GUIDELINES

FOR A GENDER EQUITY WORKSHOP

By Jo Sanders

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Workshops on gender equity are even more important now than before, because many people are under the mistaken impression that the gender problem has been solved. While we have certainly made much progress, we have not eliminated all gender inequities by far. The belief that we have done so is in itself an obstacle to needed further progress.

I have been asked many times for suggestions on how do to a workshop on gender equity. What follows is an outline that can be used for educators at any level on mathematics, science, and technology for girls and women. It can also be adapted for other gender equity topics.

Be aware, though, that a one-shot workshop by itself is unlikely to do much except give the illusion of action. For a workshop to be effective, it must have 1) action steps built in and 2) follow-up. Follow-up means a multi-part workshop that takes place over time, and/or specific activities that occur as a result of the workshop.

Keep your goal in mind: to kick-start effective gender equity change.

Basic Rules for a Gender Equity Presentation

Because gender equity can be an emotional issue for people, and because some people may have had negative experiences in the past with gender equity workshops, I strongly recommend the following six rules. This is the voice of thirty years of experience speaking to you.

1. **Prepare extensively**. Collect data on the status quo (unless you are having participants collect it in the "Personal Involvement" activity). Go over every section of the workshop for materials you need, materials participants need, and estimated time. Play it out in your mind ahead of time to catch errors and omissions.

2. **Be factual**. Deliver the workshop calmly, not ideologically or emotionally. Present facts, figures, and findings, not values. Gentle humor helps, too.

3. **No blame**. Although you are presenting an educational problem that needs to be addressed, there is no question of blame or fault since *all* of us, women as well as men, could not help learning sexist attitudes and behaviors as infants and children. Most gender bias is inadvertent, not deliberate.

4. **No male-bashing**. Women can be sexist and men can be gender-fair. If you assume otherwise, you will alienate all the men and many women. Also remember that gender issues cut both ways: males are unfairly limited by masculine gender roles, too.

5. **Demonstrate support**. Prove that this issue is taken seriously. Have present as many as possible of the senior and/or most respected people.

6. **Remember the WIIFFM (pronounced wif' im) rule[1]**. What's In It For Me? This is a legitimate question that every participant will have. Keep in mind *why* they should do anything about gender equity. Busy people need good answers, or nothing will happen.

Outline for a Gender Equity Workshop

Part 0. Preparation

The workshop must be relevant to participants' concerns and it must demonstrate that there is a gender problem they need to address. Collect quantitative and/or qualitative data to support the case you are making.

Part 1. Awareness

People need to see that gender equity is a real issue that has real consequences in the real world, that it permeates many areas of life, and that we are artificially limited by our sex. If your group is already well aware of issues of gender bias in schools and the society at large, you can skip Part 1. If not, choose one of these.

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[1] With thanks to Tom Kibler for this piece of wisdom.

Personal involvement. [2] This one is the gold standard, and can be done if your people can be counted on to do a little homework in advance. You can assign an activity or have people choose one. Have participants present what they themselves have learned or observed: the cumulative effect of this first-hand testimony is powerful. The workshop activity, of course, consists of participants' reports.

If you have a large group, having each person report will take too long. In that case, have everyone who did the same thing meet for five or 10 minutes to work up a common presentation, or just hold a full-group discussion with volunteers contributing their results.

In Colleges or Universities

- Interview or survey a representative cross-section of students about their career plans. Note any male/female differences.
- Obtain male/female enrollment figures for courses in computers, science, mathematics, and/or engineering, from the least to the most advanced, for the last few years.
- Obtain male/female dropout figures for the same courses in the same years.
- Obtain test scores and grades for males and females in these courses.
- Survey students about computers in their homes: whether there is one, how long there has been one, which room in the house it is kept, who uses it most.
- Obtain male/female figures on majors offered at your school. Compare figures for the physical sciences to those for the humanities.
- In an Arts and Sciences mathematics, science, or computer class, count the number of times male vs. female students are either called on or their called-out answers are recognized by the instructor.
- Obtain figures from the Academic Computing Lab on male/female usage and if available the amount of time males vs. females spend in the lab, or observe the lab yourself at representative times to collect this data.

In K-12 Schools

- In high schools, obtain male/female enrollment figures for courses in computers, science, and/or mathematics, from the least to the most advanced, for the last three years.
- In high schools, obtain male/female dropout figures for the same courses in the same years.
- In high schools, obtain test scores and grades for males and females in these courses.
- In middle or high schools, obtain male/female figures for extracurricular activities involving math, science, or technology such as clubs, free-access computer labs, etc.

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[2] Adapted from Sanders, Jo; Koch, Janice; and Urso, Josephine (1997). Gender Equity Right from the Start. Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum Associates. Pages 18-19.

- In elementary schools, ask children to draw a scientist. Note the characteristics of the drawings and whether they differ for girls and boys.
- At all grade levels, count the number of times girls vs. boys are either called on or their called-out answers are recognized by the teacher. Compare these results in math, science, and/or computer class vs. classes such as Language Arts and Social Studies.
- At all grade levels, count the number of males vs. females pictured on classroom and/or hallway bulletin boards or showcases.

In the Community

- Analyze the gender messages in greeting cards for birth and birthdays up to age six.
- Analyze the gender messages in a toy store, with special attention to toys related to math, science or technology.
- Analyze the gender messages in children's television programs, particularly those dealing with math, science or technology. (Watch an hour of Saturday morning TV.)
- Keep track of all the newspaper articles you see in a given period of time concerning mathematics, science and/or technology. How many men vs. women are mentioned?
- Obtain several issues of popular magazines concerned with computers or science. Count the number of times men vs. women are pictured, are the focus of articles, and/or are the authors of articles.
- Go to a video arcade and count the number of males and females there. What are the females doing? The males?
- Go to a computer store and count the number of employees and customers who are male vs. female.
- Go to web sites of likely interest to women and men, and analyze the gender messages.

Easel worlds. Tape four easel pages, widely spaced, to the wall, or use a large chalkboard. Write a heading on each: *Home, School, Community, Media*. Divide participants into four smaller groups, one group per easel page. Ask them to write the influences and messages in each arena that affect girls' and boys' notions of mathematics, science, and technology, or their general notions of what it means to be male and female in each of these areas in our society. After a few minutes ask each group to move on to the next easel page, and continue until everyone has had an opportunity to contribute to each page and to see what others have written.

Imaginary Line. Develop a half a dozen questions that are 1) relevant to your group and 2) can be answered quantitatively (number, percentage, all/some/none). Tell participants to station themselves along an imaginary line running the length of the room at the place corresponding to their answer. For

example, "How many workshops or talks on gender equity have you attended?" One end of the line can represent "three or more," the other end "none," and in between "one" and "two." This is a good way to make the status quo observable and to get participants to move around.

Draw a scientist / mathematician / computer professional. Ask participants to draw this picture as they think the typical elementary or secondary student would draw it. Use paper and tape drawings to the wall, or have people draw directly on the chalkboard. Afterward, discuss the characteristics shown in the drawings (e.g., crazy hair, pocket protectors, glasses, isolated activities, etc.), and what the drawings suggest about the people in these professions. How attractive are they? How realistic are they? What impressions do girls and boys have of such people?

If I had been born a member of the opposite sex. Ask people to spend a few minutes thinking about and writing some notes on how their lives would have been different if they had been born a member of the opposite sex. Discuss it. Why do these differences, these divisions into male and female worlds, exist? How do they limit children's futures?

Imagine. Divide participants into small groups, half of which are to invent a life story for a newborn baby, Jane, and the other half of which invent a life story for another newborn baby, John. After discussing the following in small groups, pull them back together for a discussion of any differences between Jane's life and John's.
- *Infancy*: clothes, room, most influential people
- *Nursery school*: playmates, toys, clothes, most influential people
- *Elementary school*: interests, play, learning, most influential people
- *Middle school*: interests, play, learning, most influential people
- *High school*: interests, favorite subjects, social activities, learning, most influential people
- *College*: avocational interests, vocational interests, social activities, learning, most influential people

Part 2. Education and Labor Market Statistics

Let state or national statistics on post-secondary education, occupations, and salaries make a dispassionate, factual, non-ideological case for you that males and females are far from equal and that it matters in terms of their own futures as well as the well-being of our country.

You will find current education statistics from the *Digest of Education Statistics* at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs. This publication is issued annually.

You will find current labor market statistics on detailed occupational participation and earnings by sex at http://stats.bls.gov/cpsaatab.htm#empstat. Choose Table 39, Weekly Earnings Data, or Table 11, Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation.   They are available in March or April for the preceding year.

Here is a participatory activity you can do.

Paper and pencil. Prepare a page with 6 to twelve selected occupations in the left column, blank lines for "% female" in the middle column and blank lines for "average annual salary" in the right column. Get people into pairs, preferably with people they don't already know, and have them collaborate on estimated answers. Go over the correct answers with an overhead transparency or a chalkboard.

You can do a similar activity about education. In the left column write 6 to twelve academic fields and in the right column blank lines for "% female" at the bachelors, masters, or Ph.D. level.

Part 3. Your Local Findings About Gender Equity

Against the background of the statistics, present what you learned in your preparation about gender equity in your local situation. Be sure you have enough data not to focus on only a few events, which can be challenged as unrepresentative. Be factual and calm, not political or ideological. Emphasize that gender bias is usually inadvertent and unintended, and that it is a human issue rather than a women's issue.

If your participants have done the "Personal Involvement" activity, schedule it first in the workshop. At this point, summarize what they found to remind them, and augment it with what you have learned about the local situation.

Part 4. Gender Equity Solutions

There is no point presenting problems without solutions. See other publications by Jo Sanders at www.josanders.com/resources, and/or order a

copy of *Gender Equity Right from the Start* by Sanders, Koch and Urso, published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, www.erlbaum.com.

Brainstorm Solutions. Another way to have participants work on solutions is to present general principles and ask small groups to brainstorm specific strategies appropriate for their context. Principles are:

1. Focus specifically on girls/women.
2. Design learning activities and curriculum with their interests in mind.
3. Emphasize usefulness.
4. Highlight the social aspect (especially good for K-12).
5. Eliminate biased language.
6. Eliminate biased practices.
7. Spread the word.
8. Keep it up.

Have groups report. Take notes, type them up, and distribute them afterward to participants.

Part 5. Action Planning

Reserve some time for a solid start on the next steps. Unless you facilitate action planning at this stage, the only thing that will come of your workshop is some temporary positive feelings. Change requires more than good feelings.

Divide participants into functional groups with common planning needs, and have them work on what happens next. You can distribute a planning form to help them structure their thinking. It could have basic questions on it (what, who, when, and with what resources) and timeline questions (action I/we will take this week, next week, next month, this year, next year).

Ideally the workshop would not be over without setting up a team or task force or committee to coordinate and focus gender equity efforts. Ask for volunteers and have them get together after the end of the workshop to set up a meeting time.

You should assume that there will be a continuum of acceptance of the need for gender equity action on the part of participants. I find it is helpful to think of people affected by change in five groups.

The Acceptance Continuum

1. **Leaders**, who are committed to change and will work hard for it.
2. **Supporters**, who will help but not lead.
3. **Fence-sitters**, who won't do anything to help or to hinder.
4. **Skeptics**, who may passively resist the change.
5. **Resisters**, who will actively work against the change.

Your goal is to move everyone one step up the ladder. Because many people will never become leaders for reasons of their own histories and personalities, it is not realistic to try to move everyone to Level 1. If you have this goal in mind you will surely become demoralized. On the other hand, over time it could be possible to move some people up still another level.

It is important not to demonize people who do not share your own commitment to gender equity change. They usually have understandable reasons for their opposition to gender equity change. Some educators hear it as implied criticism of their professional identity and self-worth, which they naturally resent. Some people may feel unjustly accused, since they are *absolutely positive* they do not discriminate against females. Your colleagues may assume a gender equity discussion is merely another instance of academic political

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correctness, posturing without importance or substance, or perhaps yet another here-today-and-gone-tomorrow educational fad, and thus dismissible. While men tend to assume they will be blamed as the culprits, gender equity can make women feel threatened, too. Certainly people who were raised within a traditional sex-role context may feel that gender equity is genuinely harmful for girls.

It is not necessary for everyone to agree to make substantial gender equity progress.