

2013 SOPHE Presidential Address

Getting a Concept of Coeducation

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No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving assistance.

—Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C., §1681–1688

If there is any misleading concept it is that of “coeducation”: that because women and men are sitting in the same classrooms, hearing the same lectures, reading the same books, performing the same laboratory experiments, they are receiving an equal education. They are not, first because the content of education itself validates men even as it invalidates women. Its very message is that men have been the shapers and thinkers of the world, and that this is only natural.... Women and men do not receive an equal education because outside the classroom women are perceived not as sovereign beings but as prey.

—Adrienne Rich, “Claiming an Education,” p. 168

One year after Richard Nixon signed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, I confronted coeducation such as Rich has described when I entered architecture school along with many men and very few women. Most likely, without this law authored by the first woman of color ever elected to U.S. Congress, Japanese-American Patsy Matsu Takemoto Mink, this journal’s contributors and readers would be almost entirely male today.² Designated upon her death the “Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act,” Title IX is not so simple in practice as its text makes it seem. Two decades later the American Association of University Women (AAUW) initiated a vast program of educational research that has contributed to administrative deliberations over federal policy interpreting the Mink Act, whose author was an AAUW “Member of Note.”³ Sadly, AAUW’s empirical research has documented the truth of Rich’s claim.

I loved design and excelled at it, but abandoned my architecture education after five semesters and changed my career path to enter what Catharine Beecher called “woman’s ‘true’ profession,” teaching school. For I was utterly dismayed by the unnecessary absence of women

architecture faculty, the unnecessary absence of women from the history and theory of architecture curricula, and the apparently accepted status of women architecture students as simultaneously unwelcome “immigrants”⁴ and sexual prey. If you have seen Nathaniel Kahn’s documentary film *My Architect*, you may have some sense of the abusive situation that, at age 23, I decided I could not accept. My own racially desegregated, church-sponsored high-schooling in the late 1960s had been sex-segregated with the existentialist educational aim of cultivating girls’ “courage to be,” an ontological and ethical aim that I learned to take seriously even if I had no opportunity to study physics or drafting ’til college. So I confess I was shocked and bewildered to discover Rich’s claim also described accurately the sex-desegregated, progressive public high school where I taught English. Tragically, much of its truth is still evident in public schools.

As I began my third year of school-teaching, a friend gave me an offprint of Jane Roland Martin’s article in *Harvard Educational Review*: “Excluding Women from the Educational Realm.”⁵ In it she explained how late-modern, analytic philosophy of education had excluded, distorted, and devalued women as both subjects and objects of educational thought, and therefore posed many provocative questions for the field. From the moment I read it, I knew I must pursue my Ph.D. Martin’s philosophical challenge to study the concept of coeducation resonated strongly with puzzlements my teaching experiences had posed for me. So, thirty years ago, I went back to graduate school wanting to write my dissertation on the “misleading” concept of coeducation. A National Women’s Studies Association symposium I heard in 1983—“Should Public Education Be Gender-Free?” presented by philosophers of education Ann Diller, Maryann Ayim, Kathryn Pauly Morgan, and Barbara Houston—made this aim seem not only reasonable but worthwhile.⁶

When I began drafting my dissertation prospectus, Jane Martin commended my idea, too, but my adviser forbade this topic because, he insisted, coeducation was “not a concept.” Consequently, I did not write my dissertation on the concept of coeducation. However, I continued to wonder: Why is coeducation such a thin concept? Is it a thin concept because it lacks substance worthy of study, or just because we have evaded the task of studying it? Especially when controversy emerges concerning the possible value of what empirical researchers call “single-sex education” (as if we should know what that means) such wonderments acquire new practical urgency, making important neglected philosophical inquiry on coeducation. Therefore I have made getting a concept of coeducation my lifetime purpose as a philosopher of education,⁷ by studying highly various thought on this concept by John

Dewey and the community of women teachers at Chicago's Laboratory School, Louisa May Alcott, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, and Girl Scouts USA.⁸ Tonight I focus our attention on such thought implicitly evident in, or evaded and prompted by, empirical research on public coeducation that the AAUW published between 1991 and 2013. (The most recent report focuses on women students in community colleges.⁹)

Thus I will try to untangle some conceptual confusion that makes coeducation misleading. Common-sense talk about "single-sex education" and "coeducation"—which the AAUW has uncritically adopted in its empirical research discourse—often becomes mired in ambiguity with regard to educational ends and means that such terms may signify. Here I will invite you to consider with me many provocative ethical and pedagogical questions that may arise if, as readers of AAUW research, we question that means-ends ambiguity and insist upon more precise conceptual language that recognizes sex-segregation and sex-desegregation as educational means with variable aims and consequences. I will name only two categories of such educational ends here: "one-sex education" and "coeducation." To avoid unnecessarily distracting, sibilant repetition, I will drop the prefix "sex-" even as I imply it whenever I specify, "segregated" and "desegregated." This shorthand usage may call various familiar racial analogies to mind, whose intersectionality with this issue of gender justice may further complicate and develop this inquiry helpfully, offering diverse painful reminders that aimless, thoughtless desegregation—whether racial or sexual—can have unjust, miseducative consequences. Thus intersectionality elicited by this usage may give us repeated pause, as it should: not only to wonder at how substantially African Americans have contributed to thought about coeducation, but also to consider how the stubborn racial injustice of racially desegregated public schooling has led to recent controversial discussions about the possible educational value that voluntary sex-segregated¹⁰ schooling may offer African-American boys. I hope that this exercise in conceptual clarification may prove useful for that important ongoing discussion, which limited space prevents me from taking up here. Meanwhile, too, you may fairly also consider this analysis a cautionary tale about any empirical social-scientific research on education that neglects the philosopher's logical work of clarifying concepts and values—and at the same time a plea that philosophers of education should take such research seriously as an object of conceptual critique.

I. Coeducation—An Experiment

The word “coeducation” was not yet in the English lexicon when, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, critiquing the miseducative character of monarchy and proposing a government-funded, national system of coeducation for all children, rich and poor.¹¹ She theorized coeducational aims and desegregated means for educating women as an experiment, to test the rightness of women’s claims to intelligent humanity, and argued this experiment would be an ethical necessity for revolutionary republics such as those France and the U.S. were then beginning to build. Martin’s *Reclaiming a Conversation* re-introduced philosophers of education to Wollstonecraft’s educational thought after its long neglect, at the same time proposing, “We must understand that some of the most interesting and significant theories of female education may have been authored not by single individuals but by groups of individuals.”¹² As Martin herself would later suggest, the AAUW may be such a group.¹³ Founded in 1881,¹⁴ the AAUW is “a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance,” working together to “advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.”¹⁵ Committed to coeducation as an aim for educational sex-equity, albeit while organizing voluntary segregated education programs to study controversial projects relevant to its mission, the AAUW has become a metaphoric *ad hoc* Principal Investigator for an extended version of the experiment Wollstonecraft had proposed.¹⁶ Since 1991, in a Pragmatist spirit, the AAUW has sponsored over two dozen reports of methodologically diverse, empirical research on culturally diverse girls’ and women’s education within both segregated and desegregated contexts, including, but not limited to, schools, college and university campuses, and online environments. Various teams of scholars and researchers who have produced the AAUW’s many reports come from almost every research specialty found in any college of education—as well as popular journalism—but have excluded philosophers of education.

Yet the latest of their reports on schooling does share Wollstonecraft’s concerns to expand girls’ educational opportunities, to examine comparatively and critically both boys’ and girls’ schooling and education, and to extend those privileges as rights to all children, regardless of socioeconomic status. At least implicitly, their 2008 research vindicates Wollstonecraft’s proposed experiment, whose positive consequences the report’s foreword celebrates: “Women and girls have made remarkable gains in education during the past 100 years, disrupting the belief—now largely unspoken—that boys and men are

better 'suited' to intellectual work."¹⁷ Meanwhile, white U.S. advocacy for segregated education has become philosophically ambiguous: it can reflect democratic concerns supported by AAUW research that often desegregation does obstruct gender justice, thereby miseducating both sexes; or it can reflect concerns to preserve pious traditions of white, female purity, white, male privilege, and compulsory heterosexuality. This circumstance makes conceptual inquiry on coeducational aims important for advocates of segregated education who value both gender justice and racial and sexual justice, no less than for practitioners of desegregated education.

II. The Problem of One-Sex Education

Worthy of *JoPHE* scholars' future historical research, the Mink Act's opposition to one-sex education enjoys strong support from the Obama administration, but under both Reagan and Bush administrations it has become subject to regressive modification.¹⁸ With federal administrations' support for its purpose initially, the Mink Act

...prohibited single-sex classes or programs within coed public schools, with some limited exceptions. Single-sex was permitted for physical education activities involving contact sports, sex education at the elementary and secondary levels, and choral groups. Other than these exceptions, Title IX prohibited single-sex programs unless such programs were designed to overcome the effects of past discrimination. To meet this standard, a school district had to show that the sex-based exclusion was necessary to overcome historical sex-based barriers that have disadvantaged those who would benefit from the program. For example, an all-girl math class may have met this standard if the class was designed to compensate for girls' limited participation in math.¹⁹

In 1995 the AAUW recommended "a guarded enthusiasm" for segregated classes that respected these regulations,²⁰ and later investigated that recommendation further, convening *empirical* researchers for "*philosophical* debate" about it, who acknowledged, "No learning environment," whether segregated or desegregated, "provides a sure escape from sexism."²¹ Observing also that "feminist," segregated²² education seemed to benefit girls more than segregated education that avoided critique of its social context's gender inequality, these empirical researchers could not make a reliable empirical claim segregated education "works" or is "better" than desegregated education without formulating the normative meaning of a "good education," or "the goals of education."²³ Obviously, such formulation is a philosophical research task for which few empirical researchers in education have been

educated explicitly. This roundtable's evaluative paralysis before such basic philosophical concerns recalls Martin's questions six years before the AAUW began its aggressive educational research agenda:

How can a woman avoid shallow solutions to the problems education poses if she never hears what has been said by those who have thought deeply on the subject? How can she know what education to claim if she has never entered into philosophical conversation about this education herself, indeed never even realized that such conversation existed?²⁴

The AAUW has never published even one report of philosophical research on women's and girls' education, or coeducation. Meanwhile, scholarly studies of girls' and women's education in the two decades following the Mink Act, including the AAUW's reports, sparked backlash in 2000, with critics charging that such particular attention to girls' education had put boys at unjust educational disadvantage. Endorsing that backlash, the Bush administration weakened the Mink Act's civil rights protections. In response, AAUW research has debunked "the current hype of the 'boys' crisis, which is often given as a justification for allowing unrestricted, publicly funded," segregated education while "women and girls still face inequities in educational opportunities,"²⁵ but has approved segregated education, "so long as it is appropriate, necessary, and done in a manner consistent with constitutional requirements and existing antidiscrimination laws."²⁶ This battle over the question of deregulating segregation in schools leaves us still in want of normative philosophical inquiry concerning coeducational aims by which the strategy's application might be appraised. This remains a serious gap in the AAUW's work.

III. Coeducational Aims—To Segregate or Desegregate the Sexes?

Both "single-sex education" and "coeducation" are today naïve concepts—thin, under-theorized, blind to their philosophical history and their practical complexities—many of which the AAUW has documented empirically nonetheless. Unlike Wollstonecraft, the AAUW theorizes no particular critical concept of miseducation. However, AAUW reports show that, conceived vaguely with no specificity regarding teaching, learning, or curriculum, both segregated and desegregated education have evidenced miseducative outcomes problematic for gender justice. Yet could each strategy perhaps offer some distinctive assistance toward that difficult end if each were defined and deployed specifically to achieve particular coeducational aims?

The AAUW defines single-sex education simplistically, as "classes or schools attended by only one sex."²⁷ Yet, might one-sex education

not also be conceived—admittedly with a radically deconstructive twist—as classes or schools attended by both sexes that enable one sex’s learning and disable or devalue the other’s? Can these polemically opposed terms, “single-sex education” and “coeducation,” be conceptually helpful to educators if they signify only *means* of schooling, e.g., segregation and desegregation, independent of their educational *ends*? The Mink Act challenges desegregated practices—such as sexual harassment—that have too often seemed to sustain sexism as an end, initially allowing only segregated educational practices that aim specifically for “coeducational” ends—such as equal opportunity to learn. Could segregated schooling’s early 21st-century deregulation reflect endorsement of one-sex education not merely as a means but also as an end? That question is implicit in the AAUW’s opposition to deregulation of segregated education, and might constitute a major plea for a thought experiment to test the pragmatic applicability of segregated educational strategies to particular coeducational aims.

AAUW research has implied contemporary translations of coeducational aims that Wollstonecraft theorized in 1792. For example: (a) offering freedom to claim honest female selfhood; (b) confounding the sex distinction; (c) fostering political, economic, and sexual equality; (d) cultivating sexual mutuality; and, to a substantially lesser extent than Wollstonecraft advocated, (e) providing public education for childrearing. Wollstonecraft conceived each of these coeducational aims and advocated desegregated means for their achievement, but AAUW has admitted the possible utility of segregated educational strategies for achieving them. Which of these aims that Wollstonecraft formulated for coeducation could today reasonably be accomplished through segregated means more effectively than through desegregated means alone? How? To what degree or extent? And with what consequences for surrounding, desegregated contexts? Today I can only pose and gloss, not answer or even develop fully, such questions.

A. Offering Freedom to Claim Honest Female Selfhood

The AAUW has updated the critical spirit of Wollstonecraft’s religious dissent against Divine Rights of Kings, husbands, and parents, her concern about women’s human right to develop honest selfhood. Whereas Wollstonecraft enjoined women to unmediated communion with a rational and just God, the AAUW has adopted an intense psychological focus upon the educational importance of girls’ developing rational “self-esteem,” defined by the AAUW as “a governor on dreams and future actions.”²⁸ Besides recommending scientific learning as a corrective for girls’ suffering self-esteem, the AAUW has called attention also to an “evaded curriculum” whose subject matter includes both “The Expression and Valuing of Feelings” and “Gender and Power,” and

recommended that “Students...begin to discuss more openly the ways in which ascribed power, whether on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, or religion affects different lives....”²⁹ Sponsored by the AAUW, journalist Peggy Orenstein’s *SchoolGirls* provides narrative insight into coeducational miseducation, premised upon her understanding that “Girls with healthy self-esteem have an appropriate sense of their potential, their competence, and their innate value as individuals. They feel a sense of entitlement: license to take up space in the world, a right to be heard and to express the full spectrum of human emotions.”³⁰ Orenstein demonstrated the (admittedly difficult) possibility of coeducational teaching that prizes *boys* learning respect for women and for girls’ self-esteem, and at the same time documented the particular value Latina girls’ segregated education for self-esteem in a YWCA might have. Later, however, AAUW researchers raise doubts about popular claims that girls in segregated schools have stronger self-concepts, albeit conceding that a segregated environment’s safety has been critical to many middle-school girls’ identity development and that “Something” about segregated classes “makes them preferred by many girls” over desegregated ones.³¹

Can honest female selfhood emerge and grow in segregated spaces with peer encouragement and support through conflicts and difficulties that inevitably arise? Can honest female selfhood emerge and grow in less-protective, desegregated spaces where girls may confront peer challenges that threaten sexist domination? Other categories of voluntary self-segregation—for example, according to ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation—may also become necessary to achieve the coeducational aim of offering freedom to claim honest, female selfhood. Who would not prefer peer encouragement and support over peer challenges that threaten social or sexual domination? Yet how can either boys and men or girls and women learn to value freedom for honest female selfhood if they never have opportunity for learning to negotiate ethically those peer challenges that threaten to foreclose democratic possibilities? Although segregated spaces may also present conflicts and difficulties that threaten racist or heterosexist or other sorts of domination, might segregated spaces nonetheless help to prevent, prepare for, and recover from harmful or threatening peer challenges that learners are not yet otherwise sufficiently honest and strong to resist? Could both segregation and desegregation help to achieve this coeducational aim of offering freedom to claim honest female selfhood, especially if purposefully coordinated with each other, and if the teaching and the curriculum are well-suited to this aim and to the learners themselves?

B. Confounding the Sex Distinction

Wollstonecraft’s language is deliberate: “I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates

the behavior.”³² To confound is not to refuse or deny or ignore; to confound is to cause surprise or confusion, to prove wrong or defeat, or to mix up. Her coeducational aim of confounding the sex-distinction, mandated skepticism about teaching one sex a particular subject or set of skills, but not the other, therefore means educating for both sexes’ mental and physical strength. The AAUW has pursued that same aim with comparable rational fervor, commending both segregated and desegregated strategies that have this purpose. Wollstonecraft would praise the AAUW’s strong emphasis on educating girls in sciences, technologies, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); on girls’ participation in sports and athletics; and on explicit teaching about sexuality and health. The AAUW has updated this coeducational aim by confounding also oppositional, essentialist conceptions of gender with alertness to its diverse cultural expressions, and Martin has proposed an ideal of gender justice that “takes gender into account when it makes a difference and ignores it when it does not.”³³ Advocating segregated educational strategies that serve gender justice and rejecting those that do not, the AAUW seems to “confound the sex distinction” by practicing gender-sensitivity that invokes sex as primarily a *political* distinction while regarding the essentialist *ontological* distinction as problematic.

C. Fostering Political, Economic, and Sexual Equality

Wollstonecraft critiqued imperial monarchism’s sexual economy (especially its slavery, common and legal prostitution, and children’s workhouses) to argue for political-economic, sexual equality as a coeducational aim. However, the AAUW has not critiqued, but deployed, the global-corporatist political economy on U.S. women’s behalf: to claim its resources for women’s scholarships and fellowships, for research and advocacy projects, and for coeducation’s improvement to achieve gender justice. Without addressing compulsory heterosexuality’s construction of gender inequalities,³⁴ the AAUW amends Wollstonecraft’s argument for sex equality in the political economy by arguing for educators’ necessary alertness to the double and sometimes even multiple political-economic jeopardy of sex and race, reflected in “Occupational segregation among women of color” and in Black, female-headed households’ high rates of child poverty.³⁵ Focused on the “pay gap” between educated women and men, the AAUW’s many other reports have reflected concern for economically diverse girls’ and women’s preparation and resources to earn their own independent living—although the AAUW has not yet taken up critical inquiry on education in and for professions other than STEM fields and the tenured professoriate to any substantial extent.³⁶

Just as Wollstonecraft envisioned women's political participation and representation as integral to this coeducational aim of gender equality, the AAUW's many local branch organizations and Action Network provide informal segregated education for women's political participation across the nation, especially around the issue of pay equity, and its Public Policy and Government Relations Department represents women's concerns about gender justice in the national political arena, publishing an annual Federal Policy Agenda, much of which concerns education. The AAUW has also hosted "Sister-to-Sister" summits in schools and national conferences to educate campus women student leaders.

Such voluntary segregated education may enable learning to make those political affiliations necessary to persevere and prevail in difficult advocacy for gender equality. At the same time, desegregation may enable learning to understand political strategies and controversies and forge coalitions necessary to make advocacy for gender equality effective. Even if desegregation does not ensure materially equal resources for women's and men's education, materially equal resources for their education are unlikely without desegregation, the AAUW has argued. Nor can such resources reasonably be judged a trivial concern in a nation whose public-funded schools suffer from such profound political-economic inequality, exacerbated by government vouchers for private schools, privatization of public education, and a punitive system of accountability that devalues gender justice. Can this coeducational aim of fostering political, economic, and sexual equality be achieved without segregated education? ...or without desegregated education?

D. Cultivating Sexual Mutuality

Wollstonecraft theorizes monarchist miseducation fosters a double standard of sexual morality—libertinism for men, chastity (or prostitution) for women—which oppresses women directly and children indirectly.³⁷ Therefore, she advocates desegregated learning so boys and girls might develop mutuality as one another's friends. She argues such friendship development could educate them to resist the dangerous delusions of heterosexual romance and, at the same time, prepare them for marital friendship in parental partnership as equal adults free to claim honest selfhood as individuals not dehumanized by the sex distinction. Similarly, in 2001, the AAUW recommended desegregated, coeducational efforts to "Help Girls and Boys Talk Together" and "Cultivate and Support Boy-Girl Friendships."³⁸

But the AAUW has demonstrated also that sexual harassment throughout the U.S. educational system makes this coeducational aim for sexual mutuality difficult to achieve.³⁹ Reporting that boys face sexual, often homophobic, harassment, too, from other boys,⁴⁰ the AAUW has advised that, "Boys must be helped to understand that violence damages

both the victim and the perpetrator, and that violence against women is not in a somehow-more-acceptable category than other violent acts.”⁴¹ For, according to the AAUW, “Sexual relations, interactions, and identity appear the most baffling and problem-fraught social areas for girls.... Sexual violence, sexual risks—principally, pregnancy—and ‘sex’ or relations to boys are cited...as ‘major struggles and issues’ for teenage girls.”⁴²

If we do examine segregated education mindful of this coeducational aim to cultivate sexual mutuality, new gender-sensitive questions arise concerning segregated education, too. Consider Barbara Houston’s question about coeducation: “What other effects do our strategies for eliminating gender bias have?”⁴³ Does segregated education always educate only the targeted sex? Could the very notion of one-sex education be misleading if we fail to consider segregated education’s possible coeducational (often also miseducative) consequences for both the targeted sex and the neglected one? Suppose those of the targeted sex learn to feel superior, powerful, and entitled to favoritism while those of the neglected one learn to feel inferior, powerless, and resigned to self-sacrifice, seduction, or manipulation? Or suppose those of the targeted sex learn to feel simply confident, strong, curious, and adventurous as never before while those of the neglected sex, who may be more accustomed to gender privilege or other injustices, now learn to feel resentful, angry, bitter, and prejudiced? Or suppose segregation sets up expectations of gender conformity that have racist, heterosexist, or even sexist consequences? How can such coeducational dynamics set in motion by segregated education fail to construct oppositional notions of sex and gender that undermine the very possibility of mutuality and neglect the challenges of transgender students? How does anyone learn to surrender unjust privilege or resist against unjust neglect without bitterness or loss of dignity? How can such graceful humility and ethically courageous insubordination be taught?

Of course such targeting and such neglect have long occurred in desegregated settings too—informally and often invisibly—as the AAUW has documented. Could segregated groups in such settings deliberately raise educators’ and students’ awareness of such invisible targeting and neglect in desegregated classes? Could they be designed explicitly to prevent or to survive backlashes against progress made, which are likely to generate more rather than less gender discrimination and sexual harassment and undermine any possibilities for mutuality? Could segregated spaces provide more effective settings than desegregated ones for basic anti-racist education that does not take a dismissive stance toward gender justice? Could segregated spaces provide more effective means than desegregated ones for consciousness-

raising about compulsory heterosexuality's contributions to gender bigotry and gender inequality? Any efforts to provide segregated education for gender justice must, of pragmatic necessity, reflect intelligent prospective thought about proposed means' possible consequences for students' learning in relation to the broader context within which it occurs, whether that context be a school, a family, a community, or a nation. Do those consequences undermine or support this coeducational aim of students' learning to cultivate sexual mutuality? Often, they may do both simultaneously, presenting serious dilemmas that force educators to weigh the odds, take risks, and never stop strategizing.

E. Providing Education for Childrearing

Wollstonecraft applied her theorizing about monarchist miseducation and republican coeducation to her critique of parents, schools, and printed polemics on education, and argued strongly for the necessity of education for childrearing. Her ideal of education for citizen motherhood corrected pre-modern, paternalistic notions of childrearing, although its notion of mutuality in marital friendship and parental partnership ignored many questions about fathers' education for childrearing, thus setting the stage for a new form of sexist oppression, modern maternalism. Although concerns about pregnant students and mothers in schools and community colleges recur throughout AAUW reports as obstacles to women's education, the AAUW has not yet studied motherhood as a site of educational meaning or value, much less other childrearing roles. The AAUW has called for child-care facilities to help student mothers. But it has not yet advanced a coeducational aim for both sexes' learning to care for and raise children for healthy, moral, gender-just lives. That aim could not escape posing some serious questions about curriculum and the comparative value of segregated and desegregated teaching and learning in widely various contexts, not just schools and colleges.⁴⁴

IV. Conceptual Inquiry on Coeducation

We must all learn together somehow to survive, love, and flourish in a deeply troubled, "coeducational" world. Dismissing prematurely the necessity of theorizing about coeducation even as he advocated desegregation in 1911, John Dewey conflated coeducation's ends with its means, never considering segregation's possible coeducational value. But he argued

The smell of academic oil is upon most arguments against coeducation because they fail to note that coeducation has grown up in America not for pedagogical but for social reasons. It is an intellectual and moral necessity in a democracy. Hence were the scholastic difficulties even more serious than

they are they would still have to be met and overcome because, otherwise, their underlying causes would threaten democracy itself.⁴⁵

As an atheoretical practice, what he called “coeducation” here has proven to be miseducative in myriad ways that require reconsideration of both segregated and desegregated education with careful, conceptual formulation of coeducational aims, such as Wollstonecraft’s. Assessment of coeducation’s success or failure requires far more than mere measures of male and female academic achievement: Wollstonecraft conceived its aims as chiefly moral, whose achievement requires profoundly contextual, qualitative, interpretive assessment. Dewey was right that coeducation’s difficulties threaten democracy because they are not only pedagogical and scholastic difficulties, but social ones too—sexism inextricably entangled with heterosexism, racism, classism, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry. Tonight I have scarcely raised questions about such consequential intersectionality in learning, nor even about curricular segregation and desegregation, nor about coeducation’s possible segregation and desegregation of teachers or leaders. Coeducational ends and means require far more nuanced philosophical exposition than has yet even been attempted, for which culturally diverse primary sources do exist. Wollstonecraft’s lens has clarified some significant contributions and exposed some serious gaps in the AAUW’s thought on coeducation—not least its failure to engage philosophical inquiry on women’s and girls’ education, in which moral concerns about coeducational childrearing figure prominently.⁴⁶ As philosophers of education confronting coeducation’s overwhelming problems, possibilities, ambiguities, contradictions, and complications, we have our work cut out for us if Title IX policy is ever really to accomplish the just purposes that motivated the Mink Act over four decades ago.

Endnotes

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- 2 “Obama Administration Commemorates 40 Years of Increasing Equality and Opportunity for Women in Education and Athletics,” (The White House, 20 June 20 2012), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/20/obama-administration-commemorates-40-years-increasing-equality-and-oppor>
- 3 <http://www.aauw.org/aauw125th/upload/MembersofNote.pdf>
- 4 Jane Roland Martin invoked this metaphor in *Coming of Age in Academe: Rekindling Women’s Hopes and Reforming the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- 5 Jane Roland Martin, “Excluding Women from the Educational Realm,” in *Changing the Educational Landscape: Philosophy, Women, and Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35–52.
- 6 See Ann Diller, Barbara Houston, Kathryn Pauly Morgan, and Maryann Ayim, *The Gender Question in Education* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).
- 7 Susan Laird, “Hungry for Insubordinate Educational Wisdom,” in vol. 2 of *Leaders in Philosophy of Education: Intellectual Self-Portraits*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Sense Publishers, forthcoming).
- 8 Susan Laird, “Bringing Educational Thought to Public School Lunch: Alice Waters and the Edible Schoolyard,” *Journal of Thought*, in press; Susan Laird, “‘Make New Friends But Keep the Old’: The Girl Scout

- Idea of Educating Girls and Women,” *Educating Women* 1, no. 3 (2010), <http://www.educatingwomen.net>; Susan Laird, “Food For Coeducational Thought” [Presidential essay], *Philosophy of Education 2007* (2008): 1–13; Susan Laird, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Philosophical Mother of Coeducation* (London: Continuum, 2008, forthcoming in paperback from Bloomsbury, 2014); Susan Laird, “Coeducation,” in vol. 1 of *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Foundations of Education*, ed. Eugene F. Provenzo (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 140–143; Susan Laird, “Backlash? Advocacy for Boys in a Post-Feminist Era,” *Journal of Philosophy & History of Education* 55 (2004): ; Susan Laird, “Befriending Girls as an Educational Life-Practice” [Featured essay], *Philosophy of Education 2002* (2003): 73–81; Susan Laird, “Rethinking Coeducation,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 13 (1995): 361–378; Susan Laird, “Coeducational Teaching: Taking Girls Seriously,” in *Teaching: Theory into Practice*, ed. Allan Ornstein (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1994), 355–371; Susan Laird, “Women and Gender in John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education,” *Educational Theory* 38 (1988): 111–129.
- ⁹ Adresse St. Rose and Catherine Hill, *Women in Community Colleges: Access to Success* (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women, 2013).
- ¹⁰ Some may object that “sex-separatist” may be a more apt term than “sex-segregated” since one-sex education in this case would be voluntary for boys, rather than forced by law or custom. However, such language obscures the possible forced exclusion of African-American girls from educational advantages the one-sex option makes available to boys.
- ¹¹ Laird, *Philosophical Mother of Coeducation*.
- ¹² Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 181.
- ¹³ Jane Roland Martin, *Changing the Educational Landscape*, 15.
- ¹⁴ For the AAUW’s history, see Susan Levine, *Degrees of Equality: The American Association of University Women and the Challenge of Twentieth-Century Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).
- ¹⁵ <http://www.aauw.org/About/>
- ¹⁶ The AAUW sponsors various women’s partnerships, fellowships, and other programs, and has joined with C.A.R.E. to sponsor the Women Empowered Project that produced *A Powerful Noise*, a film about women’s local community-educational actions for relief from disease, war, poverty, and ignorance internationally.

- ¹⁷ Barbara O'Connor, "Foreword," in Christianne Corbett, Catherine Hill, Andresse St. Rose, eds., *Where the Girls Are: The Facts about Gender Equity in Education* (Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation, 2008), xi.
- ¹⁸ See also AAUW Advocacy Fund, *A License for Bias: Sex Discrimination, Schools, and Title IX* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2000).
- ¹⁹ AAUW Policy and Government Regulations Department, "Separated by Sex: Title IX and Single-Sex Education," Appendix J in *AAUW Title IX 35th Anniversary Tool Kit*, http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/actionpages/upload/titleixResourceKit.pdf, 43–43.
- ²⁰ Sunny Hansen, Joyce Walker, and Barbara Flom, *Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in Schools* (Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation, 1995), 10–11.
- ²¹ AAUW Education Foundation, *Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single-Sex Education for Girls* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 1995), 2–3, author emphasis.
- ²² "Separatist" might seem a preferable term for "segregated" insofar as such one-sex education is voluntary for girls and women; but so many logical questions about force (law, custom, prejudice) and voluntariness itself arise (for whom, concerning what, considering location, etc.) that I choose to postpone study of this distinction between "separatist" and "segregated," which may merit development of new theoretical language for these phenomena that can capture their complexity.
- ²³ AAUW Education Foundation, *Separated by Sex*, 2, 7.
- ²⁴ Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation*, 5.
- ²⁵ AAUW Education Foundation, *Separated by Sex*, 39, 40; Corbett, et al., *Where the Girls Are*, 2–4. "(1) Girls' successes do not come at boys' expense; (2) On average, girls' and boys' educational performance has improved; (3) Understanding disparities by race/ethnicity and family income level is critical to understanding girls' and boys' achievement."
- ²⁶ AAUW Education Foundation, *Separated by Sex*, 43.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ²⁸ Greenberg-Lake: The Analysis Group, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America: Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 1991), 8.
- ²⁹ Wellesley Center for Research on Women, *How Schools Shortchange Girls: The AAUW Report* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1995), 141, 144.
- ³⁰ Peggy Orenstein in association with AAUW, *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), xix.

- ³¹ AAUW Educational Foundation, *Separated by Sex*, 8.
- ³² Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 5 of *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London and Washington Square, NY: Pickering & Chatto and New York University Press, 1989), 126.
- ³³ Martin first formulated this ideal in “The Ideal of the Educated Person,” in *Changing the Educational Landscape*, 83, but later theorized it more subtly.
- ³⁴ On compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity in education, see Susan Birden, *Rethinking Sexual Identity in Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Gloria Filax, *Queer Youth in the Province of the “Severely Normal”* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Cris Mayo, *Disputing the Subject of Sex* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
- ³⁵ Wellesley Center, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, 7.
- ³⁶ AAUW Educational Foundation, *Gaining a Foothold: Women’s Transitions through Work and College* (1999), *Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the Computer Age* (2000), *Women at Work* (2003), *Tenure Denied: Cases of Sex Discrimination in Academia* (2004), and *Behind the Pay Gap* (2007); Christi Corbett, *Pay Gap in STEM Occupations* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2011); Catherine Hill, *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year After College Graduation* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2012).
- ³⁷ Laird, *Philosophical Mother of Coeducation*.
- ³⁸ AAUW Educational Foundation, *Beyond the “Gender Wars”: A Conversation about Girls, Boys, and Education* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2001), 36.
- ³⁹ AAUW Educational Foundation, *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2005); Harris Interactive, *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation, 2001); Louis Harris & Associates, *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America’s Schools* (Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation, 1993).
- ⁴⁰ AAUW Educational Foundation, *Beyond the “Gender Wars,”* 23.
- ⁴¹ Wellesley Center, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, 141, 143.
- ⁴² Pamela Haag, *Voices of a Generation: Teenage Girls on Sex, School, and Self* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 1999), 17.
- ⁴³ Barbara Houston, “Gender Freedom and Subtleties of Sexist Education,” in Ann Diller, Barbara Houston, Kathryn Pauly Morgan, and Maryann Avim, eds., *The Gender Question in Education: Theory, Pedagogy, and Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 61.

- ⁴⁴ On such questions, see Jane Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- ⁴⁵ John Dewey, "Is Co-Education Injurious to Girls?" *Ladies' Home Journal* (June 1911), in vol. 6 of Jo Ann Boydston, ed., *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1964–1991), 155–164.
- ⁴⁶ Besides education for childrearing: *also* education for non-violence toward animals, opportunities for self-education in the non-human, natural, wild out-of-doors, arts and aesthetic education to develop imagination, education in and for professions, anti-militarist education, and education to resist the excesses and abuses of the global-corporatist political economy that mask and perpetrate sexual violence and injustice, to name a few such gaps that Wollstonecraft's lens exposes in AAUW's thought on coeducation.