

Opinions

Same sex or coed education?

Single-sex education improves focus, increases confidence and pushes academic boundaries



Heather Cassano
Guest Columnist

When people hear of those who spent their entire pre-college educations at same-sex institutions, they often assume those students missed

out on the classic high school experience.

I spent 14 years at an all-girls school, and I enjoyed it, miss it and would be more than willing to go back. Some students that attend coed schools seem happy that they made it out of high school alive.

So what are the perks of a single-sex, all girls education? No boys, of course. In a coed classroom there are distinct gender roles within which girls are expected to conform. Girls in a single-sex environment are more likely to pursue subjects like math and science, unlike girls in a coed school who tend to study the arts and humanities. The opposite is true for boys enrolled in single-sex schools. Boys are more likely to pursue the arts, especially drama, in a single-sex environment.

Garrison Forest School in Owings Mill, M.D., the all-girls school I attended, has a partnership with Johns Hopkins University, encouraging women to pursue scientific careers. The Women in Science and Engineering program allows female students to participate in lab research and encourages their interests in normally male dominated fields.

It is unlikely that female students in coed schooling would pursue a program like WISE. Gender roles in coed schools are an important factor in a student's education. A female student is less likely to sign up for a male-

dominated class like computer science when she knows she may be the only girl in the class. This apprehension is not a factor in single sex-education — female-only classrooms provide a more comfortable learning environment.

Attending a same-sex school provides students with a more productive environment. Braelinn Frank, a freshman at Elon University, also attended, Garrison Forest School.

"I think that going to an all-girls school really helped me focus on my studies, and to separate boys and my social life from them," she said.

The statistics strongly support single-sex education. According to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education, girls in single-sex schools score 15 percent higher on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test than girls in coed schools. Boys in single-sex schools score 35 percent higher than those in coed schools.

Many women who attended single-sex schools are now well known members of society. Such women include Sen. Hilary Rodham Clinton, Diane Sawyer and Madeleine Albright.

A common misconception about same-sex education is that it does not prepare you socially for college. This is untrue. Girls who attended same-sex schools are equally as confident and social as those who attended coed schools.

"The transfer to college was easy for me because I had many male friends outside of school from my pre-Garrison years," Frank said.

A single-sex environment allows students to concentrate more on what is important and less on what society expects him or her to be. Single-sex education lets students break away from gender norms and become individuals without gender-specific roles and interests.

Coed schooling aids in developing social skills, forges bonds among people of different backgrounds



Caitlin O'Donnell
Columnist

We all have them — those elementary school scuffles in which we are propelled into defense mode and are forced to stand up for ourselves. Whether it be two girls fighting over the cute fifth

grader or boys picking teams for a football game at recess, it's bound to happen.

My first memorable squabble did not happen with my best friend Rachel or even the girl sitting next to me in English. Rather, I was thrown into a metaphorical boxing ring with a boy, a mean-spirited male who found it funny to have everyone in the class call me the teacher's pet.

Though at the time it seemed like the end of my little fourth grade world, I wouldn't trade that experience for anything.

I discovered that boys aren't going to be kind to you just because you're female. You're just another rival who must be beaten no matter what.

I also realized girls will always rally together to defend one of their own, no matter what the situation.

And most importantly, I learned how to rationally and successfully defend myself against immature attacks from the opposite sex.

While numerous questions, criticisms and doubts have been cast on coed education, I think life lessons such as these, learned in a coed classroom, are irreplaceable and impossible to learn within the confines of same-sex education.

Though some may wish it were so, the workplace and society as a whole are certainly not structured around the idea of interactions only between the same sex. To the contrary, men and women are expected to work together promptly and efficiently to get the job done, despite their

differences.

Coed schools, both at the grade school and collegiate levels, provide students with a microcosm of society, where teachers and bosses are not always fair and males and females have different methods of working.

When girls learn only with other girls, they become accustomed to only the female style of learning, often characterized by emotion and inductive reasoning.

This has often been considered a benefit to same-sex learning, where all students are essentially working on an even playing field. But, it does not allow students to adjust to different learning styles and learn how to effectively work with people who think in a dissimilar way.

In October 2006, as part of the provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act to facilitate same-sex education in public schools, new federal rules were published allowing districts to create these schools only if enrollment was voluntary and comparable services, facilities and courses were available to both sexes.

The American Civil Liberties Union considers these schools discriminatory and detrimental to a student's learning and have even threatened legal action against them.

The debate about this type of education is obviously heated and unlikely to reach a conclusion soon.

When considering the situation, I find it significant to remember that our system of education has been successful for hundreds of years with coed classrooms. When has segregation, of any form, ever proven to be advantageous and fair?

Lessons learned through interactions with people who think and act differently than us are imperative not only to the learning process but also to life. Race, gender, religion, orientation, culture — these differences allow us to step outside of our own experiences and understand someone else's point of view.

What better place to do this than in a classroom?

Discovering the personal path to health and wellness



Sarah Beth Costello
Columnist

In the rush and chaos of everyday college life, sometimes a juicy burger and a heaping helping of french fries is just the pick-me-up needed to finish that paper or complete a project.

The feeling is familiar to me. For the past three years I have slowly begun to consume fast food on a regular basis. I am skilled at denying the calorie counts and convincing

myself that after a long day I deserve a frappuccino or double cheeseburger.

In January 2010, my blissful eating habits came to a screeching halt when I mounted the scale for the first time in three years and came face-to-face with reality. According to the body mass index calculations, I was 20 pounds overweight. There were multiple indications that my weight would continue to increase if something was not done to combat the problem.

Weight loss can be a daunting challenge, especially for a college student. Financial constraints and time restrictions often prevent

individuals from switching to healthier menus and exercising regularly.

Fad diets and advertised short cuts may seem the ideal route to losing weight fast, but diets are often short lived and rarely succeed in the long run. HealthCastle.com explains diets often fail because they deprive the body of necessary food groups (carbohydrates and fats for instance) and leave dieters hungry — a situation that will inevitably result in a "willpower blowout."

I realized the only way to lose weight and keep it off indefinitely is to adapt a new healthy living mentality. According to Inch-AWeigh.com, four out of five American women said they are dissatisfied with their looks. And almost half of all American women are on diets. In a culture obsessed with outward appearances and instant gratification, it is no wonder so many women struggle with low self-esteem.

Though there have been several initiatives in the last year to combat obesity and instill healthier meals in public school systems, people often miss the heart of the issue. The problem is not that a high percentage of Americans look fat but that a growing number of Americans are heading toward high blood pressure, diabetes, heart failure and early death.

Pursuing weight loss is a noble goal, but it is a

waste of time for people planning to subject their bodies to strict diets until they reach a healthy weight only to revert back to old habits that never really had a chance to die. I've tried the South Beach Diet and the vegetarian route. I never succeeded. Each time hunger inevitably proved stronger than my willpower and I'd come crawling back to the McDonald's line.

Overcoming my habits has been one of the hardest initiatives I have ever attempted. Instead of ruling out carbohydrates, fats or calories, I decided to forgo disastrous cravings and satisfy hunger with low-calorie snacks and meals.

I became a member of SparkPeople.com, a free Web site that provides an abundance of healthy living information and enables users to document food consumption and record exercise plans. I stopped eating fast food, gave up sodas and desserts and introduced my palate to the plethora of savory vegetables that are much better options than french fries or chicken fingers.

Ten pounds later I am halfway to my goal and am surprised at the new habits that have formed. While the first couple of weeks were difficult, I can now say the sacrifices have been worth it. I have found a weight loss plan that leaves me satisfied and has shown sensational results.

There's a whole wide blog out there ... explore it.

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