-23 November 2004.
- Shah, N. (1985). School texts. In Maha Malik and Neelam Hussain (Eds.). *Reinventing women: the representation of women in the media during the zia years*. Lahore: Simorgh, pp 80-82
- Witt, S. D. (2001). *The influence of school texts on children's gender role socialization. Curriculum and teaching*. James Nicholas Publishers
- Younger, M. & Warrington, M. (1996). Differential achievement of girls and boys at GCSE: some observations from the perspectives of one school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 17, pp 299-314.

### Correspondence

**Bernadette L. Dean**

Email: [bernadette.dean@aku.edu](mailto:bernadette.dean@aku.edu)