

Gender and education sociology essay



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Education is just as an important factor in a persons' life now as it was in the past. Only, the difference between now and the past are the people that are able to receive a complete education. Education was gender segregated for hundreds of years. Men and women went to different schools or were physically and academically separated into coeducational schools. Both had separate academic subjects, separate classrooms, and separate expectations. Women were only taught the social graces and morals, and teaching women academic subjects was considered a waste of time. Men had the choice of continuing education after high school, while women had the household choices ranging from what to wear to what to cook. By being educated for the sake of family and society which needed educated mothers to produce knowledgeable and responsible male citizens, it was expected by men and society that women were to have children, raise those children, and to be the best homemaker. Although today, everyone is entitled to the right to peruse an education, sexism is still maintained in obvious and subtle ways. Ways in which show that gender inequalities are and have been shifting into a more female advantaged educational system.

The inequalities between girls and boys are apparent even before a child begins elementary school. Girls are first introduced to the idea that they are unequal to boys, with girls being dressed in pink and given dolls for toys, while boys are dressed in blue and given toy cars and trucks to play with. Even different behaviors are acceptable for boys than for girls. For example, every time teachers seat or line-up students by gender, they are confirming that girls

and boys should be treated differently. While girls are distinguished for being neat, calm, and quiet; boys are urged to think independently, be active, and voice opinions. Girls are socialized in schools to believe popularity is most important and that educational performance and ability are of lesser importance. “ Girls in grades six and seven rate being popular and well-liked as more important than being perceived as competent or independent. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to rank independence and competence as more important” (Bailey, 1992).

According to Dr. Sax, author of the book *Why Gender Matters*, what parents and teachers should really know about, is that the brain develops differently and is wired differently in each sex. In girls, the language area of the brain develops before the areas for open relations and for geometry. Emotion is processed in the same area of the brain that processes language making it is easier for most girls to talk about their emotions. But for boys, the area involving talking and the areas involving feelings are completely separate. Girls and boys also respond differently when it comes to stress. While stress increases the learning ability in males, the same exact stress actually makes learning more difficult for girls. Ignoring these differences between the male and female mind can increase the chance of misunderstanding among the youth and thus lead to dissocialized outcomes.

Research shows that one is born with either a male or female brain and that nothing can change your brain from male to female. The lay-out of a young boy’s brain is so different compared to that of a young girl that it is easily visible with the naked eye. An example of how a male brain functions differently than that of a female can be seen through a task as simple as

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giving directions. While the male tends to use distances and directions such as east, west, north, and south to map out the path, it is easier for women to use simple reminders such as landmarks.

Knowing how the brain works has a lot to do with knowing how someone learns; it is where everything is stored. When it comes to learning, boys and girls do not learn the same way at all. Psychologists have found that girls set higher standards for themselves when it comes to school, and they look over what they have accomplished more critically than guys do. Recent evidence even shows girls becoming more academically successful than boys, despite reviews showing how boys and girls are still socialized in ways that work against gender equality.

“ Because classrooms are microcosms of society, mirroring its strengths and ills alike, it follows that the normal socialization patterns of young children that often lead to distorted perceptions of gender roles are reflected in the classrooms” (Marshall, 334). Gender bias in education is reinforced through lessons, textbooks, and teacher interactions with students; as well as, through the resources teachers choose for classroom use. For example, textbooks that leave out contributions of women or those that stereotype gender roles. Teachers should be aware of the gender bias hidden within such materials and texts and discontinue their usage.

“ We need to look at the stories we are telling our students and children. Far too many of our classroom examples, storybooks, and texts describe a world

in which boys and men are bright, brave, curious, and powerful, but girls and women are passive, silent, and invisible (McCormick pg. 41).”

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Girls enter school in the first grade with the same skills and ambitions as boys, but due to biased conditioning in the classroom, they suffer lower self-confidence and aspirations by the time they graduate from high school. Even though, two out of every three teachers may be women, they are usually for sexual stereotypes, favoring the assertive male students and the non-assertive female students. Typically, teachers call on boys more often, give them more detailed criticism, and compliment the quality of their work more than girls’ work, while more likely complimenting girls for their neatness. Such bias and stereotypes sparked ideas into many people over the injustice of these outcomes and because of this, equal education was a major theme to write about among many authors.

Mary Wollstonecraft, a female writer in the late 1700s, took a firm position toward the empowerment of women. In 1792 she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which revolves around the idea that women should share equal rights with men relating to education. At the time, women were basically still invisible and secluded from outside activity and they had little to no contact with the world outside their own homes. In order for women to raise well-rounded intelligent children, Wollstonecraft suggested that mothers needed to be educated so that they could successfully raise their children to become contributing members of society (Wollstonecraft Para. 11). She pleaded that women should reject submissive behavior and educate

themselves, building up their own self-esteem and respect, which would turn women into “ more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers-in a word, better citizens” (Para. 16). The education of women would have these positive effects because women would be free from restriction, allowing them to find happiness in sharing common interests with

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their husbands and allowing mothers to assist in the teaching of their children (Para. 14). Wollstonecraft felt that if women had independence in providing support for their own needs that they would be closer to their entitled freedoms and equality, as well as marry for love instead of support.

Daniel Defoe, also a famous writer, expresses how women were taught to do housework and nothing else throughout his essay *The Education of Women*. “ Their youth is spent to teach them to stitch and sew or make baubles. They are taught to read, indeed, and perhaps to write their names, or so; and that is the height of a woman’s education” (Defoe Para. 2). Defoe thought that if women were taught more than housework, then they may gain more wit. He talks about the possible reasons that men had to not educate women and expresses that if men were to give women the same education, women could possibly be smarter than men as “ the capacities of women are supposed to be greater, and their senses quicker than those of men” (Defoe Para. 4). Thus, Defoe believes, men fear women battling for superiority resulting in his views of still restricting women’s education. He limits their education to just learning music, dancing, learning the French and Italian

languages, teaching women to hold an intellectual conversation, and learning history. Obviously, these are not the only things that men were educated in.

The passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 banned single-sex education in American public schools, marking a huge landmark in the fight for gender equal education. It states, “ No person in the U. S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid” (Hansot pg. 19). Before Title IX, women

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were not allowed to be admitted into certain colleges because of state laws prohibiting all women, married or single, from being accepted into their college. Only eighteen percent of women had completed four or more years of college compared to twenty-six percent of young men. Women were also less likely to be in high math or science classes and tended to drop out of school more than males.

After the passing of Title IX, the effects on women became immediately clear within the educational system. The dropout rate of females as well as the number of females who became pregnant declined. There was a significant increase in the completion of bachelor, graduate and professional degrees. By 2004, women were earning 58 percent of all bachelor’s degrees in the United States and according to the Department of Education, the gender gap will only widen in the upcoming decade. “ It certainly seems clear that when women are provided with certain important resources and with opportunities

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to learn and practice specific skills, their academic achievement improves” (Pollard pg. 104). These significant increases in statistics show how Title IX has opened many new opportunities for females.

Title IX was originally enacted to impact high school and collegiate sports; although, it does not specify due to the statute covering all educational activities and complaints alleging discrimination. The statute shows how women can be just as successful as men by allowing both to have equal opportunities. It has made a large impact on the lives of many Americans today, by allowing them to make decisions and choosing any school they would like to attend. It applies to almost everyone, whether you go to an elementary school, or a university or college.

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From all of this, it is clear that women have fought hard for the educational freedoms they are destined to have, but is it possible that women are changing the educational system more to their advantage? Researchers Thomas DiPrete and Claudia Buchmann seek to answer this question and discover the reasons for the growing gender gap. They explained how greater chances of getting and staying married, higher wage earnings, and a better standard of living resulted in the growing number of women achieving success in higher education.

According to data from the General Social Surveys (DiPrete & Buchmann pg. 522) which provides information on educational accomplishment and family background, in individuals born prior to the 1960s, daughters were only equal to sons in families where both parents were college educated.

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Whereas, in less educated families and female headed households, parents favored sons over daughters. Surprisingly, the female disadvantage was even greater in households where mothers had more college experience than fathers.

For those born after the 1960s, the male advantage began to decline.

DiPrete and Buchmann note, “ A shift appears to have taken place between these two periods such that the mothers’ level of education has become more important for daughters and the fathers’ level of education has become more important for sons”(pg. 523). Their research shows that after 1966, the status of fathers within the family became a main influence in forming the educational outcomes of girls and boys. In families where the father was absent or only high school educated, a continual shift has occurred, changing from a male advantage to a female advantage. Boys growing up in such households had, and continue to have, difficulties in obtaining a college degree, despite the fact that prior to 1966, a father’s education did not affect his son’s educational achievement. On the contrary, daughters growing up under the same conditions demonstrated the highest increases in college enrollment and graduation, further influencing future generations of women.

Throughout hundreds of years, the educational system has been an absolute patriarchal system in which the male is in control. But recently over the past few decades we have seen a shift in this control; a change in the educational system that we as a society are so well adapted to. More women are becoming more academically successful than men and are graduating with honor at higher and higher levels. This can be attributed to many the factors mentioned previously; structure changes within the educational system,

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women's increase in labor participation, higher wages, the difference in each person's learning habits and brain make-up, and the effect of background on education. Each factor influences the academic outcomes of each sex. In a society where man once ruled academia and stood as the working figure, women have progressed throughout history to weaken the male role within education among other feats. They have taken gender bias in education and weakened it for the good of the people to give themselves the overall advantage.