

# The downhill race

Business



I regard my elementary school days fondly—playing on the swings at recess, dressing up for holiday parties, field days, and playing upbeat games in gym class rather than physical exertion. Those were the days when the only pain I felt was tripping on the sidewalk and scraping my knee, and the only decision I had to make was whether to draw in marker or crayon. And I could not wait to grow up. Nowadays, it seems as if our future success is completely dependent on the success of our teenage years—our scores, decisions, and reputations echo throughout the duration of our lives.

It is no surprise that so many teenagers can barely fathom the amount of pressure they face on a regular basis. There are the ever-present pressures to do well in school, to excel in extracurricular activities or sports, to maintain and develop relationships, and to essentially be perfect. Suicide is the one of the most prominent indicators that teens are crumbling under such pressures. We devote so much of our sense of self-worth to our quality of academic performance. As a result, some would rather die than experience impermanent failure.

The poem *Suicide Note* by Janice Mirikitani puts the magnitude of this trend into context. Adapted from a young girl's actual suicide note, the language is both chilling and disturbing. Quite frankly, it is painful to read because it is so touching. One of the literary elements incorporated in the poem is metaphor, resulting in an agonizing resonance with readers. The writer of the note frequently relates herself to a bird, swept away hopelessly in a gale. " So I have worked hard.

/ not good enough.../ not strong enough / It is snowing steadily / surely not good weather / for flying – this sparrow / sillied and dizzied by the wind / on the edge. / not smart enough” (Mirikitani). Birds are seen as fragile creatures—hollow bones, feathers lighter than air, and delicate as can be. In presenting herself as a fragile bird, the young girl speaks to the fragileness of heart she felt at the time of her death. This deep feeling of desolation is felt among so many teenagers, and it is just a matter of time until the harsh wind consisting of pressure, stress, and anxieties devours us.

The repetition in the poem of the words “ not enough” and “ I apologize” captures the echoing and deafening thoughts that consume teenagers who become swept up in this gale. “ How many notes written.../ ink smeared like birdprints in snow. /not good enough not pretty enough not smart enough. / dear mother and father. / I apologize / for disappointing you.

/ I’ve worked very hard, / not good enough / harder, perhaps to please you” (Mirikitani). Mirikitani succeeds in embodying the staggering mental and emotional pain that ultimately leads to suicide or suicidal thoughts. Not only does the girl in the poem apologize for not being enough, but she truly believes she fell short of perfection, and that she is at fault for it. She should not be the one apologizing; that should be society. We did this.

We created the unattainable definition of “ good enough.” We maintained and entertained the idea that perfection could be achieved, when in reality, flawlessness is intangible. We allowed self-worth to be in direct correlation with academic performance. It is an endless cycle—as expectations are raised, so do stress levels. And we allow them to be.

But when does it stop? When is “ good enough,” truly enough? Society should be apologizing to the girl in Suicide Note. The meaning of “ enough” must be redefined. Until it is, there is no saying how many more lives must be lost over an issue that should not be in existence in the first place.