

Sex Differences in Educational Attainment

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4 minutes



Male-dominated (male-only?) class at the University of Salamanca (17th century)

I wish to begin this New Year by wishing everyone a wonderful 2015. With that in mind, let's start the new calendar year with some good news...at least for one of the two sexes. In one of my recent YouTube clips [THE SAAD TRUTH_11 \(Malala Versus Trigger Warnings\)](#), I discussed the recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Malala Yousafzai who braved the Taliban in her quest to fight for the right of girls to be educated. Throughout history and across a broad range of cultural and religious settings, women's access to [education](#) was curtailed if not forbidden. After all, totalitarian ideologies are in the business of controlling the

content as well as the flow of “acceptable” information (brains are more dangerous than brawn). In many instances, autocratic rulers seek to quell women’s standing in society and as such they institute systems that bar women from equal participation in public life.

Western societies in general and universities in particular have not always been immune from institutional [sexism](#). This is incontestable. How do American universities fare today? If we are to believe the driving narrative of many contemporary feminists, the campuses remain bastions of patriarchal oppression (see my earlier *Psychology Today* articles that address feminism [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). The Institute of Education Sciences, a US governmental organization, has some interesting aggregate data (for US residents) regarding the percent of university degrees that were conferred to women at all levels (Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctor) in 2009-2010 and broken down by five racial groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native). In other words, there are 20 male-to-female ratios that can be examined (4 levels of degrees x 5 racial groups). How many of the 20 cells do men outnumber women in terms of the degrees conferred? Apparently, rampant “sexism” exists but perhaps not in the direction that one might otherwise assume. In all 20 cells, women outnumbered men. If we are to contrast this result to the corresponding data from 1999-2000, women outnumbered men in 17 of the 20 cells ([see the last two columns in the reported table](#)).

The world remains a very hostile place for women in many corners of the globe. As such, we should all strive to battle such injustices wherever these might occur. However, the American campus is perhaps not the place where much of the efforts need to be mobilized notwithstanding the fact that individual instances of sexism will regrettably never be fully

eradicated. Astonishingly, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, an indefatigable fighter for women's rights on the global stage is now considered persona non grata at many American university campuses (see the [shameful debacle at Brandeis University last year](#)). In the minds of many Western feminists, Anita Sarkeesian is a courageous fighter against the patriarchy via her analysis of video games (see her work [here](#) and a critique of it [here](#)) whilst Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a bigoted hate monger. Broken moral compasses will continue to lead us astray.

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