

## Girls' education suffers when high-achieving boys are in the classroom

Teenage girls do worse in their education, careers and social lives when they have more high-achieving boys in their classes, according to a new study from Cornell University in the United States. Conversely girls achieve **better** results in maths and science when they have **high-achieving girls** in their class and are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree.

Importantly, the study noted that the greater the exposure to high-achieving boys, the greater the negative effect on girls' self-confidence and aspirations. The higher the proportion of high-achieving boys, the lower the girls' maths and science grades, the less likely they were to complete a bachelor's degree, and the more likely they were to engage in risky behaviour, including teen pregnancy. On the other hand, boys were not affected by exposure to high-achievers of either gender.

The Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia Executive Officer Loren Bridge said the study confirmed that the absence of gender stereotyping in an all-girls school was enormously beneficial.

'Girls' schools provide an environment where girls are not exposed to stereotype threat — where they may be intimidated by high-achieving boys who are assumed to be more naturally talented at maths — or teacher bias; where teachers unintentionally give preference to high-achieving boys,' said Ms Bridge.

'Instead, girls are exposed to high-achieving girls in their classes, year levels and throughout their schools as well as to successful alumnae, all of whom inspire them to 'be what they can see' by role modelling success and achievement

'This is clearly demonstrated in the academic results of girls' schools and by their alumnae who continue to challenge gender stereotypes by entering male-dominated fields such as engineering and economics,' she said.

The research revealed that girls who had lower academic ability and those who did not have a college-educated parent were particularly negatively affected by the presence of high-achieving boys, but that they were more likely to get better grades in school and a bachelor's degree if they were exposed to high-achieving female peers.

Co-author of the report, Professor Eleanora Patacchini, said it is these girls who are the ones who benefit most from the [all-girls] environment.

'Girls seem to help other girls,' said Professor Patacchini.

These results are consistent with previous studies which have found that the presence of high-performing males reduces females' completion of mathematics and/or science courses. Feld and Zölitz (2018) found that women in the first year of study at a Dutch business school were less likely than men with a higher grade point average to choose a mathematics-related major, while Mouganie and Wang (2017) found that having high-performing males in tenth grade at school in China reduced girls' likelihood of choosing the science track in senior school.

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**Reference:**

Cools, Angela, Fernández, Raquel, & Patacchini, Eleonora. (2019, April). [Girls, boys, and high achievers](#). Discussion Paper No. 12314. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. Retrieved from: <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/12314/girls-boys-and-high-achievers>

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