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Disciplined Motivation

By Malia Blom, JD

This week, *Education Week* reported on an interesting study suggesting that girls' higher grades are linked to greater self-discipline regarding schoolwork.¹ The study, published in the February 2006 *Journal of Educational Psychology*, looked at grades, attendance, test scores, and IQ among a diverse group of students, then used questionnaires to measure self-discipline, determining that girls had better self-discipline than boys. (For example, girls spent nearly twice as much time on their homework. No word, however, on who has greater self-discipline when it comes to learning how to successfully run a halfback option in *Madden 2007*.) Interestingly, though the girls in the study group had better grades and standardized test scores, the boys actually had the higher IQ scores.

The article warns against taking this rather small study as sole evidence that girls are more disciplined than boys, pointing out that the self-discipline issue is a small part of the much larger puzzle that is the gender achievement gap.

While the self-discipline study may be too limited to be applied to education policy, the article includes a very interesting interview with an elementary school principal who was not surprised by the results. Jo Ann Rodkey, from Woodward Avenue Elementary in Florida, tells *Education Week* that she has seen a tendency in boys to be overconfident about their knowledge of material and under-learn, while girls tend to wait until they are told that they have a grasp of the work, and consequently over-learn. Ms. Rodkey links the self-discipline findings to motivation, which she calls, "the heart of success at school," and believes that understanding such differences can be helpful to those involved in single-sex education. (Woodward Avenue Elementary offers a single-sex class in addition to co-ed classes.)

Limitations of the study aside, it is interesting that Ms. Rodkey links self-discipline immediately to motivation, since it is a strong contention of *Boys and Schools* that motivating boys to be more involved and concerned with their academic achievement will go a long way towards narrowing the gender gap. Moreover, it is encouraging to see that Woodward Avenue Elementary (along with many other schools) has introduced limited same-sex education as a way to try to address the motivation and achievement gap issues. While same-sex education may not be practical or possible for every school (or the best choice for every child), it is good to see schools exercising this option for the many boys and girls who can thrive under it.

¹ Davis, Michelle R.. "Gender Gap in GPAs Seen as Linked to Self-Discipline ." Feb. 8, 2007.
<http://www.edweek.org/login.html?source=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.edweek.org%2Ffew%2Farticles%2F2007%2F02%2F08%2F23discipline.h26.html&destination=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.edweek.org%2Ffew%2Farticles%2F2007%2F02%2F08%2F23discipline.h26.html&levelId=2100&baddebt=false> (accessed Feb. 9, 2007).

(From a blog dated February 9, 2007 found at www.boysandschools.com)