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Gender Perceptions of Middle Schoolers: The Good and the Bad

Karen R. Zittleman
American University
Washington, District of Columbia

ABSTRACT

This article explores the gendered lives of students and how, in their eyes, gender stereotypes continue to be a major part of their world. Four hundred forty students in five diverse middle schools were surveyed about the advantages and drawbacks of each sex. Specifically, students were asked via a questionnaire to write a brief description of the “best” and “worst” thing about being a boy and the “best” and “worst” thing about being a girl. All students were asked all four questions, so each student not only evaluated his or her own gender, but also evaluated the other gender. Their words suggest that gender plays a significant role in their lives, expanding some options, but more often limiting the academic and social development of females and males. The first-person accounts of these middle school students bring a renewed energy to the need for gender equity efforts in schools to broaden our understandings of masculinity and femininity.