

# Gender Sensitivity

## for Adventist Teachers

BY DORA D. CLARKE-PINE

It was one of those crushing moments that we have all faced at some time in our lives. I was on the sidelines, waiting to be picked for an informal softball game at a church-related recreational outing. It was 1977. I was 16, I was a girl, and it was my first game with this group. As a result, I knew I would be one of the last chosen. Neither of the two captains disappointed me on that point. However, I could hardly blame them. No one knew I could actually play softball. I proved myself on the field that day, and never had to suffer the humiliation of being picked last again, at least with that particular group.

Let's move forward 20 years. It is 1997. I have shown up to play on a faculty softball team, which is scheduled to play a student team. Again, no one knows I can play softball. There is no blatant discrimination, but as before, there are assumptions. I am not asked where I would like to play, but am placed by default at second base—a relatively safe position for a woman in the infield. This is familiar territory to me (not the position—I usually play shortstop—but the assumption: Females can't play as well as males). Again, I will have to prove myself. Halfway through the game, I hear one of the student softball players say, "Don't hit it to her—she's too good." One guy who does hit it to me stops running to first base when he sees where it's going. I hear him say to his fellow teammates, "Why even bother running? She's going to throw me out anyway." My husband later told me he got a kick out of listening to the students talk about me. He said that I had definitely earned their respect.

So what is gender bias? Simply put, it means not affording one gender (men or women) the same opportunities given to the other. But the definition goes beyond that. Gender bias

**Regardless of whether a gender-sensitivity training model is actively selected for a particular school system,**

**gender role training will occur, either formally or informally.**

can also mean not challenging a climate of assumptions that places one gender in an inferior position to the other. This can occur on the ballfield, in the classroom, in the home, or in the church—and lifelong attitudes can thereby be lodged in the impressionable mind of a young person.

Many articles and books have highlighted issues related to gender bias, especially in the field of education.<sup>1</sup> To deal with such problems, a number of gender-sensitivity education strategies, programs, and models have been proposed.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of whether a gender-sensitivity training model is actively selected for a particular school system, gender role training *will* occur, either formally or informally. As a result, it may or may not foster an inclusive and gender-neutral climate.

Informal learning occurs all of the time. Children learn from the adults in their lives what those adults have learned growing up from the adults in *their* lives. Thus, if gender-sensitivity awareness is not actively encouraged, our classroom education on this issue will depend primarily upon teachers' personal experiences and attitudes, their priorities, and how much they actually know about fostering gender-neutral attitudes in young people.

### **The Need for Gender-Sensitivity Training**

Instead of this haphazard approach, Adventist schools

ought to provide gender-sensitivity training at all levels within the church educational system—from elementary through the college/university level. This will provide numerous benefits to our students, as well as our denomination, ranging from individual gains in self-worth to improved school communities. There will even be worldwide mission gains when no talent or skill goes ignored or undeveloped. Indeed, throughout Scripture, God tells us that His kingdom is not about walls or barriers, or about power or status. He reminds us that we are all His children. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, KJV).

### **Unlimited Possibilities**

Thus, when we begin to value each other as God values us, and when we learn to expect limitless possibilities from our youth, regardless of gender, we may be surprised at the results. But should we be? The value God has placed on each one of us often defies understanding. Romans 9:31 and 32 state, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (NKJV). To this type of love, it is not surprising that some would respond as Paul did: “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:20, 21, NIV).

Paul was not ashamed of his God, his faith, or his life mission. We want every young person in our educational system to be similarly minded. Gender-sensitivity training can be part of this process, opening up young minds to the special value that God places on each one of us individually. This can also help each person to define the roles in his or her life more fully (psychologically, socially, educationally, and spiritually), making sure they are not limited or tainted by unnecessary limitations.

### **What Happens in a Gender-Sensitivity Program?**

In a gender-sensitivity program, teachers learn to provide equitable opportunities for both girls and boys to participate and answer questions in class. Teachers also learn how to respond more equitably to students in areas such as praise, individual assistance, high-level questioning, active listening, positive personal interest, and affirmation of expressed feelings.<sup>3</sup> Such adjustments are needed because gender bias, already known to exist in many classrooms as demonstrated by problems in the above areas, often goes unrecognized by teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Gender-sensitivity programs also help teachers learn how to model the use of gender-friendly language, thus ensuring that students learn to consider as appropriate a variety of roles for males and females. For example, a teacher wanting to introduce a critical-thinking assignment might use an illustration such as this: “A powerful IBM executive, wanting to create a new software program, decided that *he or she* needed

Picture  
Removed

to hire two of the best research assistants in the area, Ms. Franks and Mr. Cole. The executive offered them great salary and benefit packages, but after hiring both of them, didn't follow through with the promise of individual company cars. If you were one of the research assistants, what would you do after it became evident that you would not be receiving the previously promised company car?" (Note that the executive and research assistants are not assumed to be male.)

Within the curriculum, teachers should ensure that resource materials such as textbooks, videotapes, and interactive CD-ROMs use gender-friendly images, photographs, illustrations, and language.<sup>5</sup> If such resources are not available, teachers should ensure that the gender bias is pointed out and discussed, thereby increasing awareness of such biases. Re-

Picture  
Removed

search indicates that even in the 1990s, there is often-times a significant level of disparity between male and female representations in sources such as textbooks.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers should also commit themselves to maintaining ethnic diversity and gender balance when selecting adult role models to lead out in presentations, special programs, and guest lectures. Having a variety of adult models communicates to students quite effectively that both men and women can and do fill valuable, leadership-related roles in society. Conversely, having both male and female adults talk about the more supportive roles they assume in life (such as spouse and parent) and how such roles have added richness and meaning to their lives teaches students that supportive and caretaking roles should be just as valued as more leadership-oriented ones. The visiting role models should be encouraged to discuss with students any gender-bias struggles that they have had to deal with and how they learned to cope with and overcome such struggles.

Teachers should see that classroom duties, chores, and leadership opportunities are fairly distributed across genders.<sup>7</sup> For example, they can ensure that girls and boys get equal opportunities to run equipment such as slide or video projectors, clean the classrooms, and lead out in discussions and projects. Maintaining such a balance in the classroom teaches students that activities should not exclude either gender. This is especially important in leadership-oriented activities, since

research shows that in mixed-group situations, males are much more likely to assume, or to be selected for, leadership positions.<sup>8</sup>

Classroom activities can be designed to encourage more active listening and empathetic response styles for both sexes. Again, using a variety of male and female adult models to introduce and encourage such activities would, of course, be ideal. Conflict-resolution programs that are integrated and infused throughout the entire school curriculum might be one way to develop these types of skills.

Finally, teachers should ensure that men and women are presented fairly in various subject areas,<sup>9</sup> especially in areas that are often male- or female-dominated (math, science, literature, social studies, etc.). When students begin to see real-life examples of individuals to whom they can personally relate making significant contributions in areas not often seen, they may be tempted to say: "Why can't I do that, too?"

### In Conclusion

The sad thing about the softball illustration used at the beginning of this article is that societal sex-role expectations

Picture  
Removed

have been so ingrained into people's personal psyches that they don't generally regard as "abnormal" the assumption that "Girls can't play as well as boys." That is how pervasive gender bias can be. The good news is that even though I viewed the initial assumptions of my male peers as "normal," I was not afraid to challenge those assumptions. And there's even more good news. If more women and more men get into the habit of challenging assumptions like those, pretty soon those assumptions—and other gender-biased assumptions—will be forced to change. I know, because again and again it has happened to me on the softball field—in the minds of both my male and female peers. And if it can happen on the softball field, it can happen in the classroom and in society as well. ✍

*At the time this article was written, Dr. Dora D. Clarke-Pine was Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology and Counseling in the School of Education at La Sierra University in River-*

side, California. She has recently accepted the position of Associate Professor in the Education and Psychology Department at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Andrea Allard and Maxine Cooper, "Too Much Talk, Not Enough Action": An Investigation of Fourth-Year Teacher Education Students' Responses to Issues of Gender in the Teacher Education Curriculum." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, March 1997; Carole Funk, "What Do Women Students Want? (And Need!) Strategies and Solutions for Gender Equity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of University Women Symposium, *Gender Issues in the Classroom and on the Campus: Focus on the 21st Century*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 1993; Yvonne S. Gentzler and Lorna K. Browne, *Gender Equity in Education: A Curriculum Plan for an Undergraduate Education Course* (Baltimore, Md.: Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Career Technology and Adult Learning, 1996); Carol S. Marshall and Judy Reinhartz, "Gender Issues in the Classroom," *Clearing House* 70:6 (July/August 1997), pp. 333-337; Jo Sanders, "Teacher Education and Gender Equity," ERIC Digest (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, 1997; Andrew I.

Schwebel, Bernice L. Schwebel, Carol R. Schwebel, and Milton Schwebel, *The Student Teacher's Handbook* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1996); Hsio C. She, "Gender Difference in Teacher-Student Interaction in High- and Low-Achieving Middle School Biology Classes." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, Oak Brook, Illinois, March 1997; Karin Wiberg, "Research Windows: Gender Issues, Personal Characteristics, and Computing," *Computing Teacher* 22:4 (December 1994/January 1995), pp. 7-10.

2. Anice Bullock and Ruth L. Telschow,

"Men and Women in Society: A Duality of Vision." Paper presented at the Annual International Conference of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development on Teaching Excellence and Conference of Administrators, Austin, Texas, May 1994; Rodney H. Clarken, "Toward Bias-Free Teaching: Gender Equity in the Classroom." Paper presented at the United Nations Non-Governmental Forum on Women, Beijing, China, August/September 1995; Penny L. Hamrich, "Confronting the Gender Gap in Science and Mathematics: The Sisters in Science Program." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, Oak Brook, Illinois, March 1997; Trudy L. Hanson, "Teaching Gender Issues in Storytelling and in the College Teaching Class." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1995; Gaill M. Hildebrand, "Interrupting Gender Assessment Practices." Paper presented in an Interactive Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, St. Louis, Missouri, March 1996; Rose Marie Hoffman, "Gender: Issues of

**When we begin to value each other as God values us, and when we learn to expect limitless possibilities from our youth, regardless of gender, we may be surprised at the results.**

Power and Equity in Counselor Education Programs." *Counselor Education and Supervision* 36:2 (December 1996), pp. 104-112; M. Anna Lundberg, "You Guys Are Overreacting: Teaching Prospective Teachers About Subtle Gender Bias," *Journal of Teacher Education* 48:1 (January/February 1997), pp. 55-61; Scott D. MacClintic and Genevieve M. Nelson, "Gender and Group Dynamics," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Biology Teachers, Charlotte, North Carolina, October 1996; Connie McIntyre and Beth Lawrence, "Teaching Ideas: Getting Into Gender Issues," *English Journal* 84:3 (March 1995), pp. 80-82; Jennifer Ocif and Beverly Marshall-Goodell, "Combining Mentoring and Service Learning: A New Approach." Paper presented at the National Conference of the Women in Engineering Program Advocates Network (June 1996); Jo Sanders, "Institutionalizing Gender Equity in Teacher Education." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Chicago, Illinois, February 1996; Bernice R. Sandler and Ellen Hoffman, *Teaching Faculty Members to Be Better Teachers: A Guide to Equitable and Effective Classroom Techniques* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1992); Fred Savitz, "Gender Equity and the Inclusive Classroom: Working Together." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Phoenix, Arizona, February/March 1997; Carol H. Schlank and Barbara Metzger, *Together and Equal: Fostering Cooperative Play and Promoting Gender Equity in Early Childhood Programs* (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1997); Joan B. Schur, "Students as Social Science Researchers: Gender Issues in the Classroom," *Social Education* 59:3 (March 1995), pp. 144-147; Glenda Valentine, "Summer Vacation: Teacher Institutes Offer Tolerance Education," *Teaching Tolerance* 5:1 (Spring 1996), pp. 60-63; \_\_\_\_\_, *Teaching Tolerance* 5:2 (Fall 1996), pp. 34-38; Karyn Weilhausen, "Girls Can Be Bull Riders, Too! Supporting Children's Understanding of Gender Roles Through Children's Literature," *Young Children* 51:5 (July 1996), pp. 79-83.

3. Clarken.

4. Funk, 1993; Barbara J. Guzzetti and Wayne O. Williams, "Gender, Text, and Discussion: Examining Intellectual Safety in the Science Classroom," *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 33:1 (1996), pp. 5-20; Marshall and Reinhartz, 1997.

5. Theresa M. McCormick, *Creating the Nonsexist Classroom; A Multicultural Approach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), p. 75.

6. John I. Goodlad and Pamela Keating, eds., *Access to Knowledge: The Continuing Agenda for Our Nation's Schools* (New York: The College Entrance Examination Board, 1994), pp. 97, 98, 325; Matthew Hogben and Carolyn K. Waterman, "Are All of Your Students Represented in Their Textbooks? A Content Analysis of Coverage of Diversity Issues in Introductory Psychology Textbooks," *Teaching of Psychology* 24:2 (1997), pp. 95-100.

7. M. Tallerico, G. Birmingham, and M. Giaccobe, *Take a Good Look: A Gender Equity Handbook for Administrators* (Albany, N.Y.: New York State Association for Women in Administration, 1995).

8. Stephen G. Sapp, Wendy J. Harrod, and Li Jun Zhao, "Leadership Emergence in Task Groups with Egalitarian Gender-Role Expectations," *Sex Roles* 34:1-2 (January 1996), pp. 65-80; Henry A. Walker, Barbara C. Iardi, Anne M. McMahon, and Mary L. Fennell, "Gender, Interaction, and Leadership," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59:3 (September 1996), pp. 255-272.

9. Tallerico, Birmingham, and Giaccobe.

Picture  
Removed