

## **Still failing at fairness: how gender bias cheats girls and boys in school and what we can do about it**

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The extent of gender bias in America's education system is appalling, if the research and anecdotes in *Still failing at fairness* are accurate. Sadker, Sadker and Kittleman explain how gender stereotypes, sexism, and gender bias are prevalent at every level of education, from kinder through to university. In 1994, the Sadker's published the first edition of this text *Failing at fairness*. While it is clear that gender bias is not as blatant in classrooms as it was a decade ago, 'Sexism is still a way of life in our schools... gender equity progress in the last few years has slowed down for women; for men, it has barely started' (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 58).

Seven chapters describe how 'gender bias short-circuits both boys and girls' (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 6); it is hard not to become dispirited when reading this text. A logical solution to the entrenched gender-bias problem in coeducational schools is to educate students in single-sex environments. The authors devote a chapter to this topic and are very complimentary about the single-sex schools they visit. However, single-sex schooling is not promoted as the panacea to gender bias. Sadker et al. are concerned about the sudden interest in single-sex schooling in America since the changes to Title IX in 2006. They warn that 'the stampede to single-sex classes is causing a dust storm of confusion – and maybe more than a little damage' (2009, p. 284). This is a fair point, as with any educational trend, the rush to implement new initiatives can mean the interests of students are only a secondary consideration.

While the authors do not champion single-sex schooling, it is hard to read *Still failing at fairness* without concluding that so much of the gender-bias that is presented would simply not be found in single-sex schools. A recurring theme of gender bias in coeducational settings is that boys 'receive the lion's share of teacher time and attention in class' (Sadker et al., 2009, p. 105).

*Still failing at fairness* presents a sobering picture of how boys and girls are suffering from gender bias in American schools. Much of the research would be applicable to Australian schools, although it is hard to believe that the Australian system is as bad as the scenarios painted by the authors. At the end of each chapter, suggestions about how to 'succeed at fairness' are listed. There are many practical ideas but they feel like a drop in the ocean.

Like David Chadwell's *A gendered choice*, this text presents an interesting, well-researched account of gender-bias in American schools. The authors are academics who have extensive knowledge of the topic through their own studies and research. For educators and parents in single-sex schools there is a certain level of comfort to be found in reading *Still failing at fairness*. Despite the conclusions in the text, single-sex schools

are largely free of gender bias, which is one of the many benefits that girls will reap from attending girls' schools.

Sadker, D., Sadker, M., & Zittleman, K. (2009). *Still failing at fairness: how gender bias cheats girls and boys in schools and what we can do about it*. New York: Scribner.