

Hello, I'm Rowan Blanchard, and today I will be speaking about gender inequality in youth.

When I was in preschool, I played catch with the other kids, and was told I threw "like a girl." I have been a feminist ever since.

I am thirteen now and balancing my education with a full-time acting career. On our show, I play a fourteen-year-old eighth grader who is coming of age. My character deals with many life lessons and challenging subjects, and it happens that this week's topic is gender inequality. Around this age, studies show that girls lose interest in the STEM subjects, science, technology, engineering and math. Unfortunately, those studies show that one of the reasons we back away is that girls in my age group would rather be liked than be leaders. I am extremely hopeful that by communicating how wrong this idea is, our audience will realize that taking advantage of a complete education is the obvious thing to do in order to reach their full potential.

As the oldest of three children, I have seen sexism be expressed at all ages. My nine-year-old brother has been called "a girl" for being in touch with his emotions. My eleven year old sister has been taught by the media that her body is an object, will be compared to other bodies, and that it has more significance than her mind or talents. This should not be the first thing she learns. This should not be her first social experience.

Everyone here either has a child or knows one. And because you are present here today, I am certain that none of you want any child to grow up in a world where there are limitations solely based on one's gender.

Earlier this year I worked with TeamHeForShe through social media, and it will please you to know that there has been an overwhelming positive response from children and former children of all ages. My favorite response thus far has been from

a twelve-year-old Pakistani girl who said she became interested in women's issues because her mother followed her dream of becoming an engineer even though it was considered a male-occupation. Her mother, a woman in a restrictive society who stood tall in the face of limiting odds to achieve a difficult goal, is a role model for me. We are privileged to live in a country that does not place these restrictions upon us. We must not drift away from taking advantage of achieving whatever goal we set our hearts on.

Unfortunately, I have also received other comments which were less inspiring. Young women were told by teachers of both sexes that they should not pursue a career in science or technology because they are male oriented careers. This should not be the education offered in a country like ours, which has always benefitted from the best minds in the best positions.

But the most disheartening comments came from girls who do not feel safe in their own school because of unwanted touching or inappropriate attention. How can you expect girls to aspire to anything when 75% of us from the ages of eleven to twenty-one year olds say daily sexism impacts our future goals and self-confidence? That's three out of four on a daily basis. I think this is unacceptable and should be unacceptable to both genders.

My biggest dream is to one day attend The Columbia School of Journalism. I read all I can about Columbia, and I came across an issue that made me realize what is inappropriate in childhood can become far worse in adulthood on a college campus. I saw many articles about a victim of campus rape who dragged a mattress across the stage with her when she received her diploma to illustrate the weight she carried through those college years. It is important for children who are forced to "carry the weight" of gender inequality at such a young age to not fear for their safety or education. Every society, including ours, must

examine these issues, improve these numbers, and allow all individuals to aspire to be anything they want.

Let us no longer be imprisoned and defined by gender stereotypes or any stereotypes. Let us be defined by our individual actions, kindness, and decency to others. At the end of day, regardless of who you are, each and every individual deserves the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. Equality of the sexes is not merely an idea, but a birth-given right.

**In a country that has achieved marriage equality, shouldn't gender equality be next?**