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Sally K. Ride Papers - "Girls and Women in Science and Math Initiative," 1995

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Workshop

November 1995

Discussion of "commonly held beliefs"

A. ATTITUDES

Interest in science

1. In elementary school, both boys and girls display "natural curiosity". This suggests an intervention strategy to take advantage of their natural interests. A cross-disciplinary, relevant curriculum may hold the most promise.

2. Significant numbers of both girls and boys lose interest in science in middle school and high school. Girls, however, are selectively discouraged...both by schools and external influences (e.g. stereotypes held by society, parents, teachers, peers become progressively more influential).

a. Both boys and girls would benefit by an emphasis on making them "independent learners".

b. An intervention strategy is suggested which is aimed at overcoming the selective discouragement experienced by girls

3. The answer to the question "Do you like math/science?" is likely related to the students' stereotypical expectations. A more careful framing of the question (that gets the essentials of math/science, without triggering stereotypes) may be more revealing.

4. It is often uncritically accepted that girls don't "like" science (or math) as well as boys do.

a. It's important not to look on this as a "trait", but rather to look at the reasons for the choices that students make, in order to help ensure that those choices are informed ones.

b. Whether or not girls feel they "belong" may affect their answer.

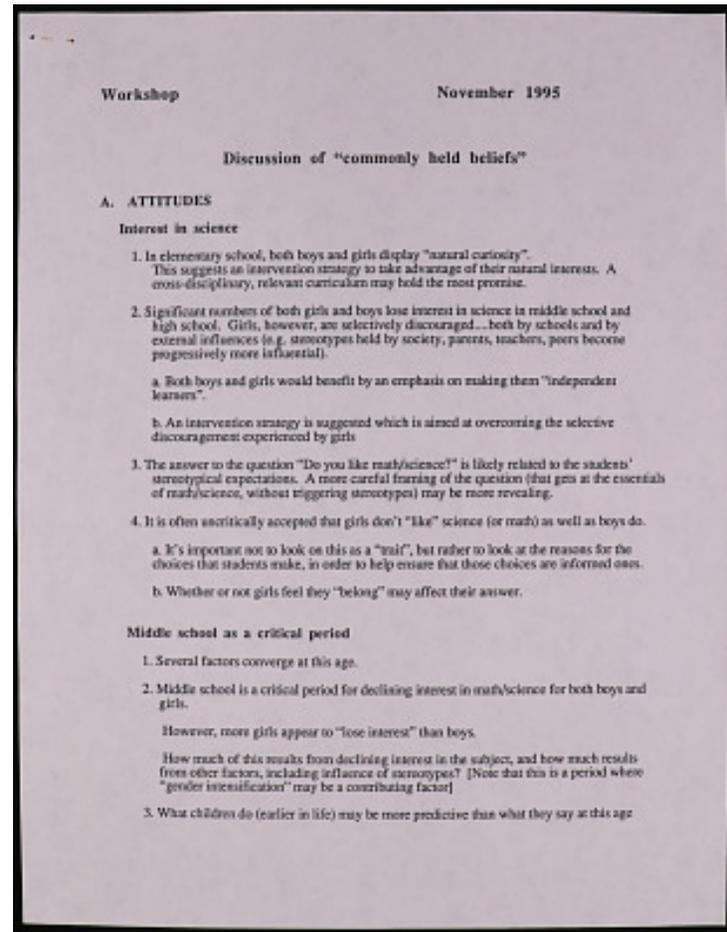
Middle school as a critical period

1. Several factors converge at this age.

2. Middle school is a critical period for declining interest in math/science for both boys and girls.

However, more girls appear to "lose interest" than boys.

How much of this results from declining interest in the subject, and how much results from other factors, including influence on stereotypes?[Note that this is a period where "gender intensification"



may be a contributing factor]

3. What children do (earlier in life) may be more predictive than what they say at this age

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