

NO! NOT EQUAL

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CHAPTER 3

Education

The gendered patterns of vocational and educational participation and attainment reflect the persistence of gender stereotypes and the continuing occupational segregation in Australia.

'... [My mum] said "Oh, well, you don't need an education to have children" ... That's what she saw in her daughters. The boys all got good educations and good jobs, because they were boys and had to support wives, and little did she realise that I needed an education when my marriage breaks up or when disaster happens in the family. You don't find them out until later years. You realise it's a big mistake' – a 47-year-old woman in *Paying the Price for Sugar and Spice*, 1985¹⁶

The link between education and gender equity is widely accepted.¹⁷ Forty years ago it was common for girls to leave school early. Now it is much more common for young women to stay on and complete Year 12. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data

show that a greater percentage of young women than young men completed Year 12 or equivalent in 2013 — 89.2% of young women compared to 84.3% of young men.¹⁸ This reflects the widespread ‘reversal of historical trends’ among OECD countries in relation to girls’ education.¹⁹

‘[I’ve] been very mentally stressed out and my sister is still in high school, and because I live in a single parent family I kind of have to take up the role of being a parent as well.’ — Melissa, a 21-year-old student who also worked part-time; *Turning 21: life chances and uncertain transitions*, 2013

‘The one thing [my parents] always said ... “just start something, you can always change, it’s never too late to be re-educated” and I think that’s the one thing that I always take with me, which I guess is why I’m not that worried about where I start, I’m more interested in starting something and then sort of moving on from there in a different direction if I want to.’ — Klara, a 21-year-old university student with high-income, Australian-born parents, *Turning 21: life chances and uncertain transitions*, 2013²⁰

Clearly, significant advances have been made in girls’ educational engagement and Year 12 attainment, but this progress is unevenly distributed. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Reform

Council's analysis of census and other data shows that, 'young women from the most disadvantaged areas are 20% less likely to attain Year 12 or equivalent than women from the least disadvantaged areas'. They also found that young women from the most disadvantaged areas were less likely to go on to full-time work or study after secondary school than either young men from the those areas or young women from the least disadvantaged areas.²¹

Overall, a greater percentage of Australians now have non-school qualifications: 57% in 2014 compared with 47.2% in 2001; however, in May 2014, a higher proportion of men (59%) than women (56%) aged 15–64 years had a non-school qualification.²² Data from the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research (NCVER) show that women and men have slightly different patterns of participation in vocational education and training with men's participation more concentrated in early adulthood.²³

Men are much more likely than women to be apprentices or trainees (with men making up 85% of apprentices and trainees aged 15–64). ABS data also show that a higher proportion of women than men were studying in the fields of society and culture (26% and 13.2% respectively) in 2014, while 20.8% of men were studying engineering and related technologies, compared with just 1.6% of women. Almost 10% of all women students aged 15–64 were

in the field of education, compared with less than 4% of men.²⁴

Research conducted by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) in 2012 shows that vocational education choices have significant economic impacts across the life course. For example:

the hospitality industry is a sector dominated by low skilled, female workers. If a 25-year-old person qualified in hospitality continued to work in this sector for the rest of their working life, they would earn a mere \$1.6 million on average. In contrast, their peers employed in high-skill industries such as engineering would earn nearly \$3 million over their working life.²⁵

While educational attainment overall has increased, it is patchy. Participation and attainment are shaped by socio-economic factors, and by social and cultural understandings of gender roles. The gendered patterns of vocational and educational participation and attainment reflect the persistence of gender stereotypes and the continuing occupational segregation in Australia, which we explore in more detail in the next section. This assessment is supported by recent research into so-called non-traditional occupations for women and girls. Gendered occupational stereotypes have serious long-term economic consequences for women and girls, as occupations that are traditionally female-dominated tend to be low paid.