

The gender gap in educational success.

Do traditional and egalitarian gender role patterns have an influence?

Results of a qualitative study at Swiss secondary schools

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Facts & public discussion (1)

Fact Switzerland:

Girls perform better than boys => fulfill conditions for higher education more often

Public discussion - hypotheses:

- discrimination (school marks)?
- feminine school culture / school uncool
- emancipation of women
- lack of male teachers
- lack of male role models (absent fathers)
- computer games
- too self-confident and / or too lazy

Research question

We ask if besides the well known reasons for the gender differences in school performance (Pisa-results with regard to motivation, industriousness, peer influence, social integration etc.) **gender role patterns might contribute to the gender gap in educational success.**

⇒ lower school success = traditional gender role patterns?

⇒ Traditional patterns = lower school aspiration?

Research sample & design

8th grade secondary pupils, age 14-15 years

3 school tracks (low – intermediate – high)

Qualitative : group discussions with male & female half classes

Some results presented here.

Quantitative : written questionnaire (N=872) => school success & gender role preferences

Our colleagues present results.

Methodological aspects

Methodology:

- Mannheim (1964): documentary method
- Bohnsack (1997, 2003): documentary interpretation of group discussions based on documentary method of Mannheim

⇒ Analysis of attitudes, orientations and opinions in groups

In our project:

cultural orientations in classes => **gender role patterns** etc.
attitudes about appropriate **behavior at school** => **learning commitment** etc.

(1) Lower school track – boys

They assume
no problems in realizing this arrangement;
their wives will agree with having the full responsibility
for children and housework.

Em: „... This is the way it happens just naturally.“

(1) Lower school track – boys

They all pursue traditional gender role patterns:

Men => bread winners
wives => care for children / do housework.

Argumentation: women more qualified than men (by nature) to care for children.

Em: „It's obvious that women have more patience with little kids and teenagers. Men don't have the nerves with kids that run around... So men go to work all day and only get home in the evening...“

(2) Lower school track – girls

have large variety of future options – from moderate traditional to pure career orientation.

Bf (wants family):

“The father has longer working hours and is home only in the evening, the mother only works on Saturdays or something like this.“

Cf (career-oriented):

„I want a profession and an apartment, a boy-friend, but won't necessarily marry him. I don't want children.“

(2) Lower school track – girls

They feel at ease and tolerant about different viewpoints of classmates.

They – realistically - assume that the boys in their class have very traditional views about future partnerships.

But no girl agrees to pure traditional role arrangement (as favoured by the boys).

Cf: „I certainly won't just do the whole housework!“

=> ***There is obviously a large gap between the expectations of the boys and the plans of the girls!***

(3) Higher school track – girls

They stress point that their investments in education and profession should „pay off“.

Df: „I first want a profession and after that a partnership and about 2 children. But I don't want everything I have built up in my professional time to fall apart, but want to go on working.“

They expect to have **good arrangements with their partners** regarding children and housework.

(3) Higher school track – girls

They hold **multiform gender role patterns / a wide range of role concepts** from clear professional orientation to mother-housework-job-orientation

They also seem at ease with the various concepts / tolerate differing viewpoints

(4) Higher school track – boys

Interesting results in this group discussion: Convinced (unlike lower track boys) that **men and women should be equal as to educational and professional opportunities.**

Like the other boys class they try to reach a *consensus opinion*: Everybody should agree to the ‚doctrin‘ of equality!

(4) Higher school track – boys

However with regard to **taking care of the children** **traditional** gender roles are tolerated **besides egalitarian views**:

Some boys think women are naturally more able to look after children, others think men can do this just as well.

The *ideological view* (doctrin of equality) is combined with a *pragmatic view*:

„When we get out of school most women will want to work and won't just do the household. They will say e.g. „you do the cooking today...“

Summary

History of relations of men and women (19th – 21st c.): strictly different (bipolar) and unequal tasks for men and women (*traditional role concepts*) => shared and equal responsibilities (*egalitarian role concepts*).

Where do the 4 groups stand with respect to this ongoing process?

Summary

High track girls:
wide range of views – moderate
traditional to **career orientation**

tolerant of differing viewpoints
manifold + flexible views

well on the way (social change)

Low track girls:
wide range of views – **moderate**
traditional to career orientation

tolerant of differing viewpoints
manifold + flexible views

well on the way (social change)

High track boys:
mostly egalitarian views

doctrin of equality
ideological + pragmatic

early stage (social change)

Low track boys:
unbroken traditional views

naive pragmatism (it will work)
not yet on the way to equalisation?

in delay (social change)

large gap between expectations of low track boys + girls
nearly no gap between expect. of high track boys + girls

Discussion

lower school success = traditional gender role patterns

traditional gender role patterns => prevent boys from high aims and commitment at school

traditional role patterns = single orientation (man earns money, woman responsible for children + household)

egalitarian role patterns = double orientation (both partners do money work and housework)

Overall result:

*Single orientation goes with low school interest and success,
double orientation goes with high school commitment and success*

Thank you for your attention!