

Trends & TudesSM

Keeping you informed of current topics in youth and education research.

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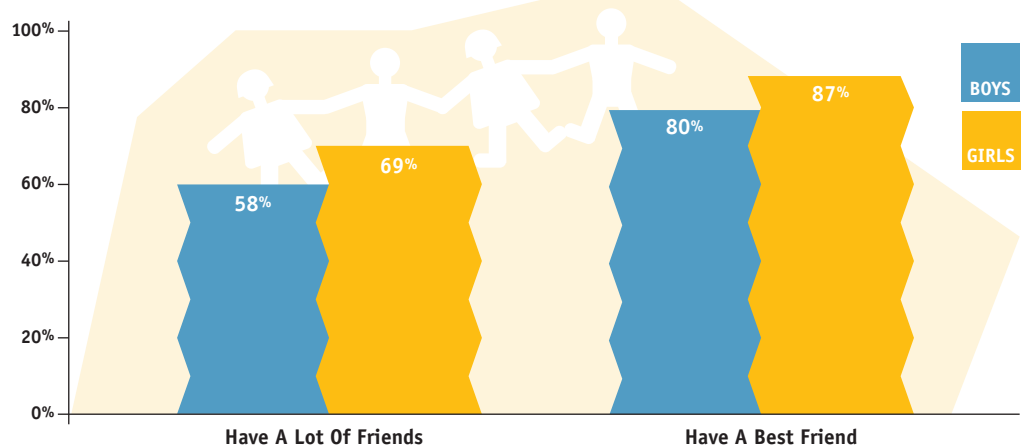
What Does It Mean To Be A Girl Or A Boy Today?

Adolescence is a time when teens are focused on discovering their identity and who they are as individuals. One important aspect of a teen's identity is being male or female and what that means for a teen in today's society. How do boys' and girls' experiences and attitudes differ in major areas of their lives such as friendships and school? How prevalent is gender discrimination in teens' lives? Several recent Harris Interactive surveys shed some light on these issues.

Friends

Clearly, friends are a very important aspect of teenagers' lives. During adolescence most young people believe that their friends understand them better than their parents do and that they can talk more openly with their friends than their parents. Half of tweens and teens would like more friends. But girls are more likely than boys to have a lot of friends already. Girls and boys who have really close friends are just as likely to say they have a friend of the opposite gender or of a different age or race. However, even among those who have close friends, girls are more likely than boys to have a best friend. This is particularly true among teens, where 84 percent of teen girls say they have a best friend, compared to 75 percent of boys.

Youth Attitudes About Friendship



SOURCE: Harris Interactive YouthQuerySM Monthly Omnibus (8- to 18-year olds) and Harris Interactive YouthPulseSM (8- to 17-year olds)

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Editorial: Our Take On It

by Dana Markow, Ph.D.

Director, Youth & Education
Research

Understanding the unique characteristics of different segments of the youth population is important to researchers and marketers alike and is a key component of our analyses. In this issue of *Trends & Tudes* we've focused attention on some of the differences between boys and girls in their approach to friendships, activities and education. But highlighting such differences can come with unintentional pitfalls—current differences in experience can be interpreted as immutable differences in potential. So people's perceptions of differences can serve to perpetuate the differences themselves.

Teachers face this challenge frequently. For example, we have documented in previous studies the finding that girls are more likely to plan on going to college. In the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 1997: Examining Gender Issues in Public School*, we found that 7th to 12th grade girls are more likely than boys to say they like school and that they are very likely to attend college. This survey—part of an annual series that Harris Interactive has been conducting on behalf of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (www.metlife.com) since 1984—also found that 81 percent of students believe that girls are as competitive as boys and only 15 percent think that boys set higher goals for the future than girls do.

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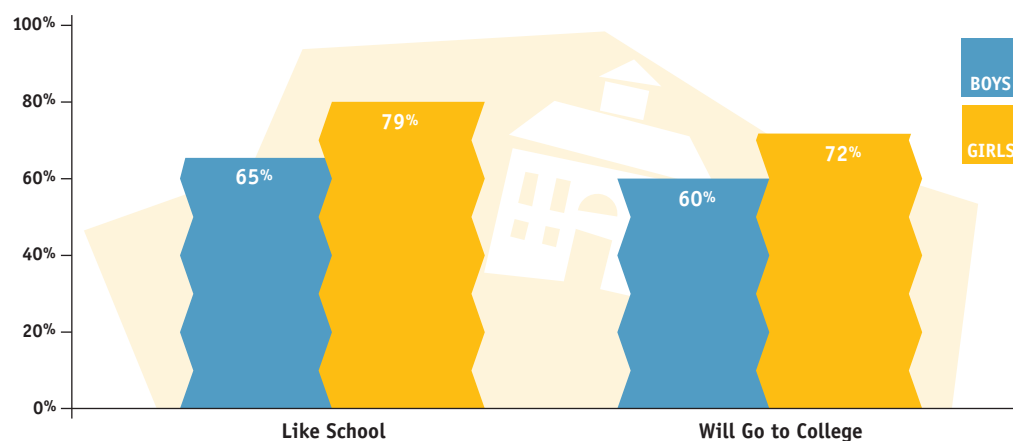
Harris Heritage. 2 Interactive Power.

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Education

Girls and boys alike view school as an area where girls excel. More girls say they enjoy school, and more girls say they will go to college. Kids themselves see gender as playing a role in academics. They believe how well they do in school depends on whether they are a boy or girl. Forty-four percent of boys believe that they would do better in school if they were girls. Conversely, 30 percent of girls think they would do worse in school if they were boys.

Youth Attitudes About Education



SOURCE: *Taking the Lead: Girls' Rights in the 21st Century* conducted for Girls Inc. by Harris Interactive (3rd through 12th Graders)

Activities

Kids believe that gender plays a role in other activities as well. Girls are more likely to say they read books and are good listeners while boys are more likely to play video games and sports. What's fascinating is that kids themselves believe that these characteristics are very much linked to gender. Most girls say that they would be *more* likely to play sports and video games if they were boys. Half of girls believe that they would be *less* likely to read books or be a good listener if they were boys. Boys also see these characteristics as being linked to gender—although not as strongly. Only one-third of boys think they would be less likely to play sports if they were girls, although half believe they would be less likely to play video games. More than four in 10 believe that they would be more likely to read books and be good listeners.

Gender Discrimination

A sizable number of teen girls tell us that **gender discrimination** is a part of their lives—that is, people making decisions on what they can or cannot do based solely on their gender and not on their abilities as an individual. Nearly three in 10 teen girls experience such attitudes frequently. Furthermore, they are not optimistic about gender discrimination improving in the future. One-quarter of teen girls believe that they will experience this treatment frequently when they are adults. On both counts, this belief is higher among girls than boys. Half of teen boys report rarely or never experiencing gender discrimination today and expect similar experiences in the future.

What potential effect do these experiences and expectations have? For one, teens are more likely to believe that it is easier for boys to reach their future goals than it is for girls to do the same (77% vs. 70%).

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The study also included secondary school teachers' views of girls' and boys' performance and potential. The results indicated that teachers consistently expressed a more optimistic view of girls than boys. Many studies have found that teachers' expectations have a powerful effect on students' expectations. In fact, the 1997 study revealed that girls were more likely than boys to feel that teachers "very much" encouraged them to do their best. Teachers' different expectations for girls and boys may explain, in part, why girls are more focused than boys on their education goals, in effect leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Teens are in the midst of defining themselves: Are they someone who is sociable, who does well in school? Will people (e.g. teachers, parents) recognize their individual talents? This issue of *Trends & Tudes* highlights the disturbing finding that gender discrimination is a common experience for teens. At least half of girls and boys feel that people, with some frequency, are not judging them on their individual abilities but rather on their gender.

Discrimination isn't the only gender-focused obstacle that kids face. Sexual harassment at school is a common occurrence for many girls and boys. Harris Interactive, in work commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (www.aauw.org), has tracked this

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Frequency Of Experiencing Gender Discrimination

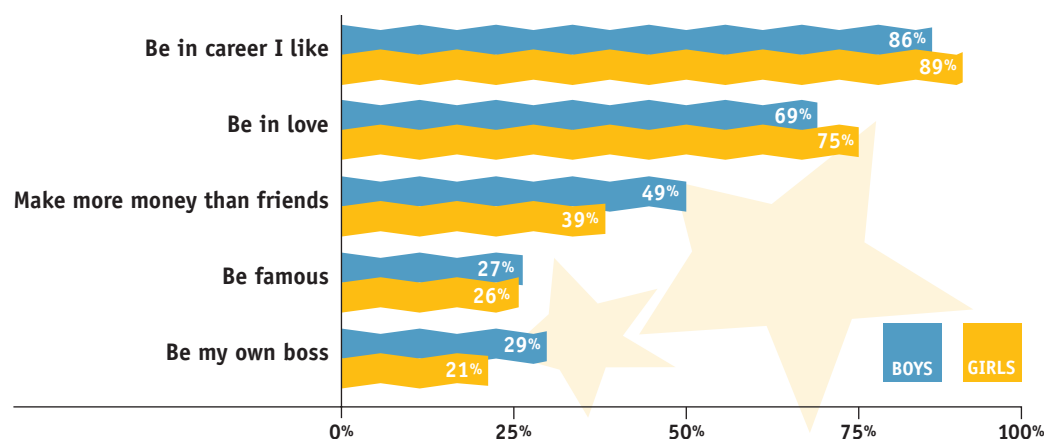
	TODAY How often do people decide what you can or cannot do only because you are a girl/boy and not because of your abilities as an individual person?		FUTURE When you are an adult, how often do you think people will decide what you can or cannot do only because you are a woman/man, and not because of your abilities as an individual person?	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Very Often/Often	28%	20%	25%	16%
Sometimes	34%	30%	35%	32%
Rarely/Never	37%	50%	39%	52%

SOURCE: *Taking the Lead: Girls' Rights in the 21st Century* conducted for Girls Inc. by Harris Interactive (7th through 12th Graders)

Aspirations

What are girls' and boys' future goals? As previously noted, girls and boys have different expectations for their educational futures: Girls are more likely to think they will go to college. They differ in their aspirations for other aspects of their lives as well. While girls are slightly more likely to think that when they are 30 they will be in love, boys are more likely to expect to make more money than their friends and to be their own boss. However, not all of their aspirations are distinguished by gender. Girls and boys are equally likely to expect to be in a career that they like (something which most kids plan on) or to be famous (an expectation of a sizable and optimistic minority!).

Young People's Aspirations



SOURCE: Harris Interactive YouthPulseSM (8- to 17-year olds)

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issue over time. The first *Hostile Hallways* report came out in 1993, and the follow-up to this landmark study was released in 2001. These studies found that sexual harassment is widespread in school life. As in 1993, eight in 10 students in grades 8 to 11 experience some form of sexual harassment at some time during their school lives. Not surprisingly, girls and boys experience sexual harassment at different rates. Girls are more likely than boys to say they have been sexually harassed. However, one striking change since 1993 is the increase in the number of boys who often experience school sexual harassment.

School sexual harassment, which encompasses speech as well as actions, has a negative impact on students' emotional and educational lives. Nearly half of students who experience sexual harassment feel very or somewhat upset, particularly those who experience physical harassment. Furthermore, students who experience sexual harassment are most likely to react by avoiding the harasser, talking less in class, not wanting to go to school, changing their seat in class, and finding it hard to pay attention in school.

We feel that such findings reinforce the idea that analyzing differences among groups comes with a responsibility to both celebrate diversity and recognize opportunities to improve the lives of today's youth.

Recent Research for Public Release

From time to time, the Harris Interactive Youth Research team is fortunate to work with media, leading foundations and non-profit organizations, and we often are able to release the results of these studies publicly.

Quality At Elementary Schools Beats Out Secondary Schools Nationwide

Elementary schools are more advanced than secondary schools in their use of quality tools and approaches, according to a national survey of 401 public school principals by Harris Interactive. Sponsored by the American Society for Quality (ASQ), the State of Quality in Education Survey results also indicate that while quality is making inroads in U.S. education today, the majority of principals (70%) believe that U.S. schools will be more likely to adopt quality improvement programs in the future. This Harris Interactive survey is the first study conducted that gauges the state of the 'quality approach to education' nationwide.

Some highlights of the research include:

- Currently, six in 10 U.S. public schools (58%) have a formalized quality improvement approach in place. Elementary schools (63%) are more likely to have a formalized quality improvement program in place, compared to middle schools (49%) and high schools (51%).
- The fact that elementary schools are more likely to be using a formalized approach to quality improvement may be explained in part because parental involvement tends to be greater at that level. Elementary school principals are more likely than middle or high school principals to consider parents as stakeholders (89% vs. 84% vs. 80%) and to involve parents' feedback in shaping school improvement plans (96% vs. 87% vs. 88%).
- The quality concepts of measurable outcomes, accountability and testing currently have a high profile among principals. Nearly all principals (95%) report that their school has a school improvement plan that includes measurable outcomes.

More information on this study is available at www.asq.org.

Harris Interactive Youth Research In The News: 360 Youth College Explorer™ Powered By Harris Interactive

American Demographics recently featured findings from the Spring 2002 Wave of the 360 Youth/Harris Interactive College Explorer affirming the power of the college market. U.S. college students spend nearly \$200 billion a year. It is a large and influential market with more than 15.6 million students and is a vital segment for marketers concerned with serving the needs of young consumers.



The national study, fielded online by Harris Interactive for 360 Youth/Alloy during the Spring 2002 semester, measured spending among college students aged 18 to 30, a group that represents 72 percent of all college students. The sample included all types of students

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Contact Us:

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(full-time, part-time, 2-year, 4-year, graduate) and looked at a broad range of consumer behaviors and category buying habits. The study covered a wide spectrum of areas, including technology, entertainment, travel, transportation, telecommunications, personal care products, financial services, snack foods and beverages.

The article ("Educated Consumers" by Rebecca Gardyn) is available in the November 2002 issue of *American Demographics*.

Complete study results are available on a subscription basis. For information on obtaining the latest data from the Fall 2002 Wave, please contact Larry Brown at 800.866.7655, x7135.

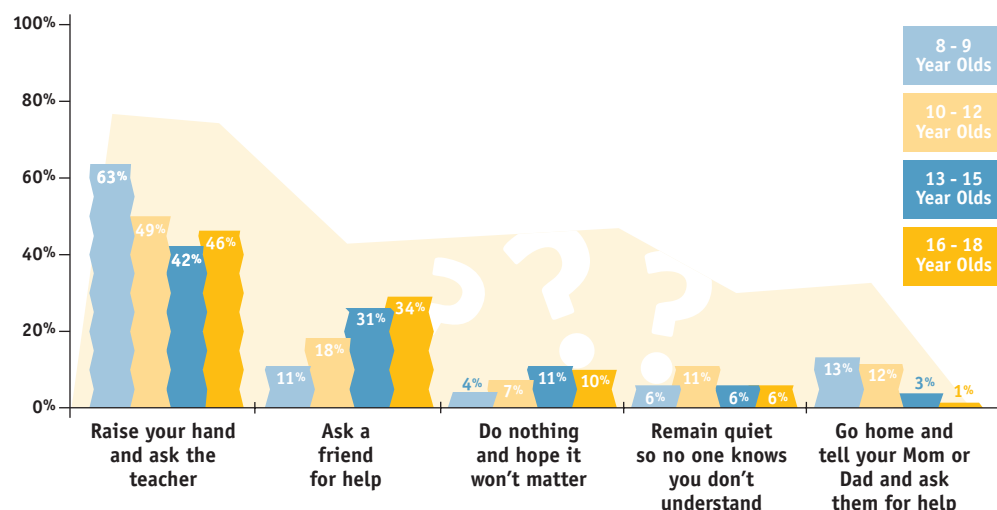
Ask a Question...

Have a burning question you would like to ask kids and teens? Here's your chance to submit a free question for our upcoming YouthQuerySM youth omnibus. Just send us an email with your suggestion. We will pick one question each month and then publish the results in the next issue of this newsletter.

...Get an answer

Kate Kappel from eSylvan submitted the following question:

If you don't understand what your teacher is teaching in class, are you most likely to...?



SOURCE: Harris Interactive YouthQuery Omnibus