



TONY BOCY/TORONTO STAR

Rower Mamie McBean shows her Olympic medals to teenage girls at the Girl Event, a conference held in Mississauga to develop self-esteem in young women.

## The Gender Gap

# Boys need attention, too

It doesn't make sense to leave the boys out when they're the ones less likely to go to university

**Re Mutual admiration at Girl Event**  
Oct. 15.

Congratulations to organizers of the Girl Event who brought more than a thousand teenage girls together with female role models in what they described as an esteem building exercise.

A Star reporter described the scene at Mississauga's Better Living Centre as "an energetic gathering that more closely resembled a revival meeting than a school assembly."

The story went on to add that the building was "for a few hours turned into a squealing, happy mutual admiration society given over to making girls feel good. Even the men's washrooms in the theatre were being used by the girls."

The story reported, "Experts agree low esteem leads to many classic teen problems ranging from suicide and depression to pregnancy and addiction, but teachers and parents are finding it increasingly difficult to fight the peer and media bombardment that culminates in adolescence."

I can agree that teen girls should be encouraged to feel every bit as equal as their male counterparts, but speaking of confusing messages during adolescence, how did boys back in class at school feel about the conference? Did anyone bother to think that the event might have actually been building resentment from boys over special treatment the girls were getting?

I would point out that just two months

ago, the Star quoted a Statistics Canada survey as saying boys are less likely than females to head off to college or university after they graduate from secondary school (*Why boys avoid school* reading, Aug. 30).

In fact, the story continued, being male is cited as one of the "significant predictors" of not pursuing a post-secondary education.

That Star report in August said some researchers blamed too many female elementary teachers and not enough male role models. It added others pointed to a school system that rewards compliance and other -feminine- virtues.

So were public funds used for the Girl Event and why weren't boys included as well so both genders could benefit from these positive messages?

If these experts at Tuesday's rally agree low self-esteem leads to classic

teen problems, then why not address the issue with girls and boys rather than single out one gender?

If teachers and parents are finding it increasingly difficult to fight the teens being bombarded with conflicting and often negative images, then why are they contributing to it by playing favourites and not including boys?

Finally, what are organizers of the Girl Event really trying to teach teen females? That they are superior to boys rather than equal counterparts? There must be a better way to set an example of equality than these organizers watching girls "take over" the boys' washroom during a lunch hour.

I hope that this event, scheduled to move on to other Canadian cities in the spring will be changed to include modern-day messages of gender equality and tolerance.

**David Hatton**, Mississauga