

TODAY'S QUOTE

> "Writers are always a great nuisance to publishers. If they could do without them, they would." — Fay Weldon, author

StarTribune

Stereotypes continue to plague kids and hinder their dreams.

Tender about gender

By Gail Rosenblum
Mindworks Coordinator

Imagine a world in which children grow up free from the confines of gender-based assumptions; where girls bolt onto the playground for a friendly game of football and the boys cheer them on; where a boy who is grieving is allowed to cry openly; where all bodies and minds are respected no matter whom they happen to be attached to.

Sadly, all we can do is imagine. Because for the nearly 5,000 children responding to this month's Mindworks, that world remains as elusive as ever. When asked, "What is the main problem you face that members of the opposite sex do not?" boys and girls describe lives firmly entrenched in gender stereotypes. And they hint at brewing displeasure toward one another.

Beauty at all costs

Grrr! power, smrrr! power. Our girls are nearly collapsing under the pressures to be physically attractive. Girls as young as age 10 chronicle the steps they take to get hair to shine, skin to behave, clothes to meet acceptable standards and scales to grant them the good news that they've finally dieted enough. While they understand the enormous toll this quest can play on their health — anorexia nervosa and bulimia were frequently mentioned — there was no groundswell of support for chucking the whole silly business. "I know for a fact that every one of my friends spends anywhere from a half-hour to two hours doing their hair and putting on makeup so they look glamorous," writes Janae Hohbein, a sixth-grader at Brooklyn Center's Garden City Elementary. "They do this because they believe if they are beautiful, they will be accepted into the popular group."

Girls talked, too, about bodily changes, such as the emotional and physical roller coaster of a menstrual cycle, and they take seriously its awesome implications: the possibility of pregnancy.

MINDWORKS continues on E16:
— Title IX passed 25 years ago.
— Essays: Both genders have their burdens.

"I HATE THE CONCEPT that, because of my gender, I have to play football and flex muscles. I would like to see some scriptwriter have Sylvester Stallone play a soft-hearted, skinny-armed poetic intellectual."

...and yet... and yet I feel so empty and alone. Why... why... why are we here, anyway?

CUT! THAT'S A WRAP! SLY, BABY! You've got me weepin' my eyes out here! Is this acting or WHAT? I tell ya, I see OSCAR written all over this one!



L.K. Hansvorn 11.99.

MATT GAERTNER-Agell
Grade 5, Plymouth-Birchview Elementary



Mindworks

Monthly forum
for young writers

"Why do boys have it easier? Bathroom lines. Bathroom lines. Bathroom lines."

— Cherish Hadley, age 17, grade 12, Redwood Falls, Minn., Redwood Valley School

"Men face having to be suspected of being good at fixing appliances."

— Robb Nelson, age 12, grade 6, St. Paul, Webster Magnet School

"Personally, I think Barbie should pump (and plump) up a little."

— Kelsey Olson, age 12, grade 6, Ramsey, Parker Elementary School



MINDWORKS from E1

The work is there if we want kids to reach potential

One new mother, 16, describes the wearisome and solitary life she now leads: up every two to three hours, cleaning up after the baby's father, washing endless loads of clothes, keeping up with homework and trying to find a job to make ends meet. While it certainly isn't a bad thing that young girls view parenthood as overwhelming, it's troubling that they don't see motherhood in adulthood as much fun, either. "Kids are so cute when they're little," writes Sandra Zanoth, 11, of Silver Lake. "But when they get older, they get inappropriate. And before you know it, we'll be getting calls from school saying our kids are in detention and the mothers have to do everything because dad is at work and never home."

And does anybody remember Title IX, the historic federal law prohibiting sex discrimination, which would change the world for female athletes? More than 25 years after its passage, girls still bemoan the lack of support they receive when playing "male" sports, from media stonewalling to inadequate playing fields to taunting by male peers. "I play for a girls' hockey team and, everywhere I go, I hear people say that hockey is a man's sport," writes Danielle Jwanouskos, a White Bear Lake ninth-grader. "I hate it so much."

Macho man

But for every girl who demands her right to play hockey, there is a boy more than happy to give her his jersey. Countless boys wrote about the unbearable pressures they feel to excel in sports when, quite frankly, they'd be happier doing anything else. "Some kids don't like sports and their dads don't want to believe it," writes 10-year-old Matt Hill, who himself enjoys athletics. "I see this kid in football every year, and I can tell that he doesn't like it. But his dad gets mad at him if he doesn't do it right."

Betcha Dad wouldn't want him to cry about it, either. Many boys wrote poignant essays recalling times they were grieving or hurt, but felt forced to buck up. "When a girl is crying, a whole bunch of people come over and ask, 'What's wrong?'" writes Jake Selstad, 11. "When a boy is crying, people come over and ask, 'What's wrong?' but what they're really thinking is, 'Man, that kid has problems.'"

The boys questioned why their chores are "harder" than the girls', and why if a girl hits them they can't hit her back. And interestingly, in light of recent research

suggesting that girls are being shortchanged in the classroom, boys argue that they are the less favored gender. "As soon as a boy says something, the teacher yells at the boy and does not say anything to the girl," writes 16-year-old Adam Dietz of New Ulm, Minn. "Sometimes it seems like the teacher thinks that a girl can never do anything wrong." There were funny moments, too, such as boys suffering cracking voices, pondering the inevitability of baldness or recounting a botched first attempt at shaving.

But the take-away message this month is serious: We have our work cut out for us if we are to truly help our children reach their potential, child by child by child.

"Girls and boys should be equal, no matter what they like, but people in our society don't let it be that way," writes Maxwell Roen, all of age 8. "I like being who I am and I don't think that people should try to interfere with that. We should all have the chance to be who we are — boy or girl."

Here's hoping that Max and his friends will show us the way.

— *Mindworks questions should be addressed to Gail Rosenblum by e-mail at grozenblum@startribune.com or by phone at 612-673-7809. Additional research by Sondra Schroeder-Davis.*

"Boys get in trouble more than girls. Way more."

— Kyle Bauer, age 9, grade 3, St. Cloud, Minn.; Saints Peter, Paul and Michael Primary

"I wonder why the media acts so worried about girls in the hospital, but continues to put out ads and messages that skinny is the way to be."

— Brittany Olander, age 11, grade 5, St. Paul, Nativity of Our Lord School

"I have no clue why girls need so much makeup, just to cover up their normal face."

— Jeff Wondra, age 12, grade 7, Blooming Prairie, Minn., Blooming Prairie High School

"A problem boys have that girls don't is that girls' voices don't crack. That's one of the most annoying things in the world; almost as bad as the Spice Girls."

— Aaron Batten, age 13, grade 8, Apple Valley, Scott Highlands Middle School

"When boys go on a date, they get stuck paying and the girls pay diddly squat."

— John Pollnow, age 9, grade 4, Cambridge, Minn., Cambridge Elementary

"Breast cancer. Girls have to live their whole lives in fear of getting breast cancer."

— Ashley Quistorff, age 11, grade 6, Sauk Centre, Minn., Sauk Centre Elementary

"One problem that girls face is trying to get a job. Like being in the Senate or House of Representatives."

— Kristy Leverington, age 10, grade 5, Pine River, Minn., Pine River Elementary

"There's nothing different between boys and girls except that boys get the harder jobs."

— Jeffery Williams, age 7, grade 1, Minneapolis, Kenwood School

"In Somalia, mothers like sons more than daughters."

— Fatima Samatar, age 13, grade 8, St. Paul, Humboldt Middle School

Both genders have their burdens

Christina Crudup

- Age 18, grade 12
- Minneapolis
- The Education Place

Boys have it easy. They go around sleeping with all types of females and don't look back once to see what's going on with her. If boys knew the problems that go on with us during pregnancy, they'd have second thoughts. We have to watch what we eat, make sure that we get enough vitamins, make sure we drink enough water. We have to take all kinds of pills: iron pills, prenatal pills. We break out, our feet swell up and so does our nose. We are always hungry; we get cravings you can't even imagine. We have to go out and buy a new wardrobe, which can be costly. Our breasts swell up to the point that they seem like they will explode if we breathe a certain way. We sometimes can't even go up a flight of stairs without feeling as if we just ran the 50-yard dash. If we knew what we know, a lot of us would have fathers. It's just that they don't understand. You can't act upon something that you don't understand.

Nathan Frey

- Age 10, grade 5
- Edina
- Countryside Elementary

I once had a coach who wanted to win, win, win and win. It was not always fun being around him because it was difficult to be as aggressive as he wanted. I think sports should be played for the enjoyment, not just to win. Hustling and giving your best is one thing; swearing and hurting someone is another.

Daria Martin

- Age 12, grade 6
- Lowry, Minn.
- Starbucks Elementary

I joined wrestling seven years ago and still have to put up with boys saying, "Oh, look! There's a girl in wrestling. Hey girl, why don't you join a girls' sport?" It's sickening.

Matt Hambro

- Age 10, grade 5
- St. Louis Park
- Cedar Manor School

When my grandma died, I was in second grade. When I got to school just my luck, that was the day we talked about family trees. Well, I ended up crying and was teased and taunted by almost every single boy and girl in my class. In fourth grade, someone stole my yo-yo. I cried and some students in my class made disrespectful comments. This year in hockey, I fell and hurt my knee. I started crying, but continued with my practice. Most people called me weak or some other word with the same meaning. So there's one cold discrimination collar placed around boys' necks every day. It is a hard part of life for boys, and people should really think before teasing about crying.

Tanya Senske

- Age 13, grade 8
- Plymouth
- Plymouth Middle School

It's not just the guys that expect us to look perfect. In fact, they're the least of the problem. It's all our same-sex peers who give us the worst grief. They are the ones who do all the criticizing. At least if guys are thinking it, most of them won't say it.

Aaron Schneider

- Age 11, grade 6
- Owatonna, Minn.
- Willow Creek Intermediate School

One of the problems I face that girls don't is that I have to run the mile faster to get Presidential Physical Fitness in gym. I think it is very unfair that boys are expected to run faster than girls. It's really no problem for me to run it in time, but that's not the point. The point is that it is very sexist.

Sarah Umland

- Age 10, grade 4
- Plymouth
- Plymouth Creek Elementary

Boys are so wild and out of control in the classroom. It is very hard for girls to work and study next to boys. Teachers always put the boys who are noisy next to the quiet girls. This is really hard for girls and easy for boys.

Elise Farrington

- Age 7, grade 2
- Eden Prairie
- Cedar Ridge Elementary

When men come home from work, they take off their shoes and coat and get comfortable on the coach. Then they turn on the TV. We have to go grocery shopping, set the table and make dinner for the family.

Jon Adams

- Age 11, grade 6
- Falcon Heights
- Brimhall Elementary

Boys need to shave. They need to get up really early when it's still very dark, go downstairs to the cold tiled bathroom and attempt to cut off tiny, stiff, millimeter-long hairs that grow around the mouth. Then they march upstairs with little bits of cream all over the places where they cut themselves.

Tim Knight

- Age 13, grade 7
- Minneapolis
- Barton Open School

Boys always seem to get blamed for things. Some teachers (not all) automatically assume it is the boy who is misbehaving when, sometimes, it is a girl. I'm not sure why it is true, but maybe it is because most teachers are girls.

Rebekah Zosel

- Age 11, grade 6
- Elk River, Minn.
- Meadowvale School

I think the reason girls don't know how to fix cars and change oil is because no one ever taught us. I appreciate my dad because he always takes me hunting and fishing. He also tried to teach me how to change the oil.

Girl, age 11, Minneapolis

When a girl goes through body changes, it can be a tough time. I've had my period six times now and it started when I was 10. I get really nervous when I have it and it's embarrassing to have to buy pads. I get especially nervous during gym if I'm having it. I also fear for my life more than I did before.

Mike Comstock

- Age 9, grade 3
- Savage
- Harriet Bishop Elementary

Now that there are girls' hockey teams, I have to share ice time with them. This means I now have early morning hockey practices; it is really hard for me to get up in the morning for a 6 a.m. practice. It makes me tired for the rest of the school day. I wish there was girls' hockey, so we could keep prime-time ice practices.

Jeff Haas

- Age 18, grade 12
- New Ulm, Minn.
- New Ulm High

One of the more dumb things is that girls have lower car insurance than guys. The insurance companies say it's because guys are more power hungry and have more of a need for speed. Just because I own a 1965 Ford Galaxie with a high-output 289, bored 4 over with aluminum 351 heads, oversized camshaft kit, Dana 460's competition gears, wheelie bars, traction bars and a 750 cfm Edelbrock carburetor and intake and high-performance Hooker Headers with glass packs. Now, the neighbor girl... she has a little Mazda and she speeds like you wouldn't believe.

Danielle Diessner

- Age 10, grade 5
- Burnsville
- Echo Park Elementary

One time I asked my brother to pick up some jeans for me. He said sure. When he came home, he had a skirt instead and told me that I'd get more boyfriends with it. I don't think I'll ever understand him. Maybe he should wear the skirt.

Dionica Aron

- Age 15, grade 9
- Minneapolis
- North High School

Girls have to work hard to develop a good relationship with their mothers. Most boys are born or grow to be Mama's boys. It usually takes a while for girls and their mothers to get along.

"STOCKINGS, PANTYHOSE, TIGHTS. Whatever you call them, it all comes down to the same vile elastic trap-pings. Believe me, there is nothing worse than sitting for hours in a church pew with your nylons cutting off your circulation from the waist down."

EMILY SCHLOSNAGLE • Age 14
Grade 8 • Rochester • St. Francis Catholic School



Briana Grothmann

- Age 9, grade 4
- Wadena, Minn.
- Wadena-Deer Creek Elementary

It's not fair that when girls get married, the boys get to keep their last name. I do not like that rule because my mom had a cool last name (not to make you mad, Dad) and she didn't get to keep it.

Dierre Martin

- Age 9, grade 4
- Minneapolis
- WMEP (West Metro Education Program) Interdistrict Downtown School

Boys are afraid of girls. And girls are afraid of boys. And boys are afraid of boys. And girls are afraid of girls.

Katelyn Krinke

- Age 7, grade 1
- North Mankato
- Hoover Elementary

My biggest problem is that boys chase me. If they would just stop chasing me, my life would be perfect.

Joe Wood

- Age 11, grade 6
- Lino Lakes
- Centennial Middle School

Boys have to do most of the outdoor dirty work. Boys have to clean the garage, mow the lawn, fix the car and lift heavy things. I

Chelsie Miller

- Age 14, grade 9
- Annandale, Minn.
- Annandale High School

As a girl growing up in the 1990s, I have been bombarded with pictures of the "perfect" girl. She is smart, pretty, athletic, popular and thin, with high self-esteem. She is class president and has a boyfriend who is captain of the football and basketball team. She is at the top of her class with a perfect A report card and never fights with her parents. She also has a perfect relationship with her brother Chip. In the real world, a girl like that would be severely bulimic, addicted to speed and suicidal. Girls like that only live on TV and in the movies.

