

May 13, 1993

To: Principal
William Tennent High School
333 Centennial Road
Warminster, PA 18974

Subject: Graduation Ceremony Caps and Gowns

I am writing to you to express my concern over a subject that may have been overlooked until now, yet I feel it is a pressing issue that deals with equality. Specifically, the protocol of the graduate ceremony catches my attention.

Upon graduation at William Tennent High School, students don the traditional cap and gown. I, however, have always wondered why the men wear black and the women wear white. My concern lies with the symbolism behind this obvious segregation of gender.

Why don't all students wear the same color? I have racked my brain trying to come up with an answer to this question. After all, the original purpose of the uniformity of the cap and gown was to represent that all students were equal, razing such barriers as class distinction and degrees of wealth. The poor and the rich, thus, became equal during the graduation ceremony. I ask for such uniformity among men and women.

My point seems obvious when posed under slightly different variables. It would be appalling if, let's say, black students were required to wear blue gowns, white students required to wear green, or students of Asian descent to wear yellow. If such "color coding" were instated the school district would inevitably be identified as racist. I contend that the separation of the genders is not so different from the aforementioned scenario.

Furthermore, I question why one's gender is even referred to. The halls of academia deal with one's mental being and do not regard students on the basis of their sex. Personally, I have worked diligently through my years at Tennent under identical conditions as my male counterparts, and I will be graduating with the Class of 1993 among the top one percent of my class. Thus, after extensively exercising my mind, I find it to be a great indignity to be outwardly recognized for my gender, which is a factor of my being that theoretically should be inconsequential and irrelevant. Again, I ask why the separation?

If representing the school colors is the desired effect, then perhaps a random dispersal among which some men could wear white and some women could wear black would be more diplomatic. However, the schematics that are presently in effect may subliminally be sending the wrong message.

While I'm sure that this has been unintentional and merely viewed as the way things have always been, I ask you to seriously consider a change. While I realize that plans have already been set into motion for this upcoming graduation, perhaps the Class of 1994 will meet graduation dressed in colors that are more reflective of the ever-progressive times in which we live.

In today's world, women still struggle for equality in many aspects of society, and hopefully every effort – no matter how small – will accumulate over the years to truly result in change. As we fast approach a new millennium, I ask you to lead William Tennent High School from the past into an enlightened future where men and women are both considered to be equal and symbolically represented as such.

Respectfully,

Jennifer L. Mintzer