

HER IMPACT INITIATIVE

Resource Guides for Women & Allies

Guides to inform, empower, and activate.

Inspired by a conversation with Parul Kamra, Communications Lead at Bala.

Defying the Invisible Rules — Gendered Expectations at Home and in School

Gender inequality rarely announces itself. It hides in seating arrangements, kitchen assignments, and who gets pulled up in class. Here's how to see it.

The Dinner Party Divide

In many households across cultures, there is an unspoken rule at social gatherings: men sit in the living room talking about politics and current events, while women congregate in or around the kitchen. No one says it out loud. No one has to.

"It was never said, but it was a very invisible line. The men are going to sit in the drawing room, and the women are going to congregate in and around the kitchen."

This invisible line is an early lesson in what is expected of girls and women — and what spaces they are allowed to inhabit. Recognizing it is the first step.

The Classroom Double Standard

The same dynamic plays out in schools. Research and lived experience consistently show that teachers treat boys' and girls' behavior very differently:

- Boys who disrupt class are often excused: "Oh, he's just being a boy."
- Girls who do far less are corrected, disciplined, or penalized immediately
- Boys are often rewarded for assertiveness; girls are penalized for the same behavior
- These patterns shape which students feel entitled to take up space and which do not

Key insight: Most children experiencing these patterns don't have the language to name them as gender discrimination. It just feels normal — because it is, in their world.

Why Normalization Is So Powerful

"When you grow up witnessing something so frequently, it's not abnormal. It becomes normalized."

Normalized inequality is harder to challenge than overt discrimination. When something has always been this way, questioning it feels strange — even to the people most harmed by it. That's why naming it matters.

How to Start Noticing

- Watch how chores are distributed in your household — who cooks, cleans, and hosts?
- Notice who speaks and who is interrupted in meetings, classrooms, and conversations
- Pay attention to whose behavior is excused versus whose is corrected
- Ask: would this reaction be the same if the person were a different gender?

Resources

- "Invisible Women" by Caroline Criado Perez — how data ignores women and why it matters
- "Delusions of Gender" by Cordelia Fine — the neuroscience of gender stereotypes
- AAUW's research on gender in education — aauw.org/research
- Teaching Tolerance — tolerance.org — classroom resources on equity

This resource guide was developed by the Her Impact Initiative. For more information or to share your story, contact us.