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"Being a teenager is hard enough.
Being gifted and female is brutal!"



Gifted Middle School Girls:

Gender Issues

AIG Camp
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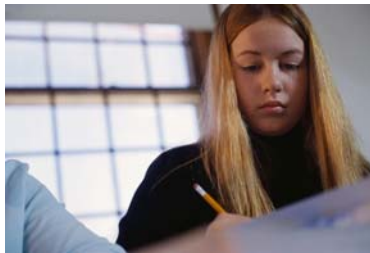
Special Issues of Gifted Middle School Girls

Gifted girls are especially at risk for emotional instability due to mixed messages they receive from family, peers, teachers, and society. In grades 4-6, their giftedness is viewed as an advantage. They receive praise and recognition for their academic accomplishments. Gifted girls in these grades tend to have a more positive self-image, and a stronger internal locus of control than their non-gifted peers. However, as gifted girls move into middle school, their academic accomplishments may not be valued. They may be faced with some difficult choices, whether real or perceived, between popularity or high achievement, participation in typically male dominated activities such as higher level math and science courses, or conformity to society's message about beauty and femininity. (Stutler, 1997).



Results of Conformity

Gifted girls may be burdened with choosing between expectations of traditional role models and suppressing their intellectual abilities to avoid success because they get the message it is unfeminine and makes them stand out as different, especially by males, to achieve at high levels. If gifted girls choose to buy into society's messages of beauty, femininity, and conformity, they may experience a number of problems including a drop in self-esteem, a lowered self-image, and a higher risk for developing eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia (Ryan, 1999). They may struggle with perfectionism, a need for control, and a loss of identity, as well as higher rates of depression, and suicide attempt rates that are four to five times higher than males (Debold, 1995 cited in Ryan, 1999).



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What can parents do?

Parents need to be aware of how to help their gifted daughters overcome the sexist barriers they will face. Parents should encourage exploration, independent thinking, independent behavior, appropriate risk-taking, applaud efforts even when they don't result in success, encourage daughters to pursue male-dominated activities, and openly challenge stereotypes. (Ryan, 1999).

