

# Parent Information Session: Gifted Girls

## Quotes from the Field

- ~ "Although there have been great strides in the past century, stereotypic images of both men and women are found throughout our culture. Gifted children, whose abilities and interests do not coincide with the mainstream image in their community may be forced to mask either their passion to excel in a particular area, and/or ignore their gift. They learn to hide their identities to survive."  
(Kerr, 2000)
- ~ The "Leaky Pipeline": Girls make up approx. half the enrollment at medical and law schools, but... (Rimm, 2007)
- Only 5% of CEO's of Fortune 500 companies
  - Only 17% of law firm partners
  - Underrepresented among tenured faculty & dept. chairs in college and universities
  - Only 10% of college faculties in physics
  - 13% of superintendents of schools
  - Overall salaries of college education women after graduation are 20% behind that of men, up to 30% 10 yrs later
  - Only 16% of Congress
  - few deans at medical schools
  - 35% of symphony orchestras (up from 10% in 1970's)
- ~ "Over 80% of high school leadership positions are now held by girls."  
(Fiscus, 1997)
- ~ "...puberty marks the point at which girls are forcefully taught the dangers of failing to be feminine."  
(Kerr, 2000)
- ~ "The Perfect Future Day Fantasy" = visualization technique for assessing students' expectations about their own future. Girls: happy place, family, improve the world Boys: money, challenging, reputation, be famous (Rimm, 2007)
- ~ "Gender stereotypes in the electronic and print media offer challenges to the healthy psychological development of gifted girls."  
(Rakow, ?)
- ~ "learned helplessness" Bright girls often become too dependent on others because independence is often seen as unfeminine.
- ~ "Whereas underachievement in college and adulthood is the specialty of gifted women, from late primary throughout the high school years, it is the special province of gifted boys..."  
(Kerr, 2000)
- ~ "... evaluative settings (applications, essays, grants, tenure, etc.) favor men. So women have to be able to do 'more than' to make it."  
(Rimm, 2007)
- ~ Internal Barriers to Success: (Reis, 1998)
- Dilemmas about abilities and talents
  - Poor planning
  - Perfectionism
  - Poor choice of partners
  - Choices about duty & nurturing personal talents rather than putting the needs of others first.
  - Religious and social issues which consistently affect women across their lifespan
  - personal choices about family
  - hiding abilities and differences
  - attributing success to luck rather than ability
  - confusing messages from home about politeness
- ~ Loss of Belief in Abilities and Self-Confidence:
- Some gifted girls lose, to varying degrees, their enthusiasm for learning and their courage to speak out and display their abilities.
    - Increasingly doubt their intellectual competence
    - Believe that boys can rely on innate ability while they must work harder to succeed
    - Avoid competition in order to preserve relationships
  - Interviews with MS gifted females revealed that girls avoid displays for outstanding intellectual ability and search for ways to better conform to the norm of the peer group.
  - "Many gifted girls drop out of gifted programs in middle school to avoid pressure and role conflict."
- ~ "By the time a gifted young woman has graduated from college, she is likely to have lowered her estimate of her own intelligence, to have changed majors to a less challenging major and to have lowered her career aspirations."  
(Kerr, 2000)

### Strategies/Tips

(Kerr 2000; Rakow, ?; Reis, 2002; Rimm, 2000, 2007; Ziegler, 2005)

- ~ Help them to discover their own meaning of femininity/masculinity.
- ~ Help them to discover early and then make choices based on their most deeply held values.
- ~ Encourage girls to recognize their options and be assertive in their decisions.
  - Help them see choices where none may be apparent: clothes, athletics, friends, career options, etc. )
  - Encourage daughters to voice their opinions (assertively, yet respectfully)
- ~ Prepare boys and girls to know that they must have a career.
- ~ Encourage leadership, future thinking, independence, and risk-taking
- ~ Girls need help in developing strategies (Chess, etc.).
- ~ Deemphasize appearance – emphasize character, kindness, strength, etc.
- ~ Don't pressure them to fit in socially. Many girls feel different during adolescence. Help them to feel comfortable with their differences and redirect energies towards positive activities.
- ~ Monitor and interpret media messages.
- ~ Cultivate reasonable optimism. (leave room for doubt)
- ~ Develop perseverance and flexibility.
  - Don't rescue! K-2 once in 2 weeks, 3-5 once in a month, 6-8 once in a grading period, 9-11 once in a semester, 12 = never
  - Don't provide too much help when attempting to perform new activities or work on unfamiliar equipment.
- ~ "Parental opinions matter greatly to young girls, and the messages sent by subtle and not-so-subtle verbal and nonverbal interactions may encourage or discourage girls for life."
- ~ Concrete feedback to improve achievement.
- ~ "Fathers especially need to be sure to compliment their daughters for perceptive comments and intellectual or academic activities, not just for looking pretty." Fathers play an important role in the aspirations of their daughters.
- ~ Stimulating talents (giftedness) has proven to be an effective protection against learned helplessness.
  - less anxiety
  - less likely to underachieve
  - kids will generalize positives to other areas
  - less likely to engage in high-risk activity
- ~ Early on, give great range of activities (special abilities, pencil tasks, physical, extra-curricular)
- ~ Teach both competition and collaboration.
  - Competition is critical for building resilience.
  - Competition against self (personal best) is best for fearful kids.
- ~ "Vaccinate kids for stress." - Travel with your daughters – adventure, enrichment, self-confidence.
- ~ Expose girls to role models. Be an active role model of independent problem-solving, decision-making, career dev. Foster friendships with gifted peers with similar interests.
- ~ Improved domain-specific self-concept + decreased test-anxiety = decreased in learned helplessness
- ~ Attributional retraining = positive effect on self-concept, control expectations, and test anxiety
  - "...students are encouraged to find internal explanations for successes (amount of effort, ability) and to attribute failures to modifiable factors (amount of effort, use of learning strategies)."

Resources: Rimm, Sylvia: See Jane Win, How Jane Won, See Jane Win for Girls <http://www.sylviarimm.com/>  
Kerr, Barbara: Smart Girls Sapolsky, Robert: Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers