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*Winter 2018*

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## ***In this Edition:***

- Why are Women Still Underrepresented in Tech Sales?.....age 4**
- The (Semi) Secret Entrance to the Gold Mine.....Page 6**
- Women Make Up 80% of Health Care Workers- but Just 40% of Executives.....Page 10**
- The Biggest HR Mistakes Companies Make.....Page 13**
- The Truth About Great Teachers and Leaders.....Page 16**
- Creating a Safe and Connected School Climate.....Page 18**
- Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.....Page 21**
- We Teach Racism, Sexism and Discrimination in Schools.....Page 24**



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# Why are women still underrepresented in tech sales?

By: Carolyn Betts

It was about girl power in the 90s, thanks to the Spice Girls. Then, Queen Bey, told us that girls run the world in 2011. With such sentiments from well known females in recent history – celebrating the modern day woman – why is it that equal pay or equal opportunity is still an uphill battle in the ever-expanding tech sales world?

More to the point, how is it that in 2017, a worldwide technology provider, such as Oracle Corporation, is being sued by the federal government for allegedly

paying white male sales employees more than their none-male or non-white colleagues?

Women in tech sales are still lagging behind in numbers. In fact, industry stats show that only 25 percent of salespeople in tech companies are women. Unfortunately, the data gets even more drastic as we look at sales management – where women fall to a low 12 percent in sales leadership roles. Women are up against a wall, trying to advance beyond the sales development representative (SDR) position, which is usually the first stop for post-college grads entering

tech sales. Based on this, it seems California's 2020 goal of a 20 percent female C-Suite may be a tad ambitious.

Personally, as a CEO for a recruiting firm that mainly places sales people at high growth companies, I know women can be killer sales people. At Betts, our data shows we hire 35 percent women for sales-related roles, which is better than the industry average but not good enough. So, why? Why are so many women not making a bigger demographic dent in the tech world? Does society still only see men as sales savvy? Are women

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not going after that competitive edge like their male counterparts are? Perhaps it is a bit of both.

These days, most companies' hearts are in the right place; they *want* women to apply, and to succeed. And, although many hiring managers start out wanting to create a more balanced workspace, their good intentions get overrun by the day-to-day pressure to fill a quota-carrying role quickly. Time is money, so the first qualified candidate – usually a male – often gets the role. This is a huge dose of cognitive dissonance for the company — leadership wants diversity, but the reality is just more of the same.

The only recourse is for the executive board to look at the bigger picture, put hiring practices in place, and ensure myopic influence is not trumping the greater need for equality. For example, some of the smarter tech companies are actually setting metrics for management, providing them with quotas for female sales candidates they expect to interview and/or advance. It is imperative to make sure managers are taking time to intentionally source female sales candidates. Creating clear policies to ensure at least 1-2 female sales candidates are interviewed is a good start!

Simultaneously, companies can get their already-hired team up to snuff by instituting gender bias training. Ask almost anyone who has participated in one of these courses and they will tell you how eye opening it can be – and maybe even a bit jarring for those who still hold even the tiniest remnants of a 50s mentality. This tactic has become a very vital part of many HR infrastructures, ensuring that even the most self-analytical of managers, directors and sales reps do not accidentally succumb to subconscious stereotyping or preconceived notions.

Companies can always do more to ensure qualified women candidates, once hired, retain the equal opportunity to advance up the ranks – from a junior SDR position to as far as they want to go. A great, real-life example of mindful corporate outreach came when tech giant Google noticed that their female employees were less likely to self-nominate for promotions, titles, or ask for raises – despite an open policy that allows for both genders to equally apply for advancements. As soon as the company began to remind employees of promotional opportunities, through corporate emails, not only did female application rates soar, the volume of promotions even surpassed those of their male counterparts. Google's "nudge" test was based on the following data from studies on gender inequality in education and the workforce:

— Girls don't raise their hands as often as boys when answering math problems, even though they have a higher rate of accuracy when they do.

— Women don't offer up their ideas as often as men in business meetings, even though observers say their thoughts are often better than the many offered by their male colleagues.

Not only does Google's method hint at how to cultivate a gender-balanced environment, it sheds light on how easy it could be for so many

women in the SDR position to get ahead just by throwing our hat in the ring. Oh yeah, and what else did Google do recently to connect with its female staff? They increased maternity leave pay, and upped their retention of post-natal female employees by 50%. Good on you, Google!

The bottom line is that, while it is tough for anyone to transition from SDR to sales account executive, it should be just as feasible for women as it is for men. The process of change must start at the top and work its way down like everything else. I invite other company leaders to invert their sales force pyramid by putting real metrics in place and holding hiring managers accountable. Begin by having an honest conversation, internally as a management team, and then create your own new company policies, terms and goals to flip the status quo.

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# The (Semi) Secret Entrance to the Gold Mine

By: Gloria Berthold Larkin

A common request from business people in the federal marketplace is to see what a winning contract looks like. In this case, the concept of transparency in government works in the contractor's favor because, due to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), there is a process in place that provides for the ability to see winning contracts, or at least, most of the contract.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was signed into law on July 4, 1966 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. This law grants public

access to all types of federal agency records, unless those records are exempt from public release by one of the nine exemptions within FOIA. For our purposes, this article will deal with access to records relating only to federal contracts.

From a very practical perspective, federal agencies receive numerous requests for contracting records on a daily basis and it is beneficial for business people to understand the requirements and processes involved in requesting these interesting records. As with all things federal,

there are varied published processes regarding FOIA requests; it is recommended that a contractor research the process for the individual agency controlling the records in which you are interested.

Each agency only responds to requests for its own records, therefore it is important to know which agency or sub-agency awarded the contract. A good source for the details is the federal contracting web sites: FedBizOpps or the Federal Procurement Data System.

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The following information is required in a FOIA request:

- Full contact information for the person making the request including name, mailing address, email and phone number.
- A complete description of the record being requested such as type of document, title, subject area, date of creation, and originating office.
- Note: Your request cannot be in the form of a question.

### FOIA Processing Fees

FOIA provisions allow the government to recover part of the cost of complying with FOIA requests. Usually, contractors requesting information are charged

for search time, document review, and duplication. Typical fees (may vary by agency) are:

- \* Duplication at 10 cents per page
- \* Clerical search/document review at \$4.00/15 minutes
- \* Professional search/document review at \$7.00/15 minutes
- \* Managerial search/document review at \$10.25/15 minutes

A FOIA request is usually considered an implicit commitment to pay up to \$25 in fees, unless the requestor indicates a higher amount. Requestors are normally notified if the anticipated fees exceed \$25.

### Response Times

In general, the FOIA requires an agency

to respond to FOIA requests within 20 business days after the office that maintains the responsive records receives the request.

A FOIA request, once granted, will give you a copy of the actual contract. Entire sections of the document may be blacked out (redacted) to protect proprietary, technical and pricing information. Even with redactions, it can be very worthwhile to submit a FOIA request on those contracts that are coming up for rebid. Make sure to leave enough lead time for backlog, research, processing and shipping.

A little known resource for contracts that have been frequently requested is the electronic reading room. If a contractor first searches this section of the agency's FOIA web site, time and money can be saved as the agency often makes electronic versions of frequently requested documents available at no charge.

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# Women make up 80% of health care workers—but just 40% of executives

By: Dan Diamond

The health care industry is powered by women.

More than 76% of hospital employees—women.

More than 77% of people who work in doctors' offices—women.

More than 88% of home health workers—women.

But the industry's key decision-makers ... are typically men.

"It's an issue," acknowledges Jennifer Stewart, an Advisory Board managing

director who oversees the HR Advancement Center and Nursing Executive Center's research.

## Gender equality getting closer, but still a goal

At least superficially, and after years of struggle, it *seems* there's near-gender equality across the U.S. workforce. Of the 143 million-plus working Americans, about 47% are women—a percentage that continues to steadily rise.

(As a personal aside, I see this equality every day. The **Advisory Board Company** maintains a Women in Leadership program to groom women for executive roles. I've had seven direct managers in my years at the firm, and all seven were women.)

And if health care has a gender problem, it's that the industry seems totally unbalanced in *favor* of women. Nearly 80% of workers in the health care and social assistance field are women, according

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to **Bureau of Labor Statistics** data.

And yet, when *Modern Healthcare*'s [much-respected list](#) of the industry's "Most Influential" people was released this week, 79 of the 100 honorees were men.

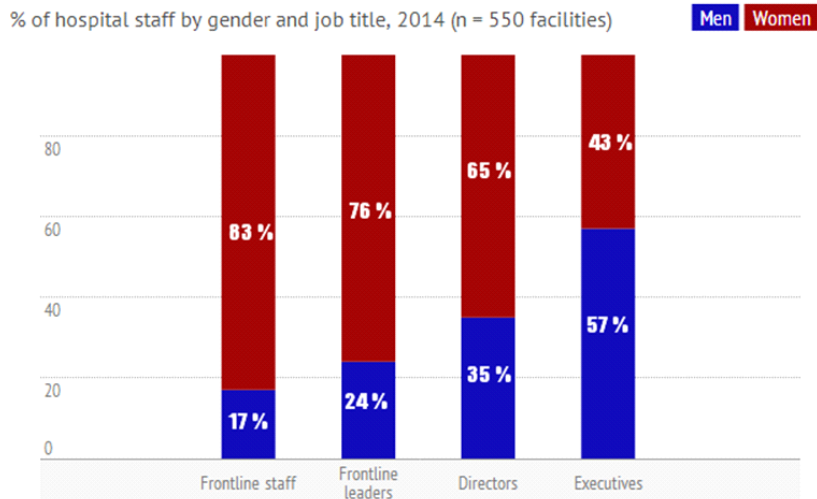
This isn't a knock on *Modern Healthcare*, which has done quite a bit to spotlight women in the industry. In 2013, the magazine [named a woman](#)—Kathleen Sebelius—as its "Most Influential" person in health care; for 2014, women represented two of the top five "Most Influential" people. *Modern Healthcare* even recognizes a standalone list of [top women executives](#).

Instead, it's reflective of the reality: Although women outnumber men four to one, they still represent a minority of health care's C-suite.

Take hospitals. While women make up three-quarters of all hospital workers, they represent an ever-shrinking slice of leadership as they move up the corporate ladder, according to Abby Martin of the [Advisory Board Survey Solutions](#) team.

To demonstrate that, Abby pulled data from the Employee Engagement Initiative's database of 550 facilities, and working together, we've graphed those findings out below.

## As org chart rises, number of women falls



Source: Advisory Board Survey Solutions Employee Engagement Benchmark.

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Looking at the Employee Engagement Benchmark data, Abby noted that the gender balance is getting better—just slowly. For instance, women represented 43% of executives in the Survey Solutions benchmark data in 2014, but that’s up from 39% in 2011.

The data generated a robust discussion in our office on Tuesday afternoon, and while we argued over some of the causes and factors, there was no debate in one area: This is a problem.

“It seems many in our industry are falling prey to what we call the ‘mini-me misunderstanding’ when succession planning,” said Advisory Board executive director Steven Berkow. Too often, leaders end up “prizing someone similar to them” when assembling a team and picking a replacement. Those sorts of blinders can harm efforts to build up a leadership bench, Steven said, which ultimately leaves an organization vulnerable.

“The goal of having more women in senior leadership is the same as any other diversity initiative,” added Jennifer. “You want to ensure your leadership team—and overall workforce—is representative of the diversity of patient population you are caring for.”

So how to think about succession planning? Focus on “the competencies that will be most critical moving forward, and deploy a more disciplined process to assess potential,” Steven suggested. He also pointed to the Advisory Board’s library of practices.

To get true balance in health care leadership—and to take advantage of the benefits that diversity can bring—executives need to address a pair of interlocking issues, Jennifer added.

“The challenge isn’t to only increase the absolute number of women in health care leadership,” she said, “but to expand their representation beyond CNO, VP of HR, and any other executive seats they’ve been historically likely to fill.”

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# The Biggest HR Mistakes Companies Make

By: Judith Lindenberger

I was recently asked to give a talk to a group of entrepreneurs on the biggest HR mistakes that companies make. In my experience of doing HR work for over thirty years, and from running a consulting practice for the last fifteen years, the biggest HR mistakes companies make are as follows:

## 1. Not keeping up with employment laws

Running a business requires wearing

many hats. Add to that keeping up with new state and federal employment regulations, and who can manage? Recent changes like “ban the box,” which prohibits most New Jersey and some Pennsylvania companies employing fifteen or more employees to make any inquiries about a job applicant’s criminal record during the initial application process, and new federal overtime rules that raise the salary threshold for exempt workers to an annual salary of \$47,476, require changes in how you do business. How can busy

business owners manage? Hiring a human resources outsourcing company to handle your human resources functions can help you stay up to date on employment laws that affect you.

## 2. Not keeping up with your employee handbook

Every business, no matter the size, should have an employee handbook that outlines workplace rules. Even if you never had a single employee

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complaint yet, you may have one at some time, and a complaint policy can help you work through the issue. Even if you have had no problems with employees abusing drugs or alcohol in the workplace, it might happen, and a drug and alcohol policy can protect you. And, even if your assistant has not complained about the bad experience he/she had with your best client to his/her Facebook friends, he/she may, and a social media policy can outline your stance on this. An outside human resources consulting firm can review and update your employee handbook and assist you in communicating changes and obtaining signed acknowledgement receipts from your staff.

### 3. Not keeping employee files properly organized

We often conduct HR audits for our clients. One common issue we find is that I-9s (which verify employee identity and work eligibility in the US) and health benefits information are not kept separate from the employee file. Health benefits information needs to be separate per the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, otherwise known as HIPPA. Keeping I-9s and health benefits information separate is required by law and not doing so can result in fines. We can help you set up your employee files properly.

### 4. Not hiring people carefully

Many employment decisions are made without a lot of planning. "We have a need - let's get someone in here quickly to manage the workload!" But bad hiring decisions can be costly, about \$16,000 on average. Instead, best practice is to write a job description, list the skills needed, determine the best recruiting sources, write appropriate interview questions, ask each candidate the same set of questions, and develop a system for making your hiring decision. We've done this countless times and can help your company create a hiring system that will continue to work for you long after we are gone.

### 5. Not providing training

Companies have a lot of expense but training is one expense that pays huge dividends. New employees can greatly benefit from an onboarding process that helps them understand their job, goals, company culture, and where to find needed resources. Onboarding training helps your new employees contribute more quickly.

Also, many new managers are thrown into the job of supervising without a lot of support. We provide practical management training that increases the confidence and competence of your leaders, reduces turnover (the number one reason employees leave companies is a bad relationship with their supervisor), and reduces the risk of lawsuits by disgruntled employees who feel as if they have been treated unfairly.

In addition, research shows that employees appreciate companies that provide them with training to learn new skills.

Simply said, training pays off.

## 6. Not documenting performance decisions

The last HR mistake that we find that companies make can be the most time consuming and costly. An employee who does not know why he or she was fired may sue you and you may need documentation to prove that you did not make a discriminatory decision. In addition, an employee who did not get the promotion he or she had hoped to get may sue you and, again, you may need to show that you made the decision based on documented performance.

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# The Truth About Great Teachers and Leaders

By: Raymond Gerson

“If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.” Kahlil Gibran

This article is an excerpt from the book, *The Greatest Opportunity* by Raymond Gerson.

All of us are sometimes in the role of a teacher or leader. We also are in the role of student or learner at different times. Usually the better the student a person is, the better

teacher and leader he or she can become. As teachers, we frequently will emphasize those lessons we want or need to know. Many times as teachers we will learn more than our students.

When we are in the role of teacher, we have an opportunity to give something back to others. We have the opportunity to pass on the lessons which were taught to us by our teachers. It is an opportunity to positively or negatively influence

others. A teacher’s influence can be powerful and long lasting. Henry Adams believed that, “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” This is why we have a responsibility to be good examples of what we are teaching and to respect the worth and dignity of our students. The way we perceive our students or employees, and the expectations we have for them, often has a greater effect than the lessons we are teaching. Our vision of their potential

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can have a transformational effect on the students as this mental picture is transferred to their minds. Do we see them as worthwhile human beings with the potential to learn and succeed? If so, their chances of success are greater.

Studies have been conducted in the schools that demonstrate that a teacher's expectations influence his or her pupil's performance. There are examples in which teachers were told that one group of students were the smart ones and another group were the dumb ones, when both groups were actually of similar intelligence. The students performed according to the preconceptions and expectations of their teachers.

The students who were considered the smart ones performed significantly better than the group who had been labeled as unintelligent. The teachers had verbally and nonverbally communicated their expectations to the students who performed accordingly. Students will usually rise to the level of the teacher's expectations. All that I am saying about the teacher student relationship is meant to include the supervisor employee relationship.

When we are in the role of a leader teacher, whether as a parent, minister, employer, mentor, or friend, who we are is even more important than what we say. We always radiate who we are, and the more we develop ourselves, the greater will be our influence. This is why continuous personal, professional, and spiritual growth is so important. Our level of inner development determines the impact we have on others. We must live what we are teaching in order to speak with the deep conviction which will influence others. There needs to be congruency between who we are and what we say and do. If I am a supervisor who is consistently late for work and I emphasize to my employees the importance of being on time, what effect can I expect from my words? My exhortations would lack power.

In our role as students and employees, we can strive for quality education or training, and be receptive to the lessons being provided by our teachers and leaders. In our role as teachers and leaders, we can nurture the seeds of greatness within our students and employees, and bring out the best that is in them. Helping the learner to unfold his or her potential is education and leadership in the truest sense and teaching at its best.

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# Creating a Safe and Connected School Climate

By: Franklin Schargel

At a time when schools seem to be teeming with bullying and cyberbullying, teachers and administrators are often unsure of how to combat the problem. The following excerpt shows teachers and administrators how to create a safe and connected school climate while concurrently implementing a threat assessment program.

*Some schools' culture and climate can contribute to the prevention of violence. How does a school, its teachers and administrators, and its students work toward implementing a culture of safety?*

## Major Components and Tasks for Creating a Safe and Connected School Climate

### *Assess the school's emotional climate.*

It is incumbent on those in positions of authority and responsibility to assess the emotional climate of their school. This perspective can be gained by systematically surveying students, faculty, parents, administrators, school board members, and representatives of community groups about the emotional climate of schools. Anonymous surveys, face-to-face interviews, focus

groups, and school climate surveys allow school officials to gather valuable insights about the school's emotional climate.

### *Emphasize the importance of listening in schools.*

A school with a culture of "two-way listening" encourages and empowers students to break the ingrained code of silence. Listening also must be expanded beyond academic concerns. Communication between teachers and students should also include listening to feelings,

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especially those of hurt and pain. It is also important to “listen” to behaviors. Many students have a difficult time finding the words to articulate disenfranchisement, hurt, or fear.

*Take a strong, but caring, stance against the code of silence.*

Silence leaves hurt unexposed and unacknowledged. Silence may encourage a young person to move along a path to violence.

*Work to change the perception that talking to an adult about a student contemplating violence is considered “snitching.” Find ways to stop bullying.*

Bullying is a continuum of abuse ranging from verbal taunts to physical threats to dangerous acts. Bullying is not playful behavior. In bullying, one student assumes power by word or deed over another in a mean-spirited and/or harmful manner. Schools must establish climates of safety and respect, which establish foundations for prosocial behavior. These climates teach conflict resolution, peer mediation, active listening, and other non-violent ways to solve problems. In a safe school climate, adults do not bully students and do not bully each other, and they do not ignore bullying behavior when they know that it is going on in the school.

*Empower students by involving them in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect.*

Creating a climate of safety should be a collaborative effort.

*Ensure that every student feels that he or she has a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school.*

These trusting relationships evolve and do not magically appear simply because an adult, such as a homeroom teacher or a guidance counselor, and a student have been ordered or assigned to interact with one another.

*Create mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.*

A mechanism for developing and sustaining safe school climates should serve as a vehicle for planning and

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monitoring the climate and culture of the school. Questions to be considered in implementing this mechanism might include the following: What should be done to develop and support climates of safety? To what extent are teachers, administrators, and other school staff encouraged to focus on students' social and emotional learning needs? How close is the school to achieving the goal of ensuring that every student feels that there is an adult to whom he or she can turn for talk, support, and advice if things get tough?

***Be aware of physical environments and their effects on creating comfort zones.***

Building structure, facility safety plans, lighting, space, and architecture — among other physical attributes of educational institutions — can contribute to whether a school environment feels, or is in fact, safe or unsafe. In large schools, administrators may wish to explore changes in the physical characteristics of the school that would permit the assignment of teachers and students to smaller, mutually intersecting and supportive groupings within the larger physical structure.

***Emphasize an integrated systems model.***

People support most what they believe they have had genuine input in creating. This requires the difficult but necessary task of bringing all of the stakeholders to bear on changes made for safety. Stakeholders include students, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, law enforcement personnel, after-school and community-based groups, and others.

***All climates of safety ultimately are “local.”***

Many local factors contribute to the creation of a culture and climate of safety. These factors include the following:

- Leadership, i.e., “open door” role of the school principal;
- “Empowered buy-in” of student groups;
- Connections to the local community and its leaders; and
- Respectful integration into the safe school climates process of “safekeepers,” such as parents and law enforcement personnel close to school.



# Why So Few?

## Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

In an era when women are increasingly prominent in medicine, law, and business, why are there so few women scientists and engineers? A 2010 research report by AAUW presents compelling evidence that can help to explain this puzzle. *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics* (STEM) presents in-depth yet accessible profiles of eight key research findings that point to environmental and social barriers — including stereotypes, gender bias, and the climate of science and engineering departments in colleges and universities — that continue to

block women's progress in STEM. The report also includes statistics on girls' and women's achievement and participation in these areas and offers new ideas for what each of us can do to more fully open scientific and engineering fields to girls and women.

### **Stereotype Threat and Implicit Bias:**

#### **Barriers to Women in STEM**

Stereotype threat arises in situations where a negative stereotype is

relevant to evaluating performance. A female student taking a math test experiences an extra cognitive and emotional burden of worry related to the stereotype that women are not good at math. A reference to this stereotype, even one as subtle as taking the test in a room of mostly men, can adversely affect her test performance. When the burden is removed, however, her performance will improve. Stereotype threat is one compelling explanation for why women remain underrepresented in STEM fields.

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Many people claim they do not believe the stereotype that girls and women are not as good as boys and men in math and science. However, even individuals who consciously refute gender and science stereotypes can still hold that belief at an unconscious level. These unconscious beliefs, or implicit biases, may be more powerful than explicitly held beliefs and values simply because we are not aware of them. Even if overt gender bias is waning, as some argue, research shows that unconscious beliefs underlying negative stereotypes continue to influence assumptions about people and behavior. Project Implicit offers Implicit Association Tests (IAT) that measure the association between two concepts to determine attitudes about different social groups. For example, the gender-science IAT measures the association between

math-arts and male-female. Between 1998 and the release of *Why So Few* in 2010, more than a half million people from around the world took the gender-science IAT, and more than 70 percent of test takers more readily associated “male” with science and “female” with arts than the reverse. These findings indicate a strong implicit association of male with science and female with arts and a high level of gender stereotyping at the unconscious level among both women and men of all races and ethnicities. The findings also challenge the notion that bias against women in math and science is a thing of the past. Women in STEM fields still face significant implicit bias on the basis of their gender.

### **In Math and Science, a Growth Mindset Benefits Girls**

Individuals with a “fixed mindset” believe that intelligence is static. In contrast, individuals with a “growth mindset” believe that intelligence can be developed. Because of this they want to learn more and, therefore, tend to embrace challenges, persist when they encounter obstacles, see effort as a path to mastery, learn from criticism, and be inspired by the success of others.

Individuals with a fixed mindset are susceptible to a loss of confidence when they encounter challenges, because they believe that if they are truly “smart,” things will come easily to them. Individuals with a growth mindset, on the other hand, show a far greater belief in the power of effort, and in the face of difficulty, their confidence actually grows because they believe they are learning and getting smarter as a result of challenging themselves.

These research findings are important for women in STEM because encountering obstacles and challenging problems is in the nature of scientific work. When girls and women believe they have a fixed amount of intelligence, they are more likely to lose confidence and disengage from science and engineering when they inevitably encounter difficulties in their course work.

This is true for all students, but it is particularly relevant for girls in math and science, where negative stereotypes persist about their abilities. Therefore, in math and science, a growth mindset benefits girls.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Women in STEM Majors**

Researchers Jane Margolis and Allan Fisher suggest that many factors can combine to increase women’s recruitment and retention in STEM. They stress that departments should pay attention to the student experience as well as faculty diversity to improve recruitment and retention of women.

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## Recommendations

### Get Girls Interested in Science and Engineering

- Spread the word about girls' and women's achievements in math and science.
- Teach girls that intellectual skills, including spatial skills, are acquired.
- Teach students about stereotype threat and promote a growth-mindset environment.
- Talented and gifted programs should send the message that they value growth and learning.
- Encourage children to develop their spatial skills.
- Help girls recognize their career-relevant skills.
- Encourage high school girls to take calculus,

physics, chemistry, computer science, and engineering classes when available.

- Make performance standards and expectations clear.

### Create College Environments That Support Women in Science and Engineering

#### For Students

- Actively recruit women into STEM majors.
- Send an inclusive message about who makes a good science or engineering student.
- Emphasize real-life applications in early STEM courses.
- Teach professors about stereotype threat and the benefits of a growth mindset.
- Make performance standards and expectations clear in STEM

courses.

- Take proactive steps to support women STEM majors. For example, sponsor social events to help integrate women into the department, provide a student lounge open to all students to encourage interaction outside of class, or sponsor a "Women in (STEM major)" group.
- Enforce Title IX in science, technology, engineering, and math.

#### For Faculty

- Conduct departmental reviews to assess the climate for female faculty.
- Ensure mentoring for all faculty.
- Support faculty work-life balance with stop-tenure-clock policies and on-site child care.

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# We Teach Racism, Sexism and Discrimination in Schools

By: Nicholas Ferroni

It seems that every year another educational prophet or academic messiah comes along with the solution to all of our education and public school woes that we are supposedly facing in America. With policy after policy, then the same policy again, it is obvious that, if there are any failures in the school systems, they are not from the teachers who receive all the blame, but from the policy makers and politicians. With all the focus on “how” we teach, we rarely consider or reevaluate “what” we teach. During my first year as a high school history teacher, teaching

predominantly urban and minority students, I came to one profound epiphany: I teach white history to black kids. In addition, along with teaching racism, I teach sexism and discrimination. I do not mean for one second that I personally indoctrinate students with such vicious and hateful values, but the text book that I use (and that nearly every public school in every state uses) indirectly leads teachers into teaching students to be racist, sexist and discriminatory to their peers and other people, which is why I no longer use the text book as the main reference for my classes.

Our text books do not blatantly encourage students to be racist, sexist or discriminatory, but it’s the lack of figures and truths which give students the impression that certain groups didn’t nearly have as large of role as others and, in some cases, groups are completely nonexistent. When broken down statistically, our textbook mentions eight white males for every one African American, women, Jew, and one figure from other various minority groups. The term “gay” is only mentioned twice, and there is only a single paragraph with any description of the “gay rights movement.”

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Now, I return to my original reflection that “I teach white history to black kids.” As a white male myself, I can honestly say I felt very little attachment to our founding fathers while being taught about them in school; so, how can we expect an African American student to feel any commonality with them? Most African American students learn about the same handful of African American figures year after year: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and Malcolm X . Their presence in the textbook tends to feel more obligatory in order to satisfy a group, and not because of their contributions.

I know what some of you are thinking: Well, that’s why we have elective courses such as African American Studies and even Black History Month, but that’s not true. The only reason we celebrate Black History Month is due to the fact that

African Americans, in the past, were nearly invisible in American history for the most part, and that is also the reason African American Studies courses were created: to focus specifically on African American figures and their history which is left out of our general texts. Also, consider that it is mostly African Americans who take those courses.

Therefore, in a regular history class, to who are my African American students left to look up to, when they are given the impression that their people were slaves and only a handful have done anything worth mentioning? It’s fair to assume that many turn towards athletes and entertainers because they feel those are their only legitimate and possible options. As far as white students, given that they learn very little about the contributions of African Americans, they then may assume that African Americans contributed very little, when that couldn’t be any further from the truth. So, we are indirectly and unknowingly teaching

racism. If we were to include more African American figures, who are more than deserving, into our text books, I have no doubt that the need for specific courses and holidays geared towards African Americans would no longer be necessary.

African Americans aren’t the only forgotten group in the history textbook. Now what have women done to deserve to be mentioned with all the great men in history? They made the men great. Like African Americans, women have played such a pivotal role in our nation, even before its conception. Yet, our textbook makes it appear that female figures have been strategically placed, and are not incorporated as often as they deserve and have surely earned. Girls learn about a predominantly male history, and this absolutely and indirectly lays the foundation of sexism. By downplaying the role of women in history, we are downplaying women in general and, therefore, are giving the impression

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that they are the weaker gender. With the exception of one section of a chapter about suffrage and a few mentions of female figures and first ladies, it is obvious that women not only struggled for equal treatment throughout history, but they are still not receiving it in the present.

When boys are not taught of the many contributions that women have made, they are being taught that women have NOT made that many contributions. I'm starting to believe that, as men, our egos are so fragile that we believe that by giving women the credit they deserve, we are also admitting their equal footing in this country. I, myself, have always been a feminist for many reasons but mainly because I owe my life and virtues to a woman. I have to believe that if we incorporated more women into our textbooks, boys would have less sexist tendencies and girls would have more ambition and optimism in their future career choices.

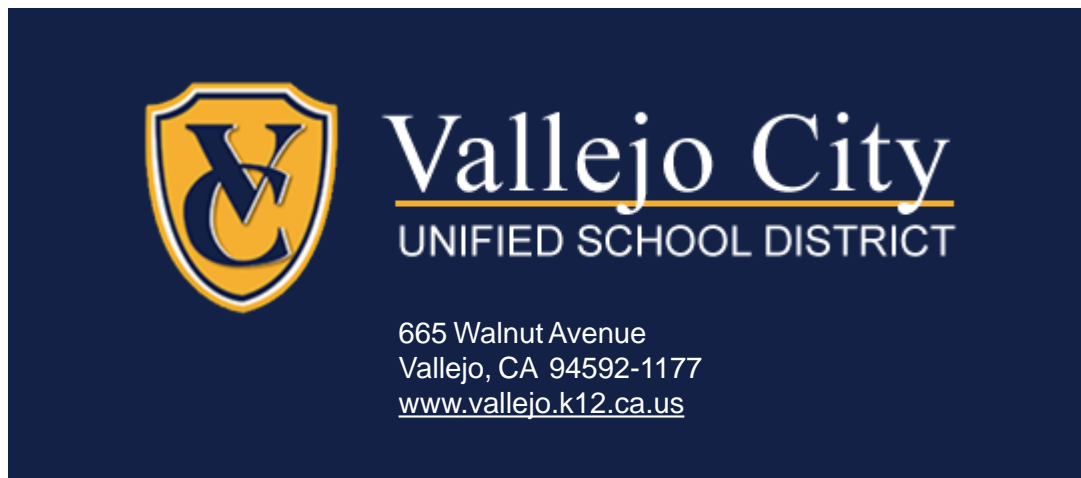
Other minority groups, which include

gays and lesbians, Jews, Muslims, Latinos, as well as others, are also slighted. There is no question about it: prejudice and hatred are taught. I have never seen a child not play with another child because of race, religion or sexuality... until a parent comes over and tells the child not to play with him or her. By omitting various minority groups from our textbooks, we are giving the impression that these groups not only didn't contribute anything to our current America, but that they literally didn't exist. By teaching all students about gay (which has roots much deeper than current events), Muslim, Asian and Latino history in America, we will NOT "make" students gay, Muslim, or even Latino; we will make them tolerant and understanding. Consider that we spend a considerable amount of time teaching about the Holocaust and America's role in freeing the prisoners from the concentration camps, but we don't mention or even reference one account of the discrimination that Jews met in America when they immigrated here in

large numbers during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

I am by no means attempting to undermine the role of our founders or other figures who are featured so regularly in our current textbooks. I am just suggesting that, if we did incorporate more figures from various groups who have also struggled, contributed and helped shape America, it would lead to a generation of students who are accepting and compassionate towards all races and religions, as well as of women, gays and lesbians. If we don't "teach the truth," we will continue to raise students who are racist, sexist and prejudiced towards certain people and groups. We have come to a point in education where we should not only reconsider how we teach but, more importantly, what we teach. I strongly believe that this would empower so many and, at the same time, help others see the true contributions of many groups who are not fairly and justly acknowledged in the present textbooks.

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