

Education, the American Dream, and Gender by 123456 Chapter 6-7

The **American Dream** is a belief that everyone ought to and has a chance to get better and make a better life for one's children. The American Dream is both a description of American society, relative to other countries, and an ideology. As a description, many citizens are examples of having "made it", overcoming odds, and making a better life for themselves and others. As an ideology, the American Dream can make some who are successful mistake their good fortune for their diligence and others who are unfortunate feel like failures and get into a downwards spiral. Not only do individuals see themselves as instances within the ideology, others see them that way. Consequently, as Weber points out, success is often seen as virtue and failure as sin. The fairness of the American Dream has a perverse arrangement with unfairness. **Education** is key to the American Dream. Let's look at how the genders are educated and what we can do with it.

Women are said to be on **the low end** of the gender hierarchy. Men and women are different, some of the differences being natural and others cultural. Even if cultural, the culture can make them even more different, for just because something is imposed does not make it less real. Surrounding these differences and the egalitarian notion that everyone ought to be treated the same because we all have the same potential, are many arguments about the pros and cons of "**separate but equal**" education for girls and boys. We do not expect in this day and age to hear anyone advocating separate but equal schools for the races, but we still hear arguments that schooling is more fair and effective when there is separation. Boys in all boy schools appear more likely to feel free to take the "soft" courses, like art and music, perhaps because they can express their interests more than their gender when they all homogenous. They do not have to be compared with girls in left-brain language in which girls tend to do better at an early age. Girls in all girl schools are said to enjoy positions of leadership that might not be allowed them in a mixed gender school.

In my experience at **CSULA** there was a woman student who had been to an all girl's school for a significant part of her schooling. She was not afraid to speak up in class. She had a sense of herself as an **intellectual**, a role culturally reserved for males. She volunteered to do a presentation for one class because she was particularly interested in the topic. She was an intelligent and creative student and managed to

write one of the most memorable papers in the class. It was a class on theory wherein the students studied several major theorists. She had the gumption to ask if she could synthesize the theorists in a drama. The professor gave her the go-ahead, and she produced a paper, in verse, wherein a group of people in an imaginary family were in family therapy. The mother took the role of Durkheim; the father took the role of Marx; the daughter took the role of Simmel, and the son, a lover of technology, took the role of Weber. The therapist took the role of Talcott Parsons, putting all four of them together in one overarching fabric and letting them know that they all needed one another and were a part of one social system. By creating the imaginary therapeutic session, the female student was able to exercise both her masculine and her feminine sides: she articulated the thinking of each theorist and she creatively posed it in drama and verse.

Perhaps in our effort to be uniquely who we are and also to honor our similarities, creativity is the answer. I have heard of courses where the professor simply tells men to come into a gender course dressed in femininity and the women to come in dressed toughly like men or “tied down” like the automaton businessman. In other courses, students are encouraged to keep journals wherein they note moments that bring gender to the fore. When one pays attention to gender, either by journaling, dressing, acting or otherwise signifying, one can see how the culture of gender subtly impinges upon us. Obviously there are great aspects of each gender. What we each and all could realize is that it behooves us to take the best from each gender pool, to recognize how we have been influenced by culture to one ‘side’ or the other, and to stretch to the opposite. This way, each one of us will become equipped to dare to create

The great thing about childhood and education is that our imagination is awakened. The sad thing is then that our imagination is swayed away from the imagined bad and toward the imagined good of our gender. It is up to each educated American to find a foothold in the path to the American Dream. While there will never be a world where all are created or start out equal, each one of us can ensure that we will not use gender to limit ourselves or others along the way. There is a dream that we can each get better. Why not follow that dream? One way is to exercise the great qualities of each gender: decisiveness, grace, listening, determination, goal-setting, discipline, protection, risk-taking, intelligence, and good humor.