

## Title IX, the WEEA and Vocational Choices

Title IX must not be changed or eliminated. It is a critical element in the struggle to provide equal opportunities and to help us compete in the global marketplace. The WEEA should be empowered in its efforts to research gender inequity and fund programs that equalize educational and vocational opportunities. Institutions that accept federal funding ought to be required to ensure they are non-discriminatory. Without Title IX and the WEEA, a woman's choice of vocation and her earning potential are adversely affected as well as her ability to become self sufficient and achieve her full intellectual potential.

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It would turn out to be one of the most pivotal days of my life. It was my birthday and my mom was taking me to get my driver's permit after school. I felt fantastic, that was, until I ran into my best friend Donna in the hallway between classes.

"Did you hear?"

"No, what?" I inquired.

"There will be no Career Center next year."

I'm not sure what hit the floor first, my jaw or my physics book.

"The boy's basketball coach broke the school's budget when he bought some really expensive new exercise equipment to make the boys jump higher" she added.

"They cut band, chorus, art classes and all of the girl's sports for next year too."

I planned to take Electronics at the Career Center the following fall. I was also a member of the band, chorus, volleyball and track teams. They were cutting the classes and activities which consisted primarily of girls, but the shop classes and boys' sports were not affected. It was not the first time I felt discriminated against based on my gender, and it would not be the last, but it was the most disheartening.

It was a full four years after the passage of Title IX, but as far as our parents and school board were concerned, that didn't matter. We were girls and our aspirations were simply unimportant. Besides, after graduation we would just end up getting married and having babies, wouldn't we?

Career Center is a county wide vocational training facility that helps small school districts by providing a variety of vocational programs to Junior and Senior high school students. Except for the transportation costs, it was (at that time) free of charge to the

individual school district. There was one hard and fast requirement; you had to attend both years of the two year program, no exceptions.

Title IX is one of the “Educational Amendments of 1972 to the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Sadker What is Title IX 1). It was signed into law by President Nixon on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1972. A short time later, the Women’s Educational Equity Act (WEEA) established the WEEA Equity Resource Center to facilitate research and provide funding for programs that help schools comply with Title IX (Sadker Failing At Fairness 35).

Maintaining the current Title IX language and funding is critical if this country is to compete in the global marketplace and truly be a nation of equals. It protects the rights of women and men, girls and boys equally. We must ensure that every citizen has an equal chance to earn a living wage in the career of their choice.

“The preamble of Title IX states ‘No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance’ ” (Valentin 1). The passage of this federal law made discrimination on the basis of gender illegal in all aspects of education (Sadker Failing At Fairness 35). All students at all levels of education, including private schools, are legally protected from prejudice, even “against marital and parental status” (Valentin 1).

The purpose of the Women’s Educational Equity Act (WEEA) and its Equity Resource Center is to assist public and private institutions with research and financial incentives to help achieve the goals of Title IX. It strives to eliminate stereotypes and helps to promote impartiality in the classroom. The organization provides funding for

“single heads of households, homemakers, part-time workers seeking full-time employment, and person seeking jobs in areas nontraditional of their sex.” It mandated states develop “sex equity coordinators” in an attempt to eliminate discrimination in vocational education (Valentin 4).

A properly funded WEEA would provide services and funding to schools that are struggling to comply with Title IX. Opponents feel compliance will force schools to cut men’s sports programs, but this is exactly why the WEEA Equity Resource Center is so essential. It can help schools fill the voids in their revenue stream and assure the laws are not being misinterpreted. The idea is not to bring men down to the level of women; it is to elevate everyone else to the level men currently enjoy.

Prior to 1918, students prepared for college by means of a curriculum including “Latin, Greek, German, philosophy and algebra.” Generally, girls excelled in this type of curriculum, particularly because of the emphasis placed on language arts. The “Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education” saw this classical curriculum as a major reason for the high dropout rate among non-college-bound students. It was considered an outdated relic which no longer met the needs of the country. This commission set out to develop a “New American High School” to prepare students for the changing occupational requirements of the industrial revolution. In the process, girls were steered towards home economics and secretarial courses. Boys on the other hand were encouraged in the more lucrative industrial arts. Girls became “Future Homemakers of America” while boys became “Future Farmers of America.” Back then, it was thought that the stress of a challenging education or

vocation would irreparably harm a woman's ability to bear children so girls were actively discouraged from seeking a vocation or higher education (Sadker Failing At Fairness 32).

Girls and women are still being dissuaded from entering non-traditional occupations nearly eighty-five years later. "Research by Linda Gottfredson found that children begin to eliminate careers because they are the wrong 'sex-type' between the ages of 6 and 8" (qtd. in Stitt-Gohdes 1). At a very early age, girls ascertain that careers in high paying non-traditional occupations such as: automotive mechanics, computers, construction trades, forensic science and utilities are simply not lady-like.

Beginning in kindergarten, girls learn to be polite and raise their hand in class while boys are permitted to dominate the classroom by blurting out their answers. "One study showed that boys spoke out of turn eight times more often than girls." Teachers unconsciously make girls feel inferior by calling on boys more often, asking them more difficult or abstract questions, and praising them on their intellect. Girls tend to be complimented on their neatness and clerical abilities. Boys receive more hands on opportunities with scientific instruments and computers than girls do. They are asked to participate in experiments seventy-nine percent of the time while girls are three-hundred percent more likely to be asked to take notes during the experiment or demonstration (Advocates 1).

The gender gap is further reinforced by the fact that boys have more access to personal computers in the home; they are vigorously encouraged by the marketing efforts of the computer and computer game manufacturers who specifically target them.

Even supposedly neutral computer programs and games are biased against girls (Anderson 1). “Nearly seventy-five percent of tomorrow’s jobs will require use of computers; fewer than thirty-three percent of participants in computer courses and related activities are girls” (qtd. in Women’s 1). These examples merely illustrate the pervasiveness of the larger problem.

Women remain grossly underrepresented in traditionally male vocations that offer them economic self-sufficiency. In fact, in some areas, they are losing ground; “the percentage of women graduating with computer science degrees has decreased twenty-five percent since 1985” (Advocates 1). Recent statistics show that only eighteen percent of engineering degrees are earned by women (Don’t 1). The ambitions of students interested in engineering and science begin to diverge due to gender inequities as early as eighth grade (National 1).

Stereotypes are so entrenched that merely providing equal educational opportunities does not actually change the opinion that women lack the ability to perform in areas traditionally perceived as male, such as spatial relations (Valentin 1). A quote from 1967 confirms we have known this stereotype to be false for many decades; “it has been established for some time that there are no basic differences in intelligence between the sexes” (qtd. in Lewis). Nevertheless, attitudes regarding “men’s work” and “women’s work” remain deeply ingrained. Female students are often disadvantaged by a lack of experience with tools and the knowledge of basic terminologies. However, vocational instructors often find that females work harder to prevail over these disadvantages than their male students. Females who seek

vocational occupations are barely tolerated, and typically not encouraged. There is not much of a support system for them, especially in trades like plumbing, automotive mechanics and electronics (Valentin 20-21). When provided with accurate information about the financial benefits of occupational training and a supportive environment, girls can and do overcome these barriers (Friedman 2).

Women continue to face obstacles in all educational institutions; their numbers in vital subjects such as mathematics and science are small when compared to their male counterparts. Over the years, not much has changed, especially in the realm of vocational training. Standardized tests favor males; thus limiting women in the areas of financial aid, admissions, and career choices. High paying technical jobs are still bastions of male dominance and are hostile environments for women, especially women of color or those with disabilities (Valentin 1).

“Vocational education has historically been characterized by a high degree of sex segregation.” Even after change in the law made it illegal to deny women access to non-traditional courses and vocational schools, men still dominate the industrial and agricultural fields while women are relegated to child care, home economics, and clerical occupations (Robbin 1). Women are woefully underrepresented in fields such as information technology and the technical sciences. Even when they earn Ph.D.’s, their earnings are fifteen to twenty percent less than their male colleagues with equivalent educations (Valentin 5).

Thousands of years of prejudice and entrenched stereotypes will not be overcome by a few decades of slow progress. Title IX made discrimination illegal, but it

did not eliminate it. Women are still being discriminated against in education. Merely asserting that girls can grow up to be anything they want, does not make it true. Not only do the barriers have to be removed; a supportive environment must also exist if women are to be elevated to equal status.

Females are generally reluctant to consider male dominated vocational choices when guidance counselors use materials depicting only men in these careers and they use the masculine pronoun "he" when speaking about prerequisites. The visual impact of printed information showing a workplace such as an automotive shop devoid of women is an unconscious signal for women to steer clear of that career (Flansburg 9). You might as well show girls a "keep out - no trespassing" sign; it has the same affect.

Trained career counselors who are up to date on the latest changes in the job market have a substantial impact on a student's career choice. They can act as a mentor by taking an active part in helping girls and women find the information necessary to make wise career choices. However, most of these professionals are severely overwhelmed with large numbers of students and increasing responsibilities. This situation impairs the quality of information available to women, especially in the area of non-traditional occupations (League 19).

Gender discrimination has a great affect on the "future earning power" of women. Negative attitudes, stereotypes, inadequate career information, lower expectations, and sexual harassment all play a part in funneling girls into positions in child care, cosmetology and other passive, low paying careers while boys are aggressively encouraged to seek training in carpentry, mechanics and other active

occupations. Girls are segregated by gender and not given the same opportunities as boys. "This includes teachers who help male students get summer jobs, but do not help female students; guidance counselors who steer females into traditional roles based on their lower expectations for them; and schools that fail to protect girls from sexual harassment" (Friedman 2).

School curriculums that are gender biased add to the problem. New vocational certificate programs in computer networking, such as the "Cisco Networking Academies" are being developed and placed in "predominantly male schools." Careers with this prerequisite typically pay "between forty-two and one-hundred thousand dollars" annually. Generally, young women have little or no access to these programs. Research has shown that girls are actively discouraged from achieving progress in vocational and technical programs by instructors who assign them to administrative tasks while boys get hands on experience with tools and equipment. If girls are provided with accurate salary information and given a supportive environment, girls overcome these barriers (Friedman 2).

There are major disparities regarding the transferability of skills and promotional paths between traditional and non-traditional careers for women. A student trained in a technical field such as electronics has skills that are easily transferred to another field, such as computer networking, utilities and laboratory testing. A student trained in a service area such as cosmetology does not have skills that can be related to other industries and lacks the potential for advancement (Flansburg 9).

In some states, women earn less than sixty-three percent of men's wages for full time year-round work (Institute 1) and they are most likely to earn the "lowest incomes of all workers" (Advocates 1). The League of Women Voters Education Fund has found that historically, a woman's work is undervalued. They receive less pay, are afforded fewer opportunities for promotion, are underrepresented in labor unions, receive fewer fringe benefits and endure greater unemployment rates (League 2).

Furthermore, children suffer because of the low economic status of their mothers, especially those living in single parent families. The numbers of homeless children and those living below the poverty level are increasing. This is a systemic problem which is best treated by eliminating the root cause. Education is the only way out of poverty for many women.

In the beginning, hopes were dashed when schools failed to take Title IX seriously. As the years passed, female students were still being denied participation in high level math, science, and vocational classes. Schools continued to discriminate against them when awarding scholarships. "One college awarded ten times as many scholarships to males as to equally qualified females." They were expelled if they became pregnant, but the biological fathers were not disciplined. Enforcement efforts were not taken seriously and the backlog of complaints mounted. A particular group of students who evaluated Title IX compliance was offered a free lunch if they could identify an educational facility that was NOT in violation of the law. No one ever won the free lunch prize (Sadker Failing At Fairness 36-37). In spite of this prevalence of

non-compliance, no school has ever lost a single dollar of federal funding under Title IX (Sadker What is Title IX 1).

Much of the effort to undermine gender equity was either caused by or related to conservatives who felt that increasing a woman's career and wage earning potential was a "threat to the family." The same administrators who are in charge of education hold strong patriarchal family values. For them, there was only one "politically correct family" and it did not include a "well educated woman of independent thought and means" (Sadker Failing At Fairness 37).

When the Reagan administration consolidated scores of programs into "block grants given to states" it wiped out many of the programs that supported Title IX. "The plan was to consolidate the WEEA out of existence." Other attempts at sabotage included reassigning key administrators to meaningless and unrelated areas, making huge staff and policy changes in their absence, and then bringing them back only to be blamed for the failure of the program (Sadker Failing At Fairness 38).

Initially, the funding approval process involved a panel of federal employees familiar with the programs and experts in education and equity. These vital professionals were replaced with untrained and inexperienced members of ultra-conservative organizations and institutions. "What is this title 'one x' I keep reading about" was one of the questions asked by "one reader reviewing proposals to help schools enforce Title IX." An investigation conducted by the General Accounting Office (GAO) revealed "one out of five [reviewers] unqualified and most of the readers barely qualified. Minority field readers had been cut by seventy-five percent" (Sadker Failing

At Fairness 38-39). Rather than raising suspicions and facing the inevitable political backlash by totally eliminating these programs; they were insidiously manipulated to the point where many of the founding educational professional felt the programs they helped developed had been demolished (Sadker Failing At Fairness 39).

By 1992, the WEEA budget had been whittled down to less than a half of a million dollars; a pitifully small amount of money when compared to the budgets of other government programs. Key staff members and experts have either resigned in disgust or have been reassigned elsewhere (Sadker Failing At Fairness 39). “Today’s backlash against women is having an impact. Congress has eliminated funding for almost all gender equity programs” (Sadker Answering The Backlash 1).

In addition to the old threats, proponents of Title IX and the WEEA face a whole host of new challenges. There are the Conservative’s efforts to amend or eliminate parts of the legislation. The WEEA is under constant threat of administrative mismanagement and under funding. Many Americans feel that sexism simply does not exist or they feel that women are already equal. (Maschke 3). Misconceptions regarding Title IX and the WEEA abound. The mere mention of the phrase “Title IX” evokes passionate but erroneous responses relating to sports programs and quota systems. “This of course is to be expected primarily from white men, specifically the college presidents and college coaches who descend on Washington to let everyone know what a deleterious effect the Title IX sports policy would have if [fully] implemented.” These are the same white men who have benefited from the status quo

since the beginning of time and actively seek to block the educational and vocational evolution of women (Maschke 3).

Although progress is slow, Title IX is working. In the twenty years between 1977 and 1997, the percentage of medical degrees earned by women has increased from nine percent to forty-one percent; women earning law degrees increased from seven percent to forty-four percent; doctoral degrees earned by women increased from twenty-five percent to forty-one percent. “There are no changes to the Title IX standards that are warranted or necessary. Modifications to the Title IX standards would limit future opportunities for women would violate the goal of gender equity. At a time when real progress is currently being made under Title IX toward equality of opportunity for women and men in athletics and education, cutbacks don't make sense” (Don't 1).

“Modifications to the Title IX standards... would limit future opportunities for women [and] would violate the goal of gender equity.” Title IX enforcement is necessary to assure equality. Rather than diluting or eliminating Title IX, the federal government should support its full enforcement (Don't 1).

Despite the fact that the guidelines for compliance are flexible and reasonable, the most passionate arguments against Title IX inevitably involve sports. Much of the fear and consternation regarding men's sports programs is due to misinterpretations of the law. Title IX is not a quota system. It is “designed to create parity in athletic opportunity and quality of experience for men and women”. There is no provision of the law that forces a school to eliminate programs for men. There are three areas of

importance when Title IX is applied to athletics: participation, scholarships and additional athletic program components (Sadker What Is Title IX 1).

To meet the requirements of participation, schools can demonstrate compliance in any one of three ways: “substantially proportionate athletic opportunities for male and female athletes, a history and continuing practice of expanding opportunities for the under-represented sex, or full and effective accommodation of the interests and abilities of the under-represented sex. Schools do not necessarily need to offer identical sports, yet they do need to provide an equal opportunity for females to play in sports of interest” (Sadker What Is Title IX 1).

To meet the requirement for scholarships, “the total amount of athletic aid must be substantially proportionate to the ratio of female and male athletes. For example, consider a college with ninety female athletes and one-hundred-fifteen male athletes and a scholarship budget of one-hundred thousand dollars. An equitable distribution of funds would award forty-four thousand dollars in scholarship aid to female athletes and fifty-six thousand dollars to males” (Sadker What Is Title IX 1). Using this percentage system is a fair and reasonable means of eliminating discrimination in terms of scholarship funding.

To meet the requirements for “additional athletic program components... equal treatment in the provision of coaching, equipment and supplies, game and practice times, locker rooms, medical and training facilities, practice and competitive facilities,

publicity, recruitment of student athletes, travel per diem allowances and tutoring opportunities” must be considered. “The standard for compliance is one of quality rather than quantity. The actual amount of money spent on women's and men's programs may differ as long the quality of facilities and services for each program achieve parity” (Sadker What Is Title IX 1). A difference in the cost of equipment supplied to a men’s athletic program and a women’s athletic program is not a violation so long as “both teams are given equipment of comparable quality” (1).

Title IX coordinators are charged with the task of ensuring enforcement and because they are selected by each individual school, compliance is very low. There is no federal agency in charge of Title IX enforcement and the honor system is enables insufficient participation.

Rather than take punitive measures, the federal government should furnish schools with the necessary assistance. Considering the current economic outlook, many schools will not be able to accomplish this goal on their own. This is exactly why properly funding the WEEA Equity Resource Center is crucial to obtaining full compliance with the law. Budget levels as low as five-hundred thousand dollar are utterly insufficient, especially when compared to the budgeted 2003 allocations of twenty million dollars for the “Responsible Fatherhood Initiative” and the seven-hundred-thirty-one million dollars for the “Andean Counterdrug Initiative” (Office 8-9).

Title IX is virtually the only legal means of prohibiting the educational discrimination of women because the United States Congress has rejected the Equal

Rights Amendment (ERA) and has refused to ratify the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). "This country is one of only six nations, along with Iran and Afghanistan, that refuses to sign" CEDAW (Sadker Answering The Backlash 1). Meanwhile, Congress has undermined a woman's right to vocational equality by eliminated funding for almost all gender equity programs.

In my opinion, diversity improves creativity and enhances the problem solving abilities of organizations by introducing new viewpoints and unique approaches. The world is going to become an extremely competitive global marketplace in the twenty-first century. If the United States is to retain and enhance its global economic status, it needs the intellectual input of all Americans, including women. As Valentin so eloquently states, "As we move closer to the twenty-first century, it seems evident that limiting women and girls also limits the nation as a whole. Gender inequity prevents females from realizing their full human potential and gives males free reign over the world" (6).

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