

Does the educational system shortchange females?

By [Charles S. Clark](#)

Introduction

Two decades after winning battles for equal access, women's activists are seeking reform of what they see as an education system still weighted against females. They point to girls' declining self-esteem, a gender gap on SAT tests and new research showing that girls receive less attention from teachers than boys. Applications to women's colleges have shot up, and some schools are experimenting with girls-only science and math classes. Congress is moving to create a federal Office of Gender Equity and expand programs to train teachers in how to avoid giving girls short shrift. But critics of the gender-equity movement point to recent strides women have made in educational achievement. They warn that efforts to eliminate bias are a futile exercise in "political correctness."

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Overview

"When I was in fourth grade, I was a very assertive tomboy," says Cynthia Mahood, recalling her girlhood in South Dakota. "But sometime around the fifth grade I went from extrovert to painfully shy introvert. I was told by my teachers that my behavior before had been inappropriate, not like a young lady. It's amazing how influenced I was."

Mahood's shyness and reluctance to speak in class endured all the way through high school. It was only at all-female Mills College, in Oakland, Calif., that she broke out of her shell. "When I came home for Christmas after that first semester," says Mahood, a junior majoring in biochemistry, "my friends were telling each other, 'I finally had a full conversation with Cynthia.' They were amazed I even had an opinion. I hadn't seen the change until they mentioned it."

Surveys show that girls growing up in America often retreat inside themselves as Mahood did. "Going underground" is how Carol Gilligan, a co-founder of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development, describes the phenomenon. Many experts link it to declining academic performance as girls go through puberty.

"Girls and boys enter school roughly equal," says an influential 1992 report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*. "On some measures of school readiness, such as fine-motor control, girls are ahead of boys. Twelve years later, girls have fallen behind their male classmates in key areas such as higher-level mathematics and measures of self-esteem." 

Girls' self-esteem is especially vulnerable. A 1990 poll of 2,400 girls and 600 boys commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) found that 60 percent of elementary school girls and 67 percent of boys agreed with the statement, "I'm happy the way I am." But when high school students were asked the same question, the percentage of girls who were happy with themselves dropped to 29 percent, compared with 46 percent for boys. 

As girls encounter adolescence, observers note, many begin prefacing their speech with disclaimers such as "I don't know," or, "I may be wrong, but. . . ." Adolescence "is hard and wonderful for most kids, but there are differences between the experiences of boys and girls," says Annie Rogers, an assistant professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Girls ages 12-13 no longer know what they knew. They doubt the grounds of their own perception. They question themselves as they hone their skills of abstraction of knowledge."

The reasons girls retreat inside themselves may be more than psychological. Advocates for gender equity were galvanized this spring by the publication of *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* by American University education Professors Myra and David Sadker. Describing adolescence for girls as "the tightening of a corset," the Sadkers tied the shyness phenomenon to the education system's "gender-biased" tests and textbooks, the harms of sexual harassment and a culture in which expectations for achievement are lower for girls than for boys. (See stories, pp. 488, 494.) After evaluating teachers in action in 100 classrooms in four states, the Sadkers found "a syntax of sexism so elusive that most teachers and students were completely unaware of its existence."  (See story, p. 486.)

Bias against girls also has become the concern of groups working outside the school milieu. New York City-based Girls Inc., devoted to improving the health, academic performance and self-confidence of girls from low-income families around the country, recently published a handbook for its youth workers that asks, "Do staff assign tasks based on gender stereotypes -- get girls to decorate, clean up, take minutes and do other secretarial tasks while boys get to carry or move things, climb ladders, make decisions and help fix things?" 

For increasing numbers of Americans, the solution to perceived gender inequity is to separate female and male students. Applications

to the nation's 84 women's colleges are up 10 percent, on average, for the third year in a row, reports the Women's College Coalition. Despite a federal law against sex discrimination in public schools, all-girl science and math classes have been set up at high schools in Ventura, Calif., and at a school for gifted students in Aurora, Ill.

With encouragement from the Clinton administration, legislation is working its way through Congress to establish an Office of Gender Equity in the Education Department that would distribute grants to train teachers in avoiding gender bias. "After 20 years, gender equity at long last is getting to the center of public debate," says Leslie Wolfe, president of the Center for Women Policy Studies, who ran women's educational-equity programs in the Carter administration. "It's very exciting that people are saying, 'Yes, damn it, that's true.'"

Detractors, however, speak disparagingly of the arrival of "feminist algebra." ⁵ Kristi Hamrick, spokeswoman for the conservative Family Research Council, says gender equity is a way for feminists to divide society and "judge people not by the content of their character but by their sex. Gender norming insinuates that boys are better, which is insulting to what it is to be a woman."

Diane Ravitch, a Bush administration education official who is now a senior research scholar at New York University, points out that women today outnumber men in college, making up 55 percent of undergraduates and 59 percent of master's candidates. "In every case of civil rights law, you end up relying on representation, so what more do they want?" she asks. "What will gender equity accomplish except provide money for people who advocate the legislation?"

Progress has been made, acknowledges Whitney Ransome, co-director of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools. But in the 1980s, she says, society and the women's movement underwent a "seismic shift." Previously, equality meant equal access. "But does access alone define equal treatment? Yes, there are equal numbers, but what is the quality of the experience? A level playing field doesn't always mean working side by side."

How the gender-equity debate plays out will hinge on the following issues:

Is the education system unfair to females?

The gender-equity debate pits data against anecdote and divides advocates over whether the metaphorical glass is half-full or half-empty.

The National Assessment of Education Progress -- a set of achievement tests at three grade levels known popularly as "the nation's report card" -- shows that girls score as well as boys in math at age 9, but then fall behind by age 17. ⁶ The reasons, the argument goes, are unequal expectations for girls, a lack of encouragement and too few female role models. A 1987 study of science classes, for example, showed that when teachers needed help carrying out a demonstration, 79 percent chose boys. ⁷

The Sadkers cite research showing that boys call out in class eight times more than girls, which grabs the teacher's attention. Their evaluations of teachers in classrooms found that in their control group, more attention was consistently paid to boys than girls, worsening as the weeks went by and producing an overall attention gap as high as 14 percent. White males were most likely to receive attention, followed by minority males, white females and minority females. ⁸

Teachers showed a sexist bias in about a third of the classes studied by University of Michigan psychology Professor Jacquelynne Eccles, though "the biggest gender difference is that boys get yelled at more than the girls," she says. ⁹

Those who question the bias findings point to the sweeping progress made by females over the past 20 years. In 1973, only 43 percent of high school girls went to college, compared with 50 percent of boys, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Nowadays, 67 percent of high school girls go to college, compared with only 58 percent of boys. Similarly, the number of girls enrolling in difficult math and science courses is up dramatically: The percentage of girls taking high school algebra rose from 35 percent in 1982 to 51 percent in 1990, those taking geometry rose from 46 percent to 65 percent and those in chemistry rose from 30.3 percent to 50 percent. ¹⁰

"At a high school graduation, girls get the most prizes and honors," says feminism critic Phyllis Schlafly, president of the Eagle Forum, in Alton, Ill. "And most teachers are female. Are they saying there's a conspiracy against girls?"

If self-esteem can be measured in academic ambitions, it should be noted that freshman girls, for the first time in history, were more likely than men to plan on getting an advanced degree, according to the 28th annual survey of college freshmen conducted in 1993 by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California- Los Angeles (UCLA).

"Part of the drumbeat for gender equity is based on the idea that girls are burdened by low self-esteem, but it's demonstrably untrue," says Ravitch, citing the UCLA survey. "The Sadkers make their claim with no objective evidence. In the end, who wins the race? Maybe it's better if teachers don't call on girls. I've seen studies showing that Korean students had low self-esteem but the highest grades. This

is a political-correctness kind of issue, but there are facts here.”

The Sadkers deny that their research is as “soft” and anecdotal as critics say. “We spent one and a half years designing the evaluation form we used in 100 classrooms,” says Myra Sadker. “The raters then circled items to show who was called on, and categorized the teacher’s reaction as one of either praise, acceptance, remediation or criticism. We found that the gender gaps were greater when teacher feedback was more specific, both positive and negative. It certainly doesn’t seem anecdotal.”

While there are encouraging signs at the national level, the argument that women have made great strides “is mixing apples and oranges,” says Susan McGhee Bailey, executive director of the Wellesley Center for Research on Women. “We have made progress because women and men have worked hard at progress.” The fact that females are a majority on campus “doesn’t speak to those not making it. Feminists 100 years ago would have hoped we’d be further along by now. Look at the small percentages of professors who are female. It’s 50 percent at Wellesley, but not at most places.”

Continued discrimination in physical education programs “is obvious,” says Nancy Huppertz, an equity specialist with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Ore. “There [also] are chronic patterns of disproportionate enrollment in science, computers and vocational ed. And look at what happens after college. There’s only one female head of a medical school. There is still a glass ceiling and a sticky floor” of low-wage women’s jobs. “It’s subtle, but we need to look beyond the letter to the spirit of the law.”

Do males and females learn differently?

When questions were raised about bias in the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (now called the Scholastic Assessment Tests), the College Board in 1989 issued a report on the politically delicate topic of differences between males and females.¹¹ Beginning soon after a child’s birth, the paper noted, parents react more positively toward their toddlers when they engage in gender-appropriate behavior.

“Boys are more interested than girls in (among other things) guns, team sports and in making and fixing things,” it said, citing research from the mid-1980s. “Girls prefer dolls, sewing, cooking and dancing.” Current research shows no gross anatomical difference between male and female brains, the report also noted. There are “structural (and hormonal) differences related to the fact that women menstruate and men do not,” but these differences “have not been reliably associated with differences in cognitive functioning.”

As they enter school, males are better at visualizing spatial relationships and performing tasks involving reasoning, with girls better at computation, the report continued. But such differences are narrowing. “With the exception of some limited domains of spatial ability and performance at the top levels of mathematics achievement, women are improving their position relative to men.”¹²

Among gender-equity advocates, there is willingness to acknowledge gender differences. “Research shows differences for males and females on three of the major approaches to learning styles,” according to two women’s groups. “Schools are geared more to the learning styles of white males, which tend to be individualistic and competitive. In contrast, many girls prefer cooperation over competition, acknowledging and building on others’ ideas to define common meanings over individual contributions, and understanding over assessment.”¹³

Girls form leaderless groups, boys form hierarchies, Nancy Goldberger told a 1991 Educational Testing Service (ETS) conference. “Girls tend to see the role of peers as support. Girls acknowledge the uncertainty of knowledge and believe that peers, by listening to each other and sharing the floor, can create a relaxed and unpressured atmosphere in which disagreement can be addressed. Girls put less emphasis on reconciling disagreement than on understanding where others are coming from. Boys tend to see the role of peers as challengers and partners in argument. One speaks to show what one knows; one argues with others to sharpen one’s position. Devil’s advocacy is a strategy that is far more comfortable for and utilized by boys and men than girls and women.”¹⁴

Many in the computer industry have noted that men -- the vast majority of computer users -- buy new software, play games and experiment, while women more often simply use word processing. “Women consider computers the way they consider Cuisinarts. They’re there for a purpose,” says Katie Payne, president of Delahaye Group Inc., a Portsmouth, N.H., market-research firm. If the computer system crashes, women simply want to call in help and get back to work. “The guys want to solve the problem.”¹⁵

Whether such differences are from nature or nurture remains a mystery. “My husband is an engineer,” recalls Schlafly, “and he gave the same sales talk to our four sons and two daughters saying they should study engineering because there they won’t teach you any untruths. All four boys did it, but neither of the girls. They couldn’t get interested, and we couldn’t make them, though they got good grades in different courses.”

Still, gender-equity activists emphasize that many of the differences reflect problems that could be overcome. “As boys get older, those who do not like math are more likely to attribute this feeling to the subject itself; they don’t like math, they say, because it is ‘not useful.’” says the AAUW report. “Girls, instead, interpret their problems with math as personal failures.”¹⁶

Anita Mattison, who teaches an all-girls math class in Ventura, Calif., noticed how in class discussions the “girls keep on with something

that we'd pretty much exhausted, like each of them had to explain it their way," a tendency the teacher viewed as a sign that the girls "needed reinforcement." ¹⁷

Ransome says there is too much emphasis in education on the vocabulary of sports and military metaphors -- "going the distance, tackling a problem." With computers, there is talk of "commands, as if the wrong command will blow the thing up or kill someone," she says. By contrast, the word menu implies that you have a series of options and that if you make a mistake, you can choose another, which is a style more accessible to girls.

Many women are passive learners "because they see math as a prepackaged set of instructions to be followed exactly as their teacher presents it," writes math Professor Ann B. Oakes. "They do not consider that they might make sense of this material or ponder over it, nor do they see mathematics as consisting of ideas generated by human beings in response to human exploration." ¹⁸

Janice Damico, who teaches sixth-grade math in Arlington, Va., says that girls do better when it is made clear that math is something that can be applied in the real world. "I think it's nuts to say that math is some kind of logic problem for girls. The key is coming up with strategies to attack a problem. Once they become more confident in that, math won't be the big bugagoo it has been."

Huppertz says studies show that girls who participate (raise their hands) in class perform better. "It helps if another girl starts off talking, setting a pattern that it is OK to discuss and that there is not a risk of getting it wrong and being chopped down," she says. "Boys have always had to have a thick skin, and there are greater expectations for them to become tough."

The notion of creating a non-competitive learning environment for girls, however, strikes some as a disservice. "The engine of our democracy runs on the fuel of competition," says Janet Parshall, assistant to the president of Concerned Women of America. "Competition is healthy in class. I married my high school sweetheart after we competed in class to see who got the best grade. It was the spark that lit the magic in our relationship."

Ravitch argues that "there is no evidence that boys and girls have differently wired brains. It's like saying there is a black or an Asian way of learning. Besides, some boys would learn more in a cooperative environment."

"Acculturation and socialization encourage traits and styles in girls and boys that are different," says Bailey. "But it is important that we think about the similarities rather than focus on the differences. By looking at the girls' situation and finding solutions, we may help boys, too."

Is female-only education a good idea?

Carol Denker, a vocational counselor at Madison Park High School in Boston, thinks many of the girls she sees would benefit from all-girl classes or schools. "The boys are loud and foulmouthed, they dominate, and they need to be smarter than the girls," she says. "The girls are afraid to get good grades because that will threaten their boyfriends. I try to tell the girls to think of their future, but the culture is so strong, it's really difficult."

Women's colleges, private and parochial girls' academies and some experimental all-girl classes in public schools all recently have been the subject of fresh arguments for gender-segregated learning. "Young women from single-sex schools enter the coeducational community with a counterpoint to the messages of prime-time television and daily school immersion in the adolescent subculture," says Roberta Felker, principal of Seton Academy in South Holland, Ill. "They bring not only a sense of strength and possibility but also what

[National Public Radio reporter] Linda Wertheimer calls 'the critical thing for women getting their education: a taste for power.' " ¹⁹

In advertisements in The New York Times, the private Emma Willard School in Troy, N.Y., says it seeks to help girls "recognize that success need not be at odds with their femininity."

The National Coalition of Girls Schools advises prospective students that, "You will know it's OK to take intellectual risks because the classroom is an arena for cooperative discovery. . . . Self-confidence and self-esteem come from experiencing success . . . not just the brains and the beauties and the jocks, but every girl." Almost 100 percent of girls' school graduates go to college -- all of them with four years of math under their belts -- and they are four times as likely as their peers to plan careers in math, science and technology, the coalition says. ²⁰

In all-female schools, "girls are taken much more seriously because they're the only act in town," says Ransome. "That means they get the lead in plays and are the major sports players." And at many women's colleges, proponents point out, female students are offered more role models because more professors and guest speakers are female.

Critics of female schools often object less to the segregation of sexes than to their elitist or ideological orientation. "Feminists will support a liberal Smith or Wellesley, but would they support a conservative women's Bible college?" asks Parshall. Ravitch believes in single-sex education, but because they "focus more on academics and are less distracting, not because they're havens from oppression."

There is no question that women's colleges are for high-achieving, professionally oriented women, says Janet McKay, president of Mills College. "But 70 percent of our students marry and have careers, which is a higher rate than that of professional women across the board. Statistically, our graduates have a better chance of balancing work and home life."

The image of women's colleges as artificial environments that breed man-haters is contested by their students. "We get comments from people who think we're feminists running around with meat cleavers," says Mills student Mahood. "But I have a boyfriend, and Mills provides a van that goes to the nearby campus of Berkeley, where we can cross-register for courses. Some people say it's easier to meet men if they're in your classes and extra-curriculars, but I haven't felt that way. My priority is to become a doctor, and everything else will come along by itself."

While many gender-equity specialists accept the option of female schools in the private sector, the recent experiments in all-girl classes within coed schools are more controversial. When St. Stephens & St. Agnes, a private middle and high school in Alexandria, Va., became coed in 1989, the faculty discussed ways to deal with gender inequity, according to David Carmen, a math teacher who directs the middle school. There was an agreement that in subjects such as English and history, where the general mode is discussion, the students "liked hearing what the other gender thinks because there are distinct girl and boy viewpoints." In math, however, "there is no boys' point of view, even though boys tend to appreciate the thrill of solving a quadratic equation while the girls appreciate the beauty of it."

It was decided to separate the genders in math from sixth to eighth grade, with all teachers teaching both types of classes. "We cover the same material, but boys are more individualistic, while the girls work in groups," Carmen says. Evaluations so far give the school reason for optimism.

General data on the success of single-sex experiments are scarce, but positive. Fifty-six percent of the students in an all-female math class at the University of Missouri-Kansas City went on to enroll in another math class, compared with only 17 percent of females in mixed classes, and the all-female class posted better grades and completion rates. ²¹

As part of the UCLA survey of college freshmen, women who declared traditionally male majors -- such as engineering -- were asked whether their grades and levels of satisfaction were influenced by the number of women in their classes. "It turned out that women tended to be more satisfied with their field when they were in classes with many women," says Linda Sax, an associate director at the Higher Education Research Institute. "But that was because they were satisfied with their chosen field, not because of the composition of the classroom. The one exception was the area of persistence. If women have other women in their class, they're more likely to persist."

Wolfe of the Center for Women Policy Studies bemoans the fact that "people I love and respect have decided to get out of those 'awful' coed classes. But single-sex classes are wrongheaded. The message that gets out is that this is the only thing that works," she says. "Coed institutions need to learn from single-sex institutions about what works. We don't want to let teachers and administrators off the hook" in the schools that 90 percent of girls attend.

Huppertz quotes an educator who said, "'Single-sex classes are intervention, not prevention.' In the short term, it will help that group," she says, "but in the long run it is conceding defeat."

"We need more research on single-sex classes," says Bailey of Wellesley. "They can send a message that girls need special attention, which can be undermining rather than empowering. The real issue is what should go on in the classroom. If it works in single-sex, why not use it in mixed classes?"

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Background

If differences between the sexes "consist only in women's bearing and begetting children, this does not amount to proof that a woman differs from a man in respect of the sort of education she should receive." ²² This egalitarian sentiment from the philosopher Plato did not carry the day in ancient Greece, which set Western civilization on a course that placed little value on educating females other than for domestic chores.

For centuries, the prevailing view was similar to that expressed by 17th-century French writer Jean de la Bruyere, who compared an educated woman with a gun that one shows as a collector's item, "but which has no use at all, any more than a carousel horse." ²³

There was a common fear that teaching a female to read would expose her to dangerously bawdy stories. Even the 14th-century French poet Christine de Pisan, one of the earliest advocates of female education, believed that it "should be narrower than men's because their tasks in life were different." ²⁴

During the 18th-century intellectual revolution known as the Enlightenment, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote that women should be educated for the sake of men, “to please them, be useful to them, get them to love and honor them, raise them when young, care for them when grown, counsel them, console them, render life sweet and agreeable to them.”²⁵

By the end of the 18th century, a movement for public education for women had been spurred by English writer Mary Wollstonecraft's treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. In 1787, statesman-physician Benjamin Rush created the Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia with the goal of educating women to help promote political liberty, though it was not envisioned that the graduates would use their knowledge in the public arena. At about the same time, Quakers started the fledgling nation's first coed schools.

Wealthy families of the time often provided their daughters with tutors, but for the most part, girls seeking to learn were smuggled into schools after boys had gone home at night, to be given quick lessons from moonlighting schoolmasters who demanded extra fees.²⁶ Still, from 1819-35, 32 academies were incorporated in America with the word “female” in their names.²⁷

In 1833, Oberlin became first college to make no distinction between the genders, and in 1837, Mount Holyoke, in Northampton, Mass., became the first of the elite Seven Sisters women's colleges. When there were concerns that educating women would turn them away from religious faith, Holyoke scientist Lydia White Shattuck assured worriers, “I have yet to learn that because of these studies, any of our students have become less reverent toward the Bible or less confident of the divine love and care.”²⁸

As more women's colleges were founded, often as part of the abolitionist movement, resistance to women applicants continued at male schools. In 1858, the University of Michigan rejected three female applicants after a nationally publicized debate. It held out until 1870, after passage of the federal Land Grant Act, when taxpayers began demanding college slots for their daughters. (Michigan professors, it is recorded, persisted in addressing women students as “Mr.”)²⁹

Coeducation Movement

A key proponent of coeducation was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a 19th-century American suffragist who argued that “if the sexes were educated together, we should have the healthy, moral and intellectual stimulus of sex ever quickening and refining all the faculties, without the undue excitement of senses that results from novelty in the present system of isolation.”³⁰

Still influential, however, were the writings of Harvard Professor Edward Clarke, who warned in *Sex in Education* in 1873 that if newly menstruating women attended school during adolescence, blood would be diverted from [their] reproductive organs to the brain. The result would be “monstrous brains and puny bodies . . . flowing thought and constipated bowels.”³¹ In 1885, the AAUW undertook its first national study, designed to dispel the notion that higher education was harmful to women's health.

By 1900, 98 percent of public high schools were coed, and by 1910, 58 percent of colleges and universities. The coed movement, however, was driven less by philosophy than by economic demands of tax-weary citizenry. “In thinly populated districts,” a historian wrote in 1896, “it was found that the number of pupils was too small to admit of separate schools being provided for boys and girls.”³²

Coeducation, of course, did not necessarily mean equal treatment. “There was no prejudice against women students” at the University of California-Berkeley, wrote industrial-engineering student Lillian Moller Gilbreth in 1900. “Consequently, it was a surprise, and a painful one, to aim for a Phi Beta Kappa key, only to learn there would be no girls on the list because, ‘when it came to finding a job, men needed the help of this honor more than women did.’”³³

Women's colleges were still disdained by many in academia as “institutions for glorified spinsterhood,” as one critic called them, and when Radcliffe College was founded in 1893, its students could use the library at neighboring Harvard only at night.³⁴

Gender Equity

The blossoming of the modern women's movement in the 1960s and '70s put women's colleges on the defensive, as the theme of the day became equal access. In one six-month period in 1968, almost a fourth of all women's colleges either closed or merged with men's institutions.³⁵

The movement reached its pinnacle when Congress passed the Education Amendments of 1972. Its Title IX -- permitting the government to withhold education funds from any school or college violating the act -- became “the best stick we ever had,” says Wolfe.

Under Title IX, “No person in the United States, shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” To date, no Title IX

funds have been withheld, though the threat to do so has influenced many institutions' policies. ³⁶

The states, during this period, began passing Equal Rights Amendments that affected schools, and in 1974, Congress passed the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA). Introduced by Rep. Patsy T. Mink, D-Hawaii (who introduced its reauthorization in 1993), the law channeled federal education dollars to enforcement of Title IX and research into reducing gender bias in education.

WEEA programs had high priority in the Carter administration, but in the Reagan-Bush era they were continually targeted for elimination. Funding for the programs shrank from \$10 million in 1980 to \$500,000 in 1992.

As the 1990s dawned, an event on a West Coast campus highlighted the fact that the women's movement's call for equal access was no longer quite so simple. In 1990, the Board of Trustees of Mills College, citing a shortage of students and shaky funding, voted to admit men for the first time in the school's 138-year history. Students felt betrayed. "Mills is like a sanctuary from sexism and all the trash that goes with it," said freshman Elizabeth Bales. "They've taken that away from us." ³⁷

With alumni threatening to cease sending donations, students called a strike. Within two weeks, the board reversed its ruling, having developed a plan to boost the endowment and alumni giving. Applications began pouring in, and by fall 1993, Mills welcomed its largest entering class ever -- still all-female.

"There was a feeling that we did something remarkable," said strike participant Giulietta Aquino. "In that period where we turned over the administration, that was worth the four-year education." ³⁸

Textbook Sexism

When feminist scholarship emerged in the 1970s, a key theme was gender bias in textbooks. "Dick and Jane as Victims," a 1975 study of 134 reading books used in elementary schools, found that "boy-centered" stories outnumbered "girl-centered" stories more than 2 to 1. ³⁹

In 1976, the Association of American Publishers issued a statement on bias-free materials, advising publishers to "avoid excluding women with the use of the pronoun 'he' by pluralizing . . . and employ generic terms such as doctor, lawyer, actor, teacher, secretary and poet for both male and females."

Today's equity activists still find flaws with textbooks. Prentice-Hall's 1992 A History of the United States, contains four illustrations of males for every female, and less than 3 percent of its text deals with women, according to the Sadkers. ⁴⁰

The AAUW and others note that textbooks nearly always portray settlers and scientists as men, and that Marie Curie is often the only female scientist mentioned. They cite the neglect of important women such as Catherine Littlefield Greene, who aided in Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin, and English author Aphra Behn, who wrote novels 30 years before Daniel Defoe, whose Robinson Crusoe is often called the first English novel. ⁴¹ Ironically, Defoe asserted that "one of the most barbarous customs in the world [is] that we deny the advantages of learning to women." ⁴²

"We do need women's heroes in history books, because we won't get them elsewhere," says Wolfe. "We're not changing facts, just how we look at them." The current curriculum is "still the macho star system, concentrating on oppression and conquest rather than social justice. If the curriculum is alienating to women, they won't learn. This is an attempt at supplying a corrective."

Roger Rogalin, vice president for the school division at the Association of American Publishers, says textbooks reflect the way society views the role of women. After complaints in the 1970s, an effort was made to show females in a variety of jobs. "But then there was a backlash, saying we never show women as homemakers."

Many of the critics are from special-interest groups and tend to generalize after flipping to a few pages of the book, he says. "The textbook publishers probably have more awareness of the issue than the state textbook-adoption boards."

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Current Situation

Women's-equity advocates have rallied round the Clinton administration, which has called for a \$3 million boost in funding for gender-equity programs in the Education Department. And the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, for the first time, has produced a broad legislative package addressing gender issues.

Originally comprised of nine bills, the package has been attached to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization, which has passed the House. (See "Chronology," p. 493.) It would create a federal Office of Gender Equity; provide for more data collection on gender, race and socioeconomic status; boost math and science education; permit schools to use general funds to combat sexual harassment; and target funds toward girls who are pregnant or new parents.

"To increase the effectiveness of WEEA," said Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo., "we must shift the program's major focus to putting effective strategies in place in individual schools, while continuing the important research and development."

Critics, such as Parshall of Concerned Women, deride the bill as "a ridiculous Christmas list of feminism . . . mandatory political correctness." Schlafly calls the bill "a boondoggle for feminists to get government money." U.S. News & World Report columnist John Leo warns that it will bring "indoctrination and federal monitoring. By identifying all girls as victims, it attempts to appropriate funding for one sex that ought to go generally to the schools." 

Single-Sex Schools

The women's movement has become divided in recent years on the controversial issue of male-only schools. Debate has swirled around court challenges to proposed all-male public schools in Detroit and to traditional, publicly funded, male military colleges, namely the Virginia Military Institute and The Citadel in South Carolina.

When the Detroit Board of Education in 1991 announced plans for special schools for African-American males, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) joined with the National Organization for Women (NOW) in a challenge. "Parents are being asked to make a cruel and unusual choice," said Helen R. Neuborne, executive director of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. "In the struggle for limited educational resources, they are being told that the way to save their boys is to give them a better education than is currently offered girls. This is unnecessary because having girls as classmates will in no way impinge boys' ability to benefit from quality education programs."

The ACLU is bringing the suit against The Citadel on behalf of Shannon Faulkner, a woman who won admission to the school but had not disclosed her gender when she applied. She has been permitted to attend classes but may not wear a uniform or live in the barracks pending the court's decision.

"It's an ancient idea: woman as tainted, polluted, corrupting, somehow diseased -- Simone de Beauvoir's 'Other,' " wrote ACLU attorney Sara L. Mandelbaum. "The idea was echoed by a star graduate of The Citadel, who testified that the very word 'woman' (along with 'skirt' and other more vulgar terms) is one of the insults most frequently hurled at cadets by those superior to them in class or rank." 

The idea that the women's movement can attack male-only schools while promoting female-only education strikes critics as hypocritical. "Boys and girls are different," says Hamrick of the Family Research Council, "but if we split them up, who will complain? The feminists? The only time things can be separate is when feminists say they can be."

But advocates for women's colleges don't oppose male-only private colleges such as Morehouse, Hampden-Sidney and Wabash, notes Jadwiga Sebrechts, executive director of the Women's College Coalition. "VMI and The Citadel get public money," she says. "Also, women's colleges serve affirmative action purposes, so it's not exactly parallel. Women's colleges open a few more doors of extra opportunity, while VMI and The Citadel offer a glorious tradition and network of powerful alumni."

McKay of Mills adds that her all-woman's college doesn't offer a unique kind of education unavailable to men elsewhere. "VMI is a unique course of study in military leadership," she says. "There is a legitimate need for groups to affiliate with one another, even if they're all male, but there can be no federal grants for that."

The arguments about women vs. men and public vs. private are being confused, says Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, a professor of history at Emory College, who testified in defense of The Citadel at Faulkner's trial. "Research and common sense suggest that what single-sex schools offer especially benefits people from lower and middle-class backgrounds, precisely the people who need the public sector. If you're at Bryn Mawr or the Ivy League, you're in an elite world where a whole range of possibilities is available. If you're a minority whose parents didn't go to college, who went to a public high school where the whole issue of social life and dating was dominant, you may not know how to imagine ambition, and a single-sex school can help you."

Fox-Genovese argues that the choice of a single-sex school should be preserved for both sexes, even with public funding, if there is demand for it. "And to go on arguing that women need special treatment," she says, "is to fall back on paternalism, the potential dangers being dependency on other people to fight your battles and increasingly legitimate resentment on the part of men."

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Outlook

Suzie Scibetta, a ninth-grader at Springfield High School in Northern Virginia, recalls how the “goof-off” boys were making fun of her perfect scores on geometry tests. “It’s interesting to be with boys,” she observes. “They make time to relax and laugh.” At one point, her curiosity tempted her to deliberately botch a test to see if the teasing would stop, but she didn’t.

Researchers have long noted that the so-called adolescent subculture -- with its emphasis on physical attractiveness, cars and clothes - is of greater import to young people than academic achievement. But the impact is not the same for both genders. “Girls in grades six and seven rate being popular and well-liked [by their own sex] as more important than being perceived as competent or independent,” says the AAUW. “Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to rank independence and competence as important.” ⁴⁵

The documented shyness among girls -- and the expectations held for them by adults -- is a big reason that gender-equity activists propose remedial action. The movement is gathering steam. The Girls Scouts this month are releasing a “Gender Equity Module” training guide for volunteers and staff. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in January encouraged colleges to create more opportunities for female athletes by adding varsity teams in archery, badminton, water polo and other sports. ⁴⁶

And most dramatically, girls' shyness explains the current experiments in single-sex math and science classes. But segregated classes in the public schools are vulnerable to a legal challenge under Title IX.

“There are less segregatory means to reach the same end,” Norma Cantu, assistant secretary for civil rights in the Education Department, said last November. “Have they really exhausted the possibilities of training teachers to handle the different learning styles of boys and girls?” ⁴⁷

Sen. John C. Danforth, R-Mo., is planning an amendment that would give demonstration projects for single-sex public schools, such as the Detroit academies for black males, a special exemption from legal challenge, provided that similar programs were offered for the opposite gender.

Women's colleges, with their hallowed traditions, “will be around for the foreseeable future, unless there are big societal changes,” says Sebrechts. “In the long term, I would hope they would not be necessary, and that the advantages they provide will be available elsewhere. For now, the issue is not how many more woman's colleges can be constructed, but how much influence they can have.”

In the 1970s, notes Ransome, “girls' schools had to justify their existence and were looked at as a dying breed. Now we're enjoying an incredible renaissance of interest because parents understand that we offer first-class education, not second-class citizenship.”

The Sadkers report being surprised that their book, *Failing at Fairness*, has been so well-received among middle school and high school girls. Some critics say, “Oh, another victim book!” says Myra Sadker. “But it's an empowerment book. Girls [who read it] are then going to meet with their teacher. That's empowerment.”

But special efforts for gender equity will prompt detractors. The Sadkers contribute to the “Balkanization of American society,” writes education author Rita Kramer. “We should be worrying about why our youngsters of both sexes are near the bottom of the ladder in international tests of math and science and excel only in measures of self-esteem.” ⁴⁸

“The feminist agenda's constant victimization of women is repugnant,” says Parshall. “Self-esteem is caught, not taught. Good teachers know how to bring it out.”

Wolfe says the much-discussed “backlash” against gender equity in the 1980s “is a rear-guard action. They're fighting the inevitable. My girls will have a real partnership with boys, and will try and revel in it.”

“It's tricky when women speak out on behalf of women,” says Wellesley's Bailey. “It's more acceptable socially to speak on behalf of others. So we must start speaking for ourselves and our daughters, which will speak for our sons, too.”

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Pro/Con

Does the U.S. education system shortchange females?

| Pro | Con |
|---|---|
| <p>Rep. Susan Molinari R-N.Y.. In an age of ever-increasing global competitiveness, it is critically important we use all our resources to their fullest potential. As</p> | <p>Diane Ravitch Senior Research Scholar, New York University.. By now, you have seen or read the reports about how girls are being systematically</p> |

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| <p>a nation worried about the future, we cannot afford to shortchange half our population. Studies show, however, we do just that by cheating our sisters and daughters in classrooms all across the United States.</p> | <p>maltreated in our nation's schools; how teachers consistently show favoritism to boys; how girls are suffering a crisis of self-esteem; how the hopes and dreams of girls are regularly shattered by the discriminatory treatment they receive in school. Every network, major newspaper and national magazine has repeated the same terrible story.</p> |
| <p>Whether we look at pre-schools, elementary or high schools, research has proven that with both male and female teachers a child's gender helps decide what kind, and often how good, their education is.</p> | <p>What they haven't told you, however, is that none of this is true. The real story -- arguably the biggest, most underreport-ed educational story of our time -- has been the successful conquest of American education by girls and women. . . .</p> |
| <p>Over the years, the findings have been consistent and disturbing. Boys tend to receive more attention, and in many cases more positive feedback, in schools than girls. Teachers are more likely to solicit responses from boys, and one study has shown they ask boys 80 percent more academically related questions than girls. Further, girls rarely, if ever, see their own lives and experiences, or the many accomplishments of women, reflected in our schools' curriculum. . . .</p> | <p>Those who claim gender bias in the schools purposefully ignore the remarkable changes that have occurred over the past generation. In 1970, women accounted for only 41 percent of college students in the United States, and fewer than 10 percent of degrees in law and medicine were awarded to women. Gender inequity, in education and society, was pervasive and triumphant.</p> |
| <p>Traditionally in schools, encouragement and expectations for our daughters, especially in areas such as math and science, are so low the repercussions reverberate through our whole society. While girls and boys start schools with the same interests and abilities, today 64 percent of high school senior boys taking physics and calculus major in science and engineering. Only 19 percent of girls will do the same.</p> | <p>Today, women are 55 percent of all undergraduates, and they are 59 percent of all master's degree candidates. Women are nearly 50 percent of the enrollment in American law schools and medical schools. In fact, women now constitute the majority of all graduate and professional students in American higher education.</p> |
| <p>At a time when our economic competitiveness depends on the recruitment of qualified engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs, teachers, almost without realizing it, treat girls differently and unconsciously veer them away from these important career choices.</p> | <p>The claim that girls and women are burdened by low self-esteem is demonstrably untrue. Surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education demonstrate that girls and young women have higher aspirations than their male counterparts. Eighth-grade girls are twice as likely as eighth-grade boys to aspire to a professional, business or managerial career. Twelfth-grade girls are more likely to aspire to get a college or graduate degree than 12th-grade boys. . . .</p> |
| <p>In short, current practices tend to give boys more attention, discourage girls from exploring certain important career choices and downgrade the importance of their contributions in class. All this leads to diminished self-confidence.</p> | <p>Another unfortunate consequence of the gender bias myth is that girls' schools and women's colleges have decided to capitalize on it and to advertise themselves as sanctuaries from male oppression. This is unworthy of them and leaves them open to the possibility that their reason for being will cease to exist when the claims of gender bias cease or prove unfounded.</p> |
| <p>But perhaps the most disturbing barrier to learning today is that far too many girls in our schools are sexually harassed. A recent survey shows that 39 percent of girls ages nine to 19 said they were harassed once a day last year, and another 29 percent said it happened once a week. Sexual harassment and intimidation by boys and teachers strips girls and young women of their potential and distracts them from learning by leaving them feeling humiliated and angry. Worse, 45 percent of the reported cases are not acted upon by administrators, often with the excuse that "boys will be boys."</p> | <p>There is a powerful case to be made for single-sex education, and it has nothing to do with cries of female victimization or male oppression. Research has convincingly demonstrated that students in single-sex schools, undistracted by the opposite sex, take their studies more seriously. . . .</p> |
| <p>. . . . Schools should be a place where everyone, despite gender, has an equal opportunity to learn and therefore contribute their fullest later in life. Our sisters and daughters, as well as our nation, deserve no less.</p> | <p>It's difficult to slow a journalistic phenomenon when it is in full cry. . . . But sooner or later, the facts will prevail. One hopes.</p> |

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| Chronology | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1960s | During the Johnson administration's Great Society, federal role greatly increases in civil rights and education; birth of modern women's movement; women's colleges begin merging with men's. |
| 1964 | Civil Rights Act includes ban on sex discrimination. |
| 1965 | Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides federal grants for schools. |

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| 1970s | Women's movement gathers steam; U.S. government enacts new protections against sex discrimination; women's studies point to bias in textbooks and instruction. |
| 1972 | Congress passes Education Amendments including Title IX, prohibiting sex discrimination in any educational institution receiving federal money. |
| 1974 | Congress passes Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) providing grants for research into programs for gender equity. |
| July 21, 1975 | Title IX takes effect. |
| 1980s | Reflecting what some view as backlash against feminism, Reagan and Bush administrations cut funds for women's programs. |
| Feb. 28, 1984 | Supreme Court in <i>Grove City College v. Bell</i> narrows the scope of Title IX by ruling that the law applies only to programs that directly receive federal aid. |
| March 22, 1988 | Congress passes Civil Rights Restoration Act, overriding President Ronald Reagan's veto and overturning <i>Grove City</i> ruling, reaffirming broad applicability of Title IX. |
| 1989 | Federal judge in New York City rules that New York State Empire Scholarships are unfair because SAT scores on which they're based are seen as gender-biased. |
| 1990s | Applications to women's colleges and girls school rise; court cases favor harassment victims. |
| Nov. 21, 1991 | President George Bush signs civil rights bill that for the first time allows victims of sexual harassment to collect limited monetary damages. |
| Feb. 26, 1992 | Supreme Court rules in <i>Franklin v. Gwinnett County Schools</i> that courts may award monetary damages for complaints brought under Title IX. The case involved a Georgia high school student who sued her school district after her teacher forced her to have intercourse. |
| 1992 | American Association of University Women publishes influential report, <i>How Schools Shortchange Girls</i> . Mattel Inc. introduces talking Barbie doll whose comment, "Math class is tough," draws ire from gender-equity activists and is eventually replaced. |
| February 1994 | FairTest files civil rights complaint with Education Department saying National Merit Scholarships are unfair to girls because they're based in large part on "gender-biased" Preliminary SAT tests. |
| March 24, 1994 | House passes reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act containing package of bills addressing gender inequity. |
| April 28, 1994 | Ms. Foundation estimates 3 million girls ages 9-15 took the day off from school for the second annual Take Your Daughter to Work Day, intended to expose girls to career options. Critics complain of unfairness toward boys. |
| April 29, 1994 | In an ongoing case challenging male-only admissions policy of Virginia Military Institute, federal district judge upholds legitimacy of creating a parallel military program for females at nearby Mary Baldwin College. |
| May 16, 1994 | Trial begins in Charleston, S.C., on Shannon Faulkner's suit to become first woman to attend The Citadel, an all-male military academy. |

Short Features

Researchers' Cameras Reveal Teachers' Bias

Myra and David Sadker were armed with camcorders when they researched their book on gender inequity. They needed the cameras to tape teachers in action -- and to convince them that they sometimes showed biases against girls.

Some of the teachers “were stunned” at the results, say the education professors. “Only after several viewings of the videotape did [one teacher] notice how she let boys call out answers but reprimanded girls for similar behavior,” they wrote. ¹

Still, the Sadkers and other advocates of gender equity decline to blame the teachers. “We’re not teacher-bashers,” says Myra Sadker, dean of education at American University. “They don’t walk in there to do harm; they walk in saying, ‘I don’t want to get rich, I want to do good.’”

Gender bias is “so subtle and societally pervasive, it’s unfair to make school the microcosm,” says Claudia Edwards, a senior professional associate at the National Education Association. She replicated the Sadkers’ experiments and also found that teachers were surprised at the bias. “Girls lose their voice in their families and in the media. In thousands of classroom interactions, gender simply doesn’t get priority. It’s a sin of omission.”

To many observers, the tendency to call on boys more is understandable. “Boys are more apt to demand attention, and you’re more apt to pay attention to them as a way of controlling the situation,” says Susan McGhee Bailey, executive director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. “Many teachers are aware of the issue, but receive little support from the administration or the community.”

Others defend the tendency of girls to stay quiet. “If a girl doesn’t respond with the same athleticism as a boy, it’s not because she’s lacking in academics,” says Janet Parshall of the Concerned Women for America, “but that she might want to catch that boy’s eye for a date Friday night. The wild flinging of arms is a turnoff.”

Though some teachers deny they are biased or say the issue is blown out of proportion, most are receptive to new training in avoiding gender bias, according to Nancy Huppertz, an equity specialist with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Ore. She conducts workshops with teachers that seek to highlight disparities in treatment with an eye toward raising expectations for girls and minorities.

“We’re supportive and non-judgmental,” Huppertz says, noting that there are few differences between male and female teachers in their handling of students. “We look for who is being asked the who-what-when-where-type questions, and who is being asked the more analytical questions. Many teachers don’t follow through with girls by using higher-order feedback. Is that a reflection of higher expectations for boys? What is the effect on those not called on? The females are getting good grades, but are they being graded merely on turning in their work and doing it neatly?”

Janice Damico, a sixth-grade math teacher in Arlington, Va., says the bias question is well-discussed in the training literature, though a survey showed that newer teachers are not as aware of the issue as experienced ones.

Meanwhile, she says, teachers should work hard to give girls a fair chance in the classroom. “I often make it a point to call on a girl, because boys are already getting enough.”

^[1] Myra and David Sadker, *Failing at Fairness: How America’s Schools Cheat Girls* (1994), p. 48.

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Do College-Bound Girls Face a Disadvantage . . .

When high school students sit down to confront that measure of adolescent success, the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), one outcome is virtually certain: Just as females earn only 71 cents on the dollar earned by males, girls’ scores will be lower than the boys’. ¹

In 1993, the overall achievement gap was 53 points, with high school males registering an eight-point advantage on the verbal test and a 45-point edge in math. (The number of points possible on each test ranges from 400-800 points.)

Whether the problem lies with female performance or with male-biased test questions is a debate that rages among gender-equity advocates and testing specialists. “SAT scores, which are designed to predict college success as defined by first-year grades, underpredict women’s grades and overpredict men’s,” observes the American Association of University Women (AAUW). “Young

women tend to receive higher college grades than young men with the same SAT scores.”²

With gender gaps also showing up in graduate school exams and other national tests, the stakes in the debate are more than academic. “Those scores determine admissions to the best schools, scholarships and ultimately the best professions,” notes Annie Rogers, assistant education professor at Harvard University.

In February, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) in Cambridge, Mass., filed a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Education Department charging that boys are favored over girls in the National Merit Scholarships. The scholarships are awarded in large part on the results of the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) taken by high school juniors.

FairTest estimated that boys receive \$15 million of the \$25 million in scholarship money awarded each year by the National Merit Scholarship Corp. A similar suit brought against New York State's Empire Scholarships in 1989 was successful. The judge noted “the probability that, absent discriminatory causes, that women would consistently score 60 points less on the SAT than men is nearly zero.”³

The problem, say critics of such tests, is that they contain questions whose vocabulary and thought processes are most familiar to white males. Girls, they also point out, do better in written essays while boys thrive on multiple choice. “Girls look at problems more complexly, seeing shades of gray and intersections between answers,” says Robert Schaeffer, public education director for FairTest. “Boys see things as 'either/or' and are more inclined to guess. Blind guessing gets results, and a fast-paced standardized test is a game which culturally favors the style of brash white boys.”

The SAT contains far more questions that favor boys, writes Phyllis Rosser of the Center for Women Policy Studies, such as the following sports-related example from the November 1987 SAT:

(Fill in the blanks from the five pairs of choices below):

Although the undefeated visitors triumphed over the underdog opponents, the game was hardly the sportswriters had predicted.“

- A) fortunately upset
- B) unexpectedly classic
- C) finally rout
- D) easily stalemate
- E) utterly mismatch

About 41 percent of boys chose the correct answer (C), but only 16 percent of girls.⁴

Finally, survey data show that females experience greater stress while taking the SAT, with 27.8 percent of girls reporting they were “extremely anxious,” compared with only 10.8 percent of the boys.⁵

The College Board, which sponsors the SAT, and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which creates the tests, have long acknowledged the gender differences, and try to adjust. Women “may do relatively better on quantitative problems that involve using a formula,” says the ETS, “whereas men do relatively better when the route to solving the quantitative problems is unclear or when estimation provides shortcuts to solutions.

“Many men and women are included in the process of planning tests and writing test questions. There is a mandatory 'sensitivity review' process in which specially trained men and women examine every question to be sure there is no stereotyping or inappropriate content based on sex, race or ethnicity.”⁶

But a senior College Board official argues that the gender gap results from factors other than flaws in the tests. She says that the same gap shows up on other national standardized tests. Moreover, more women than men take the SATs and more of those women come from low- income backgrounds.⁷

In recent years, however, research sponsored by ETS itself has pointed to bias, according to Rosser. She cites two ETS studies from 1991 and 1992. One surveyed a 1988 freshman class of 4,300 men and women at a state university and found a “statistically

significant” underprediction of women’s grade performance as compared with their SATs. A second study recommended that the tests be corrected “by adding some number of points to women’s scores or by reworking the contents of the test.”⁸

ETS reached a different conclusion. In 1992, it released a report on three ETS studies indicating that “when used in conjunction with other available information, the SAT accurately predicts the performance of women in college mathematics.” According to one of the study teams, “A closer look at the current data shows that the large difference favoring men on the SAT [math] may be counterbalanced by the equally large difference favoring women on the high school grade- point average, resulting in little or no underprediction if both predictors are used.”⁹

To FairTest’s Schaeffer, the refusal to alter the SATs shows that The College Board and the ETS are run like businesses. “Do tobacco companies tell you their product causes disease?” he asks. “The heads of ETS and The College Board make a quarter of a million dollars a year in salary and benefits. They’re selling a product and defending it.” Schaeffer says the policy also reflects a reluctance to alter a test that has been in use since 1941 -- when the vast majority of test-takers were white males -- because analysts want comparable year- to-year-data.

ETS President Nancy Cole, who has written widely on test fairness, says that if ETS were run only like a business, her staff wouldn’t be as cooperative as they are in offering test data for public scrutiny. “The only reliable evidence that critics have is from ETS,” she says. “There is a continuing desire to have comparable year-to-year for short-term surveys, and there are uses for long-term data, but it’s not something that drives us to the extreme.”

Cole is concerned about the frequent charge -- reflected in FairTest’s complaint against the National Merit Scholarships -- that important decisions on admissions and scholarships are too often made solely on the basis of SATs. “ETS guidelines strongly recommend the use of multiple types of information,” she says. “But some colleges face thousands of applicants, so some may have cutting points. It’s the same with the National Merit process. They get a great deal of information on the candidates, but the question is whether they can reduce it to a more manageable size.”

ETS urges that SAT scores always be combined with grades, a position that in the future may help females beat the gender gap. “Test and grades put together are the most complete picture of the full range of skills relevant to college,” Cole says. “Surveys and observations show that girls do better in showing a sense of social responsibility and fairness to the community, in persistence and willingness to work hard, and in use of language. The interpersonal skills of women are increasingly more valued in the business world, and grades are a way of getting at these other things.”

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COMPARING SAT SCORES

Men invariably outperform women on the math section of the Scholastic Assessment Test (formerly the Scholastic Aptitude Test). Since 1972, men also have scored higher on the verbal portion of the SAT.

Average Verbal Scores Average Mathematical Scores

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| Men | Women | Men | Women | 1969 | 459 | 466 | 513 | 470 | 1970 | 459 | 461 | 509 | 465 | 1971 | 454 | 457 | 507 | 466 | 1972 | 454 | 452 | 505 | 461 | 1973 | 446 | 443 | 502 | 460 | 1974 | 447 | 442 | 501 | 459 | 1975 | 437 | 431 | 495 | 449 | 1976 | 439 | 430 | 497 | 446 | 1977 | 431 | 427 | 497 | 445 | 1978 | 433 | 425 | 494 | 444 | 1979 | 431 | 423 | 493 | 443 | 1980 | 428 | 420 | 491 | 443 | 1981 | 430 | 418 | 492 | 443 | 1982 | 431 | 421 | 493 | 443 | 1983 | 430 | 420 | 493 | 445 | 1984 | 433 | 420 | 495 | 449 | 1985 | 437 | 425 | 499 | 452 | 1986 | 437 | 426 | 501 | 451 | 1987 | 435 | 425 | 500 | 453 | 1988 | 435 | 422 | 498 | 455 | 1989 | 434 | 421 | 500 | 454 | 1990 | 429 | 419 | 499 | 455 | 1991 | 426 | 418 | 497 | 453 | 1992 | 428 | 419 | 499 | 456 | 1993 | 428 | 420 | 502 | 457 |
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Source: The College Board, Aug. 19, 1993

^[1] The Scholastic Assessment Test, or SAT, was originally known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

^[2] American Association of University Women, *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (1992), p. 56.

^[3] The New York suit was brought by the National Organization for Women, Girls Clubs of America, the American Civil Liberties Union and a group of high school students. The judge’s quote is from FairTest documents.

^[4] Phyllis Rosser, “The SAT Gender Gap: Identifying the Causes,” Center for Women Policy Studies (1989), p. 52.

^[5] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

^[6] “Toward a Better Understanding of Gender and Testing,” ETS Board of Trustees Public Accountability Project, 1989.

[7] Gretchen Wyckoff Rigol, "Why Do Women Score Lower Than Men on the SAT?" College Prep, 1989.

[8] Phyllis Rosser, "The SAT Gender GAP: ETS Responds, A Research Update," Center for Women Policy Studies, 1992.

[9] ETS researchers Brent Bridgeman and Cathy Wendler, quoted in ETS Developments newsletter, spring 1992.

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Schoolyard Teasing Now Has a New Name . . .

When it's "Flip Skirt Day" on the playground, the little boys who grab at girls' clothing are acting out a ritual that for years was dismissed as just "boys being boys." But today, such antics among elementary school children bear the label of sexual harassment.

Nor is it considered innocent when a high school teacher requires hugs from girls who're late to class, or when students fill hallway chatter with details of one couple's "hot date."

Harassment can get so bad that "girls won't walk down certain halls or take certain courses," says Susan McGhee Bailey, executive director of Wellesley College's Center for Research on Women. "When it is allowed to continue in full view of everyone, the message is you have to get used to it, and this is appropriate behavior for boys."

As many as 85 percent of the nation's girls say they have experienced sexual harassment, along with 76 percent of the boys, according to a 1993 Louis Harris survey of 1,600 students in grades 8- 11. Two-thirds of the boys and half of the girls surveyed admitted to being harassers. Some 13 percent of the girls said they had been "forced to do something sexual other than kissing." ¹

Responding to a survey questionnaire published in the March 1993 issue of Seventeen magazine, 39 percent of the girls ages 9-19 said they had been the target of sexual comments or looks, or had been touched, pinched or grabbed on a daily basis. In two-thirds of the incidents, other people were present, the survey noted. ²

"I had four boys sexually harassing me," recalled one respondent. "I felt like they thought I was a slut. I even thought the whole bus thought I was a slut, because they would give me dirty looks and call me a slut. I hated it! I told the harassers to stop, but they wouldn't. So I wrote them a note saying it was sexual harassment, and if they didn't stop I would report them. They started saying, 'It isn't sexual harassment, we didn't lay a hand on you.'"

Investigators at the General Accounting Office recently released a study of the nation's military academies showing that 97 percent of the female students had experienced harassment. The episodes ranged from prank phone calls to name-calling to one incident in which a senior student commander reportedly dismissed a group of trainees but ordered one woman to stay behind so he could attempt to kiss her. ³

Though harassment from teachers or staff made up only 4-18 percent of the incidents in the AAUW and Seventeen surveys, the ramifications from adult-to-student harassment tend to be more serious than those from peer harassment. In California, 145 teachers lost their licenses for sexual misconduct with students from 1985-90, according to Myra and David Sadker, authors of Failing at Fairness. ⁴

And school districts have known they can be liable for monetary damages ever since the Supreme Court's 1992 ruling in Franklin v. Gwinnett. In that case, a Georgia high school student successfully sued her school district under the federal Title IX law after a teacher repeatedly questioned her about sex with her boyfriend and took her to his office and forced sexual intercourse.

"We're concerned about teachers getting due process," says Claudia Edwards, a senior professional associate at the National Association of Teachers. "Some lax school districts overreact and leak out the charges so that the teachers are hung out to dry and their careers are in jeopardy."

But Edwards acknowledges that problems do exist. "Girls are highly attuned to sexual harassment these days," she continues, even more than to sex discrimination. The number of sexual harassment complaints received by the Education Department jumped from 27 in 1988 to 156 last year.

Katy Lyle, a student at Duluth Central High School in Minnesota, was mortified in 1987 to learn of obscene graffiti about her in the boys' restroom. Her complaints were first dismissed as a "building- maintenance problem," but Katy and her mother went to the Minnesota Human Rights Department. After an 18-month process, Katy was awarded \$15,000. ⁵

Cheltzie Hentz, a first-grader in Eden Prairie, Minn., told her parents of the older boys on the bus who constantly teased her because she didn't have a penis. In handling the complaint, the U.S. Education Department ruled that the school district violated Title IX because it "did not respond forcefully" in this and similar incidents. A settlement was eventually reached in which the district agreed to develop guidelines to help staff handle harassment complaints.

Tawnya Brawdy, a junior high schooler in Petaluma, Calif., was subjected to a daily chorus of cowlike mooing from boys making fun of her breasts. After a lawsuit and an Education Department investigation that produced a 211-page report, she received an out-of-court settlement of \$20,000 in 1992. 

Another Petaluma student was less successful in her suit seeking \$1 million from the school district after boys confronted her continually with a joke about masturbation. A U.S. District Court judge in San Francisco said she failed to "prove intentional discrimination on the basis of sex on the part of an employee of the educational institution." The case, however, was the first to affirm that "student-to-student sexual harassment is actionable under Title IX." 

Why do children sexually harass? Observers point to an underdeveloped sense of empathy among young children. "I don't care, people do this stuff every day," a 14-year-old boy told the Harris survey. "No one feels insulted by it. That's stupid. We just play around. I think sexual harassment is normal." In the poll, 41 percent of boys who had harassed said it was just part of life, and 27 percent thought that the targeted person liked it.

Many common boys' comments, such as "Look at her shake her [backside]," or crude lyrics from rap songs, "would offend me, but I'm not sure about the girls," says Carol Denker, a vocational guidance counselor at Madison Park High School in Boston. "They kind of get off on it."

New York University scholar Diane Ravitch blames the media. "Society is saturated with this enticement to act out, to not repress any feelings," she says. "Freud said that civilization is not possible without a certain level of repression, but TV and the movies say don't repress."

"In negotiating for sex," says Annie Rogers, an assistant professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, "boys feel they can push as far as they can to get it, while girls feel that as soon as they say no or act demurely, that should mean stop. There's an incredible gray area." If the perpetrators were suspended from school, the behavior would stop, Rogers says. "We need policies."

California and Minnesota have enacted laws requiring public schools to create policies against sexual harassment. In a sample policy circulated in Minnesota, examples of harassment include: "Unwelcome verbal harassment or abuse; unwelcome, sexually motivated or inappropriate patting, pinching or physical contact [and] unwelcome behavior or words directed at an individual because of gender." 

Skeptics concerned about violations of free speech, however, raise eyebrows when the examples of harassment include such everyday banter as dirty jokes, "sexually descriptive letters or notes," spreading sexual rumors about other students, giving other students "the finger" and "making suggestive comments about cheerleading outfits." 

"Boys and girls are different, and you can't repeal human nature," says Phyllis Schlafly, president of the Eagle Forum and a longtime critic of feminism. "Boys like to hit, but they should be taught not to hit girls, except that the feminists are horrified because they want everyone treated the same."

Kristi Hamrick, spokeswoman for the conservative Family Research Council, adds that anger over sexual harassment in schools is "the feminists reaping their own whirlwind."

"Women are the permission-givers of society," she says. "Twenty or 30 years ago, if a girl was pinched she would slap the boy's face. Now she writes a letter to the editor. There's a difference between standing up for yourself and acting like an unempowered victim."

During the Reagan era, counters Leslie Wolfe, president of the Center for Women Policy Studies, it became common to portray harassment "victims as unequal and pitiful. But to acknowledge there is sexism doesn't diminish the person who is discriminated against." The fact remains, "you can't concentrate on doing well in school if you're afraid the boys will assault you on the playground."

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Sexual harassment in schools has a far greater impact on women than men, according to a survey by the American Association of University Women. For example, 33 percent of the girls who were harassed, and 12 percent of the boys, said they didn't want to attend school. Educational Impact:

Girls Boys All Students Not wanting to go to school 33% 12% 23% Not wanting to talk as much

in class 32 13 23 Finding it hard to pay attention
in school 28 13 21 Staying home from school
or cutting a class 24 7 13 Making a lower grade on
a test paper 23 9 16 Finding it hard to study 22 9 16 Making a lower grade
in class 20 6 13 Thinking about changing
schools 18 6 12 Doubting whether you have
what it takes to graduate
from high school 5 4 4

Sources: "Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools," American Association of University Women, June 1993

[1] The survey, "Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools," was commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation.

[2] The survey, "Secrets in Public: Sexual Harassment in Our Schools," was commissioned by the Wellesley Center for Research on Women and the National Organization for Women (NOW) Legal Defense and Education Fund.

[3] The Associated Press, Feb. 4, 1994. The GAO study, "DOD [Department of Defense] Service Academies: More Actions Needed to Eliminate Sexual Harassment," was released Jan. 31.

[4] Myra and David Sadker, *Failing at Fairness* (1994), p. 114. The Sadkers teach at American University in Washington, D.C.

[5] Los Angeles Times, Oct. 3, 1993.

[6] Newsweek, Oct. 19, 1992, p. 77.

[7] Education Week, Sept. 15, 1993.

[8] Kathryn Wells Murdock and David Kysilko, "Sexual Harassment in Schools: What It Is, What Do Do," National Association of State Boards of Education (1993), p. 21.

[9] From "Examples of Hostile Environmental Sexual Harassment," guidelines prepared by the Minnesota Department of Education, published in Harper's Magazine, June 1993, p. 14. IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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Girls Experience Greater Loss of Self-Esteem

Both boys and girls lose self-esteem as they get older, but girls show a far greater loss, according to a nationwide poll commissioned by the American Association of University Women. The sharpest drops in self-esteem occur between elementary and middle school.

Elementary school Middle school High school Boys 67% 56% 46% Girls 60 37 29

Sources: American Association of University Women and Greenberg- Lake: The Analysis Group, 1991

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Books

Florence Howe , **Women and Higher Education in American History**, W.W. Norton, 1988. A Mount Holyoke historian and an editor at the Feminist Press collaborated on this anthology of writings highlighting the founding of women's colleges and the integration of previously male-only colleges.

Margaret A. Eisenhardt , **Educated in Romance: Women, Achievement, and College Culture**, University of Chicago Press, 1990. Two anthropologists describe results of their longitudinal, in- depth study of women at two coed colleges, showing how greater dropout rates and lowered career expectations can be traced to the "adolescent subculture" on campuses that pre-empt academics and subjects women "to the sexual auction block."

Katz, Montana , and **Veronica Vieland**, **Get Smart! What You Should Know (But Won't Learn in Class) About Sexual Harassment and Sex Discrimination**, Feminist Press of the City University of New York, 1993. Columbia and Barnard University scholars offer this handbook on how to counter unwanted sexual behavior and the "hidden curriculum" that shows up in classrooms in the form of lowered expectations for females.

Riordan, Cornelius , **Girls & Boys in School: Together or Separate?** Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1991. A Providence College sociologist gives a historical overview of how the two genders have been educated, citing current research to argue in favor of allowing the choice of single-sex learning.

David Sadker , **Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls**, Charles Scribners' Sons, 1994. Two American University education professors draw from 20-plus years of research in this non-technical survey of the issues that they say keep females from achieving as well as males. They include much history of education and describe their classroom observations of teachers' often-unconscious bias.

Skolnick, Joan , **Carol Langbort and Lucille Day**, **How to Encourage Girls in Math & Science**, Prentice-Hall, 1982. Three doctors of philosophy in education have designed sample math and science lessons intended to boost female performance by emphasizing "success for each child, tasks with many approaches, tasks with many right answers, guessing and testing, estimating."

Stock, Phyllis , **Better Than Rubies: A History of Women's Education**, Capricorn Books, 1978. A Seton Hall University historian discusses women's education in the Western world from ancient times through the "courtly love" period of the Middle Ages into the "limited victory" of the 20th century.

Reports and Studies

Women, University , **Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools**, June 1993. Pollster Louis Harris conducted this survey of 1,632 eighth to 11th-graders in 79 American schools, documenting the extent of sexual harassment and examining the reasons, impact and possible solutions.

Women, University , **How Schools Shortchange Girls: A Study of Major Findings on Girls and Education**, 1992. Commissioned by the AAUW and researched by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, this overview summarizes major research on the self-esteem problems of adolescent girls, the gender gap in SAT tests, teacher treatment of girls and sexual harassment.

Association, National , **"Gender Equity in Math and Science," Parts 1 & 2, Initiatives**, 1993. This compendium of essays discusses ways to improve female performance in two of the most important fields in the arena of international economic competitiveness.

Ellen J. Vargyas , **"The Legal Implications of Gender Bias in Standardized Testing," Berkeley Women's Law Journal, Vol. 7, 1992**. Two attorneys at the National Women's Law Center give the legal history and arguments in favor of correcting the alleged gender bias in SAT and college achievement tests.

Stein, Nan , **Nancy L. Marshall and Linda R. Tropp**, **Secrets in Public: Sexual Harassment in Our Schools**, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, March 1993. Results of a survey among readers of Seventeen magazine giving detailed descriptions of the frequency and nature of schoolyard and campus sexual harassment.

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Downey, Maureen , **"Sadkers write the book on gender inequity," Atlanta Constitution, April 28, 1994, p. C3**. Gender researchers Myra and David Sadker, authors of the controversial new book "Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Shortchange Girls," are interviewed about the biases against girls they've found in the educational system.

Roger David Chambers , “Promoting gender equity: What you can do,” *Learning*, January 1994, pp. 58-59. Gender inequality still exists in schools, with many girls starting their school careers auspiciously only to languish in later grades, the authors write. Four factors that contribute to this inequality--behavioral differences, gender segregation, teacher expectations and teacher/student interactions--are discussed, and steps to a bias-free classroom are offered.

Lawton, Millicent , “Girls will -- and should -- be girls,” *Education Week*, March 30, 1994, pp. 24-27. Myra Sadker and David Sadker have written a book about how girls face gender bias in the classroom from kindergarten through graduate school. The question of whether this discrimination really exists is addressed.

Plucker, Jonathan A. , “Educational benefits from equitable treatment,” *Science Teacher*, April 1994, pp. 49-51. Interventions, strategies and resources for eliminating gender bias in the science classroom and constructing an atmosphere of gender equity are discussed.

Winerip, Michael , “Merit scholarship program faces sex bias complaint,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1994, p. A18. The ACLU and the National Center for Fair and Open Testing have filed a federal civil rights complaint charging that the method of awarding National Merit Scholarships discriminates against girls. The selection method relies primarily on PSAT scores, which tend to be lower for girls than for boys.

In the Classroom

“Gender gap grants,” *Science Teacher*, February 1994, p. 60. The Teacher Education Equity Project, a national project designed to assist professors of teacher education in addressing gender equity in the fields of math, science and technology education, is discussed.

David Sadker , “Why schools must tell girls: You're smart, you can do it,” *USA Today*, Feb. 4, 1994p. USW4. Teachers and students unwittingly shortchange girls up and down the educational ladder, from kindergarten through graduate school, the authors write. This problem is described, along with examples of what educators and students are doing to combat it.

Shea, Lois , “Teacher project aimed at gender parity,” *Boston Globe*, April 24, 1994p. NH2. Lois Shea discusses teachers' efforts to achieve gender parity in the classroom with regard to differential treatment of boys and girls.

Thompson, Sheila , “May the force be walloped,” *Vocational Education Journal*, February 1994, pp. 21-23. Educators must overcome stereotypes to recruit students, Thompson writes. Tips for fighting years of sex-role stereotyping include reducing and eliminating gender bias in vocational labs.

Legislation

Stromquist, Nelly P. , “Sex-equity legislation in education: The state as promoter of women's rights,” *Review of Educational Research*, winter 1993, pp. 379-407. A study examined federal legislation addressing gender inequities in education. Evidence indicates that women have made significant gains in access to education institutions as students rather than as educators or administrators.

Walters, Laurel Shaper , “Researchers assert girls get shortchanged in class,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 31, 1994, p. 2. The House of Representatives in late March 1994 passed the Gender Equity in Education Act, calling for retraining of public school teachers to combat educational biases against girls. Bill supporters say it's needed because girls score lower on national achievement tests and are behind in math and science.

Math and Science

Irwin, Julie , “The new math: Experts divided on all-girls classes,” *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1994, p. 1. The educational theory of putting girls in separate math and science classes is discussed. The idea is drawing mixed reviews.

Lee, Felicia R. , “Cutting chains that still bind girls in school,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 1994, p. 27. Felicia R. Lee discusses the New York Project, a program started by Girls Inc. that offers girls-only classes for math and science in East Harlem, Washington Heights and the South Bronx, where there is a high concentration of low-income girls.

Edward L. Pizzini , “Gender, achievement, and perception toward science activities,” *School Science & Mathematics*, April 1994, pp. 188-193. The science achievements of boys and girls in middle school life science are examined. The results indicate no significant differences in student achievement by gender or science activities and no significant differences in perception by gender.

Tousignant, Marylou , “An equation for equality: Same-sex classes target girls' math, science skills,” *The Washington Post*, March 15, 1994, p. A1. St. Stephen's & St. Agnes, a private Episcopal school in Alexandria, Va., separated by sex all its math and science classes, including honors courses, for grades, six, seven and eight. The intent is to focus on the different learning styles of girls

and boys.

Turni, Karen , “Schools look to help girls in math, science,” *Times-Picayune*, **April 4, 1994**, p. A1. Math and science scores from students across the nation indicate that girls get short shrift in classrooms, leading some to determine that the glass ceiling truly does begin in kindergarten. Although it has taken 20 years, help to resolve this discrimination appears to be on the way, Turni writes.

Programs

Abramson, Rudy , “Women's school in Appalachia lights a beacon of hope,” *Los Angeles Times*, **April 14, 1994**, p. A5. The New Opportunity School for Women in Kentucky is featured. The school helps low-income women from southern Appalachia seize control of their lives.

Carroll, Nicole , “A good day's work puts girls on a professional path,” *USA Today*, **April 20, 1994**, p. D3. Girls around the world will be going to work April 28, 1994, as part of the Ms. Foundation's now-annual Take Our Daughters to Work Day. While the event is known largely for its efforts to bolster girls' self-esteem, teachers and parents are beginning to tap its educational value.

Franklin, Marie C. , “Many schools trying not to shortchange girls,” *Boston Globe*, **April 24, 1994**, p. B25. The efforts of Massachusetts schools to avoid shortchanging girls, especially in science and technology studies, are examined.

Marks, Peter , “Encouraging schoolgirls to enter a mostly male world,” *The New York Times*, **Jan. 12, 1994**, p. B4. Eighth-, 9th- and 10th-grade girls were invited to the State University of New York at Stony Brook on Jan. 11, 1994, for a day of encouragement and exploration of academic disciplines that remain largely male bastions: the worlds of math and science.

Research and Studies

Debra Roker , “The political socialization of youth: Exploring the influence of school experience,” *Journal of Adolescence*, **February 1994**, pp. 3-15. A study is described that explored the possible role of educational experience in political socialization, comparing the political attitudes of girls from similar family backgrounds attending different types of school. A model of the role of the school in political socialization is proposed.

Thomas, Depelsha R. , “Study: Schooling girls raises living standards,” *Atlanta Constitution*, **Jan. 31, 1994**, p. A11. Thomas discusses a report that said foreign assistance to close a gender gap that denies equal education to girls in less-developed countries would do more to improve living standards than the billions of dollars now going into military aid and technical assistance.

West, Peter , “N.S.T.A. handbook examines effective science instruction,” *Education Week*, **April 13, 1994**, p. 11. The “NSTA [National Science Teachers Association] Handbook on Research on Science Teaching and Learning: Implications for Classroom Instruction on Problem-Solving” is discussed. Researchers have found that classrooms that emphasize group learning may be less effective at encouraging girls to study mathematics and science.

Single-Sex Education

Coulombis, Angela E. , “A new-old experiment in separating girls, boys in schools,” *Christian Science Monitor*, **April 18, 1994**, p. 1. The educational experiment of introducing single-sex classes into coed public schools is discussed. Women's groups support all-girl science and math classes, but critics contend that gender segregation is demeaning and suggests that girls require special handling to keep up with boys.

Means, Marianne , “Separate and unequal,” *Chicago Defender*, **March 2, 1994**, p. 12. Marianne Means relates the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” to the state of Virginia's campaign to keep women out of its prestigious, taxpayer-supported Virginia Military Institute.

Watts, Claudius E., III , “Single-sex education benefits men too,” *The Wall Street Journal*, **May 3, 1994**, p. A14. Claudius E. Watts III, president of The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., discusses single-sex education. Watts says The Citadel is not trying to keep women out of the Corps of Cadets by protecting machismo; The Citadel is trying to preserve an environment that molds young men into grown men of good character, honor and integrity.

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Footnotes

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