HORIZONS: 2000: A Model for Gender Fair Education

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ABSTRACT: This article presents evidence that girls are not receiving an equal education and describes a program model which offers solutions for counselors and teachers to adopt.

HORIZONS: 2000: Career and Life Planning Curriculum for Girls and Young Women, (Grades 5-12), (Bartholomew, 1993) was designed to address the contemporary needs of female students. It is a comprehensive, gender fair curriculum which can be implemented or used as a model to design programs that correct gender bias in education. The original concept and rationale for HORIZONS: 2000 arose from six years of research on the problems and concerns of working women (Bartholomew, 1988, 1989) and numerous counseling sessions with female clients. The purpose of this paper is to document the problem of educational inequity and to present an overview of the HORIZONS: 2000 program, including a description of the curriculum design and components.

Influence of Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotyping, perpetuated by the educational system, family, and culture, undermines girls’ achievement, life planning and self-esteem. The stereotyping of mathematics and science as a masculine activity can be a crucial factor in limiting women’s access to math and science-oriented occupations (Hyde, Fennema, Ryan, Frost, & Hopp, 1990; Singer & Stake, 1986). Sherman (1982) reported that when girls did enroll in math courses, they tended to “play dumb”
because they feared social disapproval (i.e. being seen by male peers as “too intelligent”). Horner (1972) attributed girls’ avoidance behavior to “fear of success.” She found that women tended to avoid success if they anticipated negative consequences of succeeding, such as social disapproval or loss of femininity.

In terms of career motivation and life planning, a majority of female students still plan to enter occupations which are traditionally dominated by women and are low-paying (Eccles, 1987; Ehrhart & Sandler, 1987; Gerstein, Lichtman, & Barokas, 1988) and anticipate combining work and family responsibilities for at least part of their adult lives (Murrell, Frieze, & Frost, 1991). Underemployment has direct economic implications for women; households headed by females are among the poorest in the country (Lottinville & Scherman, 1988). Additionally, women’s manifestation of a self-concept through career choice may be influenced by their perception of a split in the role demands of wife/mother and worker, resulting in conflict and frustration (Osipow, 1983).

The emphasis women place on career and family considerations is likely to be influenced by their perception of appropriate gender roles (Eccles, 1987). According to Bem (1979), strongly sex-typed individuals were more likely to adjust their behaviors to conform to cultural norms than those whose sex-role orientation was more androgynous. A study by Bridges (1988) suggested that women were more prone than men to base their career choices on stereotypical considerations. Fitzgerald & Crites (1980) stated that sex stereotyping has conditioned women to consider only traditional career roles, and this tremendously influenced their professional decision making. Gottfredson (1981) believed that people may give up vocational interests to take jobs that are appropriately sex-typed because they are more closely associated with self-concept and social identity. He also believed that the influence of sex-typing on career choice begins before the age of eight. The counselor must combat traditional role expectations, as they compete against the tendencies of young women to consider non-traditional careers (Shaw, 1955). As Fitzgerald and Crites (1980) stated:

The potential career development of women, although not fundamentally different than that of men, is a great deal more complex due to that combination of attitudes, role expectations, behaviors, and sanctions known as the socialization process. The effects of these complexities and complications necessitate special competencies for practitioners working with women (p. 45).