



and politics are your business, not ours," says Farenga. Alexandra Swann, a self-described fundamentalist Christian, agrees: "We should be working with all people, sharing our experiences, whether their faith agrees with ours or not."

The second difference is that traditional-minded home educators are uncomfortable with the unschoolers' laissez-faire attitude. Last year in Amherst, Massachusetts, the school superintendent publicly expressed disappointment with the quality and quantity of work submitted by a sizeable number of secondary-level homeschooled students. The students were affiliated with a homeschooling group called The Pathfinder Learning Center. The center tends to downplay the role of parents in providing direct instruction; instead, it encourages hands-on learning, traveling, and schmoozing with other homeschoolers at its facility, which acts as a teen drop-in center.

Traditional homeschoolers, who spend long hours working with their children and create detailed lesson plans, were worried about the potential fallout. One parent was quoted in the local paper as saying, "The very definition of home education is that education will take place in the home. It requires parent involvement and requires a huge parent commitment."

But such disagreements are natural in a movement that has taken its place in the mainstream and now includes parents with diverse motivations and methods. Such are the hazards of growing up. □

Singles

CHRISTINE B. WHELAN

WHEN 14-year-old Cydnee Couch was in an ordinary public school in New York City, she tried hard to keep up with her schoolwork, but it was a losing battle. The boys' spitballs, incessant chatter, and frequent tugs on her ponytail were constant distractions. Then, at the beginning of seventh grade, she transferred to the Young Women's Leadership School, a newly started all-girls charter public school in East Harlem, and she immediately noticed the difference. "I can concentrate," she says.

While opponents of single-sex education claim that the benefits are unproven, students like Cydnee are testimony to its value for the girls and boys who choose it. A grassroots push for single-sex public-school education is under way across the country. Several states are experimenting with single-sex classrooms, with New York and California taking the lead.

But the schools have faced not only educationist opposition but also legal challenges. The National Organization

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for Women and the American Civil Liberties Union don't want public-school kids to have the option of single-sex education. They say students are hurt, not helped, by single-sex classrooms, and that separate schooling for boys and girls is unconstitutional—that it violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. For these lobbies, separation by sex is as inherently unequal as separation by race.

In fact, the case for single-sex schooling does not depend

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on anecdotal evidence like Cydnee's. Scores of studies worldwide have shown that girls in single-sex high schools demonstrate a significantly higher rate of improvement on reading-achievement and science-aptitude tests between sophomore and senior years than their co-educated peers. And boys who attend single-sex high schools have higher self-confidence, are more involved in extracurricular activities, and take more foreign languages and English classes than their counterparts in co-ed schools.

Important as these findings are, they are secondary to the real issue: freedom. If parents want to send their children to single-sex academies, why shouldn't they have that choice?

Whether our current courts would rule this form of school choice constitutional is an open question; the issue has not come before the Supreme Court in just that way. The Fourteenth Amendment says no person may be denied the "equal protection of the laws," and *Brown v. Board of Education* held that separate cannot be equal in the public schools when race is the division line. But the courts have never treated sexual classifications as demanding the "strict scrutiny" afforded to racial classifications.

Brown was based on sociological studies which found that single-race schooling inherently hurts black educational achievement and thus produces inequality. Those findings have later been persuasively disputed even when race is the issue. And as we have seen, sexual segregation has been shown to produce superior results for many students of both sexes.

Detractors cite the recent Supreme Court decision ordering the all-male Virginia Military Institute to admit women as proving that sexual segregation in educational settings is unconstitutional. But the VMI case, whatever the wisdom of the outcome, involved a set of circumstances that does not apply in most instances of single-sex education. The Court ruled that no comparable school could be created for women, and that no justification for VMI's all-male status that the school's administrators had been able to produce outweighed that fact.

These conditions do not apply at most of the single-sex

charter schools sprouting across the country. In California, pairs of schools—one for girls, the other for boys—have now been started in pilot districts. These partner schools receive equal funding, staffing, equipment, facilities, and books. Some districts get an overwhelming response for the all-boys schools—in one area, a hundred boys and seven girls applied for the pair of programs—while in other districts the ratio is reversed. This is not a mark of inequality. Furthermore, with both schools opening their doors simultaneously, neither has the advantage over the other of a decades-old reputation. The districts are scrupulous in seeing that neither is better established or better endowed. And, once again, the important thing is that the students and parents have been enabled to decide what type of education best suits their needs.

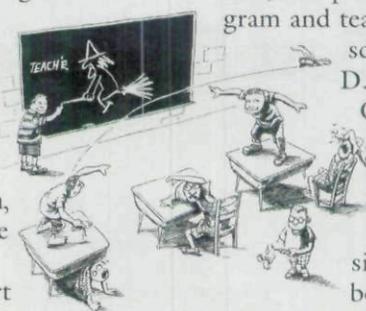
While each school district should be allowed to find what method works best for its children, probably the ideal system would consist of an all-boys school, an all-girls school, and a coeducational school. That ought to answer any possible objection to single-sex education under the Court's current reading of the Fourteenth Amendment, as well as any parents' objections to doing away with the sort of coeducational schooling they grew up with.

SINGLE-SEX education is far from an untested innovation. Although many of the private schools catering to the affluent have recently chosen to follow the public-school trend toward coeducation, such schools were traditionally single-sex. A mere 1 per cent of all schools are sexually segregated today, but recent enrollment numbers show these percentages are on the rise.

NOW and the ACLU, however, did not fly into action until the the less well-off started to follow the affluent up the ladder to educational accomplishment. The Young Women's Leadership School, which Cydnee Couch attends, is a public school that unabashedly takes its program and teaching ideas from Manhattan's elite private schools. It offers class trips to Washington, D.C., and summer programs at Smith College—unlike the City's other public schools, but similar to Brearley and Chapin.

But NOW and the ACLU are not all wrong. Full choice means the option of a single-sex public-school environment for both girls and boys; as it stands now, New York City's system fills only half the bill. No boys' public school exists. While NOW and the ACLU want to close the Young Women's Leadership School, the real answer is to open a Young Men's Leadership School. This will be costly, but less so than investing more money in a faulty system.

For Cydnee Couch and many other students, single-sex education is the right choice, a choice that allows them to concentrate on their studies rather than the opposite sex. Supporters of the Young Women's Leadership School should realize that to keep their first born alive, a younger brother is necessary. □



Miss Whelan is a senior at Princeton University.

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