

# Gender identity and single-sex schools

December 11 2013

---

Newspaper headlines worldwide tout the benefits of single-sex schools: Girls 75% more likely to take math if they go to a single-sex private school, Will boys learn better if girls aren't allowed? Single-sex education is best for girls in stereotypically male subjects...

But new research from Concordia University shows not everyone [benefits](#) from single-sex education—especially not those who don't conform to gender norms. The recent study, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Sex Roles*, shows that girls in single-sex schools more often report feeling more pressure to act like "typical girls" than their counterparts in mixed-sex schools.

Under the leadership of William Bukowski, Concordia psychology professor and Director of the Centre for Research in Human Development (CRDH), the research team interviewed 469 fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade girls from same- and mixed-sex schools. The girls were asked to respond to statements "I like to do the things that most girls like to do" to establish feelings related to gender identity.

This research was carried out in lower middle class neighbourhoods in Bogotá and Barranquilla, Colombia. By performing the study in Latin America, the researchers had increased access to same-sex schooling because of the greater frequency of all-girls schools. The traditional Latin American emphasis on machismo also provided a more marked contrast between the genders.

"Whereas tween-aged girls from single-sex schools who display

characteristics typical to their gender are less likely to be victimized by their peers, there is no such association for the girls in mixed-sex schools," explains Concordia PhD candidate Kate Drury, lead author of the study.

"Along with feeling like more typical girls, the [girls](#) in the single-sex schools felt more pressure to conform to gender norms (e.g. "It would bother the kids in my class if I acted like a boy"), suggesting that spending more time with same-gender peers leads to feeling more pressure to behave 'like a girl,'" says Drury, who is also a researcher with the CRDH.

"In other words, it doesn't matter whether boys are present or not, if children feel a lot of pressure to conform to [gender norms](#) then it follows that being gender atypical in that environment is going to be difficult," says Drury.

What does this mean for the single- vs. mixed-sex schooling debate?

"The negative repercussions of not conforming to gender roles are stronger in all-girl schools," says Bukowski. "Parents of gender atypical children should take these factors into account when deciding on what [school](#) is best."

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: Gender identity and single-sex schools (2013, December 11) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-gender-identity-single-sex-schools.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.
---