

# The consequences of doing gender in college essay sample



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The most commonly preached and accepted social path for an individual is to go through elementary and secondary school, and immediately follow that with some sort of a post-secondary education. We must take the skills we have learned in grade school and apply them, as we become adults. Schools where a student can receive a degree are regarded as the highest quality by society. We are lead to believe that the college or university campus is filled with equality and equal opportunity. In reality, college reaffirms the gender frames we have understood throughout our lives thus far and strengthens that reality even after we graduate. The gendered division of labor that we see in the workplace is formed long before we enter that arena. Both inside and outside the classroom, there are many examples of the socially constructed gender differences; violating these constructions would be a violation of our gender roles. This essay will argue that the college experience solidifies our gender roles as students experience the process of 'doing gender', resulting in a continuation of these patterns in our lives even beyond post-secondary school (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Embedded within this argument are the theories of Barbara Risman. In order to explore the sociology of the effects of college culture, we must first acknowledge that we need to conceptualize gender as a social structure. The actuality that gender is so entrenched with the individual, interactional, and institutional aspects of society will help to explain the phenomenon of gendered differences in college life (Risman, 2004). In this case, we look specifically at gender at an interactional level, but not before recognizing gender at the institutional level. Gender is seen as a primary frame in our society (Ridgeway, 2007). The college campus is no different. Student

housing as well as bathrooms and change rooms are segregated by sex. Students are asked what sex they are when they apply to any university or college. 'Mixers' or 'socials' are held for the purpose of meeting other students, but specifically so that students of the opposite sex can interact.

The gendered structure of college starts before students even apply to an institution. In the past 30 years, there has been an exponential increase in women's enrollment in post-secondary schools, to the point where there are now more women than men in Canadian universities; 58% women in 2004 (Andres and Adamuti-Trache, 2007). While this is extremely positive in terms of gender equality, there is still a very significant discrepancy in terms of what faculties men and women are entering. Women are the large majority when it comes to social work, household science, and nursing and the minority in mathematics, physical sciences, engineering and applied science. Why is this happening? Even after the boom of female enrollment in the 1980s, women are still expected to follow a particular life path that consisted of marriage and family as a priority. As a result many women may not take the pre-requisites in high school to even be eligible to enter the fields of mathematics or engineering. This of course will have long-term effects.

Outside the classroom, the gender divide is executed through physical action and behavior. Students must learn how to interact with one another in a social setting. These interactions outside the classroom provide students the opportunity to be independent. Students are encouraged to try new things and be open-minded, but we discover that the act of doing gender controls many of their decisions. Parties and dances are a very popular place to meet people and interact with the opposite sex. There are several unwritten rules  
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associated with this form of nightlife that create gendered expectations that participants must follow (Ronen, 2010). While it is never explicitly stated, parties and clubs are places where “hook-up’s” are most likely to occur, and restrictions in terms of personal space are almost completely eliminated. Shelly Ronen argues that ‘grinding’, the most predominant form of dancing in these settings, is an extension of the aggressive sexual nature at young age coupled with West and Zimmerman’s concept of ‘doing gender’.

This process involves acting out what we believe to be society’s perception of what it means to be masculine or feminine (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The initiation before a man and woman begin dancing together is perhaps the clearest example of individuals ‘doing gender’. In this space, men are almost exclusively responsible for initiating conversation or some sort of physical interaction. The idea that men must be aggressive and women must be passive only reaffirms our gender stereotypes. This relationship is even more evident in fraternities, as there seems to be an even wider range in terms of what is deemed to be appropriate behavior (Boswell and Spade, 1996).

These behaviors can have very detrimental effects after post-secondary life. When it becomes more and more acceptable for men to continuously make physical and sexual advances on women, it normalizes the idea of male dominance. Furthermore, in Ronen’s research regarding college dance floor conduct, men were never reprimanded for their behavior. The women who were observed dancing politely declined the invitation from the men they did not want to dance with. Men were seen having limited success with some approaches, yet continued to do so. Doing gender in this way leads to a <https://assignbuster.com/the-consequences-of-doing-gender-in-college-essay-sample/>

rationalization by men of potentially violent actions. They perceive the situation so that they believe they have done nothing wrong. In college life men learn to excuse, rationalize, justify, and minimize their behavior, leading to the same patterns showing up in gendered violence (Anderson and Umberson, 2001).

The gendered script of the man approaching the woman is repeated again and again. By internalizing this behavior, we begin to see aspects of our society that seem natural when they are completely constructed by society. The act of a man asking a woman to marry him is a complete duplication of students doing gender on the dance floor. The expectation that men are supposed to initiate conversation is just like the expectation that men are supposed to propose, and as a result, older women are looked at differently if they are not married after a certain age. Men have the control to pick and choose their entire life, making it so that being an unmarried man was defensible. Many unmarried women had the feeling that simply from a biological perspective, they were meant to get married at an age where child-bearing was still a possibility (Sharp and Ganong, 2007).

Just as the many examples of a gender divide shape our understandings of social behavior and aptitude after we graduate, there are also instances where colleges and universities try to lessen the gap. By making strides to promote equality during a student's post-secondary years, they have a better opportunity to seek out that equality later in life. One example of this initiative is Title IX. " Title IX is a federal statute, enacted in 1972, that prohibits sex discrimination in education programs and activities that receive federal funding" (Dufar and Linford, 2010). This statute is most evident when <https://assignbuster.com/the-consequences-of-doing-gender-in-college-essay-sample/>

we look at inter-collegiate athletics. Here it attempts to create equality between the male and female sports programs of schools associated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). As we have stated before, gender is one of the primary social structures we use to identify others. The statute seeks to eliminate the gendered belief that men deserve more funding and attention than women when it comes to athletics, causing it to become a very controversial topic. Regardless of its effect from an economic and logistic standpoint, it is a clear attempt to minimize gendered difference in colleges and universities.

We see these patterns of gender differences reoccur again and again after we leave college. Because there is such a discrepancy among men and women in a particular faculty during university, the career paths they end up taking are inevitably gendered. By doing gender in university, women are forced to do the same after they graduate. In the modern workplace, many women are at a disadvantage right from the start, simply because of the organization of work. Many fields of work, whether they are applied science, business, or politics look for an employee who is a ' disembodied and universal worker'. The reality is that this worker is a man (Acker, 1990). Women who have a post-secondary education may not be prepared for the workplace because they were not asked to acquire the skills required to succeed in university. Our society views paid work much higher than unpaid work, with this social structure resulting in many women being responsible for the unpaid work in their homes.

It is rare in our society to see a man as the primary caretaker for children.

The gender ideology perspective suggests that men and women who are <https://assignbuster.com/the-consequences-of-doing-gender-in-college-essay-sample/>

more aware of gender differences as a social construct (generally produced by childhood socialization) will distribute household labor more equally (Hook, 2006). Many people today still tend to believe that leadership is a masculine trait (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes, 2007). By doing gender, women are not expected and often not given the chance to achieve in the workplace. Other research however, may suggest that there is no bias. After research was conducted at the University of British Columbia regarding job applicants, results indicated that “ gender was not treated as an activated status characteristic whereby men hold the superior state. This was found in spite of a setting and instructions that allowed for status generalization to occur” (Foschi and Valenzuela, 2007).

Women who have had success advancing in the information technology industry have admitted that they were able to succeed because they developed what could be perceived as masculine characteristics (Demaiter and Adams, 2009). While there has been substantial progress for women entering fields that are predominantly male, there is still a lot of work to do. Erin Demaiter and Tracey Adams have argued that a good first step would be to educate the current workforce about the current structural and cultural inequalities (Demaiter and Adams, 2009). I contend that it is just as beneficial, if not more to educate students in colleges and universities about the potential job opportunities in male dominated fields.

In this essay I hope that I have made a clear correlation between the college experience and its effects after graduation. We can see that there are many aspects of students doing gender both inside and outside the classroom, and these patterns are solidified and repeated after they move on. Students are <https://assignbuster.com/the-consequences-of-doing-gender-in-college-essay-sample/>

expected to act a certain way and follow a certain life path, and the college campus is structured to reaffirm these behaviors as normal. Men and women are supposed to act differently and take different courses, which can limit their options later in life. While there have been many initiatives to lessen the gap, there are still many discrepancies when we look at patterns of enrollment and extra curricular activity. Doing gender is not necessarily a bad thing, and our awareness of it can help us with our pursuit of gender equality.

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