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# Single-Sex Schooling: Separate But Equal?

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## Single-Sex Schooling: Separate But Equal?

### **Abstract**

Does single-sex education significantly improve an individual's future labor market outcome? Sherrilyn M. Billger, Illinois State University, attempted to answer this question in her research entitled, *Reconstructing School Segregation? The Impact of Single-Sex Schooling on Labor Market Outcomes*. Billger presented her findings to Illinois Wesleyan students and faculty on March 10, 2004.

# Single-Sex Schooling: Separate but Equal?

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According to some education researchers, “co-ed can be no ed.” For many proponents of single-sex schools, the notion that co-educational classrooms can be detrimental to academic success serves as the basis for advocating separating the genders into single-sex schools. However, does a single-sex education significantly improve an individual’s future labor market outcome? Sherrilyn M. Billger, Assistant Professor of Economics at Illinois State University, attempted to answer this question in her research entitled, *Reconstructing School Segregation? The Impact of Single-Sex Schooling on Labor Market Outcomes*. Billger presented her findings to Illinois Wesleyan students and faculty on March 10, 2004 as the annual Omicron Delta Epsilon speaker.

Billger began her presentation by highlighting several of the benefits of single-sex education. Previous literature on the subject finds that separating males and females into different schools provides a less stressful environment for students, particularly in the case of females. Student benefit from single-sex schools, in part, because a single-sex environment alleviates the typical gender roles. A study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) demonstrated that teachers in co-ed classrooms call on male students more often than female students since boys tend to be more outgoing and boisterous than girls. This favoritism and gender stereotyping can be detrimental to female students, even at the collegiate level. For example, a former women’s college that recently began admitting men experienced a decrease in the number of females majoring in the sciences and mathematics as well as a drop in the number of female graduates receiving advanced degrees.

Statistically, Billger explained that graduates of all-girl secondary schools are 84 percent more likely than graduates of co-educational schools to attend college and almost twice as likely to attend graduate school. Similarly, males who attend single-sex schools

are more than twice as likely to graduate from college and 67 percent more likely to enroll in graduate school. However, these numbers ignore a selection bias, since students who choose to attend single-sex schools generally have higher family incomes, stronger work ethics, parental involvement, and other characteristics that typically lead to greater success.

In order to isolate the effects of single-sex education on labor market outcomes, Billger created econometric models that controlled for other factors which could lead to higher individual incomes. In her model that controlled for observable variables, such as parents’ education and occupation, region, and school type (private or public), Billger determined that females in her sample who attended single-sex schools earned wages that were 10 percent higher than females from co-ed schools. Likewise, Billger discovered that when controlling for unobservable variables, such as work ethic and family value of education, females who attended single-sex schools still earned 13 percent higher wages.

From these results, Billger concludes that single-sex schooling can lead to beneficial labor outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged girls. However, Billger, also noted that many educators believe that single-sex schools, in fact, reinforce gender stereotypes; and if men and women are going to eventually live and work together, they should attend school together as well.

Billger ended her discussion by looking toward the future of single-sex education. According to Billger, current policy changes in education, such as *the No Child Left Behind Act* and the evolving interpretation of *Title IX*, will lead to greater school choice and probably the creation of more single-sex public schools. To truly determine whether these schools benefit students, Billger stated that more research is required; the effect of single-sex schools remains ambiguous.