

***The Gender Gap in College: Maximizing the Developmental Potential of Women and Men* by Linda J. Sax (Book Review)**

Zach Nicolazzo

When I first heard that Dr. Linda J. Sax was coming out with a new book on the gender gap in college, I was excited to pick up a copy and read it. However, upon finishing the book, I was more disappointed than anything else. While there were some upsides to the book, there were more areas of concern that I noticed and scribbled notes about as I went through the text. Below are what I perceived as strengths and weaknesses:

### Strengths

#### *Overall readability*

While Sax's work is rooted in a vast amount of quantitative research, she makes it clear that her book does not have to be read the entire way through like a novel. She suggests readers pick and choose sections that interest them and skip around. Also, the layout of her book offers readers a chance to understand the quantitative research, even if they do not have a strong background in understanding the charts associated with said research (as I admittedly do not).

#### *Breadth and scope*

The research done by Sax for the book was impressive. There were a wide number of predictors and variables investigated in relation to what may account for differences between men and women and what may allow them to be more successful in the college setting. She focuses attention on social and political values, academic factors, and personality and identity dimensions as broad categories within which she looks at a myriad of variables.

### Weaknesses

#### *The title*

One of the mildly frustrating things about the book is the title. As I was reading Sax's book, I realized that she was not talking about the gender gap at all, but was instead investigating the sex gap in college. Gender being something we "do" rather than who we "are", as is the case with our biological sex, was not what Sax was addressing. In fact, she was looking at differences between men and women, not differences between multiple definitions of masculinity and/or femininity. This confusion was challenging for me to see as a reader, as it leads me to my next critique of the book.

#### *Invisibility of the transgender community*

Because Sax was looking at sex differences rather than gender differences, and because she was only looking at the gender binary of men/women, the transgender community was rendered invisible. By means of her approach, Sax supports a gender binary that is not an accurate portrayal of the complex nature of sex, gender identity, and gender expression. Not only is the transgender community rendered invisible by this reductionist approach, but the intersex community is, as is anything that falls outside the realm of the two categories of "man" and "woman." To see this play out in Sax's book with the understanding that the communities being pushed to the margins of her book already face marginalization made finishing the book a practice in patience for me.

#### *Intersections of identity*

Similar to the lack of recognition of the continuum of sex, gender identity, and gender expression, Sax's research did not look at other dimensions of personal identity that may influence men and women differently throughout their college experience. This was likely a gap in data collection rather than her writing, but it would have been beneficial to look at how men and women perceive their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or their ability level as influencing their overall experience and ability to be successful men and women in college. In conjunction with this, the book would have been improved by weaving in some of the research around privilege and oppression and how this may influence some of the outcomes Sax found.

### Final Thoughts

Despite my being disappointed by *The Gender Gap in College*, I am glad to have read it. I would suggest the book to others, but would do so with the caveat that folks read it in tandem with other research related to both gender as it intersects with other dimensions of personal identity as well as critical race theory, queer theory and/or other publications looking at how privilege and oppression operate and influence individuals, groups, and communities. While Sax's book is not one I would claim should be a foundational text, I do believe it, coupled with other scholarly works, can provide some insight upon which we can build successful programs and policies. Furthermore, in its weaknesses, it pushed me to think more deeply about sex, gender identity, gender expression, and who is leading/included in these conversations to begin with.