“Censoring Girls’ Choices: Continued Gender Bias in English Language Arts Classrooms”
Beth Benjamin and Linda Irwin-DeVitis

Reviewed by Camille, Sou and Pranjali
A few good quotes you could use are in blue

This article talked about society’s pressure on women to follow certain idolized roles. Girls are superficially encouraged to follow their dreams, but in reality a woman is expected to sacrifice personal gain for societal benefit (nurturing, care-giving). Their individuality and personality is suppressed because they are expected to follow the ideally “appropriate” behavior of a woman. From researching with children we found that an ideal girl is one who is quiet, submissive, and doesn’t voice her opinion. “This self-censorship is a cultural expectation; women are defined by their relationships, not by their ideas and viewpoints…Being liked, maintaining relationships, and being perceived as “nice” are central as women grow up, even at the cost of knowing and speaking and acting on their own dreams and ambitions" (pg 65). They talked to children about the stories they read and found that male characters are admired for being brave, strong and independent; where as female characters are admired for making sacrifices and for helping others (usually males). Other reasons for liking a female included: appearance/beauty, kind, sweet, nice, etc. Some boys were extremely negative about female protagonists.

Why/How do these ideas form? Barely any books written by female authors are read in class and are part of the curriculum. Women usually aren’t protagonists, and when they are, they are often stereotypically portrayed. Girls go through a stage of “silencing” when transitioning from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. It is a phenomenon where the communication patterns of young women are mellowed and fine tuned into following the ideal behaviors of a woman, and so their voice is overall weakened. “Though girls generally enter this phase with great strength and psychological vigor, the transition from girl to woman is a treacherous one in which many girls begin to doubt their own knowledge and experience, ignore and devalue their
own feelings, and move toward relationships based on cultural stereotypes rather than honesty and truth."

Due to the way teachers pay more attention to boys, some girls feel as if they shouldn't talk when boys are around to avoid being interrupted or being disagreed with. This "silencing" sometimes translates to their job aspirations in that they narrow down their future careers to those that won't involve "lots of boys."

The "second-class status" of girls in the classroom may also be due to the books they read. The lesser role of girls may be rooted in readings dating all the way back to Nursery Rhymes, such as Jack and Jill, "Jack fell down and broke his crown, and Jill came tumbling after." In addition, "female storybook characters typically attain their goals through the assistance of others, but males achieve as a result of their own efforts." (Benjamin 69) This trend is adopted by boys and girls through their writing. Boys tend to choose topics where they play an active role, and they write not to fit the required assignment, but to please themselves. On the other hand, girls tend to write about "domestic themes," and they write not to their pleasing, but to fit the requirement of their teacher.

This pattern may be changed if students read books that empowered women as well; books such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Teachers should be more aware of the themes and characters in the books they assign children to read and of how much focus attention they pay to their male and female students.

**How you can use this article in your essay**

There are various ways you can use the article “Censoring Girls' Choices: Continued Gender Bias in English Language Arts Classrooms” for ME #2. You can use the article to answer the part of the prompt about how teachers widen the gender gap in the classroom. "Censoring Girls' Choices: Continued Gender Bias in English Language Arts Classrooms" describes how classroom instructors widen the gender gap among students by having biased classroom behavior, e.g. the tendency to focus more attention on males more than females, calling on boys more often than girls, allowing more time for males to answer a question than females (Sadker and Sadker (1994)), responding more often with praise, correction or criticism to males than females, and by speaking in a biased tone when addressing their female students. They also help widen the gap by requiring readings from books that reinforce stereotypes.
(usually having male protagonists and stereotypical female characters), and seemingly having very little inclination for including books authored by females in the curriculum.

Additionally, you can use the article to address the part of prompt about the tools that teachers can provide their students to identify and, perhaps, narrow the gender gap. Some ways teachers can bridge this gap is by providing students with books that promote equity and have less stereotypical generalization, e.g. the Caldecott and Newberry Award books. In addition to choice of materials, teachers can facilitate ways of opening up classroom discussions about gender issues, listening to students of both genders, understanding and analyzing the impact of gender differences in communication, as well as expanding their own knowledge about gender differences. More self-reflection about often unconscious classroom patterns, as mentioned above: calling on males more often than females, allowing boys more time to formulate responses, etc. They can also give children more of a choice about what books they can read, instead of requiring the classic male-dominated literature often used in schools or at least often used in 1998 when this research was published.