

ABSTRACT

An Investigation into the Processes Associated
with the Reproduction of Gender Inequality
in the Secondary School - A Case Study

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This study investigated gender stereotyping in a co-educational secondary school, seen particularly in the gender differentiation in subject choice, leading to different career paths for male and female students. It sought to explore the extent of gender stereotyping present in the school, the factors associated with the reproduction of gender stereotyping, and the effects on students' aspirations and school experiences. Also explored were students' own perceptions of gender stereotyping, their responses to it and whether these varied according to race and class as well as gender.

The setting chosen was one co-educational secondary school and data were collected by a variety of methods - classroom observation, interviews with students, teachers and other school personnel, and the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of students. The data were analyzed by reviewing the field notes to generate and test assertions, identify patterns and

explain inconsistencies as well as propose explanations and answer the research questions.

The findings showed that gender stereotyping existed within the school and that a variety of factors was involved. Students made stereotypical curriculum choices out of a desire to conform to accepted norms of gender appropriate behaviour both in the family and the peer group, as well as in accordance with their perceived future roles. Very few students successfully challenged the gender divisions within the school and when this did occur such a student was likely to be a girl.

It was recommended that changes be instituted within the school to minimize the gender differentiation in curriculum choice, to sensitize teachers to the problem and that teacher education courses and professional bodies try to address this issue through the teachers who are best placed to effect change.