

INCENTIVE STRUCTURES IN THE CLASSROOM AND TEACHER  
ACCOMMODATIONS FOR GENDER

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my children, Emma, Anson, Nathan, Annika, and Beck, without whom this dream would never have become a reality. Thank you for continuously cheering me on.

## ABSTRACT

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To motivate students and to assist classes in being focused learning environments, teachers employ a variety of incentives in the classroom—both positive and negative.

This research investigates the intersection of gender and incentives looking at perspectives of both the gender of the student and the gender of the teacher. Thirteen elementary school teachers (seven women and six men) participated in in-depth interviews about their use of incentives in the classroom.

Boys received the least positive incentives and the most negative incentives in all classrooms, but boys received more positive incentives and fewer negative incentives in men's classrooms than in women's. Female teachers tended to view children in a gender-blind way treating all students with equal expectations regardless of gender. Male teachers tended to look at their classroom as gendered and held different expectations for boys than they did for girls. Male teachers also reported that they focused on having a fun classroom with edutainment-style lessons and greater in-classroom flexibility as compared to female teachers. Male teachers also had higher levels of concern about maintaining a good student-teacher relationship.

**KEY WORDS:** Classroom management, Rewards and punishments, Boys' behavior, Elementary school teachers

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| DEDICATION .....  | iii         |
| ABSTRACT .....  | iv          |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....  | v           |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....   | vi          |
| CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....                                     | 1           |
| CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....                         | 4           |
| Learning Classroom Management .....                               | 4           |
| Negative Incentives .....   | 6           |
| Positive Incentives .....   | 7           |
| Impact of Gender .....  | 9           |
| Moralizing Student Behavior .....                                 | 12          |
| Elementary Schools—Where Teaching is a Feminized Profession ..... | 13          |
| CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....                                     | 15          |
| In-Class Observations .....                                       | 15          |
| In-Depth Interviews .....   | 16          |
| Sampling .....  | 17          |
| Confidentiality and Anonymity .....                               | 18          |
| Coding and Analysis .....   | 19          |
| CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS .....  | 21          |
| Explanation of Tables .....                                       | 22          |
| Breakdown of Incentives .....                                     | 23          |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Similarities .....                                   | 33 |
| Upper Versus Lower Grades.....                       | 33 |
| Factoring for Gender or Not .....                    | 34 |
| Incentive Structure.....                             | 39 |
| Impact of Long-term Teaching in Female Teachers..... | 42 |
| Relationships with Students.....                     | 43 |
| Public Versus Private Discipline .....               | 45 |
| Teacher Intentionality .....                         | 47 |
| Other Exceptions .....                               | 50 |
| CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....                           | 51 |
| Problematic Incentive Structures .....               | 51 |
| Advantages for Male Teachers .....                   | 53 |
| Recess .....   | 55 |
| Gender-blindness .....                               | 55 |
| Socialization in School .....                        | 56 |
| Gender Accommodations .....                          | 57 |
| CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....                          | 58 |
| REFERENCES .....                                     | 62 |
| APPENDIX.....  | 69 |
| VITA.....  | 71 |

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The American educational system is literally failing our boys. According to Gurian and Stevens (2004), boys represented 90 percent of discipline referrals and earned 70 percent of Ds and Fs. Boys are punished and penalized at rates far higher than girls. Why are they penalized at such high rates? Research indicates that it is a response to a two-fold problem—first, developmentally normal boy behavior is negatively punished; and secondly, classroom management styles, like incentive structures, are designed to benefit girls (Gurian and Stevens 2005; Sax 2006). Consequently, boys are facing both academic and behavioral discouragement early in school. This un motivating environment—set at odds against boys’ needs—puts boys behind early and spirals into negative gendered responses as boys move through school (Sax 2006). Boys are responding by dropping out of high school and not enrolling in college. In 1970 women made up approximately 42% of the college population, but today the roles have flipped, leaving men in the minority at our universities (Pipada 2021).

So what is happening in the school environment? To motivate students to learn and to assist classes in being focused learning environments, teachers employ a variety of incentives in the classroom. Incentives can be broken into two categories—positive and negative. Positive incentives include rewards, tickets, money systems, and various kinds of class points. Negative incentives are discipline-connected and may involve various punishments including sitting by the teachers, loss of rewards, think time, loss of recess, and removal from the classroom. Significant work has been done assessing the effectiveness of incentives on different age groups (T. Collins et al. 2015; Hutchings et



al. 2013; Lewis, Romi and Roache 2012; Mitchell and Bradshaw 2013; Payne 2015; Visaria et al. 2016). Not every incentive has the same effect. The questions at the core of my research are:

- 1) Is male gender associated with additional negative incentives (i.e., penalties) among school-aged children?
- 2) Is female gender associated with additional positive incentives (i.e., rewards) among school-aged children?
- 3) Do female teachers impose more negative incentives on male students than male teachers?

In my research, 13 teachers were interviewed about their use of incentives—both positive and negative—as well as questioned about how incentives and punishments were applied to both male and female students. Six male teachers and seven female teachers were interviewed.

This sociological investigation into the impact of incentives on students based on their gender explored how male and female teachers applied both positive and negative incentives to male and female students. While boys were more penalized and girls more rewarded in nearly every classroom, how significant the inequity was between boys and girls was impacted by both the gender of the teacher and the length of time they had been teaching. In general, the female teachers viewed their classes gender-blind and treated boys and girls the same. They did not view boys as disadvantaged compared to girls. The male teachers in this study all had accommodation techniques to level the playing field and perceived boys as disadvantaged compared to girls in their classes. The most

seasoned female teachers also utilized notable accommodation techniques that female teachers with less experience did not.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this literature review, I discussed relevant scholarly work on the subject of behavior management in the classroom, with a focus on why boys are more likely to struggle. I show the research on why classroom management is challenging, especially for new teachers, and discuss the difficult balance of creating an optimal learning environment while responding to intense curriculum and testing demands. This led directly to the research on positive and negative incentives which most teachers employ to both manage classroom behavior and student motivation.

Next is the sociological review on the impact of student gender with a focus on the impact on boys and the literature around how boys interface in the classroom. After that is a review of teacher responses to difficult students— many of which would be boys—and the tendency to moralize students’ behavior rather than be accountable for curriculum delivery. Because my research was all done with elementary school teachers, I end by considering the impact of elementary school teachers being a majority women and thus a feminized profession. In particular, I look at the literature about the men who choose an occupation in which they will be a gender minority.

#### *Learning Classroom Management*

One of the largest problems teachers face is learning how to manage their classroom while continually motivating their students (Brashier and Norris 2008; Dicke et al. 2015; Hutchings et al. 2013; Toshalis 2010). Not knowing how to best manage a classroom increases teachers’ stress and is particularly poignant for first year teachers (Dicke et al. 2015; Toshalis 2010). Dicke and colleagues (2015) analyses of new teachers

in Germany examined differences in teachers' effectiveness based on their participation in classroom management training, stress management training, or no training. Analyses indicated that teachers enrolled in the classroom management training experienced the greatest increases in self-efficacy, followed by those receiving stress management training, who also experienced better outcomes than teachers in the control group (Dicke et al. 2015).

Brashier and Norris (2008) noted that when new teachers were overwhelmed with too much curriculum or pressure to conform, they moved away from what they know are more effective teaching strategies (thereby reducing student choice and opportunities for play) in order to comply with perceived norms. Additionally, 72 percent of participants in Brashier and Norris' (2008:35) study "reported that classroom management becomes an issue during times of play" even while acknowledging that playtime was "one of the most meaningful (as far as learning goes) parts of the day for...students." Toshalis' (2010:197) study demonstrated that teachers (particularly new teachers) must, by fact of the structure of student teaching, "direct their pedagogical efforts away from innovation and inspiration and toward discipline." Thus a teacher's own emerging teaching style is shaped through the experience of being disciplined first as a student and then as a new teacher (Toshalis 2010).

Dicke and colleagues (2015:2) pointed out that "classroom disturbances are the biggest threat to new teachers, and new teachers feel unprepared to deal with them." First-year teachers were at the greatest risk for having poor classroom management (Brashier and Norris 2008; Dicke et al. 2015). The more experience a teacher has, the better classroom management they have (Hutchings et al. 2013). Notably, all teachers,

regardless of the amount of experience they had, could benefit from additional classroom management training (Hutchings et al. 2013).

### *Negative Incentives*

Taking away recess (or breaks for secondary students) had negative effects on both student learning and the student-teacher relationship (Brashier and Norris 2008; Payne 2015). Even though teachers knew that it was counterproductive to remove recess or breaks, they still often took it away, threatened to take it away, or reduced the amount of recess (Brashier and Norris 2008). In the Brashier and Norris (2008:36) study, one teacher wrote,

My students live for recess: if they know they won't get it, they work extra hard to make sure they are good. I almost never have them sit out all of recess, but taking it away is effective to get them to behave.

Yet Payne's analysis (2015) demonstrated that removing recess was worse than simply being ineffective for all students. Specifically, Payne (2015:494) reported

*being made to miss break* has the highest overall score for *disliking the teacher* (56%) and is the only punishment that causes pupils to *dislike the teacher* more than if they are *not allowed on the school trip* (53%). There are also above average responses for *switch off* and *mess about...* as well as a below average responses for *behave well*. (Emphasis in original.)

Thus, removing recess not only damaged the student-teacher relationship, but reduced the incentive for the student to work hard and otherwise behave appropriately in class (Payne 2015).

Another frequently used negative incentive was to exclude a disruptive student from class (Lewis et al. 2012; Mitchell and Bradshaw 2013). Excluding a student from class was ineffective at correcting behavioral problems because students tended to view the exclusion as caused by the teacher's impatience or emotional response rather than the student's misbehavior (Lewis et al. 2012; Mitchell and Bradshaw 2013). Further, classroom exclusion damaged the student-teacher relationship and led other members of the class to feel that the class is chaotic and that the teacher did not have control (Mitchell and Bradshaw 2013). Ultimatums prior to expulsion function solely as tools to facilitate an exit (Martin, Bosk, and Bailey 2018). The only time that exclusion was effective was if the teacher had first offered an escalating set of punishments, talked to the student very calmly when they are asked to leave, and explained both when the student left and when they were allowed to return (or when the class was over), what the student did wrong and emphasized the negative effect their behavior had on other class members (Lewis et al. 2012).

### *Positive Incentives*

As teachers worked to manage classrooms, many try various positive incentive programs where teachers work to catch students on task, on time, or teachers use other positive reinforcements to minimize classroom disruptions (T. Collins et al. 2015; Payne 2015; Visaria et al. 2016). These positive incentives were usually extrinsic rewards or gifts "used as a form of motivation for students to achieve an academic goal or given when a particular goal is achieved" (N. Joseph 2014:15). As part of the incentive, students received rewards for good behavior—sometimes it was an immediate reward like being allowed to do something fun for a few minutes and sometimes the reward was

long-term, like earning a spot on a special school trip that happened at the end of the school year (T. Collins et al. 2015; Payne 2015). Across the board, studies show that positive incentives do have some measure of effectiveness because students enjoy receiving rewards (T. Collins et al. 2015; N. Joseph 2014; Payne 2015; Visaria et al. 2016). However, such incentives had their limitations. Younger students responded more strongly to reward-type incentives and were more willing to modify behavior or work harder to earn rewards than older students (Payne 2015). Additionally, Visaria and colleagues (2016) found that students with a lot of family support and intrinsic motivation were motivated to attend school and do well on assignments and tests without rewards (or before rewards were put in place), while the rewards were being used, and after rewards were taken away. However, disadvantaged students (both economically and those with behavioral problems) were more likely to experience drops in academic performance once rewards were removed (T. Collins et al. 2015; N. Joseph 2014; Visaria et al. 2016). In some cases, the students would have done better with no reward at all rather than been given a positive incentive and then taken away an extrinsic motivator (Visaria et al. 2016). Nadine Joseph (2014:18) discussed the challenge of what she calls “the expected-award condition.” In this situation, children showed a decreased interest in an activity when it was connected to an extrinsic reward (N. Joseph 2014). Conversely, when children were doing an activity and received an unexpected award, they showed continued or even increased interest in the activity (N. Joseph 2014). While reward-type incentive systems were popular tools for teachers, Payne (2015:497) learned that teachers contacting the parents for positive reasons had nearly as high or higher response than earning stamps (this school’s reward system) for the categories “liking the teacher,

behave well, and work hard.” And while positive incentives or rewards were more effective for younger students than older students, positive home contact was the most effective incentive system for older students (Payne 2015).

### *Impact of Gender*

A concern in the modern classroom was that of teacher responses to the behavior of boys (Gurian and Stevens 2004; Zaman 2007). In the 2004 study by Gurian and Stevens, boys represented 90 percent of discipline referrals and earned 70 percent of Ds and Fs and less than half of the As. A more recent study in the United Kingdom about how to manage classrooms with children with behavior problems noted that “between three and seven percent of children aged five to 15 years meet diagnosis criteria for a conduct disorder, boys are three times more likely than girls to have such problems” (Hutchings et al. 2013:571). From a sociological perspective, this created a concern about whether there was really a significant problem with the boys themselves, or a teacher problem with respect to the socialization of boys and typical gendered responses by boys (Gurian and Stevens 2004; Zaman 2007). This problem of not adapting to boys’ behavior may mean that girls were favored in school. In fact, Marsh, Martin, and Cheng (2008) found that by the adolescent years girls were favored in most school subjects, including math and science. A significant number of studies noted that girls outdid their male counterparts in academic motivation, achievement, maturity, and the conscientiousness of the approach to their studies (Basow 2004; Collins, Kenway and McLeod 2000; Lingard, Martino, and Mills 2002; Marsh et al. 2008; A. Martin 2004). Gurian and Stevens (2005:24) found that “girls are more likely than boys to want a good education.” Further, by the early 2000s, girls outnumbered boys in high school extracurricular activities like



student government, music and other performing arts, on newspaper and yearbook staff and in academic clubs (Basow 2004).

Focusing on his psychological and medical perspective, Sax (2016) wrote about five factors he believe were driving an increasing epidemic of unmotivated boys. These five factors were video games, changes in teaching methods, prescription drugs—particularly those designed for ADHD, environmental toxins such as bisphenol A (more commonly known as BPA), and a general devaluation of masculinity. Pressure on schools to teach more advanced curriculum to and begin standardized testing for younger children has led to essentially a first grade curriculum being taught in kindergarten (Hover 2018; Sax 2016). Differences in the development of male brains that create both a maturity and academic lag behind female brains gets compounded when those young male brains are not yet ready to take on this more challenging curriculum (Gurian and Stevens 2005; Hover 2018; Sax 2016). Girls began school an average of a year to a year and a half ahead of boys in the critical subjects of reading and writing and this gap which starts in early childhood extends throughout school life (Gurian and Stevens 2005). Often these seemingly unmotivated and naturally wiggly boys are misdiagnosed as hyperactive. Notably, in general “American boys in 2013 were roughly 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD compared with American boys in 1979” (Sax, 2016:111). Older students, including those who were “redshirted” or enrolled in school one year late, were less likely to repeat kindergarten, first, or second grade, or be diagnosed with a learning disability including ADD or ADHD (Hover 2018).

Gurian (2006) pointed out that as a society we believe myths that girls have a much harder life than boys. But this isn’t an accurate picture. While men dominated in

top professional fields, boys struggled more in school (Basow 2004; Gurian 2006; Gurian and Stevens 2005). In Clifford's (2018) study, she noted that boys are often resented as the unfairly privileged sex—an obstacle for girls to overcome in getting a quality education. This perception that girls need help or special consideration has led some teachers to deliberately privilege the girls in their classes (Clifford 2018). Some of these advantages for girls have become systematized as multiple laws and policies intended to limit the believed advantage boys have over girls and redress perceived harm to the girls (Clifford 2018). The data actually points to boys being on the weaker side and some of the disadvantages boys have start very young (Clifford 2018; Gurian and Stevens 2005; Sax 2016). Gurian (2006) noted that, even as babies and little children, boys did not receive as much cuddling and affection as girls. Further, boys have risks for disorders at much higher rates than girls. For example, boys were twice as likely as girls to have autism, six times as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, were more likely to need special education services, or be diagnosed with severe mental retardation (Basow 2004; Gurian 2006). Within the school system, more boys than girls felt that teachers did not listen to what they have to say (Gurian and Stevens 2005).

In many ways, this information flips the typical sociological approach to gender inequity on its head. Basow (2004) chafed against that idea as she noted in her study the beginning of the shift in education from favoring boys to favoring girls. However, she believes that “rather than schools privileging girls to the detriment of boys, it is actually gender socialization that is alienating boys from school culture” (Basow 2004:127). Regardless of the reason, the evidence shows boys falling behind and a need for more boy-friendly teaching strategies. Unfortunately, most teachers were unaware of or

otherwise lack access to this kind of professional development. Scantlebury (1995) discussed that teachers are trained to be gender blind. She defined gender-blindness as the concept that “sex is the difference that makes no difference” (Scantlebury 1995:134). In her research, she found teachers across the board to be gender blind “believing that equity issues...are resolved” (Scantlebury 1995:134). In her paper, she detailed how equity issues were, in fact, very present and teachers need to get help in changing their teaching strategies (Scantlebury 1995). In Clifford’s (2018) study, only 34.6% of teachers indicated that they had attended professional development focused on boy-friendly teaching strategies. Nadine Joseph (2014) wrote that teacher expectancy can affect student achievement. Thus whether a teacher expects good behavior or bad behavior, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### *Moralizing Student Behavior*

As teachers struggled with students’ behavior, the teachers had a tendency to moralize the behavior (Gurian and Stevens 2005; Toshalis 2010). Toshalis (2010) believes that student teaching and internships condition a new teacher to expect disempowerment and they are trained to blame the students instead of the curriculum or the teacher’s own delivery of the curriculum. This lack of empowerment and blame of the student led to moralizing the students’ disinterest. In Toshalis’ (2010) study, new teachers described their students as very unmotivated and claimed that the students lacked a desire to learn. Using language to classify students this way absolves “the teacher of responsibility for the students’ failures” (Toshalis 2010:199). Gurian and Stevens (2005) noted that more of this student blame landed on boys than on girls. They wrote, “every

time a teacher wonders why the boys are ‘trouble in the classroom,’ he or she is asking a moral question” (Gurian and Stevens 2005:54).

*Elementary Schools—Where Teaching is a Feminized Profession*

Another important sociological aspect is the impact of feminization on the teaching profession and how men interact within a female dominant industry. In the US, around 80% of all elementary school teachers are women (S. Joseph 2015). Like other places around the world, teaching in an elementary school in the United States is a feminized profession. In a 1995 study by Lee, Loeb, and Marks, they compared single sex secondary schools (both boys’ and girls’ schools) to coeducational schools and evaluated teachers’ feelings of control over classroom and school policy. Because the worker make up (mostly women teachers) in girls’ schools is very similar to elementary schools, there are important sociological implications in this research. Lee (1995) and colleagues noted that female centric work environments enhanced female teachers’ perceived control. But “equally important are the feelings of disenfranchisement experienced by male teachers who work in girls’ schools in both classroom and school policy matters” (Lee et al. 1995:287). They noted that gendered work environments seemed to take a toll on the worker of the underrepresented gender (Lee et al. 1995).

Twenty years later, in research by Stephen Joseph (2015), he found that overwhelmingly male teachers in elementary schools felt comfortable working among female teachers. Nevertheless, all of Stephen Joseph’s (2015:148) “respondents agreed on the need for greater male support in the teaching service.” Wood (2012) noted that male teachers often do not enter the elementary school teaching profession because of a lack of male peers and a social perception of the profession being feminine. Once in the

profession, isolation was a major issue for male teachers (Wood 2012). Because there were so few men teaching in elementary schools, Stephen Joseph's (2015) respondents would love to see a formal organization with hopes to facilitate a wider spread of male teachers and as a forum to discuss issues that affect them as well as to exchange ideas about best practices. Stephen Joseph's (2015) research also addressed the two-fold reason why male teachers choose to remain teaching in a highly feminized work environment—to make a difference, particularly to male students and to be a role model to boys without a father figure in the home. Wood (2012) expanded on this, noting that female teachers believe that male teachers were better at motivating boys than female teachers were, and male teachers perceived better relationships with their students than female teachers did. Further, female teachers perceived behavioral challenges to be more severe than male teachers (Wood 2012). In Wood's (2012) survey, respondents overwhelmingly believed that there was a need for more male elementary school teachers and part of their role was to be a role model to both boys and girls. Other respondents noted that more male teachers were needed because they offered a different approach to teaching and connected to students in a unique way (Wood 2012).

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

In this methodology section, I began with the COVID-19 impact and how the methodology changed in response to the worldwide pandemic. Next, I discussed why I chose in-depth interviews with teachers and my combination of convenience and snowball sampling to find them. Finally, I discussed the coding and analysis related to this qualitative research.

##### *In-Class Observations*

My original plan to gather data about the intersection of gender and incentives was to do so through in-class observations. I felt this would be less intrusive in part because it would require less of the teacher's time and I also felt it would be the best way to remove self-report bias. The plan was that I would sit in the back of the class for three to four 90 minute observations and tally who was being incentivized and who was being punished. Then I would write memos about what I learned. Any questions I had would be emailed to the teachers to be answered on their own time.

At this point in the process, I had completed my original IRB documents and had even received and responded to corrections. Those fixes were resubmitted in early March of 2020. I had also already secured a school district that would allow me to do the observations. Then COVID-19 struck in mid-March and suddenly schools nationwide were closed. No one knew when schools would reopen and once they did it was impossible to determine whether a visitor would be allowed to do observations. I needed to pivot.

### *In-Depth Interviews*

In this study, I conducted in-depth interviews with elementary school teachers. *Interviews as Guided Conversations* (2004) by Rubin and Rubin was particularly helpful in the construction of questions to help reduce self-report bias. Following the pattern set out by Rubin and Rubin (2004), I began each interview with basic questions—how long have you been teaching? What’s the story of getting hired at your current school? If you could teach any grade, what would it be? Rubin and Rubin (2004:129) called this stage “creating natural involvement.” As I worked through these early questions, I also employed the next stage from Rubin and Rubin (2004:130) “encouraging conversational competence.” In this stage, I set interviewees at ease by reassuring them that their position was interesting and valid. Several of the male teachers said something akin to, “I think I’m pretty unusual, so I don’t know if I’ll be much help.” I responded by letting them know I was looking for the unusual, so their interview would be particularly valuable.

After the introductory get-to-know-you questions, the next questions were core to the subject, yet something that the interviewee would absolutely know and, perhaps most importantly, feel good about (Rubin and Rubin 2004). These questions included—tell me about your classroom rules and how you arrived at them, tell me about your incentive program. Rubin and Rubin (2004) recommend that the questions build slowly. This allows the interviewer to show understanding and to gather all the facts and basic descriptions (Rubin and Rubin 2004).

Next we arrived at the most sensitive questions—which three students get the most incentives? Which three get the least? Have you found any way to help the students

at the bottom? This slow build to get to the hardest questions, helped build rapport, and if done correctly, will elicit honest answers to the difficult questions at the core of the research (Rubin and Rubin 2004). Overwhelmingly, I felt the teachers were candid with their answers. Some even verbally counted kids to arrive at their top and bottom groups.

The next stage, according to Rubin and Rubin (2004:136) is called “toning down the emotional level.” To tone down the emotional level, I would ask for the teacher’s “secret sauce” and how they managed parent contact. I concluded with an open ended question asking if there was anything else the teacher would like me to know about their classroom, incentive programs, etc. In several interviews this final question yielded important information for my research.

All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. This new methodology was IRB exempt.

### *Sampling*

To start, I selected a single school district, Alpine School District, comprising most of Utah County in the state of Utah. Utah County’s racial make-up is 82% white, 12% Hispanic (white, black, or multi-racial included), and 6% all other races (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). It is well known that Utah comprises some of the largest populations of Latter-day Saints. In Utah County, as of 2016, approximately 85% percent of the population were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Canham 2017). In the state of Utah, kindergarten is not a mandated year of school and most kindergarten classes are only half-day. Thus, kindergarten teachers were excluded from the research. Additionally, teachers who taught special education, resource, reading



recovery, and life skills classes were also excluded. All of the included teachers I interviewed teach full-time with a full-day grade-level class.

As schools reopened in the fall of 2020, I began with a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. I started by contacting friends who taught within Alpine School District and emailed teachers who had taught my children. Unfortunately, this sample was all women and I needed men for my pool as well. I sent some cold contact emails out to male teachers, some of whom I was acquainted with and others I had never met. A couple of male teachers responded. I posted on Facebook about my need to interview more male teachers and the recommendations rolled in. I contacted all male teachers referred to me via Facebook or based on the recommendations of teachers with whom I had already conducted interviews.

In the end I secured 13 interviews, six with male teachers and seven with female teachers. Three of the teachers (all women) taught first grade. The remaining 10 teachers taught grades fourth through sixth. The 13 teachers taught at 10 different elementary schools, two of which had Title I status because of high poverty rates at the school.

#### *Confidentiality and Anonymity*

While the school district is known in the study, the cities in which the research is taking place will be confidential. Further, all schools and teachers involved in the study will be given pseudonyms. If, in the course of the interview, a teacher used a student's real name, those students were given pseudonyms or their names were omitted.

### *Coding and Analysis*

Because this research was qualitative, coding was interpretive content analysis. Ahuvia (2001:145) stated that such content analysis is based on the experience of the researcher (e.g., the person who spent hours writing the questions and conducting the interviews) and “a single coder is sufficient.” Further, Ahuvia (2001:148) noted that in interpretive content analysis, the researcher was able to “justify their interpretations to their peers,” but there was no requirement that “other researchers looking at the same data would have independently come to the same conclusions.”

I designed and conducted in-depth interviews using previous research about best practices in qualitative interviewing. The interviews were 80 minutes in length on average. Interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions in addition to follow-up questions aimed at gathering additional information and examples. I wrote the questions to elicit information about teachers’ classroom strategies, including how teachers used incentives, punishments, and how the teachers related with students individually. A special focus was given on the intersection of gender and both positive and negative incentives. Further notes were made about how the gender of the teacher impacted policy and incentive creation. Additionally, I noted the differences in implementation, expectations, and flexibility that male and female teachers had of their male and female students, including details about which students received the most incentives, which students received the most penalties, and what teachers did to mitigate over-penalizing students at the bottom.

During the hours of interviews, I jotted notes and recorded ideas about potential codes and then during transcription added more information to codes which was then

used for analysis. During the analysis process, some codes were combined or eliminated as not central to the research.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

In this findings section, I began with an overview of my findings shared in tables in three different ways. I then discussed the similarities in my findings across all teachers. Next, I discussed the impact of gender socialization as it related to incentives at schools as students move from lower elementary school ages into the upper grades. After that, I went through my findings on how teachers factored for gender, if they do. Then I proceeded through the structure of incentives and how they're applied and the impact of long-term teaching of female teachers. This led to a discussion on relationships with students, public versus private discipline, and something I called teacher intentionality. Teacher intentionality is a measure of flexibility with the purpose of solving inequity. Finally, I went through other outliers in the data.

As I began to dig into my findings, it seemed appropriate to offer a caveat. In my findings, I discussed and explained differences between the male and female teachers involved in the study. These differences were what I learned in 80 minute conversations. What was highlighted by the men was quite different from what was highlighted by the women. This did not mean that the female teachers do not use some of the strategies that the male teachers do, it only meant they either did not mention or highlight it. The female teachers in the study were part of a convenience sample. Thus, they were all close personal friends or women who taught my children. These women are award-winning teachers; the best of the best.

Over the course of the interviews, with the line of questioning I walked through with the teachers, several of the female teachers expressed that things had come to their

attention that they had not thought of before and they had changes they wanted to make in their classroom because of the conversation. As I compare strategies, it is possible for the reader to feel that one gender is doing it “right” and the other is doing it “wrong.” The objective is not to moralize the strategies of teachers, but rather to point out differences and to learn from them.

### *Explanation of Tables*

Each teacher in the study had different methods of incentivizing students. Extrinsic motivators are ones where the students receive some kind of gift for achieving a goal. These can be things like gifts or prizes and they can also be rewards of extra recess, games, or some other typically fun class activity. Intrinsic motivators are not tied to any external benefit. In these cases, intrinsic motivators might be recognition for an individual or a group, or it could be for the class to do more of what is feeding the motivation. In this case, an additional academic activity (rather than a party or a break) would be an intrinsic reward. In the tables below, you can see the methods for incentivizing students and the systems for punishing them. Analyzing these systems is done in three different ways: Table 1 by gender of teacher, Table 2 by grade taught, and Table 3 by number of years teaching.

The tables below are organized so that, for each teacher, you can see the current grade being taught, the teacher’s gender, and how long the teacher has been teaching. The three tables show results organized in three different ways by these three different demographics. The next columns describe the reward system and kinds of prizes, then it is notated whether this teacher uses intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards or both. The next column describes the punishment system, if the teacher has one. The final two columns

note if the teacher is gender-blind and whether they use any kind of gender accommodation.

A “yes” on gender-blind means that teacher looked at boys and girls as being the same. They describe their class as full of children or students, but do not seem to observe students as explicitly gendered. A “no” on gender-blind means that the teacher views the class as explicitly gendered. Here the teacher observes a class of boys and girls. These teachers often have different expectations for behavior based on gendered developmental level. (The fact that boys lag behind girls both academically and socially by one to one and half years.) This is directly connected to the final column of gender accommodation. From the literature, the developmental lag between boys and girls is well noted. A teacher who uses gender accommodation recognizes this gap and works to mitigate the inequities it causes. Inherently, this would be creating a boy-friendly classroom. Techniques of added movement, high tolerance for noise, not penalizing students who talk out of turn, partner work, extra recess, and more would all qualify as implementing boy-friendly or gender-accommodated classrooms.

### *Breakdown of Incentives*

The three tables below demonstrated three different ways of comparing the data. First, every teacher but one used some sort of extrinsic motivator like class money, tickets or points to earn prizes that were overwhelmingly candy, though sometimes toys, school supplies, or parties were part of the reward. This is an across-the-board teacher strategy. There is no difference by gender, by grade taught, or by years teaching.

In Table 1 (see table below), the teachers are organized by gender. The most distinct difference between the male and female teachers is gender-blindness and gender

accommodation. All but one of the female teachers saw their classes in a gender-blind way. Only two of the seven female teachers did any sort of gender mitigation. One teacher knew she was accommodating for the boys, the other used some accommodation techniques, but still saw the class in a gender-blind way. Conversely, all the male teachers, except one, saw their class as gendered. They generally had different expectations for boys and girls and worked to resolve inequities through various accommodation techniques. Even the one male teacher who never specified seeing his students as gendered nonetheless had several accommodation policies that would make his class inherently more boy-friendly.

**Table 1.** Tables by Gender

| Grade Teaching | Teacher Gender | Years Teaching | Rewards   | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Punishment  | Gender-blind | Gender Accommodation  |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------|-----------|---|--------------|---|
| 1              | Female         | 3              | Teacher vs Student--Fun Friday Tickets cashed in for small or medium prizes   | X         |           | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy   | Yes          | No  |
| 5              | Female         | 4              | Name on Bravo board, drawing for candy or small toy   | X         |           | Kids numbers have to move up or down on a chart   | Yes          | No  |
| 1              | Female         | 8              | Class money exchanged at class store  | X         |           | Loss of class money; Think Time   | Yes          | No  |
| 4              | Female         | 15             | Class money used on silent auction  | X         |           | Talk to figure out what is wrong; reminder; strike one--loss of class money; strike two and three--note home and call home  | Yes          | No  |
| 1              | Female         | 17             | Class money exchanged for candy, small toy, books, or coupon  | X         |           | Warning; accountability discussion; loss of class money and natural consequence   | Yes          | No  |
| 5              | Female         | 25             | Group points for recognition; class money, but part of an academic exercise to understand unfair taxation; class student of the week. | X         | X         | Private individual reminder; public individual reminder; discussion in the hall; email parents; behavior intervention plan with parents and principal. Loss of group points; loss of class money; staying in at recess. | No           | Yes. Recognizes developmental differences in boys and girls. Has few penalties except talking with students. Understands different learning styles; works with students where they are. |



| Grade Teaching | Teacher Gender | Years Teaching | Rewards   | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Punishment   | Gender-blind | Gender Accommodation   |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------|-----------|--|--------------|--|
| 6              | Female         | 28             | Extremely complex reward programs, different rewards for behavior and academics. Uses class money, but only for academics. Ways to get special recognition. | X         | X         | Reminder; loss of star, notice of which rule they broke; refocus form; loss of recess; loss of lunchtime; loss of both recess and lunchtime; call home; additional duties. | Yes          | Yes. Doesn't use class money for behavior; gives opportunities to earn more money at fair.                                     |
| 4              | Male           | 4              | Row points for extra recess; Class points for Fun Friday; reward board; candy flip; plinko board; small prizes--academic reward                             | X         |           | Individual reminder, classroom exclusion; threatens to take away recess  | Yes          | Yes. Building in talk time, letting small behaviors go unpunished, adapting by the situation.                                  |
| 4              | Male           | 5              | Candy for good behavior daily; class points vs teacher points   | X         |           | Not getting daily candy; missing games like silent ball and kahoots; contact parents   | No           | Yes. Allows flexibility, walking around classroom, movement, never takes away recess.  |
| 6              | Male           | 6              | Tickets for drawing for candy, soda, game, chair. Class points for party.   | X         |           | Talk to students in hall. Take away tickets. Name on board if student owes a ticket.   | No           | Yes. Planned movement, partner work, different kinds of seats. Tickets are for effort/bravery. Restart system every two weeks. |
| 5              | Male           | 8              | Class money spent at a class market; gives class points for 30 minute party/activity.   | X         |           | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy. Talks with students privately.  | No           | Yes. Plans for movement and talking; lots of partner work.   |
| 4              | Male           | 23             | Guessing game; candy; not cleaning up   | X         |           | Losing sticks--cleaning up classroom, no candy, no guessing game, no recess  | No           | Yes. Plans in movement and partner work.   |
| 6              | Male           | 23             | Academic reward of playing kahoots. It is never declared a reward, just a fun activity.   |           | X         | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy.   | No           | Yes. Plans for movement and talking; very engaging classwork.  |

In Table 2 (see table below), one thing that stood out notably was that no male teachers were teaching a class younger than fourth grade. With the male teachers being the lead on gender accommodation practices and simultaneously teaching only in the upper grades, this meant that the boys got little if any in-class gender accommodation until the upper grades. By then, the boys had been socialized with very gendered responses to school. This will be discussed more later, but it was notable that the findings show that boys had increased gendered responses to incentives. This was found in how few boys were in the top incentive-getting groups in the upper elementary school grades and how many of them were in the group getting the least positive incentives.

**Table 2.** Teachers by Grade

| Grade Teaching | Teacher Gender | Years Teaching | Rewards   | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Punishment   | Gender-blind | Gender Accommodation  |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------|-----------|--|--------------|---|
| 1              | Female         | 3              | Teacher vs Student--Fun Friday Tickets cashed in for small or medium prizes   | X         |           | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy  | Yes          | No  |
| 1              | Female         | 8              | Class money exchanged at class store  | X         |           | Loss of class money; Think Time  | Yes          | No  |
| 1              | Female         | 17             | Class money exchanged for candy, small toy, books, or coupon  | X         |           | Warning; accountability discussion; loss of class money and natural consequence  | Yes          | No  |
| 4              | Female         | 15             | Class money used on silent auction  | X         |           | Talk to figure out what is wrong; reminder; strike one--loss of class money; strike two and three--note home and call home | Yes          | No  |
| 4              | Male           | 4              | Row points for extra recess; Class points for Fun Friday; reward board; candy flip; plinko board; small prizes--academic reward | X         |           | Individual reminder, classroom exclusion; threatens to take away recess  | Yes          | Yes. Building in talk time, letting small behaviors go unpunished, adapting by the situation. |
| 4              | Male           | 5              | Candy for good behavior daily; class points vs teacher points   | X         |           | Not getting daily candy; missing games like silent ball and kahoots; contact parents                                       | No           | Yes. Allows flexibility, walking around classroom, movement, never takes away recess.         |
| 4              | Male           | 23             | Guessing game; candy; not cleaning up   | X         |           | Losing sticks--cleaning up classroom, no candy, no guessing game, no recess  | No           | Yes. Plans in movement and partner work.  |
| 5              | Female         | 4              | Name on Bravo board, drawing for candy or small toy   | X         |           | Kids numbers have to move up or down on a chart  | Yes          | No  |

| Grade Teaching | Teacher Gender | Years Teaching | Rewards   | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Punishment  | Gender-blind | Gender Accommodation  |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------|-----------|---|--------------|---|
| 5              | Female         | 25             | Group points for recognition; class money, but part of an academic exercise to understand unfair taxation; class student of the week.                       | X         | X         | Private individual reminder; public individual reminder; discussion in the hall; email parents; behavior intervention plan with parents and principal. Loss of group points; loss of class money; staying in at recess. | No           | Yes. Recognizes developmental differences in boys and girls. Has few penalties except talking with students. Understands different learning styles; works with students where they are. |
| 5              | Male           | 8              | Class money spent at a class market; gives class points for 30 minute party/activity.   | X         |           | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy. Talks with students privately.   | No           | Yes. Plans for movement and talking; lots of partner work.  |
| 6              | Female         | 28             | Extremely complex reward programs, different rewards for behavior and academics. Uses class money, but only for academics. Ways to get special recognition. | X         | X         | Reminder; loss of star, notice of which rule they broke; refocus form; loss of recess; loss of lunchtime; loss of both recess and lunchtime; call home; additional duties.  | Yes          | Yes. Doesn't use class money for behavior; gives opportunities to earn more money at fair.  |
| 6              | Male           | 6              | Tickets for drawing for candy, soda, game, chair. Class points for party.   | X         |           | Talk to students in hall. Take away tickets. Name on board if student owes a ticket.  | No           | Yes. Planned movement, partner work, different kinds of seats. Tickets are for effort/bravery. Restart system every two weeks.  |
| 6              | Male           | 23             | Academic reward of playing kahoots. It is never declared a reward, just a fun activity.   |           | X         | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy.  | No           | Yes. Plans for movement and talking; very engaging classwork.   |

Table 3 (see table below) was organized by years teaching. Of note was that all of the teachers with 20 or more years of teaching had accommodation techniques for their classes. This included the female teacher who had accommodation practices despite seeing her class in a gender-blind way. Finally, the only teachers utilizing intrinsic motivations were the most experienced teachers. Three of the four teachers with more than twenty years in the classroom used intrinsic motivators as at least part of their positive incentive system. Here we also find the outlier, a male teacher who has no extrinsic motivators.

**Table 3.** Teachers by Years Teaching

| Grade Teaching | Teacher Gender | Years Teaching | Rewards   | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Punishment  | Gender-blind | Gender Accommodation   |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------|-----------|---|--------------|--|
| 1              | Female         | 3              | Teacher vs Student—Fun Friday Tickets cashed in for small or medium prizes.   | X         |           | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy.                                    | Yes          | No   |
| 4              | Male           | 4              | Row points for extra recess; class points for Fun Friday; reward board; candy flip; plinko board; small prizes—academic reward. | X         |           | Individual reminder; classroom exclusion; threatens to take away recess               | Yes          | Yes. Building in talk time, letting small behaviors go unpunished, adapting by the situation.                                  |
| 5              | Female         | 4              | Name on Bravo Board with drawing for candy or small toy.  | X         |           | Kids numbers have to move up or down on a chart.                                      | Yes          | No   |
| 4              | Male           | 5              | Candy for good behavior daily; class points vs teacher points.  | X         |           | Not getting daily candy; missing games like silent ball and kahoots; contact parents. | No           | Yes. Allows flexibility, walking around classroom, movement, never takes away recess.  |
| 6              | Male           | 6              | Tickets for drawing for candy, soda, game, chair. Class points for party.   | X         |           | Talk to students in hall. Take away tickets. Name on board if student owes a ticket.  | No           | Yes. Planned movement, partner work, different kinds of seats. Tickets are for effort/bravery. Restart system every two weeks. |
| 1              | Female         | 8              | Class money exchanged at class store.   | X         |           | Loss of class money; Think Time.  | Yes          | No   |
| 5              | Male           | 8              | Class money spent at a class market; gives class points for 30 minute party/activity.   | X         |           | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy. Talks with students privately.     | No           | Yes. Plans for movement and talking; lots of partner work.   |

| Grade Teaching | Teacher Gender | Years Teaching | Rewards   | Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Punishment  | Gender-blind | Gender Accommodation  |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------|-----------|---|--------------|---|
| 4              | Female         | 15             | Class money used on silent auction  | X         |           | Talk to figure out what is wrong; reminder; strike one--loss of class money; strike two and three--note home and call home  | Yes          | No  |
| 1              | Female         | 17             | Class money exchanged for candy, small toy, books, or coupon  | X         |           | Warning; accountability discussion; loss of class money and natural consequence   | Yes          | No  |
| 4              | Male           | 23             | Guessing game; candy; not cleaning up   | X         |           | Losing sticks--cleaning up classroom, no candy, no guessing game, no recess   | No           | Yes. Plans in movement and partner work.  |
| 6              | Male           | 23             | Academic reward of playing kahoots. It is never declared a reward, just a fun activity.   |           | X         | Limited punishment. No official escalation policy.  | No           | Yes. Plans for movement and talking; very engaging classwork.   |
| 5              | Female         | 25             | Group points for recognition; class money, but part of an academic exercise to understand unfair taxation; class student of the week.                       | X         | X         | Private individual reminder; public individual reminder; discussion in the hall; email parents; behavior intervention plan with parents and principal. Loss of group points; loss of class money; staying in at recess. | No           | Yes. Recognizes developmental differences in boys and girls. Has few penalties except talking with students. Understands different learning styles; works with students where they are. |
| 6              | Female         | 28             | Extremely complex reward programs, different rewards for behavior and academics. Uses class money, but only for academics. Ways to get special recognition. | X         | X         | Reminder; loss of star, notice of which rule they broke; refocus form; loss of recess; loss of lunchtime; loss of both recess and lunchtime; call home; additional duties.  | Yes          | Yes. Doesn't use class money for behavior; gives opportunities to earn more money at fair.  |

### *Similarities*

Across the board, the elementary school teachers I interviewed cited more instances of needing to discipline and dole out punishments to male students. Out of the 13 teachers, 11 cited a boy as the most difficult student they had ever had. In addition to boys receiving more punishments, the boys also received fewer rewards. When asked to think of which students received the fewest rewards, teachers noted that this bottom group was comprised of a majority of male students.

Conversely, the teachers I interviewed cited more instances of rewarding female students, expressly of having a majority of female students in the top group of those who received the most incentives. Female students received significantly fewer punishments than their male peers.

### *Upper Versus Lower Grades*

Students had more gendered rewards and punishments in the upper grades. In other words, female students in the ten upper grade classes received more rewards than did their male counterparts. Of the three first grade teachers, none could say that their upper reward groups were all or majority girls. All three first grade teachers felt that their groups were filled with boys and girls very equally. But the teachers who taught fourth through sixth grade cited their top group who received awards as all or majority girls. There were a few notable exceptions which will be discussed later.

The finding that boys were the majority in the bottom group—the one which received the least incentives— did not vary by grade level. It was as true for the first grade teachers as it was for the fourth through sixth. However, there were several upper-grade teachers who cited all boys in their bottom group, something that was not true for



any of the first grade teachers I interviewed, and a demonstration of more gendered behavior management as the students moved from lower to upper grades.

*Factoring for Gender or Not*

One of the big takeaways from my research was how differently male and female teachers approached gender dynamics of the classroom. Racial color blindness is “the belief that racial group membership should not be taken into account or even noticed” (Apfelbaum, Norton, and Sommers 2012:205) In this study I refer to gender-blindness, which can be thought of in a similar way. The teachers who viewed students in a gender-blind way did not take gender into account and discussed students in a way that they seemed not to notice gender. Female teachers tended to be gender-blind. Thus, in women’s classrooms, the expectation was that boys and girls have the same abilities to behave and the same abilities to perform academically.

Female teachers created incentive rubrics and tended to follow them quite strictly. These rubrics tended to require sitting still, not calling out, transitioning quickly and quietly from one activity to another, and completing homework. Because of developmental differences in boys and girls, these rubrics inadvertently benefitted girls in the class. This was evidenced by girls being the majority in nearly all of the teachers’ top groups of those who got incentives. As part of their systems, many of the female teachers allowed various classroom rewards to amass and had few if any start-over points built into the reward system. Five of the seven female teachers had no start-over points where all points, money, or tickets are traded in and every student started again at zero. Instead, while in some classes there were many opportunities to use the money, students who prefer can simply amass money rather than spend it. In those classes with no reset point,

it created a polarization of the “haves” and “have nots”—those who can spend money freely and buy the higher priced items, and those students who struggled to get and keep any money at all and therefore experienced a positive behavior system negatively.

Male teachers saw their class as gendered and had different behavior expectations for boys versus girls. They had a greater expectation that girls can sit quietly and do their work while they had a greater expectation that boys will need to move, fidget, and even call out. Punishments were doled out only when a child’s behavior was more extreme than the gender-differentiated expectation. So while boys were more heavily punished than girls in both male and female teachers’ classrooms, boys receive significantly fewer punishments in male teacher’s classrooms than they did female teachers’ classrooms. Mr. Ramsey described it this way, “I know this sounds weird, but I kind of know what to expect from boys and what to expect from girls. ...That goes back to the equality issue. And what I mean by the equality issue is, as a teacher, do you treat all your students equal? And the answer to that is no. That’s insane. You would never treat everyone equal. You try to give everyone what they need. And boys have different needs than girls in the classroom. So I try to treat them fairly, but not equally.”

While Mr. Ramsey’s point may sound non-sensical, he seemed to be driving at the difference between equality and equity. Within sociology of inequality, we learn that equality means to give each individual the same resources or opportunities. Meanwhile, equity acknowledges that individuals have different circumstances and instead of allocating equal resources, allocates the resources needed to move toward an equal outcome. The outcome, rather than the resource, is the point of equality. In application, this might look like a teacher giving more time or attention to disadvantaged students,

giving more leeway in grading, or accepting different levels of behavior depending on the student's impulse control or executive function.

Mr. Rowland made a similar point, "I recognize that for the majority of boys, school is not inherently designed for boys. To sit in a seat, to be quiet, to do all these things when there's so much more...physicality and things. They [boys] come up with female teachers who demand these things, that when boys get to my classroom, I feel like they deserve a chance to be boys. And not get in trouble for being boys. I just think we, as a society, try to make boys act like girls. Instead of recognizing boys and girls are different. And being a boy isn't wrong and being a girl isn't the ideal. They should both be valued equally. Too often, especially in academia, we want boys to act like girls."

To some degree, it almost sounded like Mr. Rowland was advocating for "boys will be boys" which is an idea that narrowly defines boy behavior within a social construct and is often used to excuse aggression or violence. What Mr. Rowland is addressing here, rather, is the developmental and biological difference between boys and girls supported, in particular, through brain science (Gurian and Stevens 2004; Sax 2006). This developmental gap between boys and girls on measures like impulse control is well noted and exists well into the adolescent years (Gurian and Stevens 2004; Sax 2006). Thus there is wisdom in elementary school teachers having gender-diversified expectations and creating boy-friendly classes while not limiting students to a preconceived societal gender role or accepting violence.

Like the female teachers, some of the male teachers also created incentive rubrics. Their rubrics also tended to benefit female students, but male teachers didn't accept this as an inevitable outcome. Male teachers were nearly constantly looking for inequity in

their incentive rubrics and work to solve them. This included frequently breaking their own rubric to increase equity between students, both on academic and behavior measurements. Male teachers also built frequent start-over points into their incentive rubric and didn't allow rewards (e.g., class money, tickets, etc.) to amass. In Mr. Jordan's class, girls tended to receive benefits in his class money system. This money would be spent at a class fair. But the compensatory activity was that the children could also earn money at the fair, so students, boys in particular, with less money could work to make the most compelling shop to earn the money that they can then spend. Mr. Ramsey and Mr. Judd both have incentive systems that restart each week. Mr. Mitchell's reward is daily and restarts daily. Mr. Chapman restarts his reward system every two weeks. Thus the boys and girls in these classes who struggled with good behavior or academics, got many opportunities to start over. There were no "haves" or "have nots" in these classes because, at a certain interval, everyone started over together.

In this school district, an activity called Fun Friday was common across most schools. Fun Friday varied by class but usually included things like games, arts and crafts, extra recess, or some other kind of fun activity typically done on Friday afternoons. In many of the female teachers' classes, Fun Friday was connected to individual incentives. Thus, in those classes, boys more frequently had to miss Fun Friday activities and generally had fewer individual incentives, like class money or tickets. Class money was often used for a class store or a class auction, but boys frequently had less money for these stores and auctions than did the girls in the class. Male teachers approached Fun Friday differently. Many of the male teachers used class points to "earn" Fun Friday or various party days. Once the activity was earned, the entire

class participated in fun activities together. No students were excluded, regardless of recent behavior problems or academic struggles.

Female teachers also had defined systems for punishments and escalation. When asked, female teachers could explain the systems by which students might need to sit alone in the class, be excluded from the class, or go to the principal's office. Many times, these systems were only for rare instances. Female teachers might say things like, "this has only happened once in my career" or "this only happens once every two to three years," but these teachers still knew the system that would be in place for the most extreme behaviors. Male teachers, on the other hand, generally did not have a defined punishment and escalation system. When faced with discipline problems, each problem was treated as unique and not able to easily fit within an escalation system. One male teacher described this skill as "situational awareness," and most male teachers used situational awareness to decide how to reach a student. Further, several male teachers described that if a student reacted poorly to a certain punishment or approach, they would immediately drop that approach and begin trying new things to see what might help that student behave.

As part of their escalation system, nearly all of the female teachers were willing to hold students in from recess or lunch as part of the student's punishment. Conversely, most of the male teachers were unwilling to hold students in at recess and lunch. Mr. Jordan said he would do so only to facilitate a private conversation and only as long as was needed to figure out what's going on with a student. He described it this way, "I hate keeping kids in from recess. When I keep them in from recess, it's just long enough for me to talk to them, have an open conversation without other ears hearing, and I send them

out to recess.” This divergence in official policy, however, is only that. Because many of the male teachers didn’t have a strict structure related to their punishment system, but rather assigned consequences situationally, it’s not to say that more male teachers wouldn’t hold students in from recess, but rather this was absent from most of the men’s punishment policies. Nevertheless, the research supports not holding students in. As mentioned in the literature, when students are held in from recess it increases, rather than decreases their desire to misbehave (Payne 2015). Further, holding students in from recess damages the student-teacher relationship (Payne 2015). Even though actual rates of students being held in at recess is unknown, it is of interest that male teachers intuitively do not include this penalty in their punishment policies.

#### *Incentive Structure*

With a couple of notable exceptions which will be discussed later, all of the teachers had an incentive system where students received positive rewards. True to previous studies, these teachers noted that students enjoyed receiving positive rewards, but finding incentive systems that excited all of the students became more difficult as the students got older (T. Collins et al. 2015; Payne 2015; Visaria et al. 2016).

For teachers who created rubrics or systems for earning rewards, they reported that these systems tended to benefit students with high academics, high socioeconomic backgrounds, and children of two-parent homes or other evidence of stability at home. More girls than boys were also in the top groups. Mrs. Kennett described her top group this way, “I have three little girls who are all very high academically. ...They are all very active members of their church. ...They are all like the nuclear family. They have a very supportive mom and dad and in two of those three families, there’s a stay-at-home mom.”

Mrs. Henderson described her top group this way, “It does seem like the kids that come from a stable two-parent home and ...the kids who come with good behavior habits. They’ve had a home where there’s discipline and consequences and also a positive relationship with their family members.” The bottom groups were comprised of students who struggled academically, were impacted by poverty, and had unstable home lives. More boys than girls were in the bottom groups. Here Mrs. Kennett is describing her bottom group, “So I have three little boys. They’re all very high energy and they all have a hard time paying attention. One of those three has a super supportive mom and dad, but [is] just a little chatty. I have another [whose] father is getting remarried soon. His mom is not really in the picture and they are getting ready to move. He is about to gain four new siblings or something like that. So there’s a lot going on. And my very special friend this year...his life was absolutely crazy and [he has a] single mom. He and his mom were subject to some pretty significant violence and abuse by his father when he was young. ...His mom works full-time. Great lady, but just a very unstable home.”

Parts of rubrics for incentives included things like being on time to school, being in the first group of students on task (particularly after a transition), turning in homework, getting high scores or demonstrating proficiency on tests and quizzes, having pencils or other equipment, completing certain tasks or assignments (often ones the students find onerous), completing an assignment within a predetermined amount of time, and keeping their area clean or other ways of helping tidy the classroom. In most classes, incentives for academic performance and incentives for good behavior were the same, which contributed to having students with higher academics in the top groups.

Female teachers tended to follow their rubrics and systems pretty strictly. Male teachers were more likely to adapt or change their systems particularly to benefit boys, generally, and girls with low academics. Often this included announcing rewards that were never earned or rewarding students on-the-fly. While some of the male teachers had definite rubrics for their reward system, others of the male teachers I interviewed did not have any kind of rubric at all. In those classrooms, rewards were given at random.

Like many of the male teachers, first grade teacher Mrs. Wright does not have a reward rubric. Her rewards are given at random. The number one thing she is looking for is hard work or grit. Mrs. Wright said of her incentive system, “It’s a little individualized. So for my students who struggle, I look for improvement and when I see them master something they couldn’t do before, they get a Wright Buck. ...So it’s a little arbitrary. They [the students] know that too. They’re prepared for me to say, ‘I’m giving you these Wright Bucks based on the work I see you’re trying to do.’ ...They know what I’m looking for. They know I’m looking for the effort—the grit. They know what grit means—determination and improvement.”

Where Mrs. Wright really diverged from the rest of the teachers was who gets the most rewards in her class. She said, “I would say the profile of the typical student with the most [Wright Bucks] would be someone who struggles academically. Behavior-wise it’s all across the board for who has the most Wright Bucks. ...But I would say the academic strugglers probably get an edge up because I’m really working on those guys and they’re the ones that seem to need a little more of those visible motivators.”



Mrs. Wright's approach to rewards—focusing on disadvantaged students—is backed by studies that show that students with academic or behavioral struggles tended to have the greatest response to positive rewards (T. Collins et al. 2015; Visaria et al. 2016).

*Impact of Long-term Teaching in Female Teachers*

Both Ms. Jorgenson and Mrs. Hammond, who were in their 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> years of teaching respectively, had much different systems for incentives than did most of the other female teachers.

Mrs. Hammond had separate systems for academics and behavior so that students who struggled academically wouldn't be penalized if their behavior was good. Likewise, students who struggled with classroom behavior could continue earning the academic rewards if that was easier for them. In Mrs. Hammond's classroom, class money was only given for academics—never for good behavior. Even then, when it was time for the class fair, students brought their money, but also activities. Like Mr. Jordan's class, Mrs. Hammond's students work to bring the best activity they can and earn money. Even if they've struggled to bring homework in or had other academic struggles that left them short of money, they can work to have the best booth at the fair to get more money to spend.

Ms. Jorgenson's class is the exception mentioned earlier that had no individual incentive system at all. She was the only female teacher who didn't have one. Instead, the students worked together in table points pitted against other tables in a competition. These groupings were changed often, as were other aspects of the incentive system. There was no reward given other than bragging rights. Play was a huge part of Ms. Jorgenson's class and part of the academics. For example, when working on a social

studies unit about how the British were increasing taxes on the American colonists, Ms. Jorgenson started by using a monetary individual incentive system. It's short-lived as Ms. Jorgenson, representing the British government, increased the costs of things until students were nearly all out of money. Eventually the class "revolted" and then got to write their own classroom constitution and rules, groupings, and incentive systems changed again.

These sorts of policies mirrored more of what male teachers tended to do in their classrooms, and the boys in Mrs. Hammond's and Ms. Jorgenson's classrooms were less penalized than boys in other female teacher's classes. Ms. Jorgenson was the outlier as the only female teacher who saw her class as gendered and deliberately added boy-friendly policies. She said in her years teaching, she had taught a remedial group of boys in high school, and she had also taught kindergarten. She could see the impact of boys falling behind in elementary school. She said, "When I read the folders of my high school kids and what happened was that those behaviors that they got in trouble with all the time started being reported in second and third grade." It appeared that over years of teaching, whether explicitly intentional or not, female teachers gravitated to policies that benefitted the most students which includes policies that mitigated gender inequity.

### *Relationships with Students*

Both male and female teachers felt that fostering relationships with students was critically important for student success, but how male and female teachers went about this were vastly different.

Female teachers tended to work on relationships with students during the day and overwhelmingly in class. They frequently used words of affirmation to build students up.

These were done both verbally and in writing. Writing a note to a student was frequently cited as a way to build a relationship with them.

Male teachers felt that their relationships with their students were of paramount importance. Several teachers cited it as being more important than the student making academic progress. Male teachers frequently had various kinds of fun and playtime built into their class time. The teacher was always a full participant in the fun. Male teachers often had classes that were more edutainment, sometimes even noting how exhausting it was to always be “on.” Two teachers would jump on students’ desks. One played music for class-wide successes and failures. One frequently played learning games as part of the day. All cited “dad jokes” and having fun as part of what makes their classes work. Mr. Ramsey described it this way, “My classroom’s fun and it’s not because we have fun or we do fun things, it’s because I’m fun. I’m a fun person to be around. The kids think I’m funny. The kids like me and so they are happy to be at school. And that makes all the difference.”

Male teachers frequently used a concept they called “banking” or “buy-in.” This was accomplished by looking for lots of ways to have positive interactions with students—an effort to catch them doing good things and complementing and rewarding such behavior. Several male teachers talked about taking students outside or playing with students at recess. Mr. Jordan said, “I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year going out and doing jump rope, foursquare, kickball, football, soccer—any of those things with the kids. I’m trying to see them in their best environment. For lots of kids who struggle [academically], they excel outside.”

Two male teachers, Mr. Jordan and Mr. Chapman, both discussed going to students' extracurricular activities as part of their banking. Mr. Chapman had a google calendar accessible to the students where they recorded dates and times for sports games, activities, recitals, plays, etc. While he mostly attended these activities alone or with his wife and baby, sometimes the students attended to support each other, as well. Mr. Jordan tended to focus on students who struggled academically or behaviorally and worked with parents and families to learn when these extra-curricular activities were held. He, his wife, and two small children usually attended these evening or weekend activities together. He explained, "As you make connections, you'll find that the most difficult students are the ones who need you most. And so I've gone to football games to watch my students play football. I'll bring my whole family along with me to support him. This year, I've already gone to a dance performance, I've gone to a soccer game of a student, I've gone to see a student progress in their...Taekwondo or something. I was invited and went and saw them as they went through the moves to show that they could get their red belt. I get buy-in from those students and they are my police officers who say, 'Don't you dare do anything to my teacher. They're a good person.' And it works."

#### *Public Versus Private Discipline*

Many of the teachers shared with me a kind of teaching adage that the discipline goal is to reprove in private and praise in public. But overwhelmingly teachers found this difficult and ineffective. Only one teacher, Mr. Jordan, spoke only of private discipline. He also talked about the effort that was required to pull a student aside to talk with them.

More than half of the teachers, including nearly all of the female teachers, used a combination of public and private discipline. They found that a quick, public correction

had a positive impact on behavior improvement of students. If a student needed more correction or was having an ongoing behavior problem, these teachers would pull these students aside for more in-depth behavior discussions and/or private penalties.

Mr. Ramsey described this combination system this way, “I think [this system works] partially because it is a little bit of a social punishment as well. I don’t think it’s a hugely negative social punishment, but... the other kids know who’s losing sticks [the penalty for misbehavior in his classroom]. It’s not always a private conversation. Sometimes it is. But in the case of someone who interrupts me when I’m teaching or shouts things out, I just say, ‘You need to bring me a stick.’ So I think partially it’s social.”

Four of the teachers only mentioned public discipline in our conversation. Interestingly, this group included three male teachers. Even while admonishing publicly, most teachers looked for a way to soften the blow—having names on the board at the back of the class instead of the front, asking a kid to “clip up” or “clip down” [moving a clip with the student’s name up or down according to the reward or penalty in front of the class] while public was at least brief. One teacher, Mr. Mitchell, was a bit bolder. He said, “Sometimes it’s good for the kid to feel like an idiot in front of those classmates so he can remember that feeling and not do it again. ...It isn’t until somebody calls them out for being stupid in front of everybody that they realize, ‘Oh crap, I’m acting like an idiot.’ And then they stop. So I absolutely reprove kids in public. Because it works.”

### *Teacher Intentionality*

Teacher intentionality is a student-focused method of teaching that minimizes discipline and individualizes the school experience to increase equity by meeting each student where he or she is with genuine care. This is my largest code and one cited by all thirteen teachers at length. Of interest, though, is that the male teacher teachers cited leaning on this ability—a combination of flexibility and individualizing—more than the female teachers. I had 88 pages of code on this topic with 34 pages generated by the seven female teachers comments and 54 pages from six male teacher’s comments. In every example of teacher intentionality given below, there were more men than women who used that strategy. Here are the strategies of teacher intentionality that featured the most heavily in this section.

- 1) No penalty for minor misbehavior such as shouting out. Instead, these teachers focused on conversations with students and redirecting them from misbehaving to productive work. Nine teachers—five men and four women talked about this strategy.
- 2) Individualizing consequences. Eight total teachers—all six male teachers and two of the female teacher cited using this strategy. These were teachers that had a harder time describing penalty rubrics and when talking about discipline and negative consequences would say things like, “it depends on the situation.”
- 3) Plan classroom strategies that take into account the need for movement, getting out wiggles or other downtime. Seven teachers—five male and two female—used this strategy. Mr. Rowland described it this way, “When we start math, it’s planned and it’s built-in that they’re going to have to get up to go to their cubby to

go get their math materials and come back. I have half of the computers on one side of the room and half on the other. When we use a computer, they have to get up and go get a computer. I don't hear a lot of teachers talk about transition time and having planned transition time. I expect that it's going to take several minutes and I plan for that. And they're going to talk to each other while they're doing it and they're going to visit a little bit."

- 4) Involving students in problem solving. This included seeking student feedback and implementing student ideas. Seven teachers—four male and three female utilized this strategy. Mrs. Scott described this aspect of her classroom. "We have two cans in our class. One is for concerns, and one is for compliments. During the week the students fill out little papers about something that is concerning them. They also have to put a possible solution. We have this meeting every Friday and my favorite part really is the concerns. We get to just very calmly talk about things that are happening in the class that are concerning to the students and the possible solutions that we can have to those kinds of problems. ...It feels like a big part of building that community that I was talking about."
- 5) Allowing talking and/or doing lots of partner work. Seven teachers—five male and two female used this. Mr. Chapman said this of his students, "They're constantly working with partners. Every time we do partner talk I say, 'Grab your stuff, stand up, go walk around the room and find a new partner to work with.' So by the end of any given day, they've had a partnership with seven, eight, nine different kids talking about different things—math, science, writing, whatever."

Of note is also a handful of teacher intentionality strategies that were only implemented by single teachers, but were unique in solving classroom problems. Ms. Jorgenson worked to mitigate unfairness in a school-wide incentive program for student of the week. At her current school only one student per grade would get awarded student of the week school-wide. So, in Ms. Jorgenson's class she does a student of the week every week. She said, "I give them a certificate and they come up to the front of the class and I tell them why I'm highlighting them." She felt like this helped solve problems of competitiveness and heightened emotions around perceived success or failure. She also knew that some students were really hard on themselves and some struggle with issues of fairness and justice. By awarding each student a student of the week, a lot of these concerns were resolved.

Mrs. Hammond compensated for randomness in her prize drawings. She said, "If I have kids that don't actually ever get picked for a homework ticket—because it happens—in fact, this last term I had two that never got picked. As long as they have everything turned in on time, they automatically get to pick out of the prize box at the end of the term."

Finally, Mr. Chapman had high levels of student autonomy in his class. He explained, "I give my kids a ton of ownership and autonomy. And they can do different things. We have different parts of the day structured where they can be choosing what they're doing—like a ton of different things. ... They decide what we read. They decide what we write about. They know they have ownership of their classroom."



*Other Exceptions*

Mr. Rowland's class had no extrinsic incentives—individual or class-based—of any kind. Mr. Rowland could detail how he had previously used tickets (giving them out randomly for good behavior). Over time, students began asking for tickets for every little thing and he felt it wasn't good for the students. So he eliminated his ticket system and never reinstated any kind of extrinsic incentive system at all.

He explained, “[In my class] it's not boring, boring, boring, boring, seat work, party. It's come to school. We've got good hands-on learning activities. ...I frequently get told by parents, my child loves to come to school. And thank you so much for the fact that they wake up in the morning and they want to go to school. So we do just fun learning.”

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

In this discussion section, I look at the intersection of the literature and my findings. In particular, I dive into the problems with most teachers' incentive structures, the advantages that male elementary school teachers have, the implications of gender-blindness, socialization of girls, and finally the need for gender-based accommodations.

#### *Problematic Incentive Structures*

Whether the classroom positive incentive program is being run by male or female teachers, most incentive structures are built to incentivize students with excellent behavior, good academics, and family support. But as Collins (2015) and Visaria (2016) and their colleagues have shown, these are not the students who need incentive programs. Students with significant family support tend to be intrinsically motivated. They do well without any incentive system at all. They want to please their teachers and may be incentivized by grades. The students who need incentive programs are students who struggle academically, behaviorally, or both. This group is comprised of students with low SES, little family support or otherwise unstable homes, learning disabilities or other academic deficiencies. There are more boys than girls in this bottom group. As the students aged up through elementary school, my findings showed a more gendered response from the students to incentives. In other words, incentives that worked in first grade often don't by fourth, fifth, or sixth grade. From Payne's (2015) study we learn that students respond less and less to external incentives as they get older. Certainly, my research shows that there's a faction of students—mostly boys—who end up in the bottom group consistently. It is likely that these students not only experience a

developmentally normal disinterest in incentives as they age, but perhaps also a bit of a jaded perspective after receiving comparatively few incentives from their teachers year after year.

Out of the thirteen teachers I interviewed, only one explicitly structured academic incentives in a way that targeted the students with the most academic struggles. Mrs. Wright targeted her academically lowest kids for incentives because she believed that they needed more external evidence of progress. Her measure for giving incentives was students trying their best and evidence of grit. But even for Mrs. Wright, when looking at behavior like other teachers, she was looking for quick transitions, voluntary cleaning up the classroom, and other “model behavior.”

According to the literature, for students who struggle behaviorally, individualizing behavior incentives would be more effective than rewarding “model behavior” hoping to inspire improvement from the worst behaved students. Even though many of the male teachers in my study used similar behavior rewards to female teachers—rewarding coming to class on time, turning in homework, and making quick transitions—five of the six male teachers reached out to their worst behaved students (usually boys) to find what was at the bottom of the behavior and to work individually to get behavior improvements. All five of these men cited improvement over the course of the school year in their students with the worst behavior. In these cases it was not some kind of extrinsic reward that ultimately improved the behavior, but rather genuinely building a relationship with that student by first meeting the student where they were behaviorally.

To elicit improvement in these hardest students, the male teachers watched these students with an effort to catch them being good and complimented and rewarded them for every positive thing they could to try to build a relationship. They also put in extra effort to see where they were the best by playing at recess, attending extracurricular activities, and having in class one-on-one conversations.

#### *Advantages for Male Teachers*

When asked what set him apart as a teacher, Mr. Ramsey cited two things. First being fun and second “being a guy.” He explained, “Kids socially react differently to men and women. Mom you can negotiate with. Mom you can push your boundaries. But don’t press dad. And they grow up with that. So they come here and they don’t press my boundaries, generally speaking. [It is] purely based on gender and that’s not fair. It’s not anything I can control or any of the other teachers who are female can control. ...I have a natural advantage that way. I’ve known that for a long time.” Wood (2012) and Stephen Joseph (2015) found this in their research on male teachers as well. Wood (2012) found that female teachers viewed behavior problems more severely than male teachers. It may well be because of this effect—that students may not press their male teachers the way they do their female teachers. Thus, the female teachers view behavior problems as more severe because in their classes the students’ behaviors are more severe than they are in men’s classrooms.

Many of the male teachers noted this male teacher benefit. Some male teachers believed the kids needed a healthy fear and may not fear their female teachers. Other male teachers felt like it was a shift from fun—including dad jokes—to bringing the kids in for a more serious time that was easier for men to do.

Some of the stricter structure that the female teachers reported is likely due to this issue. The female teachers needed more defined boundaries and stricter consequences to create the demand for respect that seemed to be granted to male teachers just by way of gender or physical stature, what Wood (2012:331) called “connecting with students in a unique way.” Josh Mitchell noted that parents and students found him a little intimidating, “because you can’t tell [through this Zoom call], but I’m six feet six inches tall and 300 pounds.” He then shared a story of a student who seemed drawn to him as a father figure and added this insight. “I think that happens a lot in my class or probably most male [teachers’] classes. I know the principal puts hard kids in my class because I am intimidating just in my stature. But then after I intimidate them, they know I love them. I’m like a teddy bear. People request me because they had a divorce, their husband died...and they want that powerful male figure in their [student’s] life.” Wood (2012) and Stephen Joseph (2015) noted this in their research as well—that men are drawn to teaching to be a role model. Marsh (2008) and colleagues found that for boys, supportive and affirming relationships help in their educational outcomes. While this research (Marsh et. al 2008) showed that these relationships need not just be with men, perhaps there is something to the novelty of male teachers in elementary schools that helps foster these relationships.

Most of the male teachers noted similar experiences where the hardest students—usually boys—were enrolled in their class. Sometimes knowing a hard student was coming filled a teacher with dread, but overwhelmingly the male teachers reported that the student was great for them and did better for them than any previous teacher or teachers in the following years.

It could be that these students had better performance because their male teacher had a greater emphasis on their relationship, had a classroom that was more fun, or had more engaged learning. But part of the factor could simply be responding to men in different ways than these hard kids respond to women.

### *Recess*

Penalizing students by holding them in at recess has been demonstrated in the literature to be incredibly damaging to the student-teacher relationship and increases the desire for the student to misbehave or otherwise shut down (Payne 2015). So it was with great surprise that I learned of the number of teachers in my study—with female teachers leading the pack—who would hold students in at recess or lunch as part of their punishment system. With boys being more penalized than girls in every classroom, this meant that boys who were often getting in trouble because of the need to move or lack of impulse control were not being given the breaks they so desperately needed to try to improve their classroom compliance. With what we know about the negative impacts of removing breaks from previous literature, no students should be held in during recess or lunch in a modern classroom.

### *Gender-blindness*

Scantlebury's 1995 paper was about how gender-blindness in secondary science teachers was damaging for girls. But her points on gender-blindness itself were supported in my research even though the effect my research shows was damage for elementary school-aged boys. Scantlebury (1995) pointed out that teachers were trained to be gender-blind. Within teacher training, the belief was that a gender-free education would result from practices that had no gender bias, but to do so meant that the teacher must not

acknowledge personal gender biases or the gender-differentiate needs of students. (Scantlebury 1995). Stromquist (2007) noted that gender-blindness provided a false sense of objectivity and ignored the hidden curriculum of socialization that went on in schools. In the 1990s, boys calling out was more accepted and girls came to science classes with lower self-esteem and self-confidence. In a gender-blind class these inequities were not being addressed.

In my research, many of the girls quieter, more docile classroom behavior—itsself the product of female children’s gender socialization—had turned into “model behavior” as Mrs. Wright called it. Girls’ obedience was, in effect, a reinforced gender role for which they were being rewarded. But as Mr. Rowland pointed out, being a girl—and having obedient “girl” socialized traits—should not be the ideal. As boys fall further and further behind, we need to heed Scantlebury’s (1995) call for teacher training that teaches how to view students as gendered and meet their individual needs with different teaching strategies.

### *Socialization in School*

Within schools there was a “hidden curriculum” of socialization (Stromquist 2007:7) This curriculum can introduce changes in social perception, but it can also reproduce traditional values and attitudes (Stromquist 2007). Teacher biases about gender were reinforced, even if unintentionally. As my research showed that most teachers felt that sitting still, following instructions, and being quiet were more girl-like traits. Whereas physicality, energy, and calling out, were thought of as boy traits. Stromquist (2007:10) pointed out that both elementary and secondary teachers “see girls as individuals who will succeed through quiet diligence and hard work” and boys are seen

as being more naturally clever. Studies showed that girls and boys were equally capable in subjects like math and science, yet there was still only a weak participation by girls in “certain technical fields” including mechanical, electrical, metallurgy, and electronics (Stromquist 2007:17). Additionally, “field-of-study choices at the university tend to be clustered by gender” (Stromquist 2007:17). Even though girls were both rewarded and were succeeding in every academic class, there is something in our socialization at school that reinforces traditional gender roles where boys should pursue certain academic fields and jobs and girls should pursue others.

### *Gender Accommodations*

The literature clearly showed that boys were falling behind in schools at an alarming rate (Clifford 2018; Gurian 2006; Gurian and Steven 2005). In the same way that we needed to and made gender accommodations for girls, we now need to make gender accommodations for boys. We need elementary teachers who plan for more movement, reward with play or recess, and otherwise work to accommodate rather than penalize socialized boy behavior. But as Baslow (2004) and Scantlebury (1995) show, we cannot let the pendulum swing so far that girls are disadvantaged again. In the male elementary school teachers’ classrooms—the classrooms with the most accommodations for boy behavior—my research showed girls were still getting more rewards and fewer penalties than the boys. These teachers were striving for equity by giving the boys the boost they needed to level the playing field between them and the already advanced girls. Boy-friendly teaching methods which do not disadvantage girls need to become a regular part of teacher education and professional development.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

A survey of teachers found that they did not believe that effective classroom management is related to gender (Wood 2012). My study challenges this finding. Male teachers' gender-accommodated classrooms are more effective learning environments for boys and based on self-reflected statements of incentives do not seem to harm the girls either.

My study found that male elementary school teachers, in marked contrast to female teachers, were very aware of the headwinds confronting boys in elementary school classrooms. Unlike the female teachers in my study, most of whom seemed to be gender-blind in the classroom, male teachers explicitly consider boys and girls. Further, male teachers modified their classroom protocols to accommodate boy behaviors, often labeled as problematic by female teachers.

In classrooms where boys were doing the best, a few actions by teachers were consistently employed.

- 1) Focusing on those who struggle when giving rewards. Many teachers will “randomly” reward the students that were quickest to respond to instructions or transition from one activity to another. These students are not the ones who need incentives. Giving rewards randomly to a broad spectrum of the class was a help for boys. Focusing on those who struggle academically or behaviorally and rewarding them when they show effort or improvement is likely to have the biggest impact for these students who are overwhelmingly boys (Collins et al. 2015; Visaria et al. 2016).

- 2) Acceptance of “boy behavior” including need for movement. In male teachers’ classrooms, boys were penalized less for their increased need for movement and even a lack of impulse control that is developmentally normal. Recognizing that boys brain development lags behind that of the girls by almost two years, teachers can plan for differences in behavior. (Sax 2016) Planning movement into the day or having a part of the class structure where at a signal a child can stand up and move around was helpful to boys.
- 3) Competition. Classrooms where boys were less penalized often had a healthy form of competition and competitions were arranged in a variety of ways.
- 4) Authentic, strong connection with the teacher. Teachers’ experiences with their hardest students show that bids for attention were often bids for connection. Teachers who focused on and built strong, caring relationships with students were able to penalize boys less and reward them more.
- 5) Male teachers. Teaching, particularly in elementary schools, is overwhelmingly done by women. Male teachers have an important perspective on male students. The male teachers in my research spoke of having the hardest students (usually boys) placed in their class. Typically, those boys did well in that teacher’s class though they had done poorly in school the year before. For those who could observe what happened to the “hard kid” the next year, overwhelmingly those students did poorly when they were no longer in a man’s classroom. Simply put, we need more male teachers in elementary schools.

As I have argued in this thesis, the classroom gender-blindness pendulum has swung the other way: it is now boys rather than girls who are failing in the classroom. And through it all, teachers are still proclaiming to be “gender-blind.”

Although too complex to devote the time to fully flesh out these points here, several points need to be made, nevertheless. Much of the academic literature on gender-blindness referred to the harm that confronted girls in the classroom (Basow 2004; Scantlebury 1995). Although concern appears to be growing, I speculate that concern for boys in the classroom has not been a priority because in the broader spectrum, men still carry more status than women, earn more money, and occupy more positions of power and authority. This ongoing status imbalance may serve to minimize the difficulties that boys are confronting in the contemporary classroom.

Secondly, it is problematic to assume an equality between the sexes that does not exist. To teach in a gender-blind way continues to reproduce whatever inequities are already baked in to the system. What is clear looking back is that the curriculum changes of the past forty-some-odd years have tilted the scales to favor girls. Where boys used to get both the most positive and most negative attention, now they only occupy the top spot on negative measures—the most penalized, the least rewarded.

Scantlebury (1995:134) urged that “steps needed to be taken to help teachers change their teaching strategies.” While she was referring to the strategies that advantaged boys, her urging is no less accurate today in a classroom environment that advantages girls. She, too, cautioned against gender-blind teaching because of the incorrect assumption that gender equity issues have been resolved. I echo Scantlebury’s call for change in teaching strategies.

Reeves (2022:12) noted in an article in the Atlantic, “Half a century ago, the landmark Title IX law was passed to promote gender equality in higher education. At the time there was a gap of 13 percentage points in the proportion of bachelor’s degrees going to men compared with women. Today the gender gap is a little wider—15 percentage point as of 2019—but the other way around.” So attention should be paid to what makes school better for boys.

Despite the gender gap, at the college level, men are still overrepresented in STEM fields. As an example, at my institution, Sam Houston State University, in the 2020-2021 academic year, 58.6% of the graduated in STEM majors (biological sciences, chemistry, computer science, engineering technology, geography/geology, mathematics and statistics, and physics) were men. In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, on the other hand, 68.8% of graduates are women (Sam Houston State University 2022). This suggests gendered socialization in the classroom is still ongoing.

Classroom teaching is not a zero-sum game. Girls cannot be educated at the expense of the boys or vice versa. Gender-blind teaching needs to be retired and in its place a recognition that boys and girls have different needs due to different gender socialization. Accommodations are needed for the greatest chance at gender equity in teaching. These accommodations are most likely to succeed when teachers focus on and foster strong student-teacher relationships and have the freedom to exercise teacher intentionality by minimizing discipline and individualizing the school experience.

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## APPENDIX



Date: Jul 23, 2020 8:51 AM CDT

TO: Jenna Wood Mary Scherer  
 FROM: SHSU IRB  
 PROJECT TITLE: Finding What Works: Effectiveness of Incentives in the Classroom  
 PROTOCOL #: IRB-2019-417  
 SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial  
 ACTION: Exempt - Limited IRB  
 DECISION DATE: July 22, 2020  
 EXEMPT REVIEW CATEGORIES: Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:  
 The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**SPECIAL IRB UPDATE REGARDING THE COVID-19 CRISIS: Although this study is approved, please note that face-to-face human subject research must be paused until the CDC and SHSU has determined that the current COVID-19 crisis has passed. This pause is effective immediately. Approved online human subject research may continue. If you have an approved face-to-face study and deem it feasible to move the study to online data collection, please submit a Modification through Cayuse. Indicate in the Modification that the change is being implemented as a COVID-19 safety precaution to help the IRB prioritize the submission. The IRB will continue reviewing applications unless we are advised to do otherwise.**

Greetings,

On July 22, 2020, the Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined the proposal titled Finding What Works: Effectiveness of Incentives in the Classroom to be Exempt with Limited IRB Review pursuant to 45 CFR 46. This determination is limited to the activities described in the Initial application, and extends to the performance of these activities at each respective site identified in the Initial application. Exempt determinations will stand for the life of the project unless a modification results in a new determination.

**Modifying your approved protocol:**

No changes may be made to your study without first receiving IRB modification approval. Log into [URL], select your study, and add a new submission type (Modification).

**Study Closure:**

Once research enrollment and all data collection are complete, the investigator is responsible for study closure. Log into [URL], select your study, and add a new submission type (Closure) to complete this action.

**Reporting Incidents:**

Adverse reactions include, but are not limited to, bodily harm, psychological trauma, and the release of potentially damaging personal information. If any unanticipated adverse reaction should occur while conducting your research, please login to Cayuse, select this study, and add a new submission type. This submission type will be an adverse event and will look similar to your initial submission process.

**Reminders to PIs:** Based on the risks, this project does not require renewal. However, the following are reminders of the PI's responsibilities that must be met for IRB-2019-417 Finding What Works: Effectiveness of Incentives in the Classroom.

1. When this project is finished or terminated, a Closure submission is required.
2. Changes to the approved protocol require prior board approval (NOTE: see the directive above related to Modifications).
3. Human subjects training is required to be kept current at [citiprogram.org](http://citiprogram.org) by renewing training every 5 years.

Please note that all research records should be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Chase Young, Ph.D.  
Chair, IRB  
Hannah R. Gerber, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, IRB

## VITA

Jenna Wood obtained her Bachelor's degree in Communications from Brigham Young University in 1997, with a minor in Business Management. Her graduate studies interests have focused on Sociology of Education with a particular focus on the intersection of gender and incentives in elementary school-aged children.