Leaning Out
Teen Girls and Leadership Biases

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EDUCATOR TOOLKIT
Congratulations on taking an important step in confronting gender discrimination and bias. Discussing gender can be challenging. For some youth, this is an immensely personal or even heated topic that brings up questions of equality and privilege. Others may question whether gender biases even exist. Finally, the idea that biases can be implicit—and discrimination unconscious—may itself be a novel, challenging concept to some teenagers. Fortunately, the payoff in broaching these topics is huge. By allowing children to explore this topic, share ideas for improvement, and participate in community-building and empathy-promoting activities, you are taking steps towards ensuring that your classroom is a place where everyone is respected, supported, and empowered.
Discussion Questions

THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS MAY BE USEFUL FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE READ THE “LEANING OUT” FULL REPORT OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

1. What in the report most surprised you? Least surprised you? Why?

2. This report reveals that many boys and girls tend to prefer male political leaders over female political leaders. Why do you think this is? Why is it problematic? How are female political leaders frequently portrayed? Is this the same or different than male political leaders? If it is different, how is it different?

3. This report notes that many boy and girl students prefer men as leaders in fields like business, while they prefer women as leaders in roles like child care directors and art program directors. What do you think of this finding? Is there any truth to the idea that men and women are better suited for particular fields?

4. Students in the report were most likely to support giving more power to the student council when it was led by white boys and least likely when it was led by white girls. The difference in support was small. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

5. Why might girls and women prefer boys as student council leaders? Why wouldn’t they want to pick themselves as leaders?

6. Do you think most people in your school would prefer boy leaders over girl leaders? Why or why not?

7. What types of bias or discrimination—if any—do you see in your school? Home? In the community? In the news?

8. What can you do when you see gender-based discrimination? What should you not do?

9. What can be done in this school to better promote gender equity? What can teenagers do? Adults?

10. What can be done outside of school to better promote gender equity—in places such as the community and greater society?

Activities:

Try the following activities with your students to expand their discussion and learning around gender bias and to move out of their comfort zones.

In school:

Have teens interview each other across gender and racial groups about their aspirations for leadership of various kinds. Have students write a report or present what they find. Have them consider the following questions:

1. If you could be a leader, what would you want to be a leader of? Why?

2. What obstacles might you confront and how might you overcome those obstacles?

In school or home:

1. Ask youth to participate in a series of quiet reflective writing exercises about what is it like (or, for boys, what they think it must be like) to be a girl. Have they ever felt discriminated against? Felt different than men? Allow youth to share their writing, if they feel comfortable doing so. Try the same activity asking students to reflect on what it is like to be a boy.

2. Challenge youth to think about how gender roles have continued to evolve over time. Invite youth to interview a person of a different generation. How were women treated when they were growing up? Has society changed its expectations of women? What challenges or discrimination do women still face today?
Overview:

Despite the astounding progress girls and women have made in the past few decades, a gender gap still persists, and our research suggests that biases could be at the root of this gap. Gender biases and/or discrimination is surprisingly common in many schools and sometimes happens beneath school staff’s radar. As adults, we can shed light on these important topics that often go undiscussed at school. These discussions can be challenging. For some youth, this is an immensely personal or even heated topic that brings up questions of equality and privilege. Others may question whether gender biases even exist. Finally, the idea that biases can be implicit—and discrimination unconscious—may itself be a novel concept to some teenagers. Fortunately, the payoff in broaching these topics is huge. By allowing children to explore this topic, share ideas for improvement, and participate in community-building and empathy-promoting activities, you are taking steps towards ensuring that your classroom or school is a place where everyone is respected, supported, and empowered.

The following reading exercise includes three short stories of bias and discrimination that are common in many high schools.

These stories are designed to (1) facilitate discussion about the effects of gender bias and discrimination, and (2) promote empathy and perspective taking skills.

Have students read the case study and then use the included questions to facilitate a follow-up discussion.
Jessica:

Jessica had loved playing soccer since she was a little kid, and she was the star player on the co-ed soccer team at her school. When she transferred to Adams High School in the middle of her junior year, she was surprised to hear there was no co-ed team—instead she would play on the all girls’ team. While Jessica enjoyed playing on the girls’ team and met some really talented players there, she quickly realized that the boys’ team had much nicer uniforms, had the best practice spaces, and were the ones that were celebrated in school announcements and rallies. The girls were good too, but got way less attention.

In gym class, Jessica had her chance to take on the boys on the field, though. She was better than almost everyone and pretty regularly scored tough goals against the varsity boys’ team’s star player, Jeremy. After one particularly brutal game where Jessica scored several goals against the boys, Jeremy and his soccer friends decided that they didn’t want to play against Jessica any more. In front of the entire gym class, Jeremy called Jessica “the beast” and made cracks about her being too athletic for any guy at Adams to date. The other students in the class giggled nervously, but no one said anything.

Nate:

Nate was a junior at Adams and was trying to figure out what he wanted to do after high school. He had decided not to go into his father’s restaurant business and was exploring career options. He had a bunch of younger cousins that he sometimes watched and he knew that he had always gotten along well with kids. He thought sometimes about joining the for-credit childcare program at Adams to see if professional childcare might be a good fit, but he always decided against it; those programs only had girls in them. If he joined the childcare program the other guys in school would never let it go. He signed up for shop class instead—it was less interesting to him, but at least he’d be with the guys and wouldn’t get teased.

Ms. Phillips:

Ms. Phillips was the guidance counselor at Adams. She had been trying to set up a visit from the CEO of the biggest tech firm in town for almost two months. Many Adams students wanted to work there after college and Ms. Phillips wanted the CEO to talk with the students about the company and the type of employees it hired. On the day of the event, Ms. Phillips was not surprised when over 30 students showed up. All but two were boys. As they waited for the CEO to arrive, the students chatted about what the CEO would say—what type of advice would he give? Where would he recommend they go to college and what would he say they should study? What kind of fancy car would he drive to the school? When the CEO arrived in the classroom, all of the students looked surprised and a few looked confused. A few even made snide comments under their breath. The person standing in front of them was a woman.
Discussion Tips:

Once students have read the case study, use the following questions to facilitate a discussion that will help students understand how common and harmful gender-related biases and discrimination can be, and allow students to think about solutions. In your discussion, encourage students to think about each character’s perspective and to understand and appreciate their feelings (empathy). Understanding others’ feelings is just the beginning, though—it is important to encourage students to act upon those feelings of empathy and to reach out to those who are victims of gender bias. As your students read the case and answer the questions, encourage them to think about what their best or “ideal” selves would do in this case, as opposed to what they would actually do. Ask them to think about why there is a gap between their “ideal” selves and their actual behavior. What gets in the way of them doing the right thing? Ask them to consider how they might close this gap.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES AND TIPS:

- **Students don’t take the cases seriously or don’t show empathy for the characters:** Remind students that everyone has felt mistreated or discriminated against for some reason at one point or another. It may be helpful to have students engage in a reflective exercise where they think or write about a time when they have felt judged or mistreated by their peers. Ask students how they would have liked to have been treated in their own situation.

- **Students seem to care about the characters’ feelings, but they don’t know how to help:** Try opening up a class brainstorm session about ways to help or support the characters in this story—for example, they could stick up for Jessica when she is harassed, or they could encourage Nate to join the childcare course.

- **Students’ responses suggest they care about the characters, but their everyday actions suggest that they don’t care about actual gender discrimination in real life:** Try asking students to reflect silently on instances in their own lives where they have seen other students treated differently or badly based on gender. Ask students to reflect on what they could have done to improve the situation.

- **Students start sharing personal stories aloud:** From the beginning of the discussion, encourage students to focus on the case and questions, rather than sharing many personal stories aloud. The sharing of personal stories can be emotionally triggering for some students and can be difficult to manage in a classroom setting. If students attempt to tell many personal stories or the conversation becomes too heated or emotional, re-direct the conversation to focus on the case. If very personal or emotional content is brought up and re-directed, make sure to follow up with individual students after the class period, as needed. It is important that students know that you care about their concerns and experiences.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is going on at Adams? Is Adams an extreme example of gender discrimination or is it just a typical school? How is your school the same or different than Adams?

2. Why did no one stand up for Jessica when she was teased? What would you do? What would your best self-have done in this scenario?

3. Jessica felt that the girls’ team was treated differently than the boys’ team. Why would girls’ teams be treated differently? Why is this a problem? What would you do if you were running sports programs at your school? Would you have co-ed teams?

4. Nate assumed that the other guys at Adams would tease him about joining a childcare program. Is Nate’s decision harmful? To himself? To others? Why? What would you have done if you were Nate? Why? Have you ever not done an activity because you worried about what others would think?

5. We’re you surprised that the CEO of the tech company that visited Adams was a woman? Why or why not? Why is it problematic to make assumptions about a person’s gender based on their job or title?

6. Why is it problematic that so few women are CEOs and that so few are involved in technology development?

7. What are ways that boys and girls are treated differently in your school? Are any of these ways problematic? If so, why are they problems? What can be done to fix them?

8. If you were the principal of Adams, what would you do to challenge the gender biases in the school?
Although girls and women have made tremendous gains in school and work over the last few decades, females still continue to face challenges and barriers to leadership, including gender biases. As adults, there is much we can do to prevent and reduce gender biases, including checking our own biases and being aware of the messages we are sending to both boys and girls day-to-day. There is also much we can do to prepare girls to become leaders.

A wide variety of programs and interventions directly or indirectly foster leadership skills in girls, varying extensively in activities, length, and research base. These programs range from classic girls-only activity based programs such as the Girl Scouts and Girls Inc. to more targeted programs and curricula specifically developed to build leadership. Opportunities span a multitude of interests, many representing increasing efforts to engage girls in fields in which women continue to be underrepresented (e.g. STEM, public office).

Given the wide variety of programs and interventions that foster leadership skills in girls and the limited research on efficacy, it can often be challenging to select a program. Based on our research and the wisdom of practitioners, and based in part on recommendations from the Girl Scout Research Institute, we have created the following easy-to-use guide to help parents and educators identify high quality girls’ leadership programs.

Programs should include the following key components:

**EXPOSURE**

Leadership programs should expose girls to a wide range of professions. Even when girls are provided leadership opportunities, they commonly lack exposure to leadership in certain fields, such as business and politics. Research also suggests that educational and cultural practices tend to depict men in a larger variety of occupations and as agents of change while women are more frequently portrayed as observers or victims. Look for programs or activities that include the following:

- Career exploration
- Opportunities to hear from and/or meet inspiring female leaders in a wide range of fields
- Resources and support for finding internships and volunteer or shadowing opportunities

**SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Leadership programs should focus on concrete skill development. Girls’ lack of confidence appears to be one of the strongest factors deterring them from pursuing leadership, and skill development can boost girls’ confidence. Leadership programs should take on common, specific obstacles that deter girls from pursuing leadership, including fears of public speaking, appearing bossy, or being disliked. Look for programs that include instruction and practice on the following:

- Public speaking
- Conflict resolution
- Effective or assertive communication
- Problem solving
- Networking and self-advocacy
- Goal setting
“Our view is that there’s nothing that reduces stereotypes better than activist work that requires a diversity of girls to rely on one another as allies and demands coalition building for success.”

— LYN MIKEL BROWN, Professor of Education, Colby College and Founder of Hardy Girls Healthy Women

COLLABORATION

Leadership programs and strategies should promote collaboration and a sense of solidarity among girls. Collaboration and teamwork are not only essential skills for today’s workplace, these experiences can help girls develop perspective-taking, social awareness, and respect. Working in diverse groups can be especially valuable—breaking down stereotypes and enabling girls to draw on rich wisdom about leadership in various cultures. Through collaborative experiences and relationship building, girls can also work to override competitive feelings. Look for programs that include the following:

- Team or group-based projects/activities
- Relationship building experiences or skill-building
- Opportunities to work with diverse groups (i.e., ages, cultures, etc.)

MENTORSHIP

Leadership programs should connect girls with older, respected girls and women who can model and inspire them to seek out leadership and guide them in navigating barriers they face to pursuing leadership. Mentors can be formal or informal, including volunteers who interact with girls on a regular basis. Mentors not only act as role models who can inspire and foster leadership, they can also be important models of ethical values. Women of all ages should join girls as allies and mentors in collective efforts. Look for programs that include:

- Counselor in-training, big sisters, or other program elements that connect girls with older girls and women
- Peer leadership programs
- Trained staff and volunteers

HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES

Leadership programs should hold girls to high expectations and provide them with real, meaningful opportunities to take responsibility for others. Girls will develop confidence and the desire to pursue leadership when they take on problems that are meaningful to them. Look for programs that include:

- Youth-led projects or initiatives and programs that give girls opportunities to choose causes that matter to them
- Opportunities for girls to teach and lead others
- Programs that incorporate chores, tasks, and expectations
Leaning Out: Programs and Resource List

Resources and Programs that Promote Girls’ and Women’s Equity and Empowerment

The websites below offer useful programs, research, resources, and/or activities to promote girls’ and women’s equity and empowerment. Some of the descriptions listed below have been pulled from organizational websites.

Have suggestions of other powerful programs or websites that we should add to our list? Please email us at: mcc@gse.harvard.edu

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT GIRLS AND WOMEN:

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

The Geena Davis Institute is a research-based organization working within the media and entertainment industry to improve gender balance, reduce stereotypes, and create diverse female characters in entertainment. Website includes lesson plans for addressing images of gender equality in schools, a video learning series designed to help students challenge gender stereotypes, and research studies on gender in the media.

http://seejane.org

Girls, Inc.

Girls Inc. inspires girls to be strong, smart, and bold, providing more than 140,000 girls across the U.S. and Canada with experiences and solutions to the unique challenges girls face. Girls Inc. develops informal education programs, educates the media about critical issues facing girls, and teaches girls how to advocate for themselves and their communities. Website includes tips for parents as well as a section for girls.

http://www.girlsinc.org/

Girls Leadership

Girls Leadership teaches girls the skills to know who they are, what they believe, and how to express it, empowering them to create change in their world. Website offers information on Girls Leadership programming across the country, a blog, parent education videos, and research.

http://girlsleadership.org/

Girls Write Now

Girls Write Now provides programs designed to provide creative and engaging opportunities for women of all ages in the New York City area. Programs include mentoring that matches girls with professional women writers, assistance helping girls navigate the college admissions process, and a reading series to showcase the city’s best teen writers.

http://www.girlswritenow.org/
Hardy Girls Healthy Women
A non-profit organization, primarily serving girls and women in the state of Maine, dedicated to supporting and improving the health and well-being of women. Hardy Girls Healthy Women offers a series of programs and supports to empower women, as well as curricula and resources for girls.
http://hghw.org

The Representation Project
The Representation Project inspires individuals and communities to challenge and overcome limiting stereotypes so that everyone, regardless of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation or circumstance can fulfill their potential. Website includes links to films, campaigns, research, and strategies to promote awareness of and counter negative stereotypes.
http://therepresentationproject.org/

Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)
Girls for Gender Equity is committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. GGE provides programs, mostly serving young women in New York City, that develop strengths, skills, and self-sufficiency in girls and women. GGE also conducts organizing campaigns to achieve safety and equality in the communities in which girls and women live and work.
http://www.ggenyc.org/

SPARK Movement
The Spark Movement is a girl-fueled, intergenerational activist organization working online to ignite an anti-racist gender justice movement. Website features a blog about women’s issues, a downloadable app about women in history, and a curriculum for educators.
http://www.sparksummit.com/

A Mighty Girl
A Mighty Girl offers recommendations and lists of books, toys, and movies aimed at raising smart, confident, and courageous girls. Website includes a section on parenting.
http://amightygirl.com

True Child
TrueChild helps connects race, class and gender through “gender transformative” approaches that challenge gender norms and inequities. Website features research briefs about gender-related topics and tools for parents and educators.
http://truechild.org

Girl Scouts
In Girl Scouts, girls discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together through field trips, sports programs, community service projects, cultural exchanges, and environmental activities that allow girls to grow courageous and strong. Girl Scouts offers programs for 2.8 million members across the U.S. and world, and conducts research on girls’ development.
https://www.girlscouts.org/

Girls on the Run
Girls on the Run is a physical activity based youth development program for girls in 3rd to 8th grade that teaches life skills through interactive lessons and running games. The goal of the program is to unleash confidence through accomplishment while establishing a lifetime appreciation of health and fitness. Website features information about their U.S. and Canadian-based programs.
http://www.girlsontherun.org/
Lean In

LeanIn.org, based on the book Lean In, and founded by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, encourages women to pursue their ambitions and to change the conversation from what they can’t do to what they can do. Lean In supports women by building communities of support, offering library of lectures on topics like leadership and communication, and featuring a special section for men about promoting gender equality.

http://leanin.org/

PBS Parenting

PBS Parenting has many resources for parents raising girls, including tips and strategies for building confidence, resolving relationship conflicts, and challenging stereotypes.

http://www.pbs.org/parents/parenting/raising-girls/

Teach a Girl to Lead

Teach a Girl to Lead, a project of the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, aims to inspire girls and young women to follow in the footsteps of women leaders. The website features a “teaching toolbox” with lesson plans, activities, and multimedia resources to help young women rethink leadership.

http://tag.rutgers.edu/

New Moon Media

New Moon Media is a girls’ magazine and online community of girls, parents, and allies raising strong girls in an unequal world.

http://newmoon.com/

Amy Poehler’s Smart Girls

Smart Girls is a “home base” where many young men and women are able to express their concerns. Through “Call to Action” campaigns, girls are encouraged to volunteer, be more involved in the world they live in, and expand their worldview beyond their backyards.

http://amysmartgirls.com

Ban Bossy

This site supports people to use social media to pledge to #banbossy. “Bossy” is word that often is used to describe strong women. The site features leadership tips for girls, parents, teachers, and other adults, and real stories of girls in leadership roles.

http://banbossy.com/

RESOURCES SPECIFICALLY FOR EDUCATORS OR PROGRAM LEADERS:

Teaching Resource Center (TRC)

TRC Provides information on common gender dynamics in the classroom and offers suggestions on how educators can better promote gender equity in their day-to-day teaching practices.

http://trc.virginia.edu

Wrestling with Manhood

Wrestling with Manhood is an educational program that pays attention to the popularity of professional wrestling among male youth, addressing its relationship to real-life violence. The film and accompanying curriculum encourages viewers to think about the enduring problems of men’s violence against women and bullying in our schools.

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. Their site offers resources and lesson plans on topics related to gender inequality including those on women’s history, suffrage, policies and law, and women in leadership.

http://www.aauw.org/

Teaching Tolerance

Teaching Tolerance offers a wide range of classroom resources for educators. The “Gender Equity” section of their classroom resource page includes exercises on challenging stereotypes, female identity, gender expectations, and lessons about influential women throughout history.

http://www.tolerance.org/

Gender Equity Activity Booklet

This Gender Equity Activity Booklet, produced by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, provides detailed, easy-to-use activities related to a wide range of gender equity issues. The guide also includes evaluation tools related to the exercises and student quizzes.

https://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/CTE/docs/NTO/Gender_Equity.pdf

TeachingDegree.org

TeachingDegree.org offers a lesson planning guide to teaching gender equality to teens. The guide offers information about what teachers can do day-to-day to promote equality, a list of resources that teachers can share with students, and a list of resources for parents and educators.

http://www.teachingdegree.org/2012/12/07/teaching-gender-equality-to-teens/

The Myra Sadker Foundation

The Myra Sadker Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting equity in and beyond schools. The foundation offers awards to teachers interested in promoting gender equity in their classrooms. Website offers readings and a list of recommended websites.

http://www.sadker.org/

National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE)

NCWGE is a nonprofit organization of more than 50 groups dedicated to improving educational opportunities for girls and women. Website provides updates on relevant federal education legislation and shares useful resources and NCWGE publications.

http://www.ncwge.org/

Unicef

TeachUnicef offers lesson plans, videos, multimedia, and stories intended to raise student awareness of the importance of gender equality. Many materials have an international focus.

http://teachunicef.org/

Vision 20-20 Educator’s Guide

This 95-page guide, provided as part of a gender equality initiative by Drexel University, is full of classroom activities including class starters, classroom activities, and projects and performance opportunities.
