

Gender gap in education cuts both ways

By Eduardo Porter, *New York Times*

Why do the best-educated girls do worse at math than top-educated boys?

Concern about this deficit exploded into public consciousness 35 years ago, when researchers in the department of psychology at Johns Hopkins University published an article suggesting the gap might be caused by a “superior male mathematical ability.”

The debate that ensued was furious. It was so hot that a quarter of a century later, a similar controversy contributed to the ouster of Lawrence Summers from his post as the president of Harvard.

Was there anything “natural” about the performance gap? Or was it the product of gender bias working its way through schools? As the debate raged, ending the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and math became a critical policy priority.

Amid the din over top girls’ mathematical abilities, something important was forgotten: What is happening that so many boys are falling behind in pretty much everything else?

Last week the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – a collective think tank of the world’s industrialized nations – published a report about gender inequality in education, based on the latest edition of its PISA standardized tests taken by 15-year-olds around the world.

Read the whole story