

Examine The Reasons Why Girls Are Outperforming Boys In Most Subjects And Most Levels Of Education

Whilst many think that boys are achieving no less than girls, there is definitely a growth in the gap between the sexes at all levels of education from secondary to primary schooling and possibly even from birth.

For many years it was seen that girls were underachieving in education but over a number of years a steady increase has been seen in performance. This has ultimately led to girls outperforming boys and has raised the issue of boys' underachievement. This is a relatively new factor in education so research still needs to be conducted on it, but the question still remains of why boys are underachieving.

Since the **1960s** there has been a marked change in the rights of the sexes and women have come more into line with men. This is due to equal opportunity changes in the law and work of earlier sociologists highlighting the differences so more emphasis has been placed on equality. This has led to all aspects of society changing to be more equal and is seen in education too. "

To bring girls more into line the curriculum has been altered to make it more 'girl friendly'. This 'girl friendliness' may have disadvantaged boys. There is now a greater emphasis on coursework. This suits girls better as they have better concentration, they can concentrate for three to four times longer than a boy of the same age. Girls are also more organised, they bring the right equipment and meet deadlines, and these are skills that are required for coursework. **Brown (1996)** also points out that the equal opportunity committee showed that schools were spending more on boys' curricular and extra-curricular sporting activities. This could show that, for boys, too much emphasis is placed on sporting activities and not enough on educational achievement so therefore they are not achieving in class.

To explain why girls are suddenly outstripping boys it is important to realise that this may not be a recent phenomenon that has suddenly occurred. For many **feminists** this is the view they have held for some time saying that prior to this growth female students were simply restricted from growing. A change in the female ideology has thus taken place as shown in **Sue Sharpe's** study which finds out how girls see and are seen in schools by pupils and their teachers. This study was conducted in 1976 and later in 1994. From these results she concluded that most female pupils were simply worried about "love, marriage, husbands, children, jobs, career, in that order" whilst in 1994 she highlighted that they were more concerned with "a job, career & being able to support themselves".

The attempts to improve schooling and especially the class and gender differences were then pushed heavily in the introduction of GCSEs, SATs and the National Curriculum, which helped create the equality of learning originally suggested in the **1944-Education Act**. The teaching methods also evolved to help women and the choice of subjects was increased so that girls no longer had to choose "female" subjects such as biology and home economics giving them which didn't give them as much of an opportunity in the job market. This was shown in the **1980's** as women first stepped into the workplace threatening previously safe male jobs in high-earning occupation.

Spender's study the "Invisible Woman" supports this idea that before the previously mentioned legislation women simply suffered at the hands of the education. Spender found a patriarchy in education claiming that the context was both unbalanced and the teaching methods of teachers unfair. Through observation she found girls received less attention in the class, were not pushed as much and subconsciously taught to be submissive. She also noticed that this was not surprising as all the information is checked and invalidated by men controlling the topics taught by all the country. A point

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clearly supported by **Stanworths'** "Gender differences in Further Education", which noted the large numbers of men in controlling education positions and higher paid teaching jobs. This argument suggests that with more opportunities for women in the work place, a change in the female ideology and with a fairer education system, women simply passed the boys.

Gender identity restricts different genders from different things and this is shown by Mitsos and Brown in the levels of reading between boys and girls. Their research has shown that boys don't like reading and view it as 'sissy' whereas girls like to read. Reading is a vital part of education and is needed to achieve in the education system, but boys see reading as boring, a waste of time, not real work and something to be avoided. Reading is 'feminised' in this culture because women are the main readers in society. Women tend to read fiction and boys tend to read for facts, and as fiction is the main means of teaching reading at primary school boys are being disadvantaged at an early age.

There is some evidence to note that teachers aren't as strict with boys as they are with girls. They are more likely to extend deadlines for work, be tolerant of disruptive behaviour and accept poorly presented work, all this simply because they expect it from boys. This could result in negative teacher labelling so they would be streamed into lower sets where they are restricted information and are more likely to form anti-school subcultures. Streaming usually results in lower educational achievement.

Boys are more likely to become anti-education because school promotes girls' culture but discourage boys'. In school you are expected to be quiet, follow authority and follow rules and boundaries. Girls have this culture imposed on them when they are young. Boys on the other hand are encouraged to play football, be loud and are expected to break the rules when young. This culture in schools is quite restrictive so they rebel. The two genders' extra curricular activities also show the recognition school's give to girls' culture. Boys are expected to 'do' (e.g. play football) and girls are expected to talk. Talking and communication is a key skill needed at school.

Time and time again gender-conflict is brought to the attention of the public in various forms. In our time someone who wants to make a point about gender-conflict and the inequality that is present will be more likely to use television or music to reach their audience. This however is a fairly new technology. Books or some form of writing on the other hand have been around for thousands of years.

There are alternatives to blaming the school for the underachievement of boys in education. The home could be blamed for the underachievement of boys. Working class boys have a disregard for authority. The male stereotypes that boys had were 'macho'. They were characterised by a disregard for authority and they preferred the active company of other men. They found that some boys were already fulfilling the stereotype in school. Their disregard for authority led to them being affected by the Hidden Curriculum and they were streamed in low sets. The enjoyment of other male company led to them forming anti-school subcultures. These reduced their chance of educational achievement because they were trying to fulfil the stereotype set by their parental role models.

Society could also be seen to be to blame for the educational underachievement of boys. There has been a steady decline in traditional male jobs in the manufacturing industry for example which has seen a sharp decline in recent years. This has given the boys a lack of ambition to achieve at school because they think that working is pointless if there is no job at the end. This has given boys low self-esteem and a low self-image. This could have discouraged boys from achieving at school. Feminised skills are now important to employers. Flexibility, teamwork and communication are all valued in the modern work

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place and these are traditionally associated with women. This could disadvantage men at getting jobs because they feel there is no place for them in the modern work place so educational achievement is pointless.

All these factors show that boys are underachieving in the education. Further research still needs to be done to fully explore the reasons why boys are underachieving. A lot of focus is being put on boys' underachievement and work is being done into bringing them up to the same level as girls but it still felt by some people that girls aren't reaching their full potential. Even though they are outperforming boys at all levels in the education system men are still going into the highest paid and most powerful jobs so, in a sense, girls are underachieving too. (word count: 1450)

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