The Hidden (And Not So Hidden) Curriculum of Schools: Structure, Biases and Stereotypes That Sculpt Gender

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Abstract: We examine how schools affect gender and gender relations. School structure, textbooks, teachers, and peers combine to create and reinforce gender identity as well as stereotypes, biases, and prejudices about gender, gender relations and gender roles. These gender effects can be attributed to the hidden curriculum but have received little attention. We provide theoretical and empirical research on school practices. Vignettes from college students recalling their experiences from elementary, high school and college documents the impact of the hidden, and not so hidden, curriculum. A final section examines how, when, and where gender stereotypes can be and are challenged.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first hint of a hidden curriculum occurs in Durkheim's *Moral Education* (2012), observing that more is taught and learned in schools than specified in the established curriculum of textbooks and teacher manuals. While Durkeim, Dewey (2007), and Friere (2000) imply the importance and existence of a "hidden curriculum," the phrase was first popularized by Jackson (1968). Its basic ideas have been developed by scholars of different persuasions with Marxists seeing the curriculum as reproducing class structure (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), while functionalists believe the hidden curriculums develops different cognitive and behavioral skills which define children's relationships to physical and symbolic capital, to authority, and to the process of work (Anyon, 1980). The curriculum has also been looked at as resulting from the different interests struggles, agreements, and compromises of vested interests (Apple, 1982). One of the key figures in establishing the importance of a hidden curriculum was Giroux who asked a simple question, "What is learned in school?" and answered it in his important work *Theory and Research in Social Education* (Giroux and Penna, 1979).

Feminists see the hidden curriculum as a means of perpetuating patriarchy and gender inequalities (Bain, 1985). The emphasis on the hidden curriculum and what students learn and internalize has been criticized by some who argue that students are not empty vessels but can interpret and resist the curriculum. This school of thought is referred to as "critical pedagogy," (MacLaren, 1998) or "critical consciousness" (Friere, 1973),

The research reported here continues this tradition of documenting the hidden, and not so hidden, curriculum as it impacts gender, gender relationships, gender beliefs, and gender roles.

Children enter school with a foundation of behavior and beliefs about gender and gender relations that have been shaped by parents and family (Lauer & Lauer, 2004; Santrock, 1994; Kaplan, 1991; Davidson, Payne, Maltz, and Rabow, 2015). By the age of 5, children have a rigid set of beliefs about gender that they apply to themselves, employ in their play with peers, and with others (Martin and Ruble, 2004). When children enter school they encounter challenges from new peers, new reading materials' and new authority figures. Our paper documents how schools approach and teach gender, and what children learn about gender in the new worlds they are introduced. We use the known research and the vignettes from our students to show how the school contributes to the child's understanding of gender in the world and their place and relationship to that world beyond the classroom.

2. METHODS

Students from two upper division classes (Dhillon, Rabow, Han, Maltz, Moore, 2015) at two different public universities were asked to record their daily experiences with racism, sexism and homophobia. They described these experiences in their web posts, which were not monitored by the professor or the class facilitators. Additional written work required them to apply readings to their personal lives. The web posts and written materials about schools and gender form the basis of the reported findings. When the class was over, we contacted students about using their written papers or their web posts. The students have approved all vignettes in this paper. The web posts and written applications were classified by grade level and type of experience. The categories developed from these web posts and written papers included recollections about play, teachers, books and curriculum, dress code and sports. The overall organization of a school or a classroom is organized around these five domains. Without being aware, the students were referring to what they learned from the hidden curriculum.

3. SAMPLE

The two classes had 65 students and we have used 28 vignettes from 26 students. No claims are made for the representation of the sample to the university wide population. The great majority of the students were social science majors. The sample may not have relevance for students in other countries although it is clear that the hidden curriculum exists in all cultures.

4. GENDERED SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

4.1. Segregation of Play and Toys

For many children, school begins with daycare. In the United States over 60% of children ages five or younger are in childcare, averaging six hours per day, with 40% of infants in childcare for more than 30 hours a week (Hofferth & Sandler, 1996). The gendering of play and toys begins in daycare. In one daycare center the toys available for girls, included Barbie dolls, flowers, kitchen, baby dolls, coloring, Dora Castles, fairies, and ponies. Boy toys were: balls, blocks, race cars, trucks, Spiderman, Batman, construction, Power Rangers, Transformers, football, soccer, and scissors. The toys were also gender colored so that rocking chairs and shopping carts were in pink, and the boy's toys were black, dark blue or bright red. These pre-school youngsters already expressed the belief that certain toys are only for boys while others are only for girls (Chase, 2009). These practices were confirmed in Pidgeon's (1994) analysis of daycare and Pre-Kindergarten.

A male college student reports about his beliefs regarding play from elementary school,

"At school, the girls were mainly playing with dolls, I spend most of my time running around and roughhousing with the boys. Due to the fact that I played mainly with boys and the games girls were playing were always with dolls, I came to think that every boy that played with girls was girly. In elementary school I learned the things that I should and shouldn't play with."

5. TEACHERS AND CAREGIVERS

Teachers also contribute to gender divisions. Thorne (1993) found that the continual use of the terms "boys and girls," the sorting of children into separate lines, the pitting of boys against girls in math or other contests all operate to create and reinforce the assumption that the sexes are separate social groups. Our next vignette illustrates the impact of her teacher's practices upon a female college student who poses a question to a teacher about "lines,"

"When I was kindergarten standing in a line with all girls and beside me was a line of all boys, I asked my teacher why was there two lines. My teacher stated that all the girls line up with each other and the same for the boys because we are different. At that moment I realized that I was different from the boys. I was 4 or 5 years old I did not really understand much about gender. I knew girls and boys were different."

This student was introduced to gender difference by the teacher's creation of sex segregation.

Further spatial segregation is described in the following description of school structure.

"In the elementary school there was system where a classroom would get a certain area of the playground such as the tetherball areas or handball areas for a week and then get another area the

The Hidden (And Not So Hidden) Curriculum of Schools: Structure, Biases and Stereotypes That Sculpt Gender

week after. Since the areas that kids would play were limited, there were times when the boys in my class played in one area and the girls in another."

Teachers concern themselves with qualities beyond academics as well future adult behavior. Caregivers of preschoolers praise girls for being quiet, neat, helpful and lady like, while recognizing boys for their size and physical skills. Conversations between girls and caregivers typically included topics such as clothing color, where they got their hair cut, and whether their hair needed fixing (Chick, 2002).

In the following, a student recalls the comments made by her teacher.

"Ladies sit with their legs crossed. You are all practicing to grow up and become ladies."

In the next example, a woman describes her teacher's response to her occupational aspirations.

"My fourth grade teacher asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. "That's easy! I want to be a cop." She immediately started laughing and put her hand on my shoulder and said, "Oh honey that's a male profession, I think you would make a great veterinarian." Thinking back I remember feeling embarrassed. I wondered why could men only be police officers? What was so special about them? Later I thought that maybe my teacher was really saving me from a career that I would clearly be rejected in. From that moment when my parents, teachers, or friends asked me what I wanted to be when I grow up I always responded a veterinarian. Although in the back of my mind I still wanted to one day be a police officer, and I would keep that dream to myself. I remember feeling confused during this age. I knew I had all the determination in the world to be a police officer, but what good would that determination be if I had no support system? I struggled trying to understand something that made absolutely no sense to me. I so badly wanted to understand why men were more capable of doing certain things than women."

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, teachers influence students to assimilate gender biases. In the following a teacher's bias about his student's female abilities in math are reinforced by a male peer,

"When I was 15 years old, in my math class, I did not understand a problem. I was irritated at myself and it showed. My teacher was helping me at my desk. There was this kid that was sitting in back of me and I heard him say "it's because she's a girl." From that point on I knew there was a difference and I knew that boys knew there was a difference. What was more heartbreaking was that after the boys said that, the teacher, who was a male, turned to the boy and said, "It's not her fault and mind your own business!"

From experiences such as these, girls and boys learn what their interests are and why they are "naturally suited" for particular occupations. The problems of bias and prejudice against female students and the internalization of stereotypes which include lesser performances on math tests, and diminished feelings of self-worth and competency have been well documented (Aronson et al. 1999; Correll 2001; Eccles 1994; Steele and Aronson 1995).

The evidence provided by a study of college women drawn from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) majors from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s strongly undermines the assertion that women's underrepresentation in the physical sciences and engineering fields is due to deficits in prior achievement. Women's achievements are equal to their male counterparts. Their lack of representation has to be found in the way in which gender as a social structure affects them. (Riegle-Crumb, King, Grodsky, Muller 2012)

6. BOOKS AND CURRICULUM

The hidden curriculum, which includes textbooks, lesson plans and other classroom materials, has as its major component textbooks (Witt 2001) and the reading of textbooks (Rudman, 1984). In children's elementary textbooks males are described as better, faster, smarter, funnier, more inquisitive and generally superior to females (Witt, 1997). The textbooks also value men's roles in the development of society while ignoring contributions to history (Basow, 1992; Sadker, Sadker and Stolberg 1993). The numbers of males and females reflect disparities. Males in American children's books are often depicted two to three times more often than females. Male animals are represented more frequently with a ratio of 4.3 male animals for every single female animal. The analysis of the winners of the Caldecott Award, an award given to the most distinguished American picture book for children reveals that eleven boys are pictured for every girl (Weitzman, 1977).

Keisha E. Payne & Jerome Rabow

A female student reflects upon the reading materials she was provided,

"The textbooks I had as a child and teenager were filled mostly with history and literature about males. I know now that I believed then that women could not be as successful, influential and important figures to learn about in the classroom. I remember teachers asking the class to name their role models and I always had a hard time naming someone I connect with. I now realize that I was not exposed to the many powerful and impactful women in our class discussions. Recently my college professor asked the class to name three influential women in our lives aside from family. I could not come up with any answers. I do not like that in my education I did not receive enough emphasis of women just as smart and important as their male counterparts."

Another female student laments her lack of exposure to heroines.

"In high school we are never taught about the struggle that women engaged in in fighting for equality or any other women's outstanding accomplishments. I do not remember learning much about Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Amelia Earhart, Susan B. Anthony or Senator Margaret Chase Smith. I realize how my education had been neglected."

This same student bemoans the lack of a class that would engage her desire to learn more about women while recognizing what such a lack of attention may have created,

"There has never been a class that really let us engage in what these women did for us. Because of them I am thankful to be where I am. In this world, crazy as it sounds, we are still not equivalent to men!"

In the following, a student indicates it wasn't until college that she learned about women's history and women's contributions to society.

"In high school I learned much more about men than women. It didn't matter what the subject was or who was teaching it, I learned about men. I can hardly recall times that I learned about women, it was as if they didn't exist. I think real early on I learned about Sacajawea but even then I didn't learn all the facts about that until I got to college. It wasn't until taking a Gender Women's Studies course that I learned about women and their impact on society. I started learning about Susan B. Anthony and other women. I learned the true meaning of History and how it was centered on men."

7. DRESS CODE

School dress codes are another way that gender stereotypes are created and reinforced by both the institution and the students within. In one dress code, taken from an Orange County high school¹, we found eleven rules for proper dress for girls and five rules for boys. Schools seem to be more concerned with how their female students dress. We found directions about "Halter-tops, tube-tops, one shoulder tops . . . muscle shirts, see-through or mesh tops (unless underneath a shirt) aren't to be worn. Blouses, shirts or tops that reveal bare backs, midriffs, undergarments, or that have spaghetti straps or revealing necklines are not to be worn in classes, hallways, class activities, or on field trips."²

Girls can be labeled as "good" or "bad", "slut" or "prude" depending on their dress. These dress codes are often policed by the students themselves, against one another. Raby (2010) found that girls objected to the fact that the rules about their dressing were unfair as they seemed to be responsive to men and the administration's concern for the women to not "entice" boys. While angry at the unfairness of the rule they also enforced the administration's standards as they classified some girls' as "sleazy" Clothing can be quite important for a young women's perception as they struggle to define themselves and may have to choose between being feminine or comfortable.

"As I got older and was able to choose out outfits when we went shopping I liked to pick out the spaghetti straps and shorts. However I probably only owned a couple of pairs because that type of clothing showed "too much skin". So my parents associated what kinds of clothes are suitable according to gender. Girls were supposed to dress a certain way, as were boys. This made me a little jealous of my girl cousins because they were able to wear shorts and, halter-tops and spaghetti straps

¹ Dress code example found at https://www.ocps.net/lc/west/hoc/schoolinfo/policies/Pages/DressCode.aspx

²lcps.k12.nm.us/.../JICA-R_Student_**Dress**-REVISED-FINAL-070511.pdf

The Hidden (And Not So Hidden) Curriculum of Schools: Structure, Biases and Stereotypes That Sculpt Gender

more than I ever was. Fast forward to middle school I no longer wanted to wear the spaghetti straps or cute shorts instead I felt more comfortable in baggy pants, t-shirts and chucks. Everything I wore was oversized and many times it was my brother's clothes that I would wear to school. This I think worried my parents. Maybe they thought I was taking on masculine attributes and characteristics. I know my parents probably felt alarmed because their little girl no longer wanted bows in her hair. This in part meant that I was loosing my femininity based solely on my wardrobe."

In the next example, a female student struggles between the way she wants to dress and what will be considered acceptable. A mother's participation in a PTA meeting about dress code decides to talk to her daughter. This student recounts her mother's words.

"And I've been meaning to tell you, I think you've been dressing pretty slutty lately." "Ouch! Slutty. The word stung. I was aware of the meaning, but it hadn't occurred to me that my style of dress could be perceived as such. "Whatever," I mumbled before walking away, trying not to show the wound from my mom's remark. Once I was alert to my potential 'sluttiness,' I became more cautious of what I was wearing."

Boys, like their adult PTA counterparts, can act upon their views of women who they feel are "slutty." In the following, a young man expresses the belief that women wear skimpy clothes to get attention from males, and that it is acceptable to grope women when they dress in such a way.

"I used to think what almost every guy I've ever known has thought: that girls wearing skimpy clothes are just doing it so they can get attention from guys, attention meaning sexual advances or groping. I used to hi-five my friends when they would perform some of these acts. This gave them support to actually perform groping, catcalls, and other inappropriate behavior. It was a common occurrence among my male friends to "cop-a-feel," meaning quickly grope a woman, at concerts, clubs, and other places where it could be done anonymously. I didn't think about the women at all. They were just objects"

8. SPORTS

Sports are another arena for the maintenance and perpetuation of gender biases, stereotypes and inequities. According to a United Nations 2007 report, less money is allocated to girls' sports compared to boys' sports resulting in inadequate resources, unequal wages and prizes. An NCAA Gender Equity report for 2004-2010 shows that although participation by males and females in undergraduate collegiate sports is nearly equal, the proportion of expenses by gender is 60.4 percent for men's teams and 39.6 for women's teams.³

In the following, a male finds pleasure in reinforcing the idea that girls are weaker than boys. His ideas about girls and sports, developed in the family, are reinforced by male peers. Even though he recognizes that girls were faster than boys, he could not accept that fact.

"I remember as children in the third and fourth grade, we would think that girls are weak and bad at sports. When we played in recess we would not let them play anything that we did. Especially the games of "tether ball, and "Kickball". These were in our heads boy games that only boys can play, because they are strong, tough, and fast. Now that I look back, all of the boys were fairly short, fat, and on the weaker side. Most of the girls were tall, slender, and fairly faster than the boys. However, we had these ideas, that boys were better than girls. We also saw girls as very sensitive. I especially remember that I would make girls cry, simply to rub in in their faces that they were more sensitive than boys. For some sick reason, this act made me feel tough, and cool. The fact that I had made a girl cry, and that she knew that she was sensitive and I was not, made me feel a sense of power. Perhaps this is due to the fact that when my friends and I got together; we would say how boys control women. How men, are strong, brave, and fierce leaders, like our fathers, who had their wives so well controlled, most of them never changed a single diaper for their children."

Solomon (In Houston, 1994) reports that both boys and girls thought boys were thought of as better players even when the girls had more skill. In coed basketball teams boys preferred to pass the ball to an unskilled boy rather than a skilled girl and, the girls take fewer shots, passing rather than shooting.

http://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/GEQS10.pdf

³ NCAA Gender-Equity Report 2004-2010

In this following a coach tells our student that she cannot participate in flag football. Upon hearing her story, her father does not challenge the coach's decision.

"At recess every day I would watch the boys play flag football. I always watched from the outside gates wondering why there were only boys. I wanted to play. I asked the coach he told me no because I would get hurt. I argued with him, pointing out that I was so much bigger than a lot of the boys that were playing. When I went home to complain to my dad he told me that there wasn't anything he could do about it. He told me that it's flag football so it shouldn't hurt at all. I was so confused because there was no tackling involved. Now I know that the reason that I couldn't play flag football wasn't because I was going to get hurt but because women are seen as weak. I was a weak factor in the game. This was my first experience with gender inequality."

A male student exerts his dominance over a female player during a coed game,

"I was ten years old and we were playing basketball outdoor in the schoolyard. I always played hard, because my coach instructed me too. He was the kind of coach who screamed at you if you wouldn't play hard and treat everyone on the court the same. His philosophy was if the person was on the court, you can play.

One day, my team had the ball, and a girl from the opposite team stole it, and was running down court on a fast break. I caught up to her and fouled the hell out of her. She fell down on the concrete and scraped her arms and legs and was bleeding. She looked up at me and said "why the hell would you do that, I'm just a girl out here." I felt terrible, and I never did that again when there was a girl on the court. Later I heard my friends had told the coach what I had done according to my friends the coach said "good job."

A woman in the following personal recollection expresses the structural consequence of spending less money on girls' sporting facilities,

"In our school, male and female sports teams were treated unequally. I know this because I was on the girl's softball team. The boys' baseball team had a very nice field on school grounds. My softball team had to play at a nearby park. There was an additional field at the school that could have been used but it was not kept up. The grass was dead and there were many divots. one day at practice as the ball came toward me on the ground it took a bad hop after hitting one of the divots, struck me in the face and broke my nose. After I was hit I screamed in pain and for fear of what my face must look like. The male coach told me I needed to stop screaming and sent someone to walk with me to the nurse. When I went to the doctor I was told my nose was broken. It was not crooked but there was a slight bump on the side for a while. I did not want to risk any more injuries to my face so I never played soft ball again. I see now how unfair it was that as a female, I was exposed to unnecessary danger while the boys would never have to deal with divots or dead grass."

Preferential treatment in school sports facilities is also recognized by males. A student recalls his high school memories,

".In my high school days at San Fernando High in California, I noticed there were huge discrepancies in the use of sports facilities. Girls would only be allowed to use the gym when they had a game or when the boys weren't using it for practice. It didn't bother me because I thought this preferential treatment was normal."

Another student also uses the word "normal" about girl's smaller sports facilities,

"I attended San Fernando Middle School and the thought never occurred to me that the boys were separated from the girls during sessions of physical education, I was young and I never really questioned why we were divided. The field where the school placed the boys during P.E. had a large soccer field, basketball courts, handball courts and a locker room. The girls had a smaller field, basketball courts, a gym, and a locker room. It all seemed normal,"

What happens to some men who observe female athletes? They may be less interested the athletic performance of the females as in their clothing and appearance.

"I grew up watching wrestling where the men got in the ring and fought and the women stood at ringside and looked cute. I watched the main sports baseball, basketball, and football that are all male sports. I listened to men and women alike criticize the female versions of these leagues because women were not as athletic or exciting as the men. More infuriatingly I would hear men and women The Hidden (And Not So Hidden) Curriculum of Schools: Structure, Biases and Stereotypes That Sculpt Gender

say there wouldn't watch the sports because they believed that most of the women playing were "big ugly lesbians." I also admit to on more than one occasion going to a volleyball game more interested in watching the women jumping up and down in spandex than their actual play."

In the next example, a female student describes her efforts to respond to the stereotypes that she knows exists and will receive because of her athleticism,

"I was on the basketball team my 8th grade year in middle school that really helped me slim down. I was proud of my accomplishment on my body and wasn't embarrassed nor did I think I was fat. In high school I also tried out for cheerleading which wasn't offered to me in middle school knew that cheer isn't just girls in skirts. You actually have to be athletic to do half of the things cheerleaders do, so I stuck to it. My freshman year in high school I still kept playing basketball and rough sports, I did however realized that I tried to feminize my look when I was out in the court. I would wear pink socks or a pink band, I would have on a little bit of makeup I felt like this is something I needed to do. I didn't want people to perceive me in a negative way."

This same student also recalls being called names that indicated she was less feminine because she was athletic,

"As a female athlete, I heard comments comparing me to men. They would call me "she hulk," muscle woman, and the Great Wall of China when I played softball. It always hurt my feelings because I felt it threatened my femininity and I felt embarrassed."

In the following a female student describes her experiences participating in a "female" sport,

"In high school, I participated in a dominantly female sport called pageantry or color guard. What I learned more than anything in high school was how to perform. They taught us how to walk with poise, smile, and turn our noses up. We wore very dramatic make up when we performed, and form fitting costumes with long haired wigs. Our band instructor would tell us to diet or not gain weight. We had to eat certain foods. They wanted us to be attractive for these shows."

This same student describes what happens to boys who participate in pageantry.

"There were only two boys in the color guard and were always called gay, even when they had girlfriends."

9. COLLEGE

Does the hidden curriculum disappear in higher education? Absolutely not. Margolis (2001) provides a comprehensive view of college and the influence of the hidden curriculum. Our colleges students confirm that conclusion with fellow students, professors and college counselors reinforcing traditional gender stereotyping.

A female student recalls the reaction of her male peer who asks about her major in college. She indicates "Criminology."

"Oh! I have never heard that from a girl." This made me upset. I told him that "it is different and that is what I wanted." I chose this major because I want to be a probation officer. I do not want to be in a caregiving role but wanted some authority and being a probation officer, you are seen as an authority figure."

This same student also notices how her peers respond to female professors,

"In my freshmen year in college I had this professor who is a woman who had a PhD. degree some students would just call her teacher instead of professor. One day after having heard herself being addressed as "teacher" for the entire class period she stopped the class. "I'm a woman, but I want to be called and should be called professor. I earned that title."

The next student describes her college counselor's advice about her career path.

"I changed my major to biochemistry at Santa Monica college and I spoke to a counselor about how I wanted to be a doctor. She told me that I should do the nursing program instead. I don't think she would have said this to a male counselee."

10. CHALLENGES

Giroux and MacLaren have written extensively about the ways in which the hidden curriculum needs to be demystified, challenged, and transformed. Democratic schooling and teacher education (Griroux and MacLaren, 1986), language (Giroux and MacLaren, 1992), and cultural studies (Giroux and MacLaren, 2014), are the challenges posed to those who seek transformation.

Unfortunately, we do not have many examples of professors or students who challenge the hidden curriculum.

In the following, a female student who never realized that she was constrained by gender roles is challenged by her professor,

"I never knew the extent of how much I was oppressed by gender inequalities. My only fight was against racism. It's almost as if when battling against racism you forget about sexism. I remember last semester in one of my PAS classes the professor asked all the women to raise their hands if they cared about feminism, then he said, 'Raise your hands if you are a feminist or can see yourself being feminist." I didn't raise my hand to either question. He asked those who didn't raise their hands to explain their views. I told the class that I like traditional patriarchal roles.' As the class went on in the semester and when we began reading more about patriarchy, I began to understand how traditional patriarchal roles have negative effects on women. I believed because I was getting a college education that I didn't fit the stereotypical house wife type of woman I now know that this isn't true. I see that every time I don't correct a man when he uses his masculinity over me or my saying yes when I really mean no makes me fall into that category. Being a woman and having an education isn't enough. My college degree is no guarantee that a man will respect me. Quite frankly some men don't even like the fact that some women have an education,"

We have no examples of students challenging the harmful effects of gender roles and stereotypes upon their identities and aspirations. We cannot conclude however, that students did not resist their curriculum. In their web posts and written applications, they were asked to describe the way in which the materials allowed them to understand their experiences. We did not ask them to describe if, when or how they resisted.

11. CONCLUSION

Our research confirms that the hidden curriculum, first described by Jackson in 1968 is active and alive fifty years later. Our students describe their gender experiences which often have little to do with academic subject matter. The two major findings revealed by our students is 1) the difference in identities that schools cultivate and 2) the difference in occupational aspirations. These two consequences help maintain the patriarchy of American society. Reforms become possible, however, as we come to understand more and more about the daily enactments of the hidden curriculum in textbooks, play, teaching methods, school structure, school rules, student participation, and dress codes. Schools remain one of the key institutions that influence morality and citizenship. "Education is not justified in being patient... [It] must supply answers to vital needs that brook no delay. When a change in the environment demands appropriate action of us, our hand is forced" (Durkeim, 2012,:1). The scholarship on the hidden curriculum's impact on gender is available. It remains our responsibility to see that this scholarship is not lost.

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