

# Research paper on sex-segregated education

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



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Sex-segregated schools have gained interest in recent times due to the underachievement of many students. Educators nowadays are concerned about the issue of how to reform and organize the modern system of education in the USA in order it to work more efficiently. Many researchers posit that single-sex classes may have a positive effect on both males and females educational performances. The question whether girls and boys should be taught separately is quite ambiguous, meanwhile, the number of sex-segregated classes in the schools of the United States continues to grow. With the rapid spread of this educational practice, the issue needs to be researched more carefully and thoroughly in order the advantages as well as disadvantages of single-sex education to be determined and taken into consideration.

## **History of sex-segregated classrooms**

Initially, the very first schools and universities in the United States were founded only for men. It was the period of 17th and 18th centuries when

society considered that females were less developed intellectually than males so that there was no urgent need to establish educational centers for girls (Wolf-Wendel “ Single-Sex Institutions”). Then, the 19th century brought new views and outlooks and the first schools and universities for women were founded. They were separated from males’ educational institutions since the curriculum of women’s schools and colleges was aimed at more liberal rather than pre-professional education (Wolf-Wendel “ Single-Sex Institutions”). In this sense, sex-segregated education emerged because of different educational experiences for males and females as well as due to the special expectations and opportunities for each gender (Bradley 2). Thus, boys were taught as leaders and dominants in the professional terms, while girls required less formalized education that could be put exclusively into domestic practice.

Meanwhile, social views were progressing, and by the middle of 20th century, co-educational classes became quite popular and were the normal practice of educational system in the United States. Coeducation was an extremely necessary step first of all because sex-separated classes were economically unprofitable; secondly, women became equal to men and started to work outside the home; thirdly, single-sex institutions were considered to be unnatural; and finally, there was a hope that coeducation would calm the men’s rowdy temper (Bradley; Wolf-Wendel). Moreover, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 claimed gender equality in every educational program that received federal funding, which meant greater development and applying of coeducation. Title IX itself regulated curricular and extracurricular activities in the primary and secondary schools, sought to

eliminate sex discrimination in the field of higher education, touched on sport as well as non-sport activities and some other aspects of academic life (for example, health care, etc.).

That is why, when in 2006 the Bush administration referred to the passage No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and gave public schools opportunity to increase the number of same-sex classes, it was perceived as rude violation of Title IX that barred sex discrimination in the field of education. The new federal rules sought to help public schools to experiment with single-sex education. “ Concerns about boys’ performance in secondary education have also driven some of the interest same-sex education.” (Schemo “ Federal Rules Back Single-Sex Education”)

## **Different learning styles of males and females**

Nowadays sex-segregated classrooms are not the requirement, but an option that parents are able to choose in order to provide their children with more quality education. Although the researchers and practitioners have not completely proved the undeniable and indisputable benefits of single-sex education, a number of theories indicate that boys and girls need different styles of learning in order to demonstrate best educational achievements. Some investigations also present that both males and females might show better results in studying while have separate classes. Leonard Sax, the founder and executive director of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education, in his work emphasizes that (1) males’ and females’ brain develops differently: those areas that involved in language and fine motor skills develop four years earlier in girls than in boys, while those areas that involved in geometry and spatial reasoning develop four years earlier in boys

than in girls; (2) females have more sensitive hearing – girls are distracted by noise ten times less than boys; (3) each gender reacts on stress differently – stress improves learning in boys, it worsen learning in girls; (4) in studying, males are mostly motivated by competition, while females demonstrate better learning results if they work together and cooperatively (Cable and Spradlin 4). In addition, girls prefer to learn math by overt methods and boys seek to use covert ones; females like fiction literature, while males are most interested in reading of factual accounts of real events (Cable and Spradlin 4). The differences in learning styles of males and females also appear in the emphasis on the subjects that males and females are best at: girls are less involved in learning such sciences as physics and technology, and boys are less likely to choose foreign language or music as their future professional sphere of activity (Cable and Spradlin 4). Finally, girls and boys evaluate their academic performance and success differently: females are more critical towards their learning abilities and achievements, and males, in turn, tend to estimate their academic progress higher than it is in reality (“ Learning Style Differences”). Thereby, single-sex classes take all these details into account while composing special curriculum for girls and boys and teach every gender according appropriate learning styles of males and females.

### **Advantages of sex-segregated classrooms**

As soon as debate over single-sex education gained wide publicity, it became the topic for discussions among students, parents, educators, policy makers as well as authorities in the field of education. And as every controversial theme, the spread of sex-separated classrooms has its advantages as well as

disadvantages that make this debatable question more complex and ambiguous. As for the positive sides of this type of education, it should be noticed that single-sex classes encourage the fluid gender expression. At an early age, children are the most vulnerable and influenced by external environment, so it is very important to create friendly and warm atmosphere in the classroom in order every child could feel himself comfortable. As soon as student is pleased with the place he is studying at, he is able to express himself according to the gender fluids. And only same-sex classes can allow this fluid gender to express since the established model of stereotyped gender roles is absent in such classrooms. Thereby, single-sex education prevents the fact of girls' suppression of boys and boys' suppression of girls. Although it was mentioned that girls are less successful in exact sciences, the further researches have revealed that females do better in male-dominated subjects, such as math or physics, in sex-segregated classrooms. National Association for Single-Sex Public Education conducted the study, which demonstrated that females who have graduated from all-girls high schools are six times better at math or other science than those who graduated coeducational schools (Cable and Spradlin 4). Furthermore, another reason of why same-sex classes are necessary is that they provide students' less distraction in terms of romantic affairs: " We have seen many students start to focus heavily on academics. They no longer clown or try to impress the opposite sex Girls are learning to be more academically competitive, and boys are learning to collaborate", Jill Rojas, principal of Jefferson Leadership Academies, said (Cable and Spradlin 5).

Single-sex classrooms influence not only on students' concentration on

studying, but on both girls' and boys' behavior as well. Peggy Gisler and Marge Eberts, the teachers in classrooms from kindergartens to high school, state that females and males benefit from same-sex education: "When you put girls and boys in single sex classrooms, girls get equal treatment with their peers, have more leadership roles, and enjoy a rise in self-esteem. Boys are more willing to learn through cooperation and teamwork." (Gisler and Eberts "Single Sex Classroom Behavior") It is considered that girls as well as boys feel themselves more comfortable and behave opener while studying in the classrooms with students only of their sex. Females do not fall under the dominant roles of males so that they are able to express their leadership skills. Males, in their turn, are not obsessed with the idea of making impression on females so that they do not perceive their classmates as competitors. As a result, the percentage of bullying, tease, provocation, and humiliation becomes lower in the single-sex classes.

A number of reports over demographics of students in sex-segregated classrooms show that some groups of learners succeed in such classes the most. For instance, Cornelius Riordan found that African-American and Hispanic students do their best and demonstrate great results while studying at single-sex schools (Cable and Spradlin 6). Therefore, Riordan claims that sex-separated classrooms are beneficial for girls and minority boys since they provide students with friendly atmosphere and prevent the development of racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes and, eventually, discrimination. Many educators hereby expect that same-sex classrooms would solve the problem of Black and Latino males' acceptance within educational institutions.

## **Disadvantages of sex-segregated classrooms**

The question of establishment and perception of gender roles within single-sex classrooms becomes simultaneously the advantage and the disadvantage of same-sex education. On the one hand, it helps to prevent the growth of gender roles stereotyping. However, the negative effect of single-sex classrooms lies in the fact that these traditional gender expectations may be reinforced. Mostly it can be the problem in the girls' classes as females are forced to manifest leadership skills and start to accustom themselves to solve complicated tasks independently. When there is no mutual cooperation between the opposite sexes, the traditional understanding of gender roles becomes distorted – the representatives of each sex perform tasks of both sexes. As a result, the gap between male and female sexes continues to grow that would entail the irreparable consequences in future. That is why, the issue of gender roles turns from the advantage into disadvantage, while speaking about single-sex education. Another controversial impact of sex-segregated classrooms relates to the students' level of improvement in academics and their better performance within the same-sex classes. Along with positive practice when single-sex classes demonstrated good results in academic performance of some groups of students, there are also other reports that indicate some demographics of students show little or no improvement in academic achievements. For instance, several schools in the United States refused to continue the practice of single-sex classrooms because they turned to be ineffective: “There was no significant improvement in test scores or grades and, for the boys, discipline problems escalated.” (Cable and Spradlin 8) Overall,



different researches show different results that lead to the deeper controversies over the effectiveness of the same-sex education. English teacher Virginia Fosnock from the Middle School Academy in East Boston confirms that some groups of students (for instance, boys) do better in coed classes, at the same time, another group (for instance, girls) show better results in same-sex classrooms (Cable and Spradlin 8).

What is the most obvious and undoubted problem of single-sex education is that such classrooms do not give young people opportunities to foster relationships with the opposite sex. Critics argue that same-sex schooling is not able to imitate the atmosphere of the “real life” and situations in the workplace. Moreover, sex-separated classrooms do not allow the harmonious relationships between the sexes to develop, and they prevent foster understanding (Cable and Spradlin 8). In some cases, separated classrooms can lead to sexism (Cable and Spradlin 8). In other situations, they promote in students an inability to communicate and cooperate with the opposite sex. Disharmony in relationships between the opposite sexes can be aggravated because students do not have proper imagination about the traditional gender roles and responsibilities. Therefore, it is important for both males and females to study together with the opposite sex in order to be able to built fair relationships in their future life.

Among other counterpoints given by critics of sex-segregated classrooms there is one that touches on the law. A number of people who reject this type of schooling refer to the illegality of same-sex classes and speak about segregated environments that are actually prohibited by the government. Critics still assert about the violation of the 19th Amendment, the Civil Rights

Act of 1964, and Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 (Bond and Talevi 2). In addition, another group of opponents of sex-segregated education states that it causes more discipline problems, especially among boys (Cable and Spradlin 8). Males become more aggressive and uncontrolled that results in worse outcomes in academic achievements. Another fair counterpoint is that the educational system itself is not completely ready to the new type of teaching. Those students who choose single-sex education voluntary are obviously waiting for the higher level of education. That is why, schools should have not only special program and curriculum for each sex, but they need to hire professional teachers who are better trained and aware of these special gender courses as well (Cable and Spradlin 7).

## **Conclusion**

Sex-segregated classrooms are considered as the new method of solving such problems as students' underachievement, spread of gender stereotypes, discrimination on the basis of sex, etc. But although this type of teaching seeks to eliminate all these problems and even demonstrate some positive results, the question about effectiveness and usefulness of same-sex classrooms still remains ambiguous and controversial. The advocates of sex-separated classrooms state that fluid gender is better expressed in all-girls and all-boys environments. The gender role stereotypes are decreased so that each sex is able to behave according to its own wishes. Secondly, students of same-sex classes are less distracted by the opposite sex so that they can fully concentrate on studying. That is why boys start to work cooperatively. In terms of academic achievements, minority boys do better

in same-sex classrooms, and girls show better results in the male-dominated subjects. Meanwhile, the amount of disadvantages presents the low effectiveness of single-sex education and reveals its imperfection. Thus, critics speak about reinforcing traditional gender expectations, absence of any improvement in academic performance among several groups of student, the further inability to built harmonious relationships with the opposite sex. Moreover, opponents of single-sex education indicate that it promotes the development of sexism. Other counterpoints that critics give are the unpreparedness of education system to teach students in sex-separated classes; the presence of problems with students' discipline; and finally, critics say about violation of a number of laws that are aimed at the consolidation of the different groups of society.

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