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**Math Anxiety Is Contagious**

In third grade, my class would play a game where we took turns reciting multiplication tables. If no one messed up, we were promised the grand prize of a trip to the donut shop. The pressure, the prospect of depriving my entire class of deep-friend sweets, made me so nervous I once threw up in the middle of math class. Not only did I delay my classmates' chances at early-onset diabetes, but my witch of a teacher made a point of announcing in front of us all that my vomit had to be scrubbed from the floor by a crew of professional carpet cleaners. (Yes, seriously.)

I mention this personal tale for two reasons: 1.) The public humiliation of my teacher (you know what they say about payback), and 2.) A new study has found that female elementary school teachers' own math anxiety can be toxic to girls. I'm not sure my schoolmistress was nervous about math so much as she was evil, but, still, this study adds to a growing body of research showing that negative outside influences—whether it's a bad teacher or sexual inequality in the culture at large—greatly impact not only girls' attitude toward math but their performance as well.

Researchers from the University of Chicago evaluated the math anxiety of seven female teachers and tested their 117 students -- 65 girls and 52 boys -- at the beginning and end of the school year. At the start, there was no gap between the boys' and girls' math skills. At the end of the year, however, researchers found that the more anxious a female teacher was about math, the more likely girls in her class would endorse the stereotype that boys are better than girls in the subject; and, on the whole, these girls scored six points lower on the final math exam. Sian Beilock, the study's lead author, explains: "Having a highly math-anxious female teacher may push girls to confirm the stereotype that they are not as good as boys at math, which in turn, affects girls' math achievement."

The takeaway for parents and educators alike is to surround girls with math-confident women. Personally, I'll take this as a warning that I better get over my math anxiety before having a daughter, lest I create a family legacy of hurling in math class.

Source: http://www.salon.com/mwt/broadsheet/feature/2010/01/26/girls\_math\_anxiety/index.html