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Cover Page Footnote
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*Whitney Ransome and Meg Milne Moulton**

> "As a college professor I could identify the students from girls' schools with a 90 percent accuracy rate on the first day of class. They were the young women whose hands shot up in the air, who were not afraid to defend their positions, and who assumed that I would be interested in their perspective."[1]
>
> —Dr. Robin Robertson

I. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The past decade has witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in all-girls' education.[2] Since 1991, student enrollments at schools belonging to the National Coalition of Girls' Schools ("NCGS") have risen twenty-nine percent, applications forty percent, and more than thirty new girls' schools have opened.[3] These recent developments represent a significant reversal of fortune from the 1980s. Spurred on by the passage of Title IX[4] in 1972, the 1980s were characterized by a broad-based commitment to educational equity.[5] The fervor of that era led many to question the relevance and efficacy of girls' schools.[6] Single-sex schools were losing ground to co-educational institutions, which were considered by the vast majority to be the norm.

Title IX set forth notions of equal treatment and equal access.[7] Under the rubric of this statute, any form of separation between the sexes amounted to unequal treatment. Former all-male schools

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1. Remarks of Robin Roberston, May 1991, Southern Methodist University.

2. *See generally* Samantha Stainburn, *All Girls, All the Time February 1991*, TCHR. MAG., Jan. 2000, at 22-23.

3. Nat'l Coalition of Girls' Sch., Fall Data Survey, Nov. 2000.

4. Prohibition of Sex Discrimination, Pub. L. No. 92-318, § 901, 86 Stat. 373 (1972).

5. *See generally* Jennifer Salvatore, *The Legal and Policy Debate Over Public All-Girls Schools—Can Formal Gender Neutrality Bring True Gender Equality?*, PUB. INT. L. REP., Fall 2000, at 10.

6. *See generally* Karyn Hede, *Single-Sex Classrooms: Are They Best for Girls?*, SCI. AM., Summer 1998.

7. 20 U.S.C. § 1681 (2001) (noting that "no person . . . shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to any

and colleges were quick to admit girls[8]—a move prompted as much by economic and demographic realities as pedagogical commitment to equal access. Accompanying these newly co-educational institutions, however, was a change in assumptions about girls' schools. Girls' schools historically existed to provide quality education for young women who had been denied schooling alongside men; however, as the opportunities for co-education grew, this goal seemed less necessary. In fact, single sex education became characterized as anachronistic, out of touch with the "real world," and irrelevant.[9]

What, then, explains the remarkable renaissance that has occurred in just over a decade's time? What has led to the renewal of interest in girls' schools? How does an all-girls education differ from a co-educational education? The answers to these questions can be found in a series of interrelated developments in educational theory, gender research, and the link between brain function and the learning process.

These developments, however, were not solely responsible for the resurgence of girls' schools. In the late 1980s, two educators, Rachel Belash, head of Miss Porter's School (Connecticut) and Arlene Gibson, head of Kent Place School (New Jersey), issued a call to action among their girls' school colleagues. These visionary women had no doubt about the value and benefit of single-sex education, and their goal was to systematically document those benefits and to share that information broadly.

II. DOCUMENTING GIRLS' SCHOOL OUTCOMES: THE ROLE OF ALUMNAE AND PARENT RESEARCH

The professional experience of girls' school educators informed their conviction that girls' schools had well served students of many abilities and backgrounds for generations. What was common among these schools was a long-standing commitment to learning environments that place girls first and foremost.[10] What set them apart from other schools was an in-depth understanding of how girls learn and succeed. Students at girls' schools enjoyed not just

discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance . . . .")

8. *See* Susan Ferrechio, *All-Girl Schools Report Increase in Enrollment*, WASH. TIMES, June 2, 1999, at A1.

9. MYRA & DAVID SADKER, FAILING AT FAIRNESS: HOW AMERICA'S SCHOOLS CHEAT GIRLS 230-32 (1994).

10. *See* Hede, *supra* note 7.

equal opportunity, but every opportunity. At girls' schools, all the speakers, players, writers, singers, and athletes were girls. All the doers and leaders were girls. Female mentors and role models were abundant. The "chilly classroom climates"[11] that permeated co-educational institutions were almost non-existent in girls' schools, and there were few signs of second-class citizenship.

These professionals knew that their observations and understandings would be strengthened through quantitative research. Accordingly, in 1988 and 1990, two different yet related studies were undertaken. Starting in 1988, Enrollment Management Consultants (EMC) conducted a survey for the Coalition of Girls' Boarding Schools (the "EMC study"). In almost seven hundred phone interviews with families across the country, girls' schools were cited for their academic excellence and their ability to provide a communal environment that encouraged personal and academic exploration in a supportive culture.[12] Girls' schools were seen as ideal settings for adolescent girls since they supported risk-taking, encouraged academic excellence, prepared girls for college and the real world, and fostered a sense of leadership and self-development.[13]

The second research project, the "Shulman study," was conducted by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman. Commissioned by the Coalition of Girls' Day Schools, the firm surveyed 1200 girls' school graduates. Half of those surveyed graduated between 1955 and 1960; the others between 1975 and 1980. This is what they had to say:

- Seventy-three percent reported that their girls' school experience convinced them that women could accomplish anything.[14]
- Seventy-five percent believed they were more self-confident as a result of their all-girls school experience.[15]

11. This phrase was coined by Bernice Sandler from the Center of Women's Policy Studies at the Association of American Colleges. *See* NAT'L COALITION OF GIRLS' SCHS., MATH & SCIENCE FOR GIRLS: CONVENING THE EXPERTS, REFORMING THE CLASSROOM, FINDING THE RIGHT EQUATION 28 (1992).

12. ENROLLMENT MGMT. ASSOCS, IMAGE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES FOR ACTION: THE COALITION OF GIRLS' BOARDING SCHOOLS FINAL REPORT (1989).

13. *Id.*

14. YANKELOVICH CLANCY SHULMAN, GIRLS SCHOOL ALUMNAE: ACCOMPLISHED, DISTINGUISHED, COMMUNITY-MINDED, SURVEY OF GIRLS' SCHOOL ALUMNAE (1990).

15. *Id.*

- Ninety-one percent responded that attending a girls' school helped them focus on academics and encouraged them to test their intellectual limits.[16]

The graduates cited the following as the key benefits of a girls' school education: academic quality, small class size, personal development, and preparation for college and careers.[17]

Both studies supported the conviction of girls' school educators that girls' schools provided girls with a beneficial and unique experience. The EMC study, however, did contain one troublesome finding. Ann Pollina, the current head of Westover School in Connecticut, was astonished to learn that parents of girls in all-girls schools believed that math and science courses and facilities at coed schools were superior to those at girls' schools. Pollina's experience as a math teacher and department chair did not support this assertion. Pollina suggested that the Coalition demonstrate the strength of girls' schools in these areas by organizing and sponsoring the first of several conferences on math, science, and technology for girls.

The teaching strategies that emerged from these conferences were products of lessons learned in all-girls' education: strategies that teachers and researchers alike agreed made a difference. Moreover, these approaches were not just confined to the educational setting, but could be applied to any setting in which girls wanted to achieve. These educational approaches are summarized as follows:

- Using relevant real-world applications from girls' lives
- Drawing on vocabulary metaphors that girls could identify with
- Teaching in collaborative and cooperative ways
- Calling students by name, and waiting for them to reply before moving on to the next student
- Encouraging risk-taking
- Exploring mistakes and acknowledging their value
- Teaching alternative solutions, rather than just a single right answer to a given problem
- Using writing as a means of learning any subject
- Explaining through stories
- Helping students see themselves as sources of knowledge

16. *Id.*
17. *Id.*

III. THE POWER OF COLLABORATION: THE NCGS MODEL

By coming together to research and promote the concept of single-gender schooling, the Coalition of Girls' Boarding Schools and the Coalition of Girls' Day Schools became leaders in the national dialogue on girls' and women's issues. Those educators who were experienced with teaching only girls were determined to use the EMC and Shulman studies to paint a different picture of the role of girls' schools in American education. The findings of the studies gave the Coalition's leadership important talking points for future marketing and promotional literature. It became clear that if these organizations could situate the value of girls' schools upon a theoretical and pedagogical base, then families would better appreciate the positive outcomes of a girls' school education.

Strengthened by their new data, the leadership of both the Coalition of Girls' Boarding Schools and the Coalition of Girls' Day Schools realized that there was great power in collective action. In the fall of 1991, fifty-six schools officially came together to merge the two earlier organizations to form the National Coalition of Girls' Schools.[18] Following its inception, this combined group began a comprehensive campaign to heighten the visibility of the girls' school experience. Along the way, they discovered some unexpected surprises that helped enhance their efforts.

IV. NEW REPORTS, NEW PERSPECTIVES: EMERGING THEORIES ABOUT GENDER INEQUITIES

Once the Coalition's research findings were disseminated through publications and media coverage, a slow shift in public attitude began to take place. These new attitudes were fueled by the appearance of other educational studies on different gender-based learning styles; the lower numbers of girls and women in non-traditional career pursuits; and evidence of variations in both the development and function of male and female brains.

During the feminist revolution of the 1970s, talk of innate differences in the behavior of men and women was considered politically incorrect. Social and cultural differences, rather than genetic origins, were held to explain gender disparities in professions like engineering and architecture. These differences were also used to explain the tendency of boys to be more quantitative and spatially adept. Yet studies of the brain revealed that gender differences are rooted as much in the chemistry and structure of the brain as the

18. NAT'L COALITION OF GIRLS' SCHLS., EXPECT THE BEST FROM A GIRL.

manner in which girls and boys are raised.[19] The tendencies of girls to be more contemplative, collaborative, intuitive, and verbal, and boys to be more physically active, aggressive, and independent in their learning style seemed to stem from brain function and development.[20]

With the release of these scientific findings, the NCGS research was seen through a new lens. The educational debate on gender equity began to subtly change. The driving question was no longer whether girls and women had equal access and equal opportunity. Instead the focus was on how equal their educational experiences and outcomes are. The operative word, first suggested by Carol Gilligan, was different:[21] being equal did not have to mean being the same. The ways that girls experience school, look at the world, and deal with math, science, and technology do not always parallel those of boys. This simple shift in vocabulary had profound implications. The operative question was no longer, What is wrong with girls? Why aren't they more interested in non-traditional subjects? Rather, the question became, What is wrong with the way we are teaching and interacting with girls? Why are girls not achieving at levels commensurate with their abilities?

The legal and social controversies over women's issues in the 1980s produced a great deal of research and commentary that continued well through the next decade. In 1991, the American Association of University Women ("AAUW") issued its first of many wake-up calls regarding girls in American schools. Their report, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*,[22] highlighted some of the disparities between boys' and girls' attitudes in terms of achievements and self-esteem. These differences were particularly prevalent in the areas of math and science. In the executive summary of their 1995 report, *Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School*,[23] AAUW documented innovative teaching techniques and strategies that aimed at correcting the inequities revealed in their previous work. "If girls are to grow up smart, schools need to get smarter and use creative strategies such as co-

19. *See* FRANCES A. MAHER & JANIE VICTORIA WARD, GENDER & TEACHING 93-94 (2001).

20. *Id.*

21. *See generally* CAROL GILLIGAN, IN A DIFFERENT VOICE (1993).

22. AM. ASS'N OF UNIV. WOMEN, SHORTCHANGING GIRLS, SHORTCHANGING AMERICA (1991).

23. AM. ASS'N OF UNIV. WOMEN, GROWING SMART: WHAT'S WORKING FOR GIRLS IN SCHOOL (1995).

operative learning and single-sex classes," wrote Alice Ann Leidel, president of the AAUW Educational Foundation.[24]

The Foundation report recommended that schools

> reinforce girls individuality through single-sex classes that boost girls' lagging self-perceptions in areas such as math and science, foster girls involvement through cooperative learning groups that eliminate competitive classroom practices that often marginalize girls, provide girls with mentors and role models, give girls equal access to learning through hands-on experience with computers and lab equipment, empower girls to achieve goals by working with community groups and businesses to provide girls with routes to success . . . .
>
> Some of the most exciting changes in schools today are taking place at the "margins" of the educational system, as many researchers and educators dub the spaces outside the formal curriculum where many girl-centered initiatives tend to grow . . . . Many of these initiatives deserve wider attention, even though formal program documentation and assessment are often still scant. We can learn from these programs even as we continue to evaluate them . . . . Among the most closely watched of these strategies are single-sex classes and hands-on approaches to math and science.[25]

Shortly after *Growing Smart*, another AAUW report appeared entitled *Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single Sex Education for Girls*.[26] At first glance, it seemed less optimistic about girls' centered classes and schools. As an editorial in the Wall Street Journal subsequently clarified, however, "the report didn't really state that all-girl schools [had not] shown much benefit."[27] Rather, "at its worst the reports research [was] merely uncertain about the schools' benefits and in many places [reported] all sorts of positive things about them."[28] If anything, the work of AAUW demonstrated that more research was needed to document the beneficial outcomes of an all-girl education.

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24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

26. AM. ASS'N OF UNIV. WOMEN, SEPARATED BY SEX: A CRITICAL LOOK AT SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION (1998).

27. *Review & Outlook: Schools for Girls*, WALL ST. J., Mar. 13, 1998, at A16.

28. *Id.*

V. 1999 NCGS RESEARCH: GIRLS' SCHOOL GRADUATES SPEAK OUT

While the national spotlight focused on how schools were short-changing girls and what was not working for them, NCGS member schools began to question some of the assumptions put forth by the growing list of reports. There were vitally important lessons learned in girls' schools of value to a much broader audience. Girls' school campuses and classrooms represented exciting laboratories for discovery and could serve as an invaluable asset to educators everywhere. As more and more families and policy makers sought educational options, a prime topic of consideration pitted coed schools against single-sex ones. A great deal of opinion had been offered on the subject. Unfortunately, much was theoretically driven and prone to misinterpretation.

Largely absent from the coed versus single sex debate was quantitative data assessing the defining characteristics of girls' schools: their affirmation of females' abilities in sex-typed subject areas such as math, science, and technology; their encouragement of female career aspirations; and their ability to foster self-esteem.

The voices of girls' school graduates themselves had also been missing. Apart from the earlier studies done by NCGS, no one had systematically catalogued the opinions of the alumnae of a wide spectrum of girls' high schools. To provide such data, NCGS contracted with Goodman Research Group, an educational research firm in Cambridge, Massachussetts, to conduct a large-scale survey of girls' school alumnae. The six-page survey gathered information about graduates' girls' school experiences, their home lives, and related issues.[29] Over 4,000 alumnae from sixty-four different girls' schools provided data quantifying their experiences.[30]

The findings were unambiguously positive. Alumnae placed an enormous value on their education at girls' schools. They remained confident in their abilities. They identified themselves as academic achievers. They credited their girls' schools as the places where they learned to recognize and harness their talents and potentials. In fact,

- 85% assigned one of the top two ratings of very good or excellent to their girls school overall, and to fourteen of sixteen specific aspects about their girls' school. Top-rated were preparation for college academics and providing academic

29. NAT'L COALITION OF GIRLS' SCHLS., ACHIEVEMENT, LEADERSHIP, SUCCESS (2000).

30. *Id.* at 1.

challenge; nearly all the respondents (91%) rated their schools as very good or excellent in these areas.[31]

- 85% believed girls' schools provide young women with more encouragement in science, math, and technology than coed schools and 63% felt strongly that they were better prepared for the "real world" than their cohorts at coed schools.[32]
- 88% of alumnae said they would repeat their girls' school experience again and 84% would encourage their daughters to attend.[33]

Nearly all respondents either believed somewhat or strongly agreed that girls' schools provide more leadership opportunities than those available at coed schools.[34]

VI. GIRLS SCHOOLS IN 2001: THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Following the enactment of Title IX in 1972, the number of single-sex schools declined. By the mid 1990s, only two public girls' schools remained: the Philadelphia High School for Girls and Western High School in Baltimore.[35] What the Title IX prohibition of publicly funded single sex-schools could not anticipate, however, was the informed analysis of the positive role of girls' schools and the surge in private girls' school enrollments. Growing appreciation of girls' schools eventually spilled into the public sector. Since 1995, all-girls public schools have been established in California (Jefferson Academy), New York (Young Women's Leadership School of Harlem), and Illinois (Young Women's Leadership Charter School of Chicago). Moreover, dozens of other school districts have experimented with single-sex classes. As recently as June, 2001, the United States Senate passed an education bill[36] with a provision proposed by Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison making single-sex education more available in public schools. Under the provisions of the amendment, barriers are removed for local

31. *Id.* at 2.
32. *Id.* at 2.
33. *Id.* at 18-19.
34. *Id.* at 2.
35. Stainburn, *supra* note 3.
36. Better Education for Students and Teachers Act, S.1, 107th Cong. § 5331(b)(1)(L) (2001). The provision was included in the Leave No Child Behind Act, which was passed by both houses of Congress in December 2001. Leave No Child Behind Act, H.R.1, 107th Cong. § 5331(b)(1)(L) (2001). The act provides for federal funds to be used by schools for programs to provide "same gender schools, and classrooms, consistent with applicable law." *Id.* President Bush is expected to sign the act into law in early January 2002. Mike Bowler, *Options Expand for Children in Public Schools*, BALT. SUN, Dec. 26, 2001, at 2B.

school districts that wish to offer the option of single sex schools "if comparable educational opportunities are offered for students of both sexes."[37]

What do girls' schools do differently than co-educational institutions?

- They create a risk-taking environment designed for teaching that, in the words of James Joyce, "mistakes are the portals of discovery."
- They counter mass-media influences on female students by giving girls strengthening havens where they can effectively navigate the troubling image of girls in today's media with balance and self-assurance.
- They support a can-do philosophy. All leaders, movers, and doers at the schools are female. Girls' schools show their students that any girl can be president, any girl can play the drums, and any girl can take apart and reassemble a bike.
- They ensure that learning takes center stage without social distractions. Without the presence of boys, girls tend to display their intelligence and curiosity regardless of powerful age-determined notions of popularity, attractiveness, or negative peer pressure.
- They incorporate research indicating that team problem-solving works well for girls[38] by providing extensive opportunities for collaborative learning.
- They guarantee that math, science, and technology education are integral curricular components. Girls are expected to participate fully in these areas and they do.
- They focus on real life issues like career, work, and money. In the fall of 2000 NCGS sponsored a national conference on "Girls, Women, and Money."[39] As a result of this conference, a large number of member schools are highlighting the importance of financial literacy for girls, dispelling the Prince Charming myth that they will be cared for by someone other than themselves. Most women will be in the workforce by choice and necessity and all women must carry from school the economic tools to be self-sustaining.

37. Better Education for Students and Teachers Act, S.1, 107th Cong. § 5331(b)(1)(L) (2001).

38. Marita Inglehart, Donald R. Brown, Mina Vida, *Competition, Achievement and Gender: A Stress Theoretical Analysis*, *in* STUDENT MOTIVATION, COGNITION, & LEARNING: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF WILBERT J. MCKEACHIE 312-14 (Paul R. Pintrich, et al. eds., 1994).

39. A summary of the conference is available at http://www.ncgs.org.

- They promote athletic participation as a natural way to develop team play, leadership, individual talent, physical conditioning, competence, and knowing how to win and lose.
- They sustain a predominately female culture whose hallmarks are caring, challenge, collaboration, competition, connection in the interest of developing each girl to her fullest potential and to develop a moral context that will serve them all their lives. In so doing, girls' schools honor women's voices, their female perspective, their female way of doing things.

Today's youth culture advocates short-term gratification, premature sexual experimentation, self-centeredness, anti-intellectualism, and a focus on appearance over substance. Girls' schools instruct and inspire girls to focus on their long-term educational, personal, and professional goals by providing rigorous standards, high expectations, accountability and positive role modeling. The girls' school environment affirms and encourages young women in their capacities as confident individuals, leaders, and agents of social change.

Burch Ford, head of Miss Porter's School and president of the NCGS Board of Trustees, concludes that

> "[i]t is important that girls, while they are still growing physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually, be served in a context that encourages and supports their expression, however tentative and nascent. They need to have the opportunity, easily available not just hard-won, to risk self-expression as scholars, athletes, artists, and leaders, until their competence leads to the confidence not only to express themselves but also to comfortably sustain their perspectives when they are challenged by boys and men. That competence and confidence does not follow from insight or understanding alone, but can only develop from example of adult models, along with personal practice and experience. Those examples and that experience are available and encouraged in girls' schools in ways that are neither as focused or so protected elsewhere in society."[40]

Girls' schools are creating a new paradigm for society. As institutions where girls are accustomed to being heard, and where women lead in every aspect of life, girls' schools are a model for the world girls want and deserve. They promise a place where men and women work side-by-side, respectful of each other's voices, skills, and talents, thereby leveling life's playing fields.

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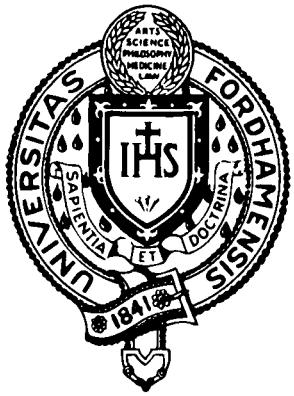
40. Remarks of Burch Ford.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