Why is it that males tend to be better at math than female students? It surely isn’t because women are incapable of becoming great math students but because males are encouraged more than females to do well in mathematics. If female students were encouraged the way males are, they would perform equally. Men are not naturally better at math; females just learn things in different ways and have learning styles completely different from male students. Gender bias occurs when people make assumptions based on ones gender regarding their behavior, abilities or preferences. Teachers’ play a significant role with gender bias in the classroom because it is teachers who control what goes on and the way things are done inside of the classroom. More importantly it is teachers’ who cause the bias in the classroom overall.

When looking at gender bias in the classroom, we must bring attention to the roles of the teachers. Whether it is intentional or not, teachers play a major part in the bias that goes on in their classrooms (Frawley). When children first start school, the all perform pretty equally, but as they get older things change and by the time females graduate high school they are much more behind males in math (Chapman). Teachers have to pay attention when they may
be giving male students more attention or having the class participate in class activities that appeal to males. Even textbooks seem to be bias and show males as strong and confident while women are quiet, neat and passive (Scantlebury). When a teacher is unconscious of their biased behavior, it can produce stereotypes for students’ success. When female students don’t have to deal with this stereotypical threat they perform better. When they aren’t expected to do well in the first place, they won’t try to perform better because they aren’t encouraged to do so. These stereotypes affect girls’ self-esteem, self-confidence and their overall performance in the classroom.

Gender bias not only has a negative effect on females but males also. When it comes to female students dealing with gender bias, they will learn to believe that if they are successful in mathematics it is because they worked hard instead of their success being on intelligence or talent (Scantlebury). Girls usually get less attention in the classroom and when they are asked questions, they are given the easier question while boys are given the more difficult questions to answer. Also males tend to take control of classroom discussions and voluntarily call out answers while girls are quiet (Scantlebury). Boys may believe that math should come easy to them and when they don’t understand it they feel ashamed and don’t want to ask questions to get help (James). In textbooks, stereotypical images of women are presented and rarely do we hear about women’s achievements in mathematics. Girls aren’t encouraged to become math teachers, scientists or technicians. Girls stay in school longer and attend classes more often
than boys and overall get better grades than boys but boys still perform better in math and science (Woodard).

“Boys will be boys” is another stereotype that teachers tend to believe. “Boys will be boys” means that boys are expected to be unruly, outspoken, athletic and far from feminine. When a boy doesn’t have one of these traits he is often looked down upon by teachers and peers because boys are supposed to be a certain way (Scantlebury). Boys tend to learn better during physical activity and are better at remembering visual thing while girls observe and remember words and objects better (James). Boys are always encouraged to think for themselves and are expected to be risk takers and challenge authority while girls who do so are seen as unfeminine (Scantlebury). Math teachers’ usually sit unruly boys by girls and assign girls to help a boy catch up on missed material because girls are seen as motherly and nurturing (Scantlebury).

How can gender bias be avoided in the classroom? There are ways teachers’ can reduce the amount of bias that goes on in their classrooms. First, they have to notice the things they say and do, and because most teachers don’t realize things, they should record their classroom sessions and pay attention to the way they treat students and which students are shown special attention and which students speak out more. They should pay attention to the types of questions they ask their students and the type of criticism given to each student. Boys seem to get more detailed feedback than girls when girls may need that in depth feedback to better
understand concepts but because math is seen as something more masculine, more time is spent with boys (Scantlebury).

Gender bias in the classroom does exist. From class activities, textbooks and even standardized tests, women/girls are always portrayed as passive, motherly, quiet, and inferior to males. When it comes to math, teachers play on these stereotypes and give male students more attention and feedback than they do female students. This makes it hard for girls to understand concepts and harder for them to build confidence and self esteem to perform better. When girls are encouraged to do well and treated the same way as their male counterparts, they have the opportunity to be just as successful in mathematics. Teachers’ have to pay attention to the things they do and not feed into the stereotypes because a person’s gender does not justify being treated unfairly. It is up to our teachers everywhere to make a change and give our female students the attention and encouragement they need to be successful math students and successful women altogether because the road one’s future starts in the classroom.
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