

## A GENDER ANALYSIS OF NEW IRANIAN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK IN GRADE SEVEN “ENGLISH FOR SCHOOLS, PROSPECT ONE”

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### ABSTRACT

*This article tries to investigate the gender stereotypes in the Iranian English textbook of grade 7 junior secondary high school based on the content analysis (i.e. texts, pictures, dialogues, etc.). For this purpose, the author merely pays attention to the student book because it is taught with a work book and one CD. To collect and analyze data, the quantitative and qualitative methods, especially the content analysis are used. The frequency of pictures, dialogues and texts for each gender gives the considerable data and helps the investigator describe numerically the obvious content of relations. Gender is the unit of analysis in the study. The results show that there is often a considerable discrimination between males (men and boys) and females (women and girls) in this textbook. This stereotype is seen in the frequency of names, pictures, jobs, social visibility, appearance, clothing, behaviors and so on. This book was written by six authors that merely one of them is female. According to my own experience, this great gap affects the girl students. Some suggestions are represented which advise the curriculum planners to reform this textbook.*

**KEYWORDS:** junior secondary program, discrimination, gender stereotype

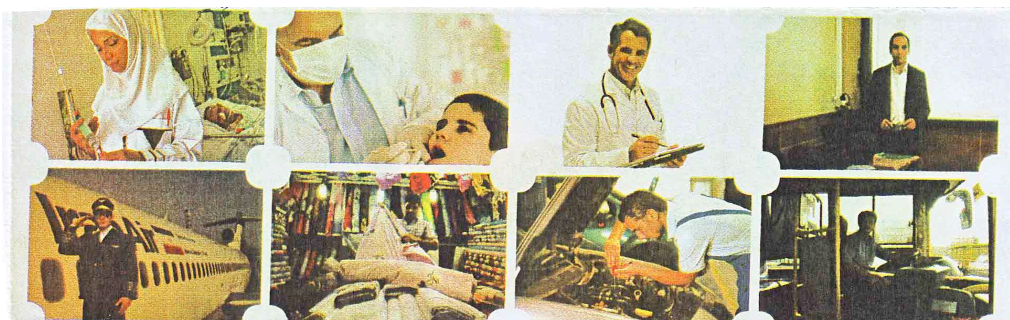
### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, sex-sensitive approach is an important subject all over the world, which draws attention of all participate in human's rights. This subject has also been noticed in writing textbooks. Leach (2003) states that sex-sensitive materials indicate a consciousness of discrimination and sexist activities, and tend to prevent them. Therefore, they never commonly try to reform sex separation. “A gender-sensitive approach would specifically address gender issues so as to destroy stereotypes and present a new way of perceiving men, women and their relationships” (p. 22).

#### *Statement of the problem*

The Iranian state completely controls the instruction and curriculum planning of all pedagogical courses in schools. The English textbooks are not exceptional in this field. In addition, the

English teachers are tightly dependent to the textbooks. In other words, the instructors are completely textbook-oriented because the curricula are designed nationally, not locally. They must follow the fixed and non-changeable textbooks prescribed by the government. Therefore they rarely find opportunity to use other instructional materials in order to reinforce their teaching skills. Since the beginning this educational year, the English textbook of grade seven has changed because of the numerous shortcomings of the previous one. Because of trying more and more from the curriculum planners, nobody can ignore the significant roles of textbooks in increasing knowledge of the learners, and helping them be socialized into dominant values of sex roles. It appears that sex equality is mostly ignored in Iranian English textbooks. One obvious instance is that no women as engineers or bosses are seen in Iranian textbooks. It is a key point that sex inequality, in some aspects, for females in the new textbook being studied is seen, especially according to the traditional gender roles. It can affect the female students as I had such a tangible experience in my own English classroom in which the girls protested some pictures in the textbook for inequality of the pictorial numbers of females and males (seven of eight pictures in a single page belonged to the males and only one of them contained female). You can see this case in figure 1. Despite women are passive and restricted in textbooks, they are active participants in social environment. Recently, Iranian women have considerably presented at universities more than men in traditional and modern fields such as engineering (Mehran, 2009).



*Figure 1: gender stereotype of careers in one single paper of textbook*

What are the reasons which encourage me to concentrate on extent to the gender discrimination in this new English textbook being taught for about four months in grade seven at Iranian schools. One reason is related to my own previous viewpoint to unfairness of the sex representations in different textbooks. When I began teaching English for the first time in the middle schools, I understood this important point that there were a lot of differences in the number of using the males' and females' careers, names, pictures, etc. in English textbooks, although the fact is not really such a way in society. In previous English textbooks, the females had been considered as second-class individuals. They were not free in comparison to the men. The other reason for choosing this subject is that the young adolescents (aged 10 to 15) are in a case according to moral growth on which their concentrations transit from self to other people. In addition, they considerably test "moral judgments of adults," and like to construct the value systems of themselves, that are mostly affected by their trusted adults' principles (the National Middle School Association, 2010, p. 58). According to Finkenauer and Engels (2002) at this age,

children could show “gender-atypical” behavior or “gender-undesireable interests” (p. 37). Therefore, the role of textbooks should be noticed in this field.

This study investigates the English subject area as foreign language textbooks. One reason for planning such textbooks is related to political objectives on which the government never wants that the students, especially at this age (10-15), learn the authentic foreign languages and their cultures. If they learn English authentically, they will easily influenced by the West. This subject, in its own turn, has an important function in planning such English textbooks for Iranian students. In this article, the sex discrimination in English textbook of grade seven will be analyzed. It tries to concentrate on names, employments and social roles of men and women based on pictures, dialogues (conversations), written forms, pair and group conversations among different sexes in “English for Schools Prospect One.”

### ***Significance of the study***

As the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published “Promoting Gender Equality through Textbooks,” the significance of textbooks planning was increasingly indicated all over the world. Each textbook can be considered as an important and active medium which can connect culture and knowledge. In UNESCO report (2002), it was taken that sexism stereotypes tend to disappoint females from studying modern fields like mathematics and sciences (p. 4).

Many researchers have analyzed Iranian textbooks, but a few of them concentrated on gender discrimination in particular. Malekzadeh (2011) investigated Iranian textbooks in order to understand the explicit and implicit kinds of discrimination against several groups.

Ali Ahmadi, the education pre-minister of Iran, focused on the necessity of sex-specific textbooks in Iran. He stated that because of the reality that boys and girls of the same age have various “spiritual, mental and physical” requirements, the textbooks for each of them should be different (Adnkronos news agency (2008), cited in Abbas-nejad-konjin, p. 10). Everybody hopes that identification of sex discriminations of nowadays textbooks can prepare conditions for planning gender-sensitive curricula in the early future.

The teachers should be familiar with the content analysis of textbooks in order to be able to answer their students’ unexpected questions about the imbalance of females’ and males’ roles and visibility in the textbooks, as I myself had the same experience in classroom in which some girls were sad about the considerable numbers of men to women in the pictures of a single page of the textbook. In addition, “English for Schools, Prospect One” is a new textbook and it is necessary for the English teachers to have more information of it. It can help the curriculum planners improve its content, especially in terms of sex equality.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are numerous investigations which have studied Iranian textbooks in general. But in the field of gender discrimination, some researchers discussed in the books in summary. Higgins and

Ghaffari (1991) investigated Iranian textbooks. Their study concentrates on socialization on the role of genders. They examine the textbooks as well as Iranian education system. Their study indicates that the Iranian ministry of education centrally publishes the textbooks which must be taught by the teachers all over the country with no notice to the properties of public or private. Passing from one grade to the higher one, students must receive acceptable scores in the prescribed tests limited to the content of the textbooks. They are completely dependent to the textbooks (p. 216). The authors analyze two different language textbooks in two eras, the textbooks during the Pahlavi era (in 1969-70), and the ones during Islamic Republic era (in 1986-87). In these textbooks from two different eras, Higgins and Ghaffari analyze the content of texts based on family roles, career, participation of men and women in social activities, gender-typed personality, etc. The authors hypothesized a point in women's visibility in post-Pahlavi textbooks and their traditional responsibilities. Based on their hypothesis, Higgins and Ghaffari considered females as "emotional, irrational, empathetic, and impulsive, and males as rational, objective, independent, and assertive" (p. 223). Despite the hypothesis, they gauged a bit changes in the case of socialization of sex-role in textbooks in two eras. A lot of textbooks of the 80s which were used in the Pahlavi era were revised and gender socialization in the textbooks was involved little in revision. Therefore, little transition existed in "methodology, concepts, and content" in the textbooks utilized in two eras (p. 218). The pictures of all textbooks involved the most changes due to different religious, political, and cultural elements to women in two eras. Malekzadeh (2011) confirms that the "fundamental changes" in Iranian textbooks started in 1998, although during 1979-1989 showed specific "ad hoc reforms" in the education system.

A more recent analysis of Iranian textbook has been done by Abbas-nejad-konjin (2013). She has studied sex inequality in three Iranian pre-junior high school textbooks. One of the investigated textbooks is English in grade eight. She has found that there is considerable discrimination between men and women in Iranian textbooks. According to her, textbooks are able to change the stereotyped understandings of men and women (p. 9).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this article is to answer the following questions:

- 1- Have the gender equality been followed in this textbook?
- 2- If there is sex inequality, it is against males or females?
- 3- In which cases, there is inequality?

## METHODOLOGY

If we notice carefully through "Prospect One", a lot of cases in sex discrimination and traditional occupations are seen in most fields. Females are represented in pictures and names, but their number is less than males. In addition, females are mostly shown in passive careers in comparison to males and they must often care and nurture that show gender discrimination against them. On the other hand, males are increasingly active in terms of jobs and social positions. Nowadays, the Iranian women are considerably active and powerful in society and at home. They are able to have a fairly competition with men, but the subject of gender stereotypes

is still observed in different Iranian textbooks. Such realities of women's victory are seen in some books and the statistics of different media.

The extent of sex discrimination in this book is not the same. In a few cases, women are shown as active and non-traditional members of the society or men are in a traditional position like cooking. In this investigation, compound-methods, qualitative and quantitative, especially the content analysis are utilized. Content analysis is a research method used regularly and objectively in order to describe numerically the obvious content of relations (Delavar, p. 275). Gender is the unit of analysis in this study. The number of female and male, their social positions in the dialogues, written forms, and pictures, the frequency of women and men in this textbook, the number of females' and males' names, and the careers or occupations of each gender are involved in quantitative analysis. The interpretation of data taken from quantitative is done via qualitative analysis.

This English textbook has published by The Ministry of Education so that it has been taught in the educational year 2013-2014 all over Iran. Everybody can access this book at <http://www.chap.sch.ir/>.

In evaluation of sex stereotype, content analysis should be applied. Neaendorf (2002) states that content analysis was extensively used in investigating sex roles, and comparing males' and females' beliefs in textbooks and other sources such as films, news and so on. In content analysis, quantitative and qualitative analyses are necessary due to having numbers and interpretation of them. Again it is necessary to mention the three research questions for this study as following:

- 1- Have the gender equality been followed in this textbook?
- 2- If there is sex inequality, it is against males or females?
- 3- In which cases there is inequality?

I analyzed "the English for Schools, Prospect One" about sex-presence in order to find out the answers of these questions. I did a content analysis of the written text, pictures, and dialogues by concentrating on family, careers, names, and social roles of women and men.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Significance of "English for Schools, Prospect One" in Iranian curricula*

It is clear that textbooks are ideal media for each state in order to transfer its social, cultural, religious, and political purposes to the students. Some textbooks have more effectiveness to others so that they can help appropriate socialization of the students into the social and political values acceptable for that government. Consequently, this book can effectively perform this goal.

The textbooks are able to transfer cultural values via the written words such as poems, proverbs, and so on; because the students can become familiar, explicitly or implicitly, with them through textbooks. Consequently, the students will be ideally socialized for living in their society. In addition, this textbook can act as an effective instrument in order to impose the philosophy of the

majority group or party, consciously or unconsciously, on the learners. It has the power to help the state simply reach its purposes from this age. All activities and conversations among individuals are done by homogenous students (e.g. male-male or female-female), except the dialogues between the members of a single family. This natural subject shows, in a good manner, that the cultural, religious, political values in Iranian society are being taught to the students via this textbook. This textbook, reverse the previous one, focuses on dialogue, conversation, speaking, and listening rather than structure, grammar, reading, and writing. It should be cited that learning English, in Iran, formally begins at grade seven for the first time.

Another significance of this textbook is its teaching method based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is free from the traditional methods. From this view, this property is a great revolution in Iranian English textbooks for the first time. This textbook involves eight lessons and occupies two blocks per week, the same amount that Compensatory courses, Fostering affairs, Physical education, The Holy Quran, Art, Arabic language, and Religious teaching are taught. Persian literature, Mathematics, Science, Social studies, and Introduction to techniques and vocations are taught in more blocks per week. Unfortunately, the amount of blocks for English textbook of grade seven is not enough at all. This important shortage have fallen under question the significance of learning English in Iran.

### ***Review of analysis method***

The four categories presented by Finoa Leach (2003, p. 107) pale the way of the content analysis of this book:

- “Frequency and nature of appearance of females”
- “Work/employment roles”
- “Socio-political roles of males and females”
- “The family roles of males and females”

It is important to mention that there is no considerable ambiguous subject in gender names, pictures, occupations, dialogues, etc. That is, it is obvious that all peoples’ gender in pictures, dialogues, written forms, etc. are females or males (except at first page in “welcome” part in which a little child’s gender is not clear), what the careers are, and the names are for males or females.

### ***Analysis of grade 7 English textbook***

Iranian students begin learning English at grade seven in the formal education system of schools. Then, they go on learning English through next grades to the end of high school. It is common all over the country, except in some cities in which it is possible for the children to participate in private institutions of the foreign languages such as English. The other students have to wait until grade seven for learning English.

At grade seven, students are unfamiliar with English language. So, the textbook contains simple conversations, basic daily words, and a lot of pictures for instruction. Because the focus is on speaking and listening; dialogues, pair and group activities have an effective function in learning.

The first page of each book is very important for reader to judge. Two pictures of people are seen at the first page of this book, that both of them involve heterogeneous persons. One of them contains five members of a family: father, mother, two boys, and another who is ambiguous in sex. Another picture involves some men and women from different Iranian tribes according to their clothes (figure 2).



*Figure 2: equality of genders in different tribes and non-equality in a family*

According to the Islamic laws, the contents of this book is never similar to the Western textbooks, for example, dressing of females, especially wearing Chador is an important element in this textbook. In addition, all the names used in this textbook are completely Iranian. Totally, this book contains 80 pictures of people, of which 55 (68.75%) indicate male, 21 (26.25%) show female, and 4 (5%) show heterogeneity. In the case of names, the book is less biased. In total, 90 names appear in this book, some are first names, and the others are last names. Some last names are accompanied with titles Mr., Mrs., or Miss. The term Ms. is not mentioned in the book. There are 47 (50.2%) male names and 43 (49.8%) female names. In other words, the appearance of females' names is approximately equal to the males' names. The authors try to completely avoid bringing culture, names, pictures, etc. from the West. Therefore, we cannot see any cases of the foreign countries.

The pictures of each sex's faces are mostly equal in visibility. Sometimes the males and females are equally shown with their backs turned to the reader. In addition, the females are mostly wearing similar and formal outfits, same models and colors outdoor; it is difficult to identify each individual girl from the other. But the males are in different wear, models, and colors. So, distinguishing each individual male from the other is very easy.

Based on table 1, different kinds of males are, in number, shown more than females. In general, males are 136 (59.5%) and females are 92 (40.5). Except the word "wife" which has been mentioned in this book, and the word "husband" has not been cited, most female genders in different kinds are less than males.

*Table 1: Frequency of Genders in Different Words*

Gender	Kind	Number	total (percentage)
<b>Female</b>	Woman	4	28 (45%)
	Girl	4	
	Mother	9	
	Sister	3	
	Aunt	5	
	Grandmother	1	
	Wife	1	
	Daughter	1	
<b>male</b>	Man	5	34 (55%)
	Boy	6	
	Father	11	
	Brother	4	
	Uncle	6	
	Grandfather	1	
	Son	1	

The other significant sex stereotype is observed in classrooms. The boys are very active and irregular in their classes. On the other hand, the girls appear regular. That is, they are sitting on their desks without any additional behaviors seen in boys' classrooms. The majority of boys do not pay attention to their teachers and indeed they are in another garden. The girl students just listen to their teachers and follow her. It means that the boys merely have the right not to follow their teachers but the girls must sit on their benches and do what their teachers like. About the jobs and social, cultural, and economic roles of men and women in text, conversations, and pictures, these data are observed: in the case of career, women are shown as teachers, nurses, housewives, librarians, clerks, cooks; and in one case, a woman is indicated as a dentist. In this textbook, women are mostly described in traditional jobs. Men are shown as teachers, building workers, mechanics, athletes, drivers, dentists, pilots, doctors, shopkeepers, policemen, and cooks. We see men as baker, waiter, farmer, engineer, and clerk in some case. In previous textbook, men were not indicated as cook. Surprisingly, even in teaching which is traditionally for women, men are more frequent. In this textbook, nursing is specialized to women, although a lot of nurses in Iranian society are nurses. Women are not indicated in any non-traditional careers like engineering and mechanics. Consequently, there is no considerable effort to break the dominant gender stereotypes of females' occupations in textbooks. Unfortunately, men and women have noticeable differences in facial appearance. It means that men are cheerful and active, but women are seen with no laugh or smile on their lips. This traditional process is seen all over the pictures of the book. It seems that no women have right to laugh or even smile. Pictures show this discrimination well, such as figures 3 below:

*Figure 3: gender inequality in laughing and smiling*

In social visibility, there is a noticeable discrimination between men and women in this textbook. Women are often passive and in traditional places according to the pictures. They are mostly restricted at home, school, and library. Additionally, they are at hospitals as nurses, at shops as buyers, at shrines as pilgrims. Only in one picture, a group of women are seen in a festival as native dancers with some men. At the other side, men are very active in society, based on the pictorial representations. They are increasingly at social visible positions. In fact, men are exactly shown as they are in society, the matter not be followed for women. In addition to be at home, school, at hospital as doctors, at shop as sellers, men are at offices, airports, streets, repair shops, companies, building activities, farms, baker's, restaurants as waiters or cooks, and stadiums as players or spectators. It appears that, in this book, most places and jobs are specialized for men. That is, women are not allowed to be in such locations. Summarily, men are visibly paid attention rather than women in this textbook (table 2). It is important to cite that the both genders, boys and girls, are shown merely at schools and homes in this textbook. In fact, there is no picture of park, cinema, recreational places in which people take recreation. Everybody is working or studying or talking to each other. This monotonous atmosphere of textbook makes increasingly tired the teachers and students.

*Table 2: Frequency of men's and women's jobs*

Job	Men	Women
building worker	3	0
mechanic	5	0
Athlete	2	0
Cook	2	3
Driver	3	0
Baker	1	0
Dentist	2	1
Pilot	2	0
Doctor	3	0
shopkeeper	3	0
Waiter	1	0

Police	2	0
Farmer	1	0
engineer	1	0
Teacher	15	11
Clerk	1	3
Nurse	0	4
Librarian	0	2
housekeeping	0	3
Total	47	27

### *Discussions of findings*

It appears that Iranian women are considered as second-class citizens in this Iranian English textbook, although it is not as such as we see in society. Women and girls go to school and university in Iran without any social limitation. Fortunately, Iranian women are as active in different occupations as men. A lot of them have occupied the seats of universities as students or professors. In addition, they are studying in different non-traditional fields such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, engineering, mechanics, etc. Not only women are active at homes but also they are powerful in social positions. There are numerous women active in politics. It means that they are able to increasingly influence the political conditions of Iran. For instance, Mrs. Vahid Dastjerdi was the minister of Medical Education in Mr. Ahmadinejad's cabinet, Mrs. Ebtekar is as the president of the Environment Organization in Mr. Roohani's council at this time and also she was at this position in Mr. Khatami's state. In addition, we can point to Mrs. Parvin E'tesami as an effective poet on Persian literature of Iran.

On the other hand, women are not justly shown in this textbook as they are in society. Here we can see a great gap between using men and women in different views. The most important point about women, in this book, is related to extent of their activities in society. If somebody has no information about real social conditions of Iranian women, and then he or she looks at text and pictures of this new English textbook, he or she will surely imagine that Iranian women's rights are disregarded by state and men. This textbook considerably limits women at home or school. Nobody can find out a case in which a woman has another occupation except teaching at schools or nursing in hospitals. Only in one case, there is a dentist woman in text, exactly like a water drop in a sea. That is, this book can't indicate the real social careers such as politician, professor, doctor, dentist, boss, engineer, etc. of the Iranian women. What we can see in our country is that there are a lot of women in different sensitive social jobs. In result, nobody can deny the important roles of women in Iran, unless those who want to intentionally accuse Iran as an unfit country for women's rights.

The other investigation is about most similarity of all women's clothes. They have not worn different outfits in forms, colors, etc. All of them are in unmixed clothes. But men are very different in the colors, models, forms of their shirts, jackets, jeans and so on. So, there is a considerable discrimination in men's and women's outfits. It is clear that Iranian women can put

on outfits in several colors, models, forms, etc., as everybody can observe this fact in Iranian streets, workplaces and so on. But unfortunately it is shown reversely in this national textbook.

Women, unfortunately, are not juicy and happy in pictures; they never laugh or smile at most cases. It appears that they are not alive creatures. At the other hand, men mostly laugh or smile in pictures; they are very happy and fresh. In fact, everybody must accept that both genders are equally authorized to be cheerful and alive. It appears that women are not considered as men's citizens. Totally, there is a null viewpoint about women in this textbook even we want to judge based on Islamic laws, because Islam religion, indeed, is not the authentic creed we think.

Citing females' names does not indicate sex stereotypes in this textbook. Fortunately, men are not dominant in this aspect, in using names. Although five of six authors of this book are men, this case does not approximately influence the frequency of using proper names.

### ***Recommendations***

These suggestions can be noticed by teachers, school authorities, and the ministry of education of Iran. Instructors and other responsible people of schools have an important role in increasing or decreasing different kinds of sex discrimination. Because of using fixed imposed textbooks such as "Prospect one," teachers and school administrators have a difficult task in combating gender inequality. They can use artful skills in order to manage and guide students in the logic ways. As an example, they can focus on the positive and hopeful aspects of gender viewpoint in the textbook and also draw the students' attention to this direction. As I said before, I had such a problem about the number of women's and men's representations in my English classroom. This was my strategy in order to probably solve the problem. I told the students not to focus on that individual textbook as a criterion, but they could study the other books written about the famous women of the world. The school authorities should invite successful women in different traditional or modern careers to lecture and to transmit their experiences to the students. By doing so, the learners, especially the girls, can be motivated and encouraged to try for success.

On the other hand, the ministry of education, especially authors and editors of textbooks, has the same responsibilities in reforming gender inequality in textbooks. They should try to show women as exactly as they are in society. They are responsible for creating balance between men and women in their books. Some techniques can be used by them as below:

- (1) Showing female engineers, doctors, politicians, and specialists in different fields
- (2) Bringing famous women in textbooks and writing about their success
- (3) Describing women as active citizens, as they are really in society because they are sometimes more active and effective than men in social affairs
- (4) Increasing the number of women in text and representations
- (5) Paying attention to women's identities, names, wears, social visibility, etc.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although Iranian women are actively present at different modern occupations in society, their real social positions are not shown in the new English textbook titled “English for Schools, Prospect one”. If we carefully and logically analyze this textbook in content, we find out that the names, visibility, occupations, careers, etc. of women are not clearly represented to the students in this textbook. It can be referred to the religious and cultural conditions in Iran in which the authors must follow such distinctive frameworks. Five men and one woman are the authors of this book, so it is natural that they ignored the realities of women in society in order to apply in their books. In summary, women are as minority in all aspects and there is no real balance between their authentic rights and men’s in this textbook. English teachers and school authorities should try more and more to compensate the shortages, and the ministry of education, especially the authors must accept the realities of women’s rights and must be trained as much as possible in the field of textbook planning.

One of the most important limitations in this study is the religious and cultural conditions in the Iranian society. This factor makes the investigator do research carefully and follow the national framework. Another limitation is that there are not, unfortunately, many researches and resources in the field of gender discrimination about the Iranian textbooks.

The findings of this study, in its own turn, are considerably able to help the female students as the future women increase their self-confidence and esteem. In addition, they can find out their real individual and social identities in the society. This investigation can help the society correct its viewpoint about the sexual inequality in the occupational and educational fields for males and females.

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