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THE GENDER INCLUSIVENESS OF A WOMEN'S HISTORY CURRICULUM IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Synopsis—This article focuses on the meaning of a “female-friendly” way of teaching history for girls and boys in secondary education in the Netherlands. It shows how girls and boys experienced a female-friendly learning method for two divergent types of subject matter: women's history and traditional history. The research took place in the context of the introduction of women's history as a compulsory examination subject in all secondary schools in the Netherlands. The article starts with an elaboration of the (theoretical) background of a female-friendly teaching method and a description of the research project. With help of the learner report methodology we then investigate the experiences of girls and boys with a female-friendly teaching method in secondary school curricula for traditional and women's history. Our research yielded two results. First, girls as well as boys preferred a female-friendly way of teaching to a more traditional one. In the second place, students' evaluations of a female-friendly teaching method and the subject women's history revealed an unexpected link: Women's history taught in a female-friendly way was not recognized as a body of knowledge. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

INTRODUCTION

In 1990 and 1991 women's history was a compulsory examination subject at all Dutch secondary schools.¹ Students in vocational education and general secondary education studied the position of women in the Netherlands and the United States of America in the period 1929-1969. This event was quite unique. No other country in the world featured such a comprehensive effort to include gender in the curriculum of secondary education.

Within women's studies, however, it is generally accepted that the gender inclusiveness of a curriculum is not only based on the content, but on the *teaching method* as well (see e.g., Rosser 1990). Most experiments with female-friendly ways of teaching have taken place in higher education. The reason for this may be the relative flexibility of the curriculum. Unlike higher education, the objectives in secondary education are usually fixed at a national level. Neither students nor individual teachers have

much influence on these targets. Textbooks are developed to achieve the objectives set and in most cases presume a certain teaching method. This was also the case with women's history as an innovative examination subject in secondary education. The examination course books compiled for this purpose may be characterized as traditional in terms of teaching methods. The emphasis was on facts and cognitive aspects of the subject, while emotional aspects were neglected. Moreover, the relation of women's history as a subject to the daily lives of girls and boys was hardly elaborated.

In 1989 the Dutch Ministry of Education asked us to evaluate women's history as a compulsory subject in secondary education. Since we wanted to investigate the gender inclusiveness of a curriculum in depth (i.e., in the course content as well as in the teaching method), we designed this investigation as experimental research (ten Dam, Farkas Teekens & van Loosbroek, 1991). We developed teaching materials in order to conduct different ways of teaching—a female-friendly and a regular teaching method—on both women's history and traditional history.² We asked girls and boys who had worked with the different materials about

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their experiences. The research took place in the second-highest grade of secondary schools for general education. The main reason for this was that we did not want examinations undertaken in the final year to interfere with the aim of the project. The teaching materials had to prepare students for the subject matter of the final examination. Therefore, the materials designed for the research focuses on developments in the Netherlands in relation to events in the rest of Europe and in the United States during the years 1900–1929.

This article focuses on the meaning of a female-friendly way of teaching history for girls and boys in secondary education.³ The question, how did girls and boys in secondary education experience a female-friendly learning method, will be answered for two divergent types of subject matter: women's history and traditional history. An elaboration of a female-friendly teaching method precedes the description of the structure and organization of the research. As an example of the way we designed a female-friendly teaching method and a regular one in the context of history as a subject matter, we will give four excerpts from the teaching material used. The experiences of girls and boys with the different teaching methods follow. The last part of this article reflects on the research results and explores questions that merit closer attention.

Female-friendly teaching method

The basic assumption of what is often called "gender-inclusive education" is the idea that current methods of teaching do not sufficiently tie in with the way girls learn. The hypothesis of scholars who subscribe to this line of thought is that the learning processes of girls can be characterized by a number of feminine attributes like the need for completeness, continuity and involvement and for concrete examples that enable them to relate what they have learnt to everyday experiences. These attributes would have already developed during pre-school socialization (Volman, ten Dam, & van Eck, 1993).

Nancy Chodorow's (1978) theory is often used to explain gender-related learning processes (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Collins, 1989; Klein, 1987; Rosser, 1989, 1990). Chodorow relates the dif-

ferences in the psychological structure of women and men to the division of labor between the sexes, which generally means that women are responsible for raising children, while men go out to work. According to the author, girls therefore establish direct and personal identifications with their mothers, who are immediately available as models. Boys, however, have to make do with fantasies about their fathers who may often be absent. They develop their masculine identity by identifying with the position of the father and by reacting against femininity, an indirect identification.

Scholars using this theory to explain gender-related differences in learning processes argue that the learning styles of girls and boys have the same structure as their earlier identification processes. According to this view, closeness and involvement are important elements in girls' learning processes. Boys, on the other hand, are better prepared to deal with abstractions and to recognize the totality of a situation in its parts. Moreover, the learning style of men and boys is usually based on following rules. They can follow such rules without wanting to understand their meaning and background. A holistic style of learning is more common among girls and women; they want to understand something in its totality before applying detailed rules within that totality (e.g., Turkle, 1984, 1988; Rosser, 1990). The learning styles of girls are interpreted in this approach as more or less stable traits of personality that merit greater consideration in educational environments.

The idea of "feminine learning styles" is one of the few examples of a so-called difference-approach.⁴ Instead of regarding girls in education as a group that lags behind and using boys and masculinity as the measuring rod for improvement, this approach stresses a positive appraisal of girls as "being different."

The strength of projects on developing a female-friendly teaching method lies in particular in the gathering of practical information and ideas on the gender specific character of education. Implicit statements like "girls require a modified method of working," however, are made all too easily. The reproaches primarily address the dangers of stereotyping, of overlooking differences between individual girls and individual boys, and of (re)devaluing the feminine learning style. Moreover, there has been criticism of the tendency to view the learning styles of girls and boys as fixed patterns without

considering the influence of earlier learning processes and the educational context, thereby creating the risk of essentialism (ten Dam & Volman 1995).

Despite these critical comments, the idea of adapting to girls' learning styles has been well received. In the Dutch Policy Plan 1994, for example, *the learning style of girls is assumed to be one of the main causes of gender inequality in education. Very little empirical research, however, has been done. The research by Belenky et al. (1986) is presumably one of the best known studies on women's learning processes. This study includes theoretical approaches such as Chodorow's theory on socialization. Unfortunately, the sample group consists entirely of female respondents, which makes it impossible to determine whether learning processes are gender-related. This article explores this question indirectly by assessing the extent to which girls are more receptive than boys to a teaching method presumed to be "female-friendly."*

We have summarized the assumptions about a feminine learning style or way of knowing, we found in the literature, in the following guidelines for a female-friendly teaching method:

1. Girls and women learn more effectively when the presentation of the course material includes a familiar context (e.g., phrasing a question relating to their experiences, approaching a problem from various angles, or replacing multiple-choice questions with essay questions).
2. Girls and women learn more effectively when the presentation of the course consists of concrete examples with which they either have or could establish affective links (e.g., providing examples related to the girls' immediate environments, having the girls actively search their surroundings for applications for what they have learnt, or enabling girls to become involved and to identify with the course material).
3. Girls and women learn more effectively when the presentation of the course material relates to their areas of social competence and when the classes enhance communication (e.g., issuing group assignments, avoiding competition, creating opportunities for cooperation, using the girls' associations to produce personal meanings and enabling students to speak and to write about these as-

sociations, using approaches that foster communication in small groups).

We elaborated on these guidelines in the context of history as a subject in secondary education.

The structure and organization of the research

Sixteen teachers from all over the Netherlands participated in this study. The teachers were recruited via professional journals and informal contacts. In addition, 497 students (291 girls and 206 boys) between 14 and 16 years old were involved. We compiled teaching kits for women's history and traditional history which were used in their lessons in the second-highest grade of lower general secondary education and upper general secondary education.⁵ One version of each teaching kit was developed for the regular teaching method, and another version of each kit was designed for the female-friendly teaching method. The women's history curriculum consisted of 11 classes attended by 224 students. Five classes used the female-friendly way of teaching, and six used the regular teaching method. Eleven classes consisting of 273 students were taught traditional history: six classes used a female-friendly way of teaching and five classes a regular method. The teaching kits used covered between 8 and 11 lessons, which meant that every class worked with the material for four consecutive weeks. Before the research began, all teachers received written instructions and attended a 1-day course about the teaching material they would be using. The teachers were assigned to the classes in a random way. During the research period the classes were observed at least one time. Neither the teachers nor the students knew that the teaching methods constituted an important part of the research.

In order to investigate students' appreciation of the lessons, we asked them to fill in a questionnaire after the experiment and to write learner reports. A description of the methodology of the learner reports appears later in this article.

On the basis of background information on students which we collected immediately before the research began, we concluded that the two groups did not differ in terms of performance in history and that there were no significant differences between the groups regarding the stu-

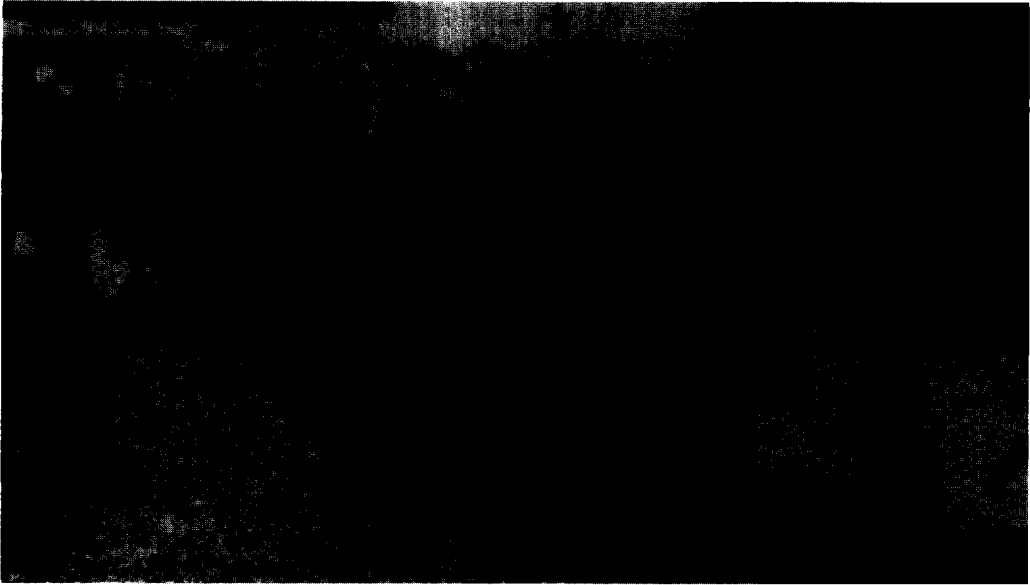


Fig. 1. Two weeks ago the 24th child was born to the Vork family in the village of Noorden. The mother and baby are in excellent condition, but that no complaints need to be made about the other members of the family will be evident from the picture.

dents' backgrounds (gender, age, ethnic origin, parents' education, parents' occupations, importance placed on school and on enjoying school).

Excerpts from the teaching materials

This section presents four excerpts from the teaching kits we developed: a female-friendly teaching method in the context of women's history; a female-friendly teaching method in the context of traditional history; a regular teaching method in the context of traditional history; a regular teaching method in the context of women's history. All excerpts address the concept of pillarization.⁶

Women's history/female-friendly teaching method

The first excerpt deals with pillarization from a women's history perspective according to the guidelines of a female-friendly teaching method. The concept is approached by a question about the influence of pillarization on the daily life of women. One aspect of daily life is selected, namely sexuality. This topic from "private" life is likely to appeal to girls and will

consequently activate both cognitive and affective skills. The illustration elicits amazement, the statistical material is matter of fact. The concept of pillarization is not presented as an isolated historical phenomenon, but as part of a complex reality. Students must order and reorder the subject content to understand the nature of the problem. Subject content and questions are presented in an open manner. As the relationship between cause and effect is somewhat ambiguous, different answers to the questions are possible, as well as ample opportunities for communication. Information is conveyed in part by formulating one's own questions, and group work is requested. It will become clear that the concept of pillarization has different meanings for different people. Moreover, the concept's meaning has evolved over time and is likely to elicit personal feelings.

What was it like to be a woman in the Netherlands at the beginning of this century?

Pillarization was a way of life. It meant social segmentation according to religion or ideology with separate clubs and associations. We shall examine the effect of pillarization on women's daily lives (Figure 1).

How did people view sexuality?

The neo-Malthusian association established a chapter in the Netherlands at the end of the 19th century. This organization wanted to limit the number of children. The underlying ideology was that, especially among the poor, large families prevented improvements in the standard of living. Fewer babies might improve the care given to the other children. The association tried to achieve this goal by providing information and means (contraceptives). Many Catholics and Protestants believed the neo-Malthusians were sent by the devil. They believed that humans were forbidden to interfere with God's work. Preventing pregnancy certainly meant interfering. Sex was permissible only inside a marriage and only for the purpose of having children. As we read earlier, clergymen in the Catholic and Protestant clusters were very concerned with moral conduct. Consequently, reverends and pastors monitored sexual behavior within their clusters. The table below contains data on the number of children per family between 1919 and 1928.

Questions

1. Ask your parents or grandparents whether they remember anything about living within a cluster. Write a short essay about their experiences.
2. (...) Imagine you are a girl in a Catholic or Protestant cluster. If one of your girlfriends were unaffiliated, how would you explain to her what it means being part of a cluster?

Traditional history/female-friendly teaching method

The second excerpt begins with a question. A description is given of what pillarization entails, by giving examples of what a girl would do when she would belong to one of the pillars. By contrast with the subject women's history, here the explicit emphasis on "private" life is lacking.

Did pillarization have an important influence?

One could say that pillarization influenced all spheres of life in the Netherlands. "The pillar" coached a person from the cradle to the grave and would do anything to keep a person "within the pillar." For instance a roman catholic girl would go to a roman catholic school, attend a roman catholic sports club, and would marry a roman catholic boy. She would listen to the roman catholic radio station, be a member of the roman catholic womens' society and (after 1919) she would vote for the Roman Catholic Party and she would take care that her children would do just the same. Many girls became nuns. Here you see a picture with a girl is entering a convent. A choice for life, that is why she is dressed as a bride (Figure 2). Thus, pillarization is not a purely political affair, but a general social phenomenon. However politics contributed a great deal to the awareness of people within the pillars. The struggle for schools played an important role in this respect. The impact of pillarization now is much less than 65 years ago. People are not so obedient towards their pillar anymore. But pillarization is not gone in the Netherlands. You can still find it when you look at radio stations, newspapers, schools, and clubs. Just think of your own environment. Do you yourself notice elements of pillarization?

Questions:

1. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Table 1. Number of Children Per Family Between 1919 and 1928

	Roman Catholic	Calvinist	Dutch Reformed	Non-church Goers
In agriculture				
Self-employed	8.50	6.50	4.00	3.50
Rural workers	7.50	5.00	4.75	4.50
Blue collar workers	5.25	5.00	5.00	3.00
Other self employed	5.25	4.75	3.25	2.75
Employees	4.50	4.00	3.00	2.50
Total	5.25	4.75	3.00	2.50



Fig. 2. Here you see a picture with a girl who is entering a convent. A choice for life, that is why she is dressed as a bride.

2. *Do you feel that this is a large or a small family. Why?*
3. *Do you know how many brothers and sisters your parents had?*
4. *In the picture you can see how the eldest daughter of the family goes into a convent. That means a Roman Catholic family is depicted. Could you mention another reason why this picture presents "a typical roman catholic family" from the 1920s?*

Traditional history/regular teaching method

This part discusses pillarization in a traditional way, which means in a more or less abstract manner. Historical information is not provided in the context of a question. There is little room for involvement and personal identification. Examples are taken from the traditionally male context and therefore represent a masculine perception of the social environment. Illustrations confirm this perspective by depicting men and boys; they are not used as a source of information in itself. Questions and tasks are

clearly described. Students have no opportunity to elaborate on an answer while working on the task. Group work and communication are not required. The way the questions are formulated suggests that only one answer is correct.

In the 1920s, Dutch society was characterized by pillarization. This trend involved clusters consisting of segments of the population pertaining to a specific group, each with its own religious affiliation or ideology and its own clubs and interest groups. These clusters guided people throughout their lives and did everything to retain the members of their fold. For example, Catholic boys attended Catholic schools, joined Catholic soccer clubs, married Catholic girls, listened to the KRO [a Catholic radio broadcasting network], read Catholic newspapers and voted for the RKSP [a Catholic political party]. In addition to the Catholic cluster, there was a Protestant, a socialist, and an unaffiliated cluster. The unaffiliated cluster was not really a cluster, but rather the group of individuals

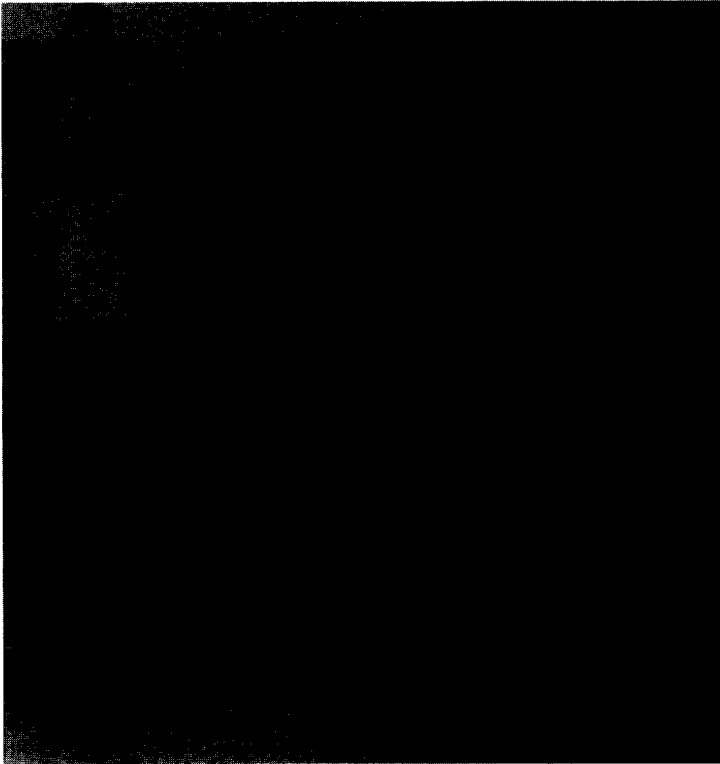


Fig. 3. The priest gives the kick-off for the soccer-match.

that did not belong to any of the other three clusters. Pillarization is, therefore, less a political than a general social phenomenon. It created political stability in the Netherlands, as everyone stood by his cluster. The conflict over denominational and parochial schools raised the awareness of members of the Catholic and Protestant clusters. Universal suffrage provided politicians within the clusters with more supporters.

Questions

1. *What is a cluster?*
2. *Which clusters existed in the Netherlands?*

Women's history/regular teaching method

In this excerpt information is given about sexuality as an aspect of daily life in the "private" sphere, in a matter of fact way. To answer

the question about the influence of pillarization historical insight is needed but no personal perceptions are asked for.

The influence of pillarization

In a former paragraph we saw already that the roman catholic and the protestant pillars in particular were intensively involved with the moral behaviour of people. Especially in the field of sexuality very outspoken ideas were prevalent. The roman catholics predominated the discussion, but the protestants followed suit. The roman catholic ideal was a large family with many children. The only place for sexuality was within marriage and sexuality had only one aim: having children. The priest and the reverend supervised the strict compliance with this ideal. When it was felt that too few children were born in a family the priest came by to have a talk. It

was absolutely forbidden to use methods to avoid pregnancy.

Questions

A old Dutch saying goes:

*'Twee geloven op een kussen
daar slaapt de duivel tussen'*

*(Two religions on one pillow
will make the devil sleep in the middle)*

1. *What is the meaning of this saying?*
2. *Would there be great opportunity for the devil to do so at the beginning of this century? Explain why you think yes/no.*

The learner reports

To analyze the learning experiences of the girls and boys, we used the learner report methodology.⁷ The key question of the learner report always concerns what the respondent has learned (in this course, about this subject, etc.). We asked students to formulate (learning effect) sentences that began with "I have learnt that" or "I have noticed/discovered that ...". Open questions permit students to develop their own meanings pertaining to the subject matter concerned. In addition to revealing the learning experiences intended, this method highlighted unexpected learning experiences.

The learner reports were analyzed as follows. First, we counted every learning sentence formulated by a student as one learning experience. Students were allowed to answer the open question "What have you learnt or discovered ..." as they wished. Understandably, this question immediately brought the course content to the minds of many students. Nevertheless, they also addressed the teaching method used. Table

Table 2. Number of Learning Experiences for Teaching Method and Subject Matter According to Sex and Women's Versus Traditional History

	Women's History		Traditional History	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Teaching method	45	27	107	57
Content	191	133	231	107
Other	14	7	11	17
Total	250	167	349	181

2 shows how many reported learning experiences concerned the teaching method and how many reflected course content. The learning experiences reported by students in women's history courses were especially likely to address the course material. This unorthodox subject for secondary education curricula took center stage. Students in traditional history courses were more inclined to reflect on the teaching method.

Quantifying the different types of learning experiences leaves a great deal of unused information. Especially the students' choices of words elucidate their interpretations of the lessons. How did girls and boys give meaning to the teaching method used? Did the subject matter (women's history or traditional history) influence their experiences of the teaching method? To answer these questions, our approach to the material had to leave the expressions of the students intact. We found a solution in the form of *collective essays*. Sixteen essays were compiled from the learning experiences written in the girls' and boys' own words. Differentiations involved the teaching method used (a female-friendly teaching method or a regular one), the subject matter (women's history or traditional history) and the type of school.⁸ For each of the resulting eight groups, we compiled one collective essay for girls and one for boys. The methodology of combining the answers to an open question to form a collective essay was derived from Janssen, den Hart, and den Draak (1989). We compiled the essays in the following way:

- In principle, every learning effect sentence reported was included in an essay, unless various students had written virtually the same sentence, in which case it was included only once. Sentences with the same meanings but different words were included in the essay.
- The essays are divided into paragraphs. The learning effect sentences about the subject (women's) history on the one hand and the teaching method on the other, were collected in separate paragraphs.
- Each paragraph begins with "I have learnt (discovered/noticed) that." This opening is omitted from subsequent sentences.
- Each paragraph begins with the learning effect sentences used most by students.
- To enhance readability, grammar and punc-

tuation were corrected, and some sentences were combined without altering their meanings.

The methodology of combining the learning reports of individual students into collective essay naturally leads to inconsistencies in the content of each essay. Conflicting learning experiences are included in the same essay. We consider such instances assets rather than drawbacks to this approach, as inconsistencies and contradictions highlight individual differences among girls. To provide insight into the data we collected, an extensive excerpt appears below from the essay by girls who studied traditional history according to the female-friendly teaching method we developed. We have chosen sections of the essay about pillarization and about the teaching method used.

I have noticed that pillarization was very important throughout history. Standing was also very important. Pillarization still exists. I thought it had disappeared. The church and pillarization used to be tremendously important in daily life. They were very influential. I do not think I would have enjoyed living under pillarization. Too many things were forbidden. (...)

We have learnt about more than just politics. History is often about politics. I am more interested in how people used to live. The past and the present are not so different. I felt it was important to learn about past attitudes to certain issues instead of memorizing dry facts. It was fun to talk about the upper class at home because we knew prominent figures of the past, it's even more enjoyable when you know the people.

I have discovered that the book contains a lot of trivial information, about radios and clothing, which may be nice to know, but why spend half a book on it? (...)

I have learnt there are different approaches to history and specific topics. We had covered all the material before, [since] I finished the college-preparatory version of tenth grade last year. Even though I already knew the material, the presentation was new. You can have different opinions about history. A lot of questions asked for a personal opinion. Per-

sonal opinions are very important. I like answering questions about my opinion. It makes you think. I felt more involved. If you keep up with the class, you learn a lot, and you don't need to study too hard for a test. There are many ways to explain the material. We worked in teams a lot. I like working in teams. I enjoyed hearing everyone's opinion. History is interesting when you talk about it a lot with your fellow students. There were a lot of class discussions on this topic. I also liked being more involved in the history classes. I felt there were too many open questions about my opinion. This method of teaching history (with lots of discussions) is wonderful.

I have learnt that it was easier than last year. History can be simple. It doesn't have to be difficult. Easy, even childish: but the discussions were great. It was fun. The easiness of the material made the discussions possible. The workbooks were too simple, even though the rest was interesting. I didn't learn much from these classes. (...) (Girls: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

Students' experiences with a female-friendly teaching method

The learner reports clearly show that students experienced history classes taught according to the female-friendly method we developed, differently from the ones where a regular teaching method was used. The reports stress several aspects, such as the different perspectives presented on the subject matter, more active class involvement, a more congenial environment, requests for personal opinions, equal appreciation of different opinions, reflection on and discussion about the subject matter, explanations of concepts, team assignments and a lower threshold of difficulty. The learner reports, however, do not provide us with an unequivocal picture of girls' and boys' experiences with these aspects.

Traditional history classes taught in a female-friendly way: More fun for girls and boys

The evaluations of a female-friendly teaching method were especially favorable for tradi-

tional subject matter. The essays by girls who attended these classes provide a detailed and favorable evaluation of the different elements of a female-friendly teaching method. The following paragraph contains the learning sentences about the teaching method written by the girls who were taught traditional history in a female-friendly way.

I have noticed that this method makes history much more fun. The class was more enjoyable. This method seems much more interesting, although the topic is also a factor. You can approach history from several angles. A question can lead to various ideas and answers. Everyone has her own opinion about certain questions. I've noticed that fun classes really improve class participation. The topics were also much more enjoyable. Having your own opinion helps you remember the material. Working this way (in teams) is much more fun and makes learning easier. Teamwork helps you solve problems much faster than working alone. In a team, you don't work as hard as when you're alone or with a partner. You learn much more by talking about the subject a lot. This method is much easier and much more fun. I've noticed there are several ways of working in class. Finally, I really enjoyed this method! (Girls: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

Girls' learning effect sentences were especially positive about the acceptance of different opinions. They were equally enthusiastic about working in teams. Teamwork made history classes much more enjoyable. Scholars such as Yolanda te Poel (1982) have mentioned that girls are more receptive to and capable of acquiring knowledge in a congenial environment. Teamwork also enables students to talk about the subject matter. These conversations significantly stimulate student involvement.

History is interesting when you talk about it a lot with fellow students. (Girls: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

Girls were not alone in their positive assessments of a female-friendly teaching method. Boys also tended to appreciate a female-friendly teaching method in traditional history courses.

The paragraphs in their essays about the teaching method begin with the learning effect sentences that contain favorable assessments of a female-friendly teaching method. This means that these learning sentences were used most frequently by them. Although boys wrote more concise essays than girls, they mentioned virtually the same elements of the method used. Nevertheless, the boys' essays omitted references to the congenial class environment. It is also striking that boys used "discuss" where girls wrote "talk about." "Discuss" has a more competitive connotation than "talk about" (also see Kramarae & Treichler, 1990).

I find this method much more enjoyable than other ones. I have discovered that I have an outspoken opinion about many topics. There are many ways to explain history (many ways of teaching). Everyone has or can have a different opinion about an issue. You learn a lot from extensive class discussions. (Boys: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

While the female-friendly teaching method specifically addresses presumed learning styles among girls, boys appear to have appreciated this teaching method as well. This phenomenon is fairly common in educational research. For example, studies in the field of teaching mathematics show that the learning materials designed over the past few years to accommodate assumptions about girls' interests and their working methods were also appreciated by boys (e.g., Busato, ten Dam, van den Eeden, & Terwel, 1995). The following statement may describe this phenomenon: educational improvements that serve girls' needs will benefit boys as well.

Our female-friendly teaching kits emphasized working in small groups. While girls' learner reports contained mostly favorable reactions to teamwork, the research results show that this element of a female-friendly teaching method elicited conflicting reactions among boys.

Teams don't work very well. You don't understand the material. (Teacher's name) got angry at me more often than usual. (Boys: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

Teams are much more fun, and I also enjoyed talking about the material. (Boys: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

The learner reports also show that both boys and girls consider a female-friendly teaching method easier than the methods to which they are accustomed. Both groups view this difference as an asset.

In addition to providing insight into girls' and boys' experiences with a female-friendly teaching method in traditional history courses, the learner reports reveal that especially girls became more interested and involved in traditional history taught according to a female-friendly method. This teaching method improved girls' identifications with the past.

The First World War began with the murders in Serajewo. The first war preconditioned the outbreak of the second one. Some people were happy about the outbreak of the war. They see war sometimes as a solution for problems: I was thinking of useless violence. The things we learned were not about politics. Often history is only about politics. I find it interesting to know how people lived in the past, then you do not need to simply learn facts by heart. It is nice to be asked for your own opinion, then you start to think for yourself. I felt more involved. (Girls: female-friendly teaching method/traditional subject matter).

The learner reports written by boys in traditional history courses did not reflect the same empathy as that expressed by girls. The tone of the sentences was significantly more detached. Improving personal involvement in a subject like history seems particularly important for retaining interest among girls. Boys, however, appear receptive to classical topics in history, such as wars, even without explicitly promoting involvement and identification.

I have discovered the subject is fun. I enjoyed [learning about] World War I most. If you like it, you can learn a lot. There was a lot I didn't know about that period. (Boys: regular teaching method/traditional subject matter).

The authority of a feminist subject and the issue of gender identity

Changing the subject matter from traditional history to women's history caused a remarkable change in students' evaluations of a female-friendly teaching method. In the collective essay of the girls who were taught women's history in a female-friendly way the following paragraph appeared.

I have noticed that the subject was tedious, some topics were interesting, but a few put me to sleep. Toward the end, the topic seemed drawn-out and boring. It was basically an interesting field, although it got boring after we had been working on it for a while. While I found the subject interesting, it became dull, and all kinds of irrelevant information was added. (Girls: female-friendly teaching method/women's history).

Boys' opinions were virtually all negative. Almost the whole paragraph in their collective essay consists of negative remarks. Very few positive evaluation sentences were mentioned.

I have noticed that too many questions reflect women's views, boys are people, too. This teaching method is dull. History teaching can be terribly boring. The speaker was really corny. This teaching method should never be implemented because I thought it was WORTHLESS. I thought there were too many of those stupid essay questions and not enough multiple choice ones. My [female] teacher is stubborn. No teaching method can interest all students. The teaching method was very playful, as if we were in junior high, with hardly any deep questions. The questions in the booklet were terribly simple, and the test was much too difficult compared to the questions. I have discovered that this teaching method can be fun. (Boys: female-friendly teaching method/women's history).

Examining the aspects which students disliked about a female-friendly teaching method for women's history shows that both girls and boys objected to the dull and drawn-out nature of the classes. This evaluation is not necessarily attributable to the subject matter. Rarely did students learning women's history in the traditional way consider these classes dull and drawn out.

I have learned that women in this century have undergone a tremendous change in respect to work and mentality. Women had to fight for their position. I have seen that women's history is really interesting (perhaps because I am a woman myself). I like it when history is not about wars and things like that. It was a nice topic and I am more interested in the lessons now. History can be very instructive. (Girls: regular teaching method/women's history).

The difference in evaluating a female-friendly teaching method between women's history on the one hand and traditional history on the other was very surprising. We had really expected girls to report positive learning experiences with women's history taught in a female-friendly way. The learner reports show the contrary. We shall make a cautious attempt to explain this discrepancy. We consider the various subjects in secondary education as cultural products focussing on the development of knowledge, skills, and values. All three aspects of education are present in each subject and, of course, cannot be separated. In the eyes of students and even teachers, however, "values" and "knowledge" are constructed as if they were oppositions. Within this conceptualization women's history is exclusively associated with values, in terms of opinions, whereas the regular issues that are treated in the "traditional" history curriculum are seen as knowledge, in terms of facts. The essays show that girls and boys are quick to express their view on the position of women and how it has changed. We fear that the explicitly value-linked character of women's history as a subject has prevented students from considering it as a body of knowledge. The allegedly neutral character of history knowledge generally transmitted in schools, which of course implicitly is also linked with values but often not acknowledged as such, makes the knowledge base of women's history less visible. Moreover, women's history was introduced as "a subject" separated from traditional "normal" history, instead of a revision of historical knowledge based on a specific perception of the past. Although in history lessons the role of both women and men in history is increasingly paid attention too, history in Dutch secondary schools still is primarily his story. Consequently women's history as a rather isolated subject could easily be associated with values.

The "female-friendly" teaching method probably reinforced this process. The "female-friendly" teaching method we implemented encourages students to reflect on the content of the lessons given. This emphasis on reflection enables students specifically to produce their own meaning of the subject. In designing the course material and training the instructors, we emphasized using students' experiences, especially those of girls, as a basis for learning. This focus may have neglected the relationship between theory and experience in learning. Perhaps the equilibrium between theory and experiences has shifted too much towards experiences because theory is no longer presented to students as such. If, as the learner reports suggest, this imbalance has occurred, then women's history classes appear to have born the brunt of it. Although a female-friendly teaching method was effective in bridging the gap between students and traditional history (especially girls became more interested and involved in traditional history), this method made students of women's history feel they were learning very little. Many students seem to have missed an intellectual challenge.

Finally, the unexpectedly negative opinions expressed by girls about women's history classes taught in a female-friendly way may be related to the issue of gender identity. Talking about course content is an important component of a female-friendly teaching method that emphasizes reflection and the production of individual meanings pertaining to women's history. It is questionable, however, whether public speaking (in class), is a "natural" identity trait in girls of about 15. The problems this method may have caused were probably exacerbated because the subject women's history required taking the floor about women's inequality in the past. Analyzing the girls' experiences with this subject matter shows that girls fear becoming part of a group that they (and boys) associate with a "deficiency." Belonging to such a group undermines a carefully constructed image of equality. In this context, girls reacted to women's history by acknowledging inequality between the sexes and at the same time referring the phenomenon of gender inequality to the archives (see ten Dam & Rijkschroef, 1996) They did not want to identify themselves with women as a group struggling for equality, even though the aspects of involvement and identifi-

cation are one of the cornerstones of a female-friendly teaching method.

CONCLUSION

This article addresses girls' and boys' experiences with a female-friendly teaching method in secondary school curricula for traditional and women's history. Until now, little research has been conducted on the idea of a feminine learning style. The results of the studies undertaken vary according to the type of research. On the one hand, psychological research on the learning styles of women and men with help of standardized instruments (e.g., Kolb's Learning Style Inventory or Entwistle's Approaches to Studying Inventory) shows rather small gender differences (Severiens & ten Dam, 1994). On the other hand, qualitative feminist research like Belenky et al. (1986) or Collins (1989), highlights "women's ways of knowing." Since this kind of research, however, is primarily conducted among female respondents, it is questionable whether the ways of knowing noted can indeed be characterized as feminine as opposed to masculine. One exception is the project conducted by Baxter Magolda (1992). She investigated ways of knowing among male and female students in higher education. Although Baxter Magolda reports no gender-related differences in the intellectual development of students, she has noted various gender-related patterns within the different positions of cognitive complexity. Girls' self-images as learners, their views of instructors' roles, the role of peers, evaluation in the learning process, and the nature of knowledge often reflect a relational approach. The pattern of men tends to be more abstract and individualistic. The guidelines we developed for a female-friendly teaching method, and in particular the third guideline, contains elements of this relational pattern.

Our research yielded two striking results. Firstly, the students' evaluations of a female-friendly teaching method were not clearly gender-related. Both boys and girls evaluated a female-friendly teaching method favorably in the traditional history classes. According to the girls, traditional history taught in a female-friendly way reflected a variety of perspectives, allowed more active class participation, provided a more congenial class setting, elicited personal opinions, included extensive discus-

sion of the subject matter, clarified the meaning of concepts, assigned teamwork and was easier. In their learner reports, boys listed positive comments about a number of the same elements. They especially stressed the different perspectives on the subject, the requests for personal opinions, and the equal appreciation for different opinions. While girls valued the opportunities for talking about the subject matter, boys loved animated discussions. This difference is not merely semantic. A preference for discussions seems to be related to an individual, competitive learning approach (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992). Furthermore, boys were less positive about teamwork than girls. Finally, boys did not deem the congenial class setting a noteworthy educational feature. The importance that girls attach to congeniality at school, both in and out of class, may be related to Chodorow's socialization theory: more than boys, girls develop their identity through affective relationships. A congenial environment enables them to establish trusting relationships with their instructors and fellow students.

We already mentioned that the phenomenon that educational measures advocated for girls also benefit boys is well known in educational research. The reports from both girls and boys about the traditional history lessons in which a female-friendly teaching method was used were more favorable than those from students who were taught traditional history in a regular way. In this sense, the female-friendly teaching method we developed can generally be regarded as good teaching. Before accepting—and interpreting—such an explanation, it is necessary to study the classroom processes in more detail. For example, which small-group interactions had taken place between the students themselves? What was the nature of the attention and behavior of teachers with regard to girls and boys? Although data on implementation was collected from teachers' log books and one session of every class was observed, our knowledge of the gender context in which the lessons had taken place is insufficient. To put it differently, not only the formal curriculum, but especially processes concerning the hidden curriculum require additional research to explain this result.

The second striking result of this study concerns the unexpected link between women's history as a feminist subject and a female-friendly teaching method. The investigation to

determine whether girls' experienced a "female-friendly" teaching method more positively than boys took place in the context of a research project evaluating the introduction of women's history as a compulsory subject in secondary education. We viewed both the content of the lessons and the teaching method as important aspects of what is often called the gender inclusiveness of education. Surprisingly, our research shows that, while subject matter and teaching method did indeed influence each other, the effect was negative. Girls probably experienced problems with the emphasis on "identification" when they were taught women's history. Consistent with the aim of a female-friendly teaching method they were encouraged to get involved in the subject of the position of women in the past and present, and in the issue of the shifting meanings of femininity and masculinity. Identification with the phenomenon of gender inequality and gender differences, however, caused a problem. It treats girls' carefully constructed "gender-neutral" identity: virtually none of the girls were able to identify positively with gender inequality and gender differences, which was the topic studied in women's history.

The concepts "dull" and "tedious" permeated the learning experiences of the boys and many of the girls who were taught women's history in a female-friendly way.⁹ We have attempted to explain this evaluation of the lessons by noting that the classes may have overemphasized experiences and the development of "personal" meanings. Secondary school students, both girls and boys, did not recognize women's history taught in a female-friendly way as a body of knowledge. This research finding creates a dilemma for gender-inclusive education in secondary schools, which tailors both the subject matter and the teaching method to girls. To be recognized by students as a body of knowledge, a feminist subject such as women's history must command greater authority. Presenting "facts" as truths, however, conflicts with the principles of a female-friendly teaching method, which involve stimulating critical reflection and guiding students to produce their own meanings of the course material.

ENDNOTES

1. In the Netherlands, two topics are chosen every year for the final written examination in history and political science, to be taken by all students who take history in

secondary schools. For each topic, the subject matter is outlined. The assignment of the subject matter, including the preparation of content, is executed by a small group of professional historians, advised and controlled by the Ministry of Education. "The subject-matter is published two years before the examinations take place leaving enough time for preparation of teachers, publishers of examination course books and the committee which formulates the examination questions." (Grever, 1991, p. 66).

2. We conceptualized traditional history as a historiography that does not usually include gender as an identifying feature of society and individuals.
3. See ten Dam and Rijkschroeff (1996) for the meaning of women's history as a subject for girls.
4. See J. Scott 1988, for a discussion of the relationship between difference strategies and equality strategies in feminism.
5. Pursuant to the Secondary Education Act, there are two main streams of secondary education in the Netherlands. The first comprises general education. The second stream comprises prevocational education. General secondary education is provided in the following forms: college preparatory education (vwo); length of course 6 years, ages 12 to 18; upper general secondary education (havo); length of course 5 years, ages 12 to 17; lower general secondary education (mavo); length of course 4 years, ages 12 to 16. Only students attending mavo and havo participated in the research. They received proportional representation in the two research groups.
6. Pillarization (*verzuiling*) is a differentiation within society whereby the population is divided into ideological and religious social segments that each have their own schools, societies, political parties, broadcasting networks, newspapers, hospitals, and so on. It is a vertical differentiation running through all the social classes (horizontal stratification). During the first half of the 20th century, Dutch society was divided into a Roman Catholic cluster, a Protestant cluster (with internal subdivisions), and an unaffiliated cluster.
7. See ten Dam and Rijkschroeff (1996) for an elaboration of the learner report methodology in the context of this research project.
8. See Note 5. This article does not discuss differences between and within the streams.
9. The paragraphs in the collective essays concerned begin with sentences in which words like these were present. This means that these sentences were used most frequently by the students

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