**IYOW TASK**

Vicky Allan: Please, Sirs, can we have some more male primary teachers?

WHEN my children were very young and one of the childminders I used was a man, I was surprised to receive comments from other parents which suggested they would feel uncomfortable about employing a male themselves. “I just couldn’t trust a man,” one friend said. “I’d feel too worried.”

Men didn't feature much in the nursery, babysitting or early years of most children, unless the man was their father.

It was the same picture throughout my children's early years. When they started school there were only two male teachers in their primary, one of whom was the head teacher, who rapidly disappeared off to do something important in overseeing how other schools were run. The female deputy head acted up for a while, then eventually a new head teacher came along, also male. But year after year, my boys were being taught by women. It has always struck me that this doesn’t send a good message to children, either about the place of women in the world, or of men.

So, when Scottish Education Minister Shirley Anne Somerville last week announced a drive to get more men into primary education and early years work, I applauded. Only one in 10 primary school teachers is male; in nursery care there are yet fewer men (one in 20). What I see out there, in my own children’s world, is a monoculture in which few men are to be found. Even as fathers are becoming increasingly hands on, in the professional worlds of childcare and teaching, a firm message is being delivered to children – that looking after the young is the job of women, not men.

Since our culture still values male professions more than women’s, we're also signalling that this job isn't that important – the raising of the next generation is too small an issue for men to involve themselves in.

Somerville launched the drive as part of an attempt to counter the current shortage of primary school teachers, and the predicted need for early-years workers when the [**SNP**](http://www.heraldscotland.com/search/?search=SNP&topic_id=8742) [**Government**](http://www.heraldscotland.com/search/?search=Government&topic_id=8816) roll out their plans to extend free childcare. Of course, it’s not necessary that men be targeted in order to meet this shortage – all that’s needed is more people, whatever the gender.

But the fact that there are so very few men in primary and early years education seems increasingly anachronistic, and the situation is fuelled by gender stereotypes. Women are more caring and nurturing. Men are more likely to be paedophiles. The latter may statistically be true but, given the tiny actual percentage of men guilty of such acts, that a whole gender should be tarred with that brush suggests moral panic. Yes, we need to create systems that protect children, but we also need to develop a culture in which the natural urge many men have to care for children is encouraged rather than discouraged.

Many parents, of course, do want to see more men working in early years. A 2011 survey found that 98 per cent of parents were in favour of men caring for three to five-year-olds. Yet, still there is the occasional loud voice of disapproval. Last year, Tory minister Andrea Leadsom made the inflammatory declaration that she thought it not “sensible” to leave a child in the care of a male nanny.

Meanwhile, the problem isn't just that men working in early years are viewed with suspicion, it’s that the sector is simply not attracting many men. In [**Scotland**](http://www.heraldscotland.com/search/?search=Scotland&topic_id=8820), some excellent campaigners are trying to change things – for instance Kenny Spence, the founder of Men In Childcare, runs a scheme to fund and encourage more men to train in early years care. But progress is slow. In Norway the number of male childcare workers has risen from 3 per cent in 1991, to 10 per cent in 2011, with a target now of 20 per cent.

What I find most dispiriting about the lack of men in children’s earlier years, is the story it tells about what’s important in our culture and what is not. That our education system is so gender-stratified, is a microcosmic lesson in how wider society works. Teaching, once a chiefly male profession, has become devalued and disrespected since women entered the workforce at a time when education was one of the few career options open to them. In primaries, where men do appear, it’s often at the top of the tree, as heads.

Meanwhile, though everyone knows the early years are key in laying the bedrock for future lives and society, pay and attitudes don't reflect that. Partly, I suspect, that's because this work has been done, unpaid, by women for centuries. Anything women used to do for nothing is undervalued.

This needs to change if we want to draw more men in. Men will be lured by the same factors that will attract more women – greater status and respect for the profession, more financial reward, better working conditions. We need to pay more than lip service to how important this job is.

**Male Teachers IYOW Qs**

1. In paragraph 3, the writer gives the example of her children’s primary school experience to illustrate the role men are given in the school. Explain in your own words how men are given an elevated position.  **(3 marks)**
2. Why did the writer “applaud” in paragraph 4 when she heard to proposal to encourage more men into primary teaching? Explain in your own words. **(2 marks)**
3. In Paragraph 7, the writer outlines some of the “gender stereotypes” society holds about men and women. In your own words, briefly explain the stereotypes held for each gender. **(2 marks)**
4. The writer describes what’s happening with gender in teaching as “a microcosmic lesson in how wider society works”. Explain in your own words, the reasons she gives for this theory. (Paragraph 10) **(3 marks)**
5. In paragraph 11, the writer gives reasons why she thinks “pay and attitudes don’t reflect” the hard work of childcare. In your own words, outline her reasons for this. **(2 marks)**
6. Explain in your own words the writer’s suggested changes, designed to entice men to the career. (paragraph 12) **(3 marks)**

**15 marks**

**Word Choice Task**

Rosemary Goring: Can anyone halt the relentless destruction of Edinburgh?

IMAGINE you have just bought a flat in Edinburgh’s New Town. Everything looks peachy. Then you hear the scrape of suitcases and stilettos, as braying students settle in upstairs for the new term. Soon the weekend parties begin. When you complain, their parents, who own the flat, call you a killjoy.

Meanwhile, from downstairs comes the drumbeat of Airbnb guests keeping alley-cat hours. The grocer on the corner has long since disappeared, and there is not a butcher or affordable bakery within an easy walk. Welcome to the land of metro shops and Harvey Nichol’s deli counter.

As the Festival approaches, the decibels increase, as do litter, marauding gulls, and the sense of being a stranger in your own city. In October, when you decide to sell, your estate agent recommends mentioning what profitable business neighbouring properties have been doing with short-term lets. The place is under offer in days, and you can start hunting for a cottage on Rannoch Moor.

It is only 250 years since the wealthy began to flee the Old Town for the quiet elegance of the New. Now, the equivalent of New York’s white flight is under way as residents in one of the loveliest capitals in the world pack up. Those who stay do so with gritted teeth. Meet one, and conversation quickly turns to the depredations on St Andrew Square, in the name of so-called art, or the habits of migratory tenants on their once well-maintained stairs.

Ahead of the final decision on turning Edinburgh’s Old Royal High School into a deluxe eye-sore hotel, signatories such as Carol Grigor in a letter to the council make the point that this choice will be “monumental”. It “goes far beyond the redevelopment of a single listed building... This is a red line we should not cross for the sake of narrow commercial interests, not when there is a better option.”

That option is a proposed international music school which Ms Grigor is helping fund. The contrast is stark: one venture continues to turn the city into a cash cow, in so doing undermining its heritage; the other builds on Edinburgh’s reputation as a centre of culture and learning. In other words, of enlightenment. What an old-fashioned concept that now seems.

Essentially, the Old Royal High is the canary in the mine. Already permission has been granted to countless unsympathetic new-builds, from a towering hotel in the Cowgate blocking light to Central Library, to the soulless development in Caltongate. Each was a blow to the heart of the capital, an assault on its architectural integrity. But if the Old Royal High is transformed into yet another hotel, this will be a tipping point, marking the moment when the city’s future is set, possibly irrevocably, in a direction that benefits no-one.

No, not even the hospitality industry which at the moment is revelling in unprecedented numbers of visitors. Because when the very things that make Edinburgh uniquely attractive are eroded, when the quality of life for residents is cynically depleted, sightseers will find themselves in streets richer in hotels and bars than in history or modern cultured life. Soon it will be an oyster without a pearl.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to encourage tourism. Quite the reverse. The problem, however, is that too many dire decisions have been justified in the name of culture, when those signing them off do not understand the meaning of the word. What message will it send when a former school is turned into a hotel where nobody who works or lives in EH7 could afford to spend the night? The council might as well run up a flag on its own horrid headquarters bearing pound and dollar signs.

Even the much-vaunted festivals are losing some of their lustre. How can a £22 ticket to enjoy Alex Salmond making dreadful jokes be called culture? The very notion of art and entertainment has been debased, but to say so brings accusations of elitism. Yet this is not to decry the wilder or crasser events, but to beg merely for regulation. In other words, for some overseeing authority to consider the whole picture, and make strategic plans that will enhance the city.

Sadly, it is pointless even to write this. Edinburgh City Council rarely listens to what citizens say. A friend who has lived in the Grassmarket for more than 40 years complained to a councillor about recent planning decisions. He was told that if he didn’t like living in Edinburgh any more, he should leave.

When long-standing residents are made to feel unwanted, an obstacle to commerce, then all balance – and sanity – has been lost. The New Town’s construction was founded on principles of harmony and proportion. Unless something is done soon to save the capital, those virtues will soon be as historic as the Royal Mile.

**Edinburgh Article-WC MS**

1. How does the writer use word choice to create a negative image of students in paragraph one? Use at least two examples in your answer. **(4 marks)**
2. How does the writer’s use of language in paragraph 3 indicate that during the Festival the city becomes less appealing? Use two examples in your answer.  **(4 marks)**
3. How does the word choice used in paragraph 6 highlight the difference of the writer’s opinions on the two proposed ideas for the Old Royal High School?  **(4 marks)**
4. How does the writer use language to express her distaste at the new building developments in Edinburgh in paragraph 7? **(6 marks)**

**18 marks**

**Sentence Structure Task**

**Taylor Swift is so sick of everyone talking about her that she made a video so everyone will do just that**

Every primary school, every office and every college dorm has a Swift. Your husband dated her in sixth form

Taylor Swift, as Sunday night’s MTV Video Music Awards proved, is possibly not the Queen of Pop, but she is certainly one of pop’s most irritating and therefore watchable courtiers. You have to give her that.

Swift’s video for “Look What You Made Me Do”, her new Right Said Fred “Too Sexy” re-hash rhapsodises how furious, vengeful, yet at the same time not bothered, she is about criticism.

Old Taylor Swift is dead! Or so the message was in the video premiered at one of the pop landscape’s most lauded evenings! Swift appears from the grave, dressed as a zombie, in a three minute video jam-packed laboriously with references to how badly the world has treated her. No frame, no millisecond wasted. The symbolism is so bold one would need to be dead oneself not to pick up on it.

Swift lampoons her celebrity girl squad, her fake “Oh I’ve won an award” face, her label as a “snake”. But just to make it clear, all new Taylor Swift is totally rising above all this tittle-tattle about Katy Perry, Kim Kardashian, Kanye West or Calvin Harris.

Yes, she’s put it to bed by employing video director Joseph Khan to stuff a three minute video with nods to Perry’s lack of Grammy awards, Kim K’s jewellery heist and her not-so secret credit on a Calvin Harris hit. This should sort it Taylor. They won’t be talking about you anymore. Hang on, is it just me, or does new re-born Taylor Swift, seem an awful lot like the old one?

And furthermore, isn’t Taylor Swift so utterly fascinating as a pop phenomenon because every woman, in the Western World at least, knows someone like her. I began toying with this theory circa her girl squad-era which, to my weary vintage gaze, seemed like a pack of flinty-eyed social climbers jostling for Instagram exposure. It was nothing remotely resembling friendship.

Or perhaps it was when that poor git Tom Hiddleston got tangled up with her during her Calvin Harris rebound state-of-mind. Somehow Hiddleston and his mother ended up on a casual “seaside stroll” along Aldeburgh beach with the world’s paparazzi. All completely accidental, probably. The last thing she wanted, I am sure, was all that attention.

Swift is a glorious piece of work. And so, indicative of a genre. Every primary school, every office and every college dorm has a Swift. Your husband dated her in sixth form, but she broke his heart and now he just can’t understand why you don’t like her messaging him on Facebook because, come on honey, she is just so harmless!

Twitter, in particular, is awash with Swift-a-likes. They are generally most active at 1am addressing the self-created problem of “everyone having an opinion” on them by starting a hundred post long “Thread” drawing attention to “backstabbers everywhere”, despite themselves being “only about love and good vibes”, and this being all a bit rum when considering their charity work and their self-diagnosed bi-polar that they rarely talk about.

Swift is the Queen of women like this. It is no coincidence that she spent last week dramatically deleting her Instagram accounts in a scorched earth “Nothing to see here!” manner. Flouncing on and off social media is the modus operandi of the Swift-a-like.

If you don’t know anyone like this: I’m sorry, you are her. Swift’s behaviour over the weekend reminds me of a recent brilliant spoof advice feature on the razor-sharp comedy “woman’s interest” website The Reductress entitled “How to Avoid Negativity Now That You Are Over The Drama You Created”.

The closing moments of “Look What You Made Me Do” feature a cacophony of through-the-years Swift, (country and western Swift, Shake It Off Swift, all-American goddess Swift).

The gang are insulting the new re-born Swift 2.0 with the sorts of things you hear in gossip columns. It’s all very sixth-form and I’m certain Swift hopes this underlines that she is self-aware enough to know and deal with what her detractors say.

Yet having met women like Swifts so, so many times before, this is purely more sympathy-seeking. “Look what they’re saying! Poor me!” she’s actually saying. All I did was dress up as Katy Perry and wave about a Grammy and now everyone's making it look like I’ve wound up Katy Perry!

Taylor Swift’s has made it clear she’s pig sick of everyone talking about her, by ensuring everyone in pop land can talk of nothing else. You have to admire this. She is not the Queen of Pop, but she’s a brilliantly accomplished jester.

**Taylor Swift SS Qs**

1. How does the writer use sentence structure to express her attitude towards Taylor Swift in paragraph 4? **(2 marks)**
2. How does the writer’s use of sentence structure in paragraph 5 express her distaste for Taylor Swift? **(2 marks)**
3. How does the writer’s use of sentence structure cast doubt over Taylor Swift’s intentions in her relationship with Tom Hiddleston? (paragraph 7) **(2 marks)**
4. How does the writer’s sentence construction in paragraph 8 suggest that Swift is not a one-off character? **(2 marks)**
5. How does the writer use sentence structure to mimic Taylor Swift’s victim-playing in paragraph 14? Give two examples in your answer.  **(4 marks)**

**12 marks**

**Imagery Task**

**I used to think social media was a force for good. Now the evidence says I was wrong**

[Matt Haig](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/matt-haig)

More and more, it’s clear these platforms create divisions, exploit our insecurities and risk our health. They’re as bad as the tobacco industry

I used to think social media was essentially a force for good, whether it was to initiate the Arab spring of 2011, or simply as a useful tool for bringing together like-minded people to share videos of ninja cats. Having spent a lot of time thinking about mental health, I even saw social media’s much-maligned potential for anonymity as a good thing, helping people to open up about problems when they might not feel able to do so in that physical space we still quaintly call real life.

I also knew from my own experience that it could sometimes provide a happy distraction from the evil twins of anxiety and depression. I have made friends online. As an author, it’s also been a great way to test new ideas, and has taken storytelling from its castle in the sky back down to the (now hashtag-heavy) campfire. As someone who often finds social situations mentally exhausting, [social media seemed far more solution than problem](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/24/social-media-bad-press-lifeline-young-people).

Yes, I would occasionally feel that maybe staring at my Twitter feed near-continuously for seven hours wasn’t that healthy, especially when I was arguing with an army of Trump fans telling me to jump off a cliff. Yes, I’d see articles warning of the dangers of excessive internet use, but I dismissed these as traditional, reactionary takes. I saw social media naysayers as the first reviewers of Technicolor movies, who felt the colour distracted from the story, or were like the people who [walked out on Bob Dylan at Newport folk festival](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/may/27/newport-folk-festival-to-mark-50-years-since-dylan-went-electric) for playing an electric guitar, or like those who warned that radio or TV or video games or miniskirts, or hip-hop or selfies or fidget spinners or whatever, would lead to the end of civilisation.

I remember a Daily Mail headline, “How using [Facebook](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/facebook) could raise your risk of cancer”, which made things even clearer: to be anti-social media was to be hysterically on the wrong side of history.

Then I started the research for a book I am writing on how the external world affects our mental health. I wanted to acknowledge the downsides of social media, but to argue that far from being a force for ill, it offers a safe place where the insanities of life elsewhere can be processed and articulated.

But the deeper into the research I went, the harder it was to sustain this argument. Besides the Daily Mail screeching about the dangers, other people – scientists, psychologists, tech insiders and internet users themselves – were highlighting ways in which social media use was damaging health.

Even the internet activist and former Google employee [Wael Ghonim](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/09/wael-ghonim-egypt-regime-targets-secular-activists) – one of the initiators of the Arab spring and one-time poster boy for internet-inspired revolution – who once saw social media as a social cure – now saw it as a negative force. In his eyes it went from being a place for crowdsourcing and sharing, during the initial wave of demonstrations against the Egyptian regime, to a [fractious battleground](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/egypt-5-years-on-was-it-ever-a-social-media-revolution) full of “echo chambers” and “hate speech”: “The same tool that united us to topple dictators eventually tore us apart.” Ghonim saw social media polarising people into angry opposing camps – army supporters and Islamists – leaving centrists such as himself stuck in the middle, powerless.

And this isn’t just politics. It’s health too. A survey conducted by the [Royal Society of Public Health](https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/social-media-and-young-people-s-mental-health-and-wellbeing.html) asked 1,500 young people to keep track of their moods while on the five most popular social media sites. Instagram and Snapchat came out worst, often inspiring feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and self-loathing. And according to another survey carried out by the youth charity [Plan International UK](https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/almost-half-of-girls-aged-11-18-have-experienced-harassment-or-bullying-online), half of girls and two-fifths of boys have been the victims of online bullying.

The evidence is growing that social media can be a health risk, particularly for young people who now have all the normal pressures of youth (fitting in, looking good, being popular) being exploited by the multibillion-dollar companies that own the platforms they spend much of their lives on.

Kurt Vonnegut said: “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful who we pretend to be.” This seems especially true now we have reached a new stage of marketing where we are not just consumers, but also the thing consumed. If you have friends you only ever talk to on Facebook, your entire relationship with them is framed by commerce. When we willingly choose to become unpaid content providers, we commercialise ourselves. And we are encouraged to be obsessed with numbers (of followers, messages, comments, retweets, favourites), as if operating in a kind of friend economy, an emotional stock market where the stock is ourselves and where we are encouraged to weigh our worth against others.

Of course, humans comparing themselves to others isn’t new. But when the others are every human on the internet, people end up comparing themselves – their looks, their relationships, their wealth, their lives – to the carefully filtered lives of people they would never meet in the real world – and feeling inadequate.

Reading first-hand accounts by people with bulimia and anorexia who are convinced that social media exacerbated or even triggered their illnesses, I began to realise something: this situation is not the equivalent of Bob Dylan’s electric guitar. It is closer to the tobacco or fast-food industries, where vested interests deny the existence of blatant problems that were not there before.

To ignore it, to let companies shape and exploit and steal our lives, would be the ultra-conservative option. The one that says free markets have their own morality. The one that is fine entrusting our future collective health to tech billionaires. The one that believes, totally, in free will; and that mental health problems are either not significant, or are entirely of the individual’s making.

We are traditionally far better at realising risks to physical health than to mental health, even when they are interrelated. If we can accept that our physical health can be shaped by society – by secondhand smoke or a bad diet – then we must accept that our mental health can be too. And as our social spaces increasingly become digital spaces, we need to look seriously and urgently at how these new, business-owned societies are affecting our minds. We must try to see how the rising mental health crisis may be related to the way people are living and interacting.

Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg says that “by giving people the power to share, we’re making the world more transparent”. But what we really need to do is make social media transparent.

Of course, we won’t stop using it – I certainly won’t – but precisely for that reason we need to know more about what it is doing to us. To our politics, to our health, to the future generation, and to the world around us. We need to ensure we are still the ones using the technology – and that the technology isn’t using us.

**Imagery Questions**

1. How does the writer’s use of imagery help to demonstrate how certain mental illnesses are linked? (Paragraph 2) **(3 marks)**
2. How does the writer’s use of imagery in paragraph 3 demonstrate his former opinion towards critics of social media?  **(3 marks)**
3. How does the writer’s use of imagery in paragraph 6 create a negative view of the Daily Mail? **(3 marks)**
4. How does the writer use imagery to describe the negative place that social media sites have become? (paragraph 7)  **(3 marks)**
5. In paragraph 12, the writer says social media sites are “closer to the tobacco or fast-food industries, where vested interests deny the existence of blatant problems that were not there before.” Why is this comparison effective? What does it suggest about social media?  **(2 marks)**

**14 marks**

**Tone Task**

**Well done, Ryanair - yes, Ryanair! – for shaming the speedy boarders**

[Stuart Heritage](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/stuart-heritage)

Making those who stuff two bags into overhead lockers buy priority boarding has done what would once have been unthinkable: made Ryanair look good

Nobody likes a speedy boarder. That’s just a fact, plain and simple. People who purchase priority boarding upgrades on low-cost airlines are *genuinely* worse than the devil. They’re snooty and snobby, and the only way they can distinguish themselves from the unwashed plebs they’re forced to share a plane with is by spending a fiver for the privilege of sitting in it first. They’re people who go on the internet specifically to pretend not to know who [Kim Kardashian](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/kim-kardashian) is. They’re people who sneer in Harvesters. They are the absolute living worst.

They’re so bad that they’ve even done the unthinkable and made Ryanair look halfway good. [Ryanair](https://www.theguardian.com/business/ryanair), for crying out loud: a company that’s inherently impossible to like. A company that made its name with unremitting unpleasantness as standard, run by a silent-movie baddie on a gap year from tying women to railway lines, has somehow come out of a policy announcement looking decent. [Ryanair has just announced its intention](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/sep/06/ryanair-priority-boarding-carry-on-bags-cabin-luggage) to force everyone who uses a wheelie bag as hand luggage to purchase a priority boarding pass. And, well, hooray.

On the surface, this is simply to address issues of space. On a plane with 189 seats, they say, there is only enough space in the overhead lockers for 90 bags. But lately, people have been exploiting Ryanair’s two-bag hand luggage policy by dragging both a wheelie bag and an oversized rucksack on with them. If every passenger did this, there’d be 380 bags all competing for a microscopic amount of space. Ryanair’s answer is a simple one: if you really want to bring two big bags on board with you, you’re going to have to pay for them.

But really it seems [Ryanair](https://www.theguardian.com/business/ryanair) is simply doing a sterling piece of detective work. Whether intentionally or not, it’s actually helping to weed out secret speedy boarders. The people who are speedy boarders at heart – the sort of people who ignore the homeless and watch illegally streamed films for free, the sort of people who look at you with a dumb I’d-help-if-I-could expression when you ask for them to move their bag from an empty seat on a crowded train – but can’t commit to paying extra to make their monstrousness explicit, are gradually being edged out into the daylight.

And, make no mistake, people who try to cram two big bags into the overhead lockers on planes are the living embodiment of secret speedy boarders. They’re the people who stop the plane taking off on time, causing a bottleneck in the aisle because they’re tutting and wheezing and attempting the aviation equivalent of stuffing a wedding cake into a drainpipe. They could have just placed one of their bags in hold for free like everyone else. But no: that would have taken a maximum of five minutes and the barest trace of consideration for other people, and their convenience isn’t worth that.

But now these people have been forced out into the open. If they want to maintain their selfishness, they’re going to have to pay for it. They’re going to have to let everyone else on the plane know upfront what exactly a swaggering imbecile they are. The bell will ring in the departure gate, and they’ll announce “Can everyone who labours under the woeful apprehension that they’re somehow better than you please come to the front of the line?”, and the rest of us will watch, silently committing their bovine faces to memory.

Honestly, I think Ryanair could have probably gone a little further with this plan. Hopefully its next policy will involve leading the speedy boarders to the plane with a bell-ringing nun who keeps chanting the word “Shame” at them. Or, better yet, special badges for speedy boarders to wear, so that everyone else can single them out and understand the depths of their depravity. Or, you know, slightly bigger overhead lockers. Whichever’s easiest, really.

**Tone Qs**

1. What is the writer’s attitude towards ‘speedy boarders’ on Ryanair flights? Give two pieces of evidence in your answer. (paragraph 1). **(4 marks)**
2. How is language used by the writer in paragraph 2 to indicate how their now contrasting feelings towards Ryanair? Give 2 pieces of evidence in your answer. **(4 marks)**
3. How does the writer’s language in paragraph 4 convey a positive attitude towards Ryanair? Give evidence in your answer.  **(2 marks)**
4. How do the final lines of the passage create a humorous ending to the passage? Use evidence in your answer. **(2 marks)**

**12 marks**

**Comparison Task 1**

**Let’s drop the gender stereotypes – we are all non-binary**

[Hadley Freeman](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/hadleyfreeman)

No one’s a wholly pink butterfly or a blue car. We are all, to varying degrees, purple spaceship onesies

It was my twin boys’ birthday recently, and beforehand I was struck with a by-now-familiar anxiety. No, not the one about how the sands of time pass through the hourglass a thousand times quicker once you have kids due to a combination of daily monotony and mind-melting busyness, and how all my ambitions and dreams will soon be sucked down the plughole of life, and next time I look in the mirror, my own grandmother will be looking back at me. But thanks for asking. Rather, I had to ask how macho, exactly, are my two-year-olds?

This started when I went shopping for presents and all the toys on the “recommended for boys” shelf were so macho, they verged on camp. Toolkits, fireman hats, plastic weapons: was I shopping for my toddlers or the Village People? But I’d been in this situation before. One day, when the babies were three months old, I managed somehow to leave the house and go to a shop to stock up on onesies. There, I had the firmly binary choice of either pink playsuits covered in butterfly patterns or blue ones bedecked with images of cars. This made me wonder two things: first, why are cars masculine, given that they all have bonnets? Second, would my boys really object to wearing onesies with butterflies? They didn’t seem to mind wearing ones covered in their own bodily waste. Or was that in itself an expression of their machoness?

Discussions about gender stereotyping are, as you’ve probably noticed, very much the hot topic at the moment. Only the most tediously reactionary conservative would splutter outraged spittle at the suggestion that boys might be interested in a broader spectrum of toys than trucks and toolkits, just as girls shouldn’t be marshalled towards princesses and Barbies. But it won’t surprise anyone who follows the news that there are quite a few tediously reactionary conservatives around these days.

When John Lewis announced earlier this month that it is now making its children’s clothes gender-neutral, the backlash was as idiotic as it was inevitable. Some commentators raged that stores must let “boys be boys and girls be girls”, without explaining why being a boy has to involve wearing a T-shirt with a car on it. Some quailed at the apparently terrifying prospect of little boys – their darkest desires no longer kept in check by segregated clothing – asking to wear frilly dresses, and that may well happen and the world will continue to spin.

But this is not, really, what the John Lewis move is about. Rather, the store is encouraging girls to think of sweaters with spaceships on them as being suitable for them, and letting boys know that they won’t be arrested if they pick out a pink sweatshirt. This, the expansion of choice, is what gender neutrality should be about.

So it’s frustrating that too often the effect is the opposite. The Priory School in East Sussex made the doubtless well-intended decision this year to opt for gender-neutral uniforms from year 7, decreeing that boys and girls will wear the same uniform, which means trousers. This is partly for purposes of what the school calls “decency”, as some girls have presumably been rolling their skirts up to belt height, but it’s also to help transgender students feel included. Anything that reaches out to transgender teenagers is to be applauded. But the sensible thing, surely, is not to ban skirts; it’s to let everyone wear them (and set a regulation length, for heaven’s sake).

Too often, discussions of gender today, rather than expanding boundaries, only contract them. When people say they’re “non-binary”, it sounds to me more like they swallowed the lie of the pink and blue onesies. Because the point is everyone, really, is non-binary – no one’s a wholly pink butterfly or blue car onesie. We are all, to varying degrees, purple spaceship onesies – and, yes, that is the scientific term.

Gender stereotypes are too often confused with biology, and you hear this mistake being made as much on the left as you do on the right. After all, it’s not that big a leap from saying boys wear car prints to Eddie Izzard saying he likes having manicures “because I’m trans”. Suggesting a man can’t possibly like having his nails done is a disappointingly reductive take on gender from Izzard, who was once so determined to tear down stereotypes about masculinity.

Anyway, my toddlers and I are not to be confined by such retrograde ideas of what it means to be male, so I gave them the gender-neutral gift of a keyboard. Other people gave them trucks and buses and puzzles.

And guess what? They liked them all. Because as even a two-year-old could tell you, cars do not make the man.

Why we should reconsider assigning babies as ‘boy’s or ‘girls’ at birth

Amid the uproar about gender neutral children’s clothing in John Lewis and at a school in East Sussex, perhaps we should consider letting children have more say over their identities

Trans rights have burst into the spotlight in the past few years thanks to high-profile figures like Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner, with the former’s 2014 Time cover seen as a watershed moment for the movement.

Now, the debate has turned to children and gender. John Lewis has sparked controversy after it announced it would be scrapping “boys’ and “girls” labels on children’s clothing. While the decision was praised by many as progressive, others accused the store of “bowing down to political correctness”. Further fanning the flames of unease was the story that the Priory School in Lewes, East Sussex, has scrapped skirts for new students as part of its gender neutral clothing policy.

Underlying these stories is the idea that gender isn’t as rigid as we thought it might be. It’s more fluid than the longheld binaries of “girl” and “boy”, and “man” and “woman”. People are accepting that the gender the midwife assigns us at birth after taking a look at our genitals doesn’t always match up with how we feel inside. That’s why some people identify as trans, gender non-binary and queer.

Since gender issues have hit the mainstream in recent years, the number of people seeking gender identity treatment has risen dramatically in the UK, with some of the 14 clinics seeing spikes of several hundred percent, according to the Guardian. And the number of children seeking help for gender dysphoria, where the gender they were assigned with at birth doesn’t match what they identify with, has increased more than tenfold in the six years leading up to 2016, according to figures from the Gender Identity Development service. Between April to December 2015, nearly 969 under-18s in the UK were referred to the NHS with gender identity issues, including almost 200 aged 12 or under. There were just 94 in 2009 to 2010.

All things considered, then, why do we still assign gender to children at birth? Gender reveal parties where where a baby’s status as ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ is celebrated before the sprog has even made it out the womb, are already being questioned and lampooned online. In decades to come, will placing so much emphasis on gender be a welcome thing of the past?

Dr Helen Webberley, a GP and Gender Specialist at .GenderGP.co.uk hopes so.

“Looking back through history, and listening to people’s stories today, we can clearly see that one’s gender - how they feel and how they identify - is not determined by their chromosomes, genetic make-up or genitals," she tells The Independent.

“Although most people with what we perceive to be male genitals, identify as male, there are many people with those genitals who identify very strongly as female, and vice versa and all along the spectrum between male and female.

“Maybe we don’t even need to set a gender identity at all - in the same way we don’t have to declare our religion, our colour, our sexuality, our intellect - why does it matter where on the gender spectrum we sit?”

Lee-Anne Lawrance, a 30-year-old graphic design from Surrey who identifies as non-binary and uses the pronoun “they” has experienced how assigning gender at birth can be harmful.

“As a non-binary person, I do not identify with the gender I was assigned at birth. Being squeezed into this box that I didn't fit into was stressful and painful. Constantly being told I am something I am not, that other people knew me better than I knew myself, has definitely affected my mental health. Imagine if the whole world repeatedly told you that you had blue hair and you knew you didn't, imagine growing up with that.”

Lawrance is among campaigners pushing for an ‘x’ marker on British passports to signify a person who doesn’t identify as a man or a woman. However, they argue that the idea of scrapping the current system is “difficult”.

“I can see why people value it when it is so entrenched in every aspect of our society. It's hard to think about a society that works a little differently to the one we have now. Why do we assign genders at birth and then raise our children differently based on that assignment? Does it not just reinforce stereotypes about men and women? Are we not creating the structure that we try to fight against later on when we try to get more women into STEM fields and so on?”

“Gender markers follow us throughout our lives, yet in many contexts seem arbitrary,” chimes Jamie Pallas of Gendered Intelligence, an arts organisation for young trans people.

“We are seeing more and more parents are interested in gender neutral parenting – they are resisting gender stereotypes and the reinforcement of gender roles," adds Pallas. "However, the legal and social assignment of gender at birth is entrenched in society and unlikely to disappear anytime soon. The backlash against efforts to de-gender children’s clothes, for example, demonstrates quite clearly that we are a long way off understanding gender as more diverse than a binary system of boy or girl.”

A better system might involve noting down a baby’s sex on medical records, but not in a way that denotes their gender, they argue.

“Let children figure out their gender for themselves,” says Lawrance. “Give them the opportunity to explore and enjoy life without being constrained to a pink box or a blue box.

**Comparison Task 2**

**The Guardian view on children’s mental health: not an optional extra**

The latest research shows the crisis is even worse than anyone realised. Wellbeing must be put back where it belongs – at the heart of what schools do

Adolescence is notorious for its moments of misery that at least for the fortunate are unequalled in later life. Almost every adult looks back on the eruption of spots and the inexplicable weight gain, the exam pressures and the mishandled relationship crises with sympathy for their earlier selves. So it is no surprise to discover that in any given fortnight, many teenagers have felt low. The shock is just how low, and how many. Nearly one in four 14-year-old girls and almost one in 10 boys the same age, say they have felt inadequate, unloved, or worthless. That means that hundreds of thousands of young teenagers are experiencing a range of feelings that amount to a diagnosis of clinical depression; worst of all, the numbers are disproportionately higher in poorer families. The link between poverty and depression is well established. Now it is clear that long before children from low-income families even start their first job, they are at greater risk. The crisis in children’s mental health is even more extensive than anyone realised.

Adding colour to these findings comes a second, much smaller but still reliable survey by Girlguiding. Previously, the survey of over 1,000 girls from the ages of seven to 21 had identified high levels of anxiety about body image and the taboos associated with talking about being depressed. This year’s report looks at the pressure girls are under to conform with gender stereotypes. It is not hard to point to other pressures that show the triviality of worrying about pimple break-out: the National Children’s Bureau, a partner in the millennial cohort study, highlights relentless demands from schools and parents to achieve at the expense of a focus on wider wellbeing and emotional resilience.

Many parents would add their own feelings of guilt and regret about not having time just to be around, to be there to detect the first signs that their son or daughter is feeling down, the financial consequences of an era of stagnant pay and flexible employment and the always-on demands of the 21st century. The digital age is as harsh to children as it is to their parents: social media can act as a monstrous microscope under which the kind of blunder or embarrassment that would once have been confined to a group in the school playground can be replayed and deconstructed by anyone on Snapchat or Instagram. Anonymity is a cover for the deliberately cruel and the merely unthinking alike.

These are pressures that will only get worse. It is futile to wish for a kinder, gentler age. Instead there needs to be a real investment of time, money and imagination in building resilience. A green paper on children’s mental health is promised for later this year. Theresa May wants children’s mental health to be one of the issues on which she is judged. So here are some of the big things she should make sure that it says.

First, although schools cannot make up for what happens in families, they can help children find ways of surviving it. But schools, pressed for time and resources, will struggle to prioritise mental resilience unless it becomes one of the ways that they are assessed. More than a decade ago, back in the days when Ed Balls ran the Department for Children, Schools and Families, wellbeing was an integral part of the great education project. No subsequent government has formally abandoned the commitment, but since 2010 – when the department went back to its narrow focus on education – academic achievement has trumped everything. Schools need the help and support that allows them to put wellbeing at the heart of what they do. Ofsted needs to develop ways of assessing it.

Government needs to measure progress: the millennial cohort survey broke new ground asking teenagers to describe for themselves their feelings. Above all, child and adolescent mental health services, despite repeated promises, are still so underfunded that nearly a quarter of children referred are turned away. Being a teenager may always have low moments. But it should never have been allowed to get as tough as this.

**Mindfulness and wellbeing lessons can make school pupils even less happy, experts claim**

'We seem to be saying that some emotions are dangerous for children... I think it’s pathologising them'

Giving pupils lessons on happiness and wellbeing could do them damage and make them even more unhappy, a group of leading academics have said. As schools and mental health campaigners place increasing emphasis on the benefits of meditation and mindfulness exercises, one school of thought suggests the younger generation are being brought up to think of happiness as something that cannot be inherent, but must be taught.

Speaking to TES magazine, Pooky Knightsmith, vice-chair of the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition, said such exercises could be actively harmful for those who are particularly vulnerable or have a history of trauma.

 “If a child is suffering abuse at home, being given space and time for thoughts to drift through your head isn’t necessarily good,” she said. “Schools need to be aware of the potential risks, even with the most seemingly nice of interventions.”

Ashley Frawley, a senior lecturer at Swansea University and the author of Semiotics of Happiness, told the magazine: “Happiness becomes not something that sneaks up on you – something you might find when you’re looking at a sunset – but something you have to work at. People are going into schools and encouraging young people to think that happiness is quite difficult, and you have to meditate and so on to get there. It’s a complete misunderstanding of how human emotion works.”

This term, the Department for Education invited bids for multimillion pound contracts to introduce mental-health training in more than 200 schools. The move comes amid growing concerns for increasing mental health problems in children and young people, with many schools highlighting a lack of provisions to help those already in need of support.

Responding to a survey last month, teachers from across the country said they had seen children as young as four suffering from mental health problems such as panic attacks, eating disorders, anxiety and depression. Exams-based pressure, internet-induced insecurities and poor quality sleep have all been cited as potential contributors towards a rising number of diagnosable mental illnesses seen in children.

Mental health charity YoungMinds urged the government to address what they called a “mental health crisis” within school classrooms, but some academics argue that schools are in danger of having money and attention spent in the wrong areas, tapping into some “phony” programmes designed to target popular wellbeing lifestyle trends.

“Schools are spending so much on these things, and some of them are really, really phony,” said Kathryn Ecclestone, a visiting professor at the University of Sheffield who is involved in researching the subject.“People can just set themselves up as wellbeing consultants, and some of these are snake oil,” she said.

Ian Morris, Wellington head of wellbeing at Wellington College, was the teacher who first developed happiness lessons, back in 2006. But he agrees with Dr Frawley that an excessive emphasis on happiness above all other emotions can be damaging for pupils.

“We seem to be saying that some emotions are dangerous for children,” added Ian Morris, head of wellbeing at Wellington College. “I think it’s pathologising children. Saying, ‘Oh, God – anxiety’s bad, and we must eliminate that from children’s experience,’ is really absurd, and patronising as well. It’s easy to do quite a lot of damage with this.”