

Males are Underachieving in Education - Why?

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In the early stages of education, girls over performed boys. This was because girls' concern in education was underachievement. However, from GCSE level, girls fell behind boys and were less likely to gain three A Levels and progress into higher education. A major change occurred in the early 1990's when girls outperformed boys in all areas and at all levels of the education system. Boy's underachievement suddenly became the major concern

The general trend in attainment over recent years has been both upward female and male attainment, however the females improve more leading to an increasingly wider gender gap. Now that trends have been identified, we can speculate reasons. When sociologists first investigated gender, the focus was on female underachievement in education, and the ways that traditional ideas about the proper role of women in society prevented them from achieving their full potential. There are relatively few studies detailing boy's underachievement due to the new nature of the issue. However, there are many different viewpoints on the emergence of boys underachievement with reasons put forward ranging from biological differences to different teacher attitudes and labeling within the classroom. For example, in Arnold's study 'Raising levels of Achievement', he identified four main reasons as to why girls outperform boys. These are inborn differences; differences in the development of the brain hemisphere between boys and girls, stereotypes and self-perceptions and the way boys over perceive their own ability.

The issue of differential gender achievement has great social significance. Our society claims to be liberal and democratic with commitment to social equality. We supposedly live in a meritocratic society, meaning that status, income and attainment is based upon merit - the individual talent of a person. If any variable such as ethnicity, social class, or in this case gender is seen to have an effect on educational opportunities and attainment, it disregards the idea of meritocracy. This raises social issues that there is inequality in education and that the educational outcomes of one gender are limited.

Boy's underachievement has societal importance relating to changes in wider society. It has been suggested that economic changes have impacted upon female achievement, which in turn has led to relative male underachievement. The decline in manual work and increase in non-manual work may have provided more job opportunities for women and less for men. The introduction of equal opportunities legislation has increased the number of women in middle management positions. This has resulted in traditional gender roles disappearing with more positive role models for girls to follow. This change in female attitudes has been studied by a number of sociologists. Sue Sharpe's 1976 study of the working class girl found that they prioritized marriage and family before education and careers. In her 1994 revisit of this study, she found that girls were now more focused on their careers and were less likely to want to marry or start a family at an early age. This new focus on education and careers has arguably led to an increased motivation to succeed at school. This further reinforces the significance of boy's underachievement by showing its close links with wider societal issues.

Research Questions and Objectives

The aim is to substantiate some of the possible explanations of boy's underachievement. My study is based on a number of research questions:

1. To what extent are females outperforming males in education?
2. What are the current priorities of males and females?
3. Do males and females hold different self-perceptions and different attitudes towards the education system?
4. To what extent do the following have an effect on boys underachievement
5.
 - a. attitudes of school and teachers,
 - b. social and economic factors such as lack of positive male role models and the assessment process including coursework content of subjects?
6. What can be done about improving boy's achievement?

The objectives are to:

1. Examine the trend in gender attainment
2. Identify the difference in the current life priorities of males and females
3. Establish reasons for boy's underachievement

4. Develop initiatives to help narrow the gender gap

Methods

When designing data collection methods, it is important to note the methodological direction of the study to ensure that the data produced is going to be useful. I will be following the positivist theorists. They emphasize reliability, reliability and representativeness when collecting data. Positivists prefer quantitative methods such as structured interviews, official statistics, questionnaires and laboratory experiments. Quantitative methods reflect a more scientific approach and will present tables and charts with statistical data as evidence of a piece of research. In a questionnaire, they favor questions with fixed response categories so that patterns and trends can be uncovered.

Data produced by the use of quantitative type methods is also said to have the benefit of bringing greater reliability to the study. From a positivistic viewpoint, a study that is reliable must be replicable and uncover relationships between certain factors. To gain all of this any questionnaire must have fixed response questions for answers to be 'grouped' and analyzed. Too much restriction of answers in this way can be criticized for being purely statistical and hence lack any real understanding and meaning. There would be obvious doubts about the accuracy of my study if at least some consideration was not given to qualitative methods. Overall, the general methodological direction of my study is geared towards being more quantitative than qualitative whilst still maintaining the necessary balance in the data which means that it can be both reliable and valid.

The general trend recently has been towards 'triangulation' where a researcher uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques to produce a more comprehensive picture of social life. It is hard to find a research method that satisfies all three key criteria; that is, one, which provides data that is reliable, representative and valid. Researchers find themselves forced between choosing quantitative methods, which are highly reliable, but lacking in validity, or qualitative methods which are very hard to repeat, but which are high in validity. For these reasons, I intend to make use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The main research methods that I will use are two self-completion questionnaires - one for pupils and one for teachers. I chose written questionnaires for a number of reasons. Firstly, they allow me to employ the method of triangulation as questionnaires can use both qualitative and quantitative methods. Pre-coded questions with fixed response categories generate statistical data, which is easy to analyze. Open-ended questions allow the respondents to speak freely about certain issues, in their own words. The two types of questions complement one another and often an open question follows a closed question allowing the respondent to expand on their response. The data produced will be easily comparable and as a result patterns and trends can be identified meaning that the criteria of research from a positivistic angle can be met. At the same time, validity can be retained in the data with the presence of some open questions. There will be no interviewer bias, which may have had an effect on the data. If I was to complete an interview instead of a questionnaire, in some cases my presence will have had an effect on the responses given. Any interviewer bias that is reflected in the data produced from an interview reduces the data reliability and the study as a whole. A questionnaire that is handed out in school and collected in on completion is a relatively quick, cheap and easy method of research. A questionnaire allows me to survey a relatively large sample of year 11 pupils and teachers in the time that is available. As a result, the representativeness and reliability is likely to be improved.

I am going to use probability sampling by selecting a simple random sample of the research population. This is to obtain a statistically representative sample, so that when the results of the research are analyzed valid generalizations to the wider population can be made. The pupils will all come from year 11, as I can only ask a limited number of pupils in the available time and cannot consider more than one year group. At this age, just before sitting their GCSE examinations, any possible causes of differential educational attainment are likely to have taken their toll. Studying one year group will allow me to come to more comprehensive and detailed conclusions rather than sketchily analyzing all year groups within a school. To distribute my questionnaire, all boys and girls in year 11 from three different schools will be entered into random number tables. 50 girls and 50 boys will be chosen using random numbers so that a representative sample of mixed ability males and females is gained. The same technique will be used to issue 100 teacher questionnaires to teachers of both genders, all subjects etc.

As with any study concerning differential educational attainment purely on the basis of social characteristics, there are ethical issues. Although this issue is not as sensitive as some e.g. abuse, it is still important to select the words that I use carefully in both research methods, particularly the teacher questionnaires. It is important not to suggest that there is widespread and obvious gender discrimination occurring in the classroom. It is for this reason that the teacher questionnaire uses more qualitative methods such as open-ended questions, as qualitative methods are generally regarded as best for dealing with sensitive issues and to prevent any supposed accusations. This is another important benefit of triangulation as this way my own opinions on any of the subjects will have no effect on my data collection. Another ethical issue is confidentiality. This is will people reading the research be able to recognize and identify the individuals who have taken part in the research? It may be the case that a teacher in my study holds stereotypical attitudes about males and females, which could lead to a guess who type scenario. My questionnaires will be completed anonymously and I will not be there when they complete them, so there will be a certain degree of confidentiality guaranteed.

Timescales

It is vital that I manage my time effectively throughout this project. The deadline date for the dissertation is 26th April,

so I have worked backwards to estimate how long each stage will take to complete. I have produced a schedule for my research using a Gantt Chart to provide a visual representation of the tasks that need to be completed for my project. The timescale is realistic and I have set aside two months at the end to allow for any unforeseen problems that may occur and mean that I run over on any of the tasks. The article was produced by the member of masterpapers.com. Sharon White is a senior writer and writers consultant at term papers. Get some useful tips for thesis and buy term papers .