Ever since age seven I have been involved in competitive sports. I am a swimmer. There is some teamwork involved, but ultimately each event becomes me against everyone in the other lanes. My parents clearly felt that the best way to prepare me for life was through learning to compete. Recently, though, many parents and educators have suggested that it is best to prepare their children for the future by teaching cooperation and teamwork. Some argue that such skills prepare America’s youth to navigate an increasingly interdependent society. While cooperation is an important life skill, learning to be competitive is the best preparation for life in a global society because it teaches children to strive for more, work hard to produce better results, and provides incentives for achieving these results.

Although most large companies and corporations function at their best through teamwork, countries like China and India have developed at unprecedented rates, largely due to their competitive education systems. A documentary film entitled *One Million Minutes* highlighted the high school experiences of students from around the world, and concluded that in countries like China and India, where achieving higher education is more competitive, students not only were more motivated, but also achieved higher test scores on average. Learning to be competitive from a young age allows students to strive for more, always seeking to advance. Another documentary film entitled *Greed* featured Ted Turner, a business mogul and founder of the CNN network, who attributed his twenty-seven million dollar annual salary to his competitive, even greedy, attitude. By learning to be competitive, Turner and others were able to become immensely successful in their respective fields. Through competition, the leaders in this film were shown to provide more for society in terms of jobs, intellectual property, and consumer goods than they ever could have by waiting for a cooperative group to come up with the same ideas.

Competition forces people to seek an advantage in order to succeed. Teaching children to be competitive shows them how to exploit their advantages for their own sake, and often for the sake of society as a whole. Cooperative learning, on the other hand, may allow for ideas to be shared more easily, but without competitiveness there is no incentive to improve upon those ideas. Eighteenth century Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith, in his book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, wrote that competition forces all of us to produce better goods at a lower cost. He argued that in a society in which producers must compete for the business of the consumers, the producers must exploit advantages in order to make profits. This simple economic principle shows that selfishness and competitive spirit actually advance the common
good. By educating children to be competitive, they learn to produce better goods for society, leading to more consumption, more production, more jobs, and a repeating cycle of prosperity. Thus competition is the most important factor of economic prosperity in a society. While cooperation may benefit a few, learning to use one’s individual spirit and a productive use of one’s natural advantages will lead to success for many.

Competition provides people individual incentives to perform well, whereas cooperation often is effective only through peer pressure to produce results. In 1916 Russia and Eastern Europe became the Soviet Union, a grand socio-economic experiment based on Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* and book trilogy *Capital*. The USSR entered a state of existence in which private property virtually ceased to exist and every person was said to be exactly equal. In effect, it was a society based solely on the cooperation and selflessness of its citizens. This proved to be a naïve hope for Russians. In the book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes the dismal life of Shukhov, an inmate in a Soviet gulag. In the story, instead of cooperating to construct a power station, the inmates are unmotivated to do good work, and instead only put their best effort forth when they can compete for the opportunity to get tobacco or “fatback” (pork). Given that this book was loosely based on Solzhenitsyn’s own experiences in the Russian gulag system, one can conclude that it accurately portrays the truth that it is human nature to be selfish and compete, and that society functions more effectively when humans are free to do so. It would seem, then, that teaching students to embrace their natural competition – and even their selfishness – is the best way to prepare them for success, in any type of society, but especially a global one. Men like John Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie are often accused of robbing their workers of livelihood in order to amass their own fortunes, yet without the competitive and ruthless attitudes of these men, America wouldn’t have refined oil, or built steel mills. Competition needs to be monitored, of course, and children must be taught to play by the rules of society, but without competition, society would collapse upon itself, like the Soviet Russia did in 1991. History proves that learning to be competitive is not only the most efficient way for society to function, but also the only way for society to survive.

Cooperation and competition both play vital roles in any society. After all it is learning to cooperate that stimulates children to trade toys in their early years, and trade goods and services that keep our economy functioning as they grow older. Yet, for all the good that cooperation provides it is more useful – to both the individual and to society – to learn to be competitive. My swim team members and I function as a team, looking for that overall win
against our competing team, but those victories only come when each of us, individually, gets into the pool alone and tries to be the best swimmer that day.

**Persuasive Essay**

The struggle between classes is a centuries-old issue. The poor desire that their hard work will grant them the social standing of a higher class, and the upper class works hard to keep their riches. While the term “poor” has different meaning to people — anything from a homeless man trying to survive, to a low-income family struggling to keep their house — the poor are seen by everyone and are definitely not “invisible.” In “Evaluation,” Barbara Ehrenreich’s argument that the poor are able to “disguise” themselves in American society is erroneous and lets society off the hook for failing to help them. Ehrenreich’s claim rests upon the questionable assumption that we do not see the poor because they have managed to disguise their class distinction. Despite what may be efforts to hide their poverty, most of us see the poor, most of us recognize the poor, but we often overlook and discount them because they seem unimportant – not because they are somehow hidden from view.

Through media and television, the lower class is seen by the more affluent, whether it is in a positive or negative way, and are often mocked and made to be a joke. On the Internet, “People of Walmart” photos are currently a trending subject. These “humorous” photos depict Walmart shoppers as poor, freakish, unusual outcasts. Society ridicules and laughs in the faces of these obese men, poor women in mismatched clothes, or anyone else who dares to shop at Walmart. These people are not “disguised,” but are cast out and unwelcomed in the more comfortable classes, who think they are superior. The poor are represented in television as well. The new sitcom, “Fresh off the Boat,” follows a kid in a struggling Asian immigrant family. While the family attempts to fit into the suburbs and “disguise themselves” as “typical” Americans, their efforts are met with comedic failure, and they are not genuinely accepted into the middle class suburban society that they wish to be a part of. Although the upper class notices the poor, they are not willing to accept them with open arms.

Society tends to ignore the lower class and confines them together, separate from the middle and upper classes, thus making it impossible for them to disguise their income status. In all major cities, the affluent typically live together comfortably while the poor live in areas far away from them. In New York City, the upper class lives in the Upper East Side while the less fortunate are forced to live in areas like the Bronx. In Chicago, the poor are
scattered around on the outskirts of the city. Everyone knows the poor are there, but they are overlooked because they are out of sight. In Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*, Myrtle and Wilson struggle with their business in the “Valley of Ashes,” an industrial wasteland where the poorest class is confined. Myrtle tries to adopt “upper class” dress and behaviors, but it typically falls short and her status as low income and poorly educated is highlighted even more through those pitiful efforts. It is almost as if society does not want to be bothered by people trying to achieve the “American Dream,” even though we notice their struggles. Their efforts to disguise themselves or adopt upper class behaviors are too often met with ridicule.

No matter how hard they may try, the poor cannot be disguised. They will always be noticed, but not necessarily helped, which is probably Ehrenreich’s overall point. She aims, correctly, to criticize our culture for its failure to help the poor, but she wrongly claims that it is a failure to notice the poor. We all see the homeless man begging for money while we try to avoid eye contact and quickly pass him on the street. The poor see the affluent and the affluent see the poor, but there is an unfortunate barrier that divides them because people either feel too guilty and think that the poor are hopeless, or feel too superior to do anything to help them. In either case, it helps no one to suggest that the poor have successfully “disguised” themselves and thus we don’t feel any responsibility to our fellow man.

**Persuasive Essay Sample**

Gender roles have always been prominent in society and have influenced the way men and women perceive each other. However, the way men and women perceive themselves individually cannot be defined entirely by gender. In his book, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, John Gray claims that a man defines himself through the ability to achieve results whereas a woman defines herself through her feelings and relationships. Gray is incorrect in his assertion because an individual’s sense of self is defined through both aspects Gray discusses, regardless of gender.

It is a natural human tendency to perceive oneself based on life circumstances and what is expected from one’s community, but many people transcend those limitations. This pattern is often shown among characters in many books, such as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic American novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. In this story, the main characters, Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, demonstrate much more than the qualities Gray associates with a
man’s sense of self and a woman’s sense of self. Although Hester Prynne is banned from society and marked as little more than an adulterer, she doesn’t allow herself to be defined by the letter “A” on her chest as most women in that society would. Instead, transforms the meaning of the letter “A” from adulteress to “able” to “angel,” revealing that she did not restrict herself to a self-perception based on her failed relationships, but rather took action to achieve results. She sees herself as a strong and vital woman, which allows her to achieve a better life for herself and especially her daughter. As for Dimmesdale, he is established as having already achieved a very high position in society as a Puritan minister. Dimmesdale also is presented as someone who was a renowned scholar at Oxford University, building his credibility and affirming his achievements. However, he defines himself almost entirely through his feelings and relationships. Seeing the shame brought upon Hester, Dimmesdale loses all his self-respect because he feels guilty and ashamed for not being able to atone for his wrongdoings and support Hester through her difficulties. He feels he has betrayed his relationship with both Hester and the community. Dimmesdale defines himself by his failed relationships, not by his professional results. There are similar examples in history of men and women finding self-worth in precisely the opposite way that Gray asserts.

Although it is assumed by Gray that women focus on their feelings and relationships to define their self-worth, there are many well-known women who define themselves by their accomplishments. Marie Curie was a famous scientist who was noted for her impressive advancements in chemistry. Curie was also very devoted to her husband, Pierre Curie. Together, they discovered two new elements, which they named Polonium and Radium. Clearly, her sense of self can be attributed to her strong professional relationship with her husband and their ability to achieve results working together. Her interest and research in radioactivity led to her later discovery of the first x-rays, which are used every day to monitor health all over the world. In addition to her discoveries, she was also the first woman to ever receive the Nobel Prize, let alone the first to win the Nobel Prize for two separate categories. It is evident that Marie Curie, having a secure relationship with her husband, largely defined herself through her contributions to science and the ability to advance the field through her profound, life-changing discoveries.

As for men, Gray argues that gender roles have determined that their sense of self is defined by their ability to achieve results, but increasingly men also measure their self-worth through emotions and relationships. For example, the role and responsibility of the President of the United States requires a man of emotional stability and the ability to achieve great things for the country. The current President, Barack Obama, demonstrates both of these qualities. Yet he is also very proud of his family, expressing love and gratitude to his wife and daughters on a
regular basis. Much of his motivation stems from these relationships, allowing him to hope to improve the world we live in to provide a positive future for his family, specifically his daughters. He must also have feelings of self-confidence in decision making and well-established relationships with his cabinet members, diplomats, foreign leaders, etc., in order for our nation to continue to grow and succeed. Obama has to be emotionally smart and responsible to be comfortable with the way he defines himself so he can properly represent our country. His ability to maintain quality relationships is crucial to the stability of our nation because it allows him to achieve greater things for the country. If the President only defined himself as someone who could achieve results, weak relationships and hard feelings towards others would only hurt that process. All leadership roles require both of these values – relationship building and achieving results – so few successful leaders define themselves through only one.

Overall, Gray’s cut and dried definition of self-worth based on gender preferences is incorrect because self-image is defined through a mixture of both areas. History, literature, and contemporary society show both genders reflecting on their ability to achieve results, their feelings, and the quality of their relationships as compatible values. Personally or professionally, men and women alike test these boundaries at times, allowing themselves to develop a sense of self based on a variety of qualities, not simply the gender roles implied by society.