

PALGRAVE STUDIES
IN GENDER AND EDUCATION

A Girl's Education

*Schooling and the
Formation of Gender,
Identities and Future Visions*

**Judith Gill, Katharine Esson
and Rosalina Yuen**



Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education

Series Editor

Yvette Taylor

School of Education,
University of Strathclyde
Glasgow, United Kingdom

This series aims to provide a comprehensive space for an increasingly diverse and complex area of interdisciplinary social science research: Gender and Education. As the field of women and gender studies is rapidly developing and becoming ‘internationalised’ as with traditional social science disciplines of e.g. sociology, educational studies, social geography etc. there is greater need for a dynamic, global series that plots emerging definitions and debates, and monitors critical complexities of gender and education. This series will have an explicitly feminist approach and orientation, attending to key theoretical and methodological debates, and ensuring a continued conversation and relevance within the inter-disciplinary and long-standing ‘Gender and Education’ field. The series will be better able to combine renewed and revitalized feminist research methods and theories with emergent and salient public and policy issues. These include pre, compulsory, and post-compulsory education, ‘early years’ and ‘life long’ education; educational (dis)engagements of pupils, students and staff; trajectories and intersectional inequalities incl. race, class, sexuality, age, disability; policy and practice across educational landscapes; diversity and difference, including institutional (schools, colleges, universities), locational and embodied (in ‘teacher’-‘learner’ positions); varied global activism in and beyond the classroom and the ‘public university’; educational technologies and transitions and the (ir)relevance of (in)formal educational settings; emergent educational mainstreams and margins. In operating a critical approach to ‘gender and education’, the series recognizes the importance of probing beyond the boundaries of specific territorial-legislative domains in order to develop a more international, intersectional focus. In addressing varied conceptual and methodological questions, the Series combines an intersectional focus on competing - and sometimes colliding - strands of educational provisioning, equality and ‘diversity’, as well as providing insightful reflections of the continuing critical shift of gender and feminism within (and beyond) the academy. Proposals: If you have a proposal for the series you would like to discuss please contact: Andrew James, Senior Commissioning Editor, Education: a.james@palgrave.com Yvette Taylor, Professor in Social and Policy Studies: taylor@lsbu.ac.uk

More information about this series at
<http://www.springer.com/series/14626>

Judith Gill • Katharine Esson • Rosalina Yuen

A Girl's Education

Schooling and the Formation of Gender, Identities
and Future Visions

palgrave
macmillan

Judith Gill
School of Education
University of South Australia
Mawson Lakes, South Australia,
Australia

Rosalina Yuen
Ros Yuen Psychology
Beulah Park, South Australia,
Australia

Katharine Esson
NSW Department of Industry
Darlinghurst, New South Wales,
Australia

Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education

ISBN 978-1-137-52486-7 ISBN 978-1-137-52487-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-52487-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016943496

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

The author(s) has/have asserted their right(s) to be identified as the author(s) of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

*To the girls and women of the future that they may live
fulfilling lives that are less constrained
by gender restrictions and more celebrated
in recognition of the values of friendship,
cooperation, and loyalty.*

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

This Series aims to provide a comprehensive space for an increasingly diverse and complex area of interdisciplinary social science research: gender and education. Because the field of women and gender studies is developing rapidly and becoming 'internationalised' – as are traditional social science disciplines such as sociology, educational studies, social geography, and so on – there is a greater need for this dynamic, global Series that plots emerging definitions and debates and monitors critical complexities of gender and education. This Series has an explicitly feminist approach and orientation and attends to key theoretical and methodological debates, ensuring a continued conversation and relevance within the well-established, inter-disciplinary field of gender and education.

The Series combines renewed and revitalised feminist research methods and theories with emergent and salient public policy issues. These include pre-compulsory and post-compulsory education; 'early years' and 'lifelong' education; educational (dis)engagements of pupils, students and staff; trajectories and intersectional inequalities including race, class, sexuality, age and disability; policy and practice across educational landscapes; diversity and difference, including institutional (schools, colleges, universities), locational and embodied (in 'teacher'–'learner' positions); varied global activism in and beyond the classroom and the 'public university'; educational technologies and transitions and the (ir)relevance of (in) formal educational settings; and emergent educational mainstreams and margins. In using a critical approach to gender and education, the Series recognises the importance of probing beyond the boundaries of specific territorial-legislative domains in order to develop a more international,

intersectional focus. In addressing varied conceptual and methodological questions, the Series combines an intersectional focus on competing – and sometimes colliding – strands of educational provisioning and equality and ‘diversity’, and provides insightful reflections on the continuing critical shift of gender and feminism within (and beyond) the academy.

Yvette Taylor
University of Strathclyde, UK

PREFACE: RECLAIMING THE SPACE FOR GIRLS

Toward the end of the twentieth century, girls' education received a great deal of attention across the English-speaking world. While to some degree this focus was associated with feminist energy derived from what became known as the 'second wave' women's movement, there were also profound changes in the general understanding of the ways in which schooling prepared young people for working lives. Women's infiltration of the labor force across the English-speaking world is widely recognized as the most profound social change of the late twentieth century. In the UK, the numbers of women in paid work rose from 59% in 1980 to 70% in 2008 when the numbers of women at work became much closer to those of men. By 2008, 14.3 million women were in the UK workforce alongside 16.9 million men. Comparable figures from the USA show that women's presence in the labor force increased dramatically, from 30.3 million in 1970 to 72.7 million during 2006–2010. In percentage terms women made up 37.9% of the labor force in 1970 compared to 47.2% between 2006 and 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2012). While the numerous implications of this change for the ways in which lives are lived, domestically and professionally, are still being worked out in many lives, what is clear is that there is no possibility of a return to the traditional division of labor between men and women which placed men in the public world of work and women in the private world of the home.

The relatively sudden and rapid increase in the numbers of women in paid work quickly led to increased demands on schooling to better prepare girls for working lives. Whereas prior to 1975 parents were less likely to support daughters in education beyond the compulsory years than their

sons, the idea that girls were on the way to becoming wage earners meant that their education began to be seen as an investment. Coincidentally educational research uncovered the myriad ways in which schooling had typically constrained girls' interests and capabilities to areas traditionally associated with home management and child rearing while at the same time providing opportunities for boys to make choices between a wider range of learning experiences leading to professional careers. Furthermore, for the years up until 1975 in Australia and the UK, boys were much more likely to complete schooling than were girls. Consequently, a significantly higher proportion of young men entered university and followed through to the professions. In the USA, where the tradition of secondary schooling was less strongly connected to university entrance, the situation of girls' school experience as different from their male peers was not fully registered much before the 1990s when the Sadkers' work (1994) roundly denounced American schools as failing girls in multiple ways. Across the globe, the idea of essential gender difference had been firmly embedded in educational arrangements and treatments, so much so that these differences had continued for many decades earlier without attracting much notice.

In England and Australia, the 1970s and 1980s comprised a watershed for widespread educational change with respect to gender. While the initial studies had been based on large-scale surveys showing quantifiable gender differences in schooling outcomes, researchers gradually turned to investigations of life in schools in the effort to track the production of these divisions. Thus girls were seen not just as comprising a category distinguished by lack of achievement and school completion, but as produced as girls within this category by the ways in which schooling was organized. Investigations of schooling practice revealed pedagogical tendencies contributing to gender differences in learning capacities and self-understanding. By the early 1990s, schooling processes attracted numbers of micro studies of life in schools and classrooms. As Johnson (1993, 10) noted:

...we need to recognize how the interpellation [calling into being] of sexed subjects ... does not occur in institutions like educational ones in a unitary way. The construction of gender goes on busily in the daily life of schools through a range of different processes. We need to study how such practices formulate and determine the terms of sexual difference in this setting and the range of ways in which this is done.

Hence the rationale for this book in which we will attempt to show some of the ways in which gender construction occurs and how it has been understood by researchers and readers.

Following dramatic demonstrations of the ways in which girls were significantly less well served by schooling when compared to boys, considerable amounts of time, research energy, and funding were devoted to investigating ways to improve girls' education—popularly understood to mean to make girls' education more like that of boys. Educational policies and practices were challenged to demonstrate they were gender inclusive. Gender differences in outcomes were subject to close scrutiny and heightened accountability with demands that gender be included as a category in all tables, listings, and audits describing schooling outcomes. As a result of research demonstrating girls being regarded as less important than boys, the very term 'girl' was challenged as being derogatory and educators were urged to adopt the term 'young woman' in any writing or reporting of female educational experience.

More recently, the term 'girl' has experienced something of a revival, albeit not always in a positive direction, as shall be explained in the following chapter! In this work, we have deliberately adopted the term 'girl' as we want to signal the importance of the place of girl in educational writing and research. Whereas in previous times the idea of girl and woman was clearly defined in terms of expectations and behaviors and the role of girls was to live up to and within that clearly defined position, nowadays it seems that the space created for girls in widespread popular culture continues to be ambiguous and ill-defined, varying across contexts. We do not propose to produce a tight clear definition of the expectations placed on girls but rather to explore the ways in which adolescent girls interpret their place in terms of current conceptions and possibilities and the ways in which they envisage potential futures.

Of course, the old adage about boys needing to be boys is still around—one local elite boys' school proudly displays on its school fences and advertising material 'we know boys!'—with the implication that theirs is a specialist knowledge uniquely appropriate to the task of boys' education. Coincidentally a non-government girls' school in the near neighborhood announces on its wall poster and media advertising materials 'Our success is in the woman she becomes!' Obviously the subtext for both establishments is built around a concept of difference, but while the boys are apparently to be given the right to be boys (whatever that means), the girls are to be charged with the requirement to become something else—no

longer girls but women. It's hard to avoid the idea that boys as boys are to be accepted and welcomed, whereas girls have to work on themselves to adapt and adopt the requirements for adult womanhood if they are to be accepted and celebrated.

This book will focus on adolescent girls as subjects at a time popularly associated with their active involvement, responsibilities, and freedoms in the context of late modernity. Rather than define girls as preoccupied with Havighurst's developmental tasks in which one's identity was supposedly permanently settled at adolescence (Havighurst 1948) as part of a masculinized version of youth coming-of-age, we see girls as certainly engaging with a search for selfhood, but a self that is fluid and multiple and one which endures through several iterations as they seek to define themselves in a manner fitting with the mood of the times in order to achieve their own sense of individual self or subjectivity. In doing this they are engaging with the dominant discourses of late modernity which include a heavy emphasis on individualization (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2009; Rose 1990) to be enacted through choice (Baker 2008) and taking responsibility for oneself (what Budgeon calls responsabilization (Budgeon 2001, 11)). It is important to stress the temporality of the effects of these discourses at this particular time within the girls' lives which lends them an urgency but also a level of determination, rightly seen by the girls as both challenging and frightening. Coincidentally the term girl makes important claims on the topic as a move to freeze the frame, to concentrate on this moment in an effort to capture the ways in which girls' vulnerability allows the analysis to entertain with the larger forces of the time. Consequently, we insist on the *girlhood* of our subjects in all its elusive changeability, its contrariness, and its potentiality in their headlong rush to become adult women.

Judith Gill
School of Education, University of South Australia,
Mawson Lakes, SA, Australia

Katharine Esson
NSW Department of Industry, Darlinghurst,
NSW, Australia

Rosalina Yuen
Ros Yuen Psychology, Beulah Park,
SA, Australia

REFERENCES

- Baker, J. (2008). The ideology of choice. Overstating progress and hiding injustice in the lives of young women. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31, 53–64.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U., & Beck Gernsheim, E. (2009). *Losing the traditional: Individualization and precarious freedoms*. London: Sage.
- Budgeon, S. (2001). Emergent feminist(?) identities: Young women and the practice of micropolitics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 8(1), 7–28. doi:[10.1177/13505068010080010211](https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068010080010211).
- Havighurst, R. J. (1948). *Developmental tasks and education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, L. (1993). *The modern girl: Girlhood and growing up*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Rose, N. (1990). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self*. London: Routledge.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). *Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls*. New York: Macmillan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank all the girls who willingly spoke with us in the studies outlined in this book. Your contributions have been terrifically important, exciting, and challenging for us in putting this work together.

Quite simply, without you, it would not have been possible.

CONTENTS

1	Who Are Girls in Current Times and Is There a Problem?	1
2	How We Know What We Know: Knowledge and Evidence	27
3	See How Far We've Come! Girls' Education in Recent History. And Where Does This Leave Girls Now?	61
4	The Balancing Act	95
5	Girls at School: The Formation of Learning Identities	125
6	Post-school Pathways and Girls' Imagined Futures	155
7	Girls at School: A More Complex Picture	183
	Index	205

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Judith Gill is a former secondary schoolteacher who has worked in teacher education in South Australian universities for the past 30 years. She has recently retired from the University of South Australia where she is currently an adjunct associate professor. Her main research interest is in gender and its associations with achievement and working lives. Her doctoral study looked at the ways in which schooling practice led to the construction of gender in students, both boys and girls. She has been a frequent consultant to schools in relation to gender context, the topic of her 2004 book *Beyond the Great Divide: Single sex or coeducation* (UNSW Press, 2004). Most recently, she has researched the issue of minority girls and women in STEM fields generally and in particular engineering.

Kathy Esson has worked widely in the fields of education and health. She currently works with the NSW Skills Board on policy and research in relation to vocational education and training. Her doctoral research examined gendered subjectivity in Australian adolescent girls. She has also been involved in a review of public education in NSW, done work on tobacco for WHO, taught psychology, and been a university student counselor, working primarily with young women. Kathy has qualifications in psychology, counseling, and education. She received the Elaine Dignan Award from the Australian Psychological Society for her research and policy work with girls and women.

Rosalina Yuen is a psychologist in private practice. She is a former social worker who has worked extensively in child protection and forensic mental health. Her interest in gender and education originated from her clinical

work with marginalized girls and young women. Her doctoral study examined the ways senior schoolgirls experienced the ‘successful girl’ story as they move from school to post-school destinations, the ways in which their biographies are intensely planned and differentially shaped by available resources. In her private practice, she counsels many girls and young women in issues relating to schooling, university studies, relationships, sexuality, career choices, parenting, and combining work and family. She provides counseling to schools, university student services, and employee programs.

ABBREVIATIONS

OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development available at www.oecd.org/
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment, a subset of the OECD
PLP	Professional Learning Plan required of all students in year 10 in some Australian states to chart their future studies in senior school
SES	Socioeconomic status—calculable in terms of government indexes in Australia, but the term used more broadly refers to social differences in economic background
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 5.1	Responses in percentages to <i>My parents encourage me to do well at school</i>	133
Fig. 5.2	Responses in percentages to <i>Overall I enjoy school</i>	133
Fig. 5.3	Responses in percentage to <i>I am doing as well as other people my age</i>	134
Fig. 5.4	Responses in percentages to <i>I am doing pretty well</i>	134
Fig. 5.5	Responses in percentages to <i>A university degree is so complicated I don't know where to start</i>	135
Fig. 6.1	Responses in percentages to <i>Thinking about the future, how important is it for you to be doing a job in which you are your own boss</i>	164
Fig. 6.2	Responses in percentages to <i>Thinking about the future, how important is it for you to participate in decision making</i>	165
Fig. 6.3	Responses in percentages to <i>Thinking about the future, how important is it for you to be doing a job in which you learn new skills all the time</i>	167
Fig. 6.4	Responses in percentages to <i>Thinking about the future, how important is it for you to be doing a job in which you earn a lot of money</i>	169
Fig. 6.5	Responses in percentages to <i>Thinking about the future, how important is it for you to be doing a job in which you have contact with a lot of people</i>	170
Fig. 6.6	Responses in percentages to the question <i>Men have careers, women have jobs</i>	172
Fig. 6.7	Responses in percentages to the question <i>All in all it is better for the family if the husband provides most of the income and the wife takes care of home and the family</i>	172

Fig. 6.8	Responses in percentages to the question <i>Men and women should contribute equally to the family income</i>	173
Fig. 6.9	Responses in percentages to the question <i>A woman's relationship with her partner is better if she doesn't place too much importance on her job</i>	173
Fig. 6.10	Responses in percentages to the question <i>If someone's career should suffer for the good of the family, it should be the wife's and not the husband's</i>	174
Fig. 6.11	Responses in percentages to the question <i>A man should be prepared to relocate if his wife gets a better job offer in another city</i>	174
Fig. 6.12	Responses in percentages to <i>It is difficult for women to have successful careers and raise a family at the same time</i>	176
Fig. 6.13	Responses in percentages to <i>It is difficult for men to have successful careers and raise a family at the same time</i>	176

Who Are Girls in Current Times and Is There a Problem?

A Whistling Woman and a Crowing Hen
Is neither good for God nor Men. (Anon: Folkloric rhyme)

INTRODUCTION

In this book, we look at the ways current girls and young women are responding to the unprecedented transformation of women's lives from the traditional roles of earlier times to the still largely uncharted waters of the twenty-first century. We begin with a sketch of the situation.

Not so long ago across the developed world, a general understanding of the accepted role of girls was so commonplace that it drew little attention from the general population. Generations of folklore such as in the example above, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, religious and moral stories, and even popular songs combined to preach a message of girls as fundamentally different from boys and to warn of the dire situations anticipated for those who did not conform.

Traditionally, girls were understood to be primarily good, obedient, docile children, helpful to their mothers from whom they learned their domestic role. To be pretty was seen as an advantage (so long as it was not too sexy) but above all girls were destined to wait until they were chosen by a prospective husband. In English-speaking societies, the consistent message was of heterosexual coupling—not surprising because until recent

times, homosexuality was considered to be morally deviant and, in many places, legally outlawed. The overarching message, namely that boys were understood to have been born to be the actors and leaders and girls the followers, was reinforced by a multitude of cultural artifacts. Boys looked for adventure while girls looked, watched, and waited for their turn to be chosen.

In recent times, girls have shed the quiet image of being on the sidelines and have emerged as first-class students, top performers in school testing and examinations, credited with being reliable in school-related tasks such as homework, neat writing, excellent bookwork, along with being well behaved in class. Teachers routinely anticipate that girls will excel in reading and writing and their diligent work habits ensure that they achieve highly in end-of-school examinations. They are model pupils whose achievements are expected to lead into high-profile positions and professions in any walk of life they choose.

Of course, the versions of ‘being girl’ presented above are themselves stereotypes—ways of seeing the world that reflect some aspects of mainstream thinking but which are not without exception. There have always been girls who did not conform to the good girl image and who chose not to be bound by the many limitations of those earlier eras. Nowadays, too, there are girls who resist the idea that you can do anything regardless of social imperatives. Some girls today hold to attitudes and values not very different from those of their grandmothers. Others aim for a fast trendy image, engage in ‘slut walks’ (protest marches against rape), and talk of wild experiences. Sexuality is ‘out there’, a part of the package, but experienced and lived in wildly divergent ways. In fact, it is harder than ever to generalize about girls in the present moment. Are they really players in a ‘female future’ or are they still preoccupied with what have traditionally been girl’s issues such as boyfriends, current fashion, looks, and style?

In the course of this book, we suggest that currently girls are faced with the difficult task of balancing features associated with traditional girlhood which are still seen as desirable with the challenges of contemporary life. Today’s adolescents are confronted with the need to sort out what matters for each individual from the range of potentially conflicting expectations held by significant others including parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and of course the girls themselves. Today’s girls must try to work out, from the range of new possibilities for themselves as grown women, the way forward to living a productive and fulfilling life. The familiar trite phrase ‘having it all’ doesn’t begin to get to grips with the compromises and

concessions that form a constant dynamic in girls' current plans and future visions. Hence the impetus for this book which will attempt to shed light on the processes involved.

We begin by analyzing the changes that have occurred in girls' behavior and education in recent times.

A TIME FOR CHANGE

By the early twenty-first century, the old certainties about the position of girls have all but disappeared. No longer are there the strict rules of behavior that govern female decorum; gone too is the rigid division between public and private worlds which located most girls and women firmly in the home. Up until the mid-twentieth century, most girls across Western societies were seen as destined first and foremost to be wives and mothers and so their schooling was centrally involved with the development of domestic arts. Even those few who managed to secure enough education to demonstrate academic ability were discouraged from showing their intellectual capacities. In many places, they were barred from accessing higher education, or else only allowed in as audit students, not really able to get a degree. Sadly, this discrimination was practiced fiercely in even long established universities—at Cambridge, the highly prestigious British University, young women were not entitled to graduate with a degree until 1949. Those few who did pursue learning were labeled 'blue-stockings' and became objects of social derision rather than being taken seriously.

Women's involvement in paid work during two world wars began an irreversible trend that saw increasing numbers of women in employment outside the home. By the late twentieth century, the trend had become an almost universal expectation among women in the developed West that they would spend a significant amount of their adult years in the workforce. Furthermore, this development was to have important implications for the way education was conducted. Questions continue to be raised about issues of curriculum, school gender context (such as debates around coeducation or single sex schooling), career counseling, and work experience. The overarching question to be addressed here is how best to organize education for girls in the current era?

The global economy is frequently seen as the main driver of the change in the workforce, with particular reference to its gender composition. With increasingly large numbers of people moving around the world, the