

Study examines why people choose same-sex schools

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In the last decade, same sex schools and classes have increased dramatically across the United States. Many studies have examined the differences in the education students receive in a same sex school versus co-ed institutions. Now, a KU professor has co-authored a study asking why administrators, parents and students choose them, and their perceptions of fairness of same sex education.

Meagan Patterson, assistant professor of [psychology](#) and research in education, co-authored the study with Erin Pahlke and Katherine Galligan of Arizona State University. It will be presented at the American Educational Research Association convention in April in Vancouver, British Columbia.

“These schools are increasing in popularity, but we don’t know why administrators are establishing them, or why parents and students are choosing them,” Patterson said.

For the study, Patterson and her colleagues surveyed more than 1,000 people, including 589 middle school students, 316 parents of middle school students and 121 teachers. The same sex schools in the study were all girls schools, as they represent nearly two-thirds of same sex schools in the United States.

The researchers derived seven rationales for same sex schools from a pilot study: gender differences in learning, gender differences in interests, gender differences in academic ability, distractions from boys,

ingroup preference, gender discrimination and parental preference. They then surveyed participants about their beliefs regarding each of the rationales.

[Gender differences](#) in learning, parental preference and girls' ingroup preference — or girls wanting to go to school with other girls — were the mostly strongly endorsed rationales, and scored equally.

Even though neurological research doesn't necessarily support the idea of boys and girls having different learning methods, a large number of teachers and parents clearly believe in the idea, indicating they are hearing that message and taking it to heart, Patterson said. The number of participants that agreed separating genders was necessary because girls are more academically advanced scored second lowest among the seven rationales, but people affiliated with same sex schools were much more positive in agreement, and students were the most likely group to agree.

Gender discrimination, or the idea that boys get preferential treatment, scored the second lowest. Parental preference, among the most highly-endorsed rationales, scored highest among same-sex school-affiliated parents and students rated it more highly than teachers.

Survey participants were also asked if they view segregated schooling as fair. Patterson said they expected same-sex affiliated participants to consider gender-segregated schooling more fair than their co-ed counterparts and the results confirmed this. The same group also considered segregation by academic performance more fair than their co-ed peers, but teachers and parents' views did not differ by school affiliation. [Parents](#) and teachers viewed gender-segregated schooling more fair than students, also confirming the researchers' hypothesis. Overall, the participants agreed that gender segregation was more fair than separating by academic ability, which in turn was more fair than

segregating by race.

“I think it’s interesting that separating by gender was viewed as more fair than separating by [academic ability](#),” Patterson said. “Not surprisingly, both were viewed as more fair than racial segregation.”

There is no scientific consensus on which schools are better overall. Yet, Patterson said, some stakeholders clearly view same-sex schools as the better option, evidenced by their growing popularity. She hopes to expand the research to look at gender stereotyping and related issues among students after they have spent more time in same-sex schools.

“I’d like to learn more about what might make these schools appealing or beneficial to some [students](#),” Patterson said. “Is it that they’re single-sex, or that they have a more academic focus, or something else entirely?”

Provided by University of Kansas

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