

The Benefits of Single-Sex Education

Wendy Chang
English 322-3
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As society today strives for gender equality in every area and for everyone, gender bias has become a controversial issue that raises many questions. Even with all the efforts to end gender bias, however, it is still in society.

Unfortunately, gender bias exists even in education. Even though most schools today provide coed classes, these oftentimes hinder girls and only benefit boys. Research shows that single-sex classes are better for girls and, therefore, should be encouraged. Single-sex classes eliminate gender bias and are proven to give girls both academic and personal benefits.

During the first 200 years in America, women were not allowed in schools.

Education was only for men, so "in colonial times, only a third of all women could even sign their names" (Sajbel 91). It was not until Revolutionary times that women were given the opportunity for education. However, the schools only provided a limited amount of education, and high school education for females was nonexistent until the first half of the nineteenth century (Sajbel 91). At first the schools were all single-sex, but throughout the nineteenth

century the number of coed schools increased. By the end of the 1800's, coeducation got its foothold, "but even as late as the 1960's, students in public coed schools were being funneled into gender-specific classes" (Sajbel 91). Boys took shop and prepared to be wage earners while girls took home economics and prepared to be homemakers. Then in 1972, Congress passed Title IX, a law prohibiting sex discrimination in educational institutions (Malfar interview). Nevertheless, the debate over single-sex classes versus coed classes continued. Although more effort was placed upon gender equality in the early 1990's, such equality oftentimes failed to take place in coed classes. In contrast, single-sex classes can provide gender equality and improve education for girls.

One significant advantage of single-sex classes is the elimination of gender bias that often occurs in coed classes. Myra and David Sadker, authors of Failing at Fairness, commented, "An intrinsic gender bias [exists] in coed schools, resulting in a new interest in all-girls educational institutions" (Sajbel 89). Since coed classes shortchange girls, many concerned parents feel that single-sex classes are the solution. "Research continues to support the fact that women ... do not have equal opportunities" in coeducational settings (Tannen 51). For example, girls are not called on as often as boys in coed classes. Teachers pay more attention to boys since "boys tend to be louder and more aggressive than girls" (Palar 38). Many times teachers tolerate disruptive behavior in boys but discourage the same behavior in girls:

Researchers Myra and David Sadker found that when

boys blurt an answer without being called on, teachers listen.

When girls call out, teachers tell them to raise their hands if they wanted to speak (Palar 40).

The discipline differences between boys and girls are quite obvious, starting as early as kindergarten when teachers and parents allow boys to play rough but tell girls to act like girls. As one teacher noted, favoritism is also an issue in coed classes: "Any teacher can easily get sucked into favoring the boys. You get a thrill from involving a boy who's going to be disruptive; you don't get the same payoff from involving girls who are going to be quiet" (Sajbel 39).

Furthermore, girls receive fewer encouraging comments than boys do because teachers have higher expectations for boys than for girls (Palar 40). When boys ask for help, teachers are likely to tell them to try again, yet when girls ask for help, teachers tend to tell girls the answers right away. In the long run this does not help girls; they are not taught independence. Single-sex classes eliminate competition for attention and favoritism towards boys as well as provide better opportunities for learning. Single-sex classes remove gender bias and unequal treatment that exist in coed classes.

Once girls are free from the gender bias of coed classes, they perform better academically. As studies show, boys and girls enter school with about the same abilities until approximately seventh grade, "but by the time they graduate from high school, boys do better than girls in math and science" (Palar 39). Furthermore, research indicates that "coed schools show an inherent and often inadvertent bias against females in textbooks, teaching techniques

and standardized tests" (Sajbel 91). Clearly, minimizing this bias is advantageous to girls. Single-sex classes reinforce girls' individuality and "boost girls' lagging self-perceptions in areas such as math and science" ("Growing Smart" www). Apparently, girls show more interest in math and science when taught in single-sex classes. If it works in math and science, it would follow that gains in all subject areas would logically evolve. Therefore, single-sex classes are more beneficial academically for girls.

Not only do single-sex classes offer academic advantages, but also personal benefits. For instance, distractions are eliminated when the sexes are separated, thereby allowing students to "think about something besides their hormones" (Hancock 76). Additionally, all-girl schools offer a nurturing environment in which girls are not afraid to try (Sajbel 90). The teaching style and the single-sex environment make girls feel more comfortable in class. Classmates are also friendlier. A student in a single-sex school said that in all-girl schools one is respected for doing well in class, instead of being mocked by other students (Sajbel 93). Another problem is that adolescent girls have lower self-esteem than adolescent boys, but single-sex education compensates for this disparity. All-girl schools work hard to honor every individual student, build self-confidence, and teach each person to have a better self-image (Tannen 54). Many times it is hard to find female role models since men typically hold the positions of power:

Universally acknowledged is that girls' schools promote leadership, because all positions of power are held by

girls. Female teachers provide strong, intelligent role models and prove it's okay for women to be smart (Sajbel 92).

The personal advantages of single-sex classes are fewer distractions, more comfort, higher self-esteem, and appropriate role models.

Single-sex classes provide many things that coed classes cannot, especially a non-gender biased education, academic advantages, and a comfortable learning environment. Society should ensure gender equality in schools by not allowing the present inequality to continue. The solution to this problem is single-sex classes.

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