

Girls' Bill of Rights

There are almost 36 million girls age 18 and under living in the United States.²⁴

Girls have the right to be themselves and to resist gender stereotypes.

Harris Interactive Survey Results

- ◆ Sixty percent of girls say that they experience stereotypes that limit their right to be themselves.⁹

Other Sources

- ◆ An international study in 1999 found that the stereotypes most associated with women were “feminine,” “affectionate,” “emotional,” “superstitious,” “attractive,” “sensitive,” and “sexy.” The stereotypes most associated with men were “masculine,” “adventurous,” “forceful,” “strong,” “tough,” and “coarse.” In every country surveyed, the female stereotype was weaker and less active than the male stereotype.²⁸
- ◆ In her 1999 book on advertising and its effect on women and girls, Jean Kilbourne found that advertising that targets girls often depicts violence against girls. It also encourages girls to be thinner, quieter, nicer, more passive, more approval-seeking, more beautiful, sexier and virginal.¹⁴
- ◆ A 1999 study by the Women’s Foundation of Colorado found that “girl-friendly software,” that which is “engaging to girls, lacking in stereotypical themes and technologically sophisticated” is in short supply for younger girls and virtually nonexistent for older girls. As of this study, the number of games marketed to girls numbered less than 100, despite the fact that sales in software for girls more than doubled in one year.²²

Girls have the right to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm.

Harris Interactive Survey Results

- ◆ Fifty-one percent of girls surveyed said that they experience stereotypes that limit their right to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm. Over a third (37 percent) of girls indicated that they feel constrained by these stereotypes, saying they don’t like them.⁹
- ◆ More than one in three girls say it is true and they don’t like it that “girls are expected to speak softly and not cause trouble,” (35 percent) and that they don’t like it that “people don’t think girls are good leaders” (40 percent).⁹
- ◆ Black girls are more likely than white girls to report that in their experience “girls are expected to speak softly and not cause trouble” (69 percent vs. 54 percent) and “people think girls are only interested in love and romance” (63 percent vs. 48 percent).⁹

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Other Sources

- ◆ Approximately one in three girls (32 percent) does not feel that she has “opportunity for open discussion in [her] classes.”¹²
- ◆ In a 1999 study of over 1000 successful women, about one in three reported involvement in student government in high school. Women with successful careers in government and law were among those most likely to have been involved with student government and/or a debate team in high school. More than half of women with successful careers in media were involved with a drama club in high school.²⁰
- ◆ A study commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation found that girls in middle school must overcome “subtle, but powerful messages reinforcing boys’ dominance in the classroom” from teachers and school administrators.¹
- ◆ A 1999 study found that 15 percent of advertisements targeting African American women and 35 percent of advertisements targeting Caucasian women included images of women in “weak or submissive postures.”¹⁷

Girls have the right to take risks, to strive freely and to take pride in success.

Harris Interactive Survey Results

- ◆ Half of girls (49 percent) said that they experience stereotypes that limit their right to take risks, strive freely and take pride in success. Elementary school girls are more likely than high school girls to say they experience stereotypes related to this right (54 percent vs. 44 percent).⁹

Other Sources

- ◆ Approximately 42 percent of high school girls participate in at least one school-sponsored sport.²⁵
- ◆ According to a 1998 study commissioned by the Women’s Sports Foundation, girls who play sports are more likely to delay first intercourse than girls who don’t play sports.³⁴
- ◆ Girls who are athletes in high school are more likely to have higher grades and standardized test scores and less likely to drop out of high school. They are also more likely to attend college.¹⁹
- ◆ While over half of high school boys (55 percent) indicate that they have “high self-confidence,” less than half of girls (39 percent) indicate that this is true.⁶
- ◆ Girls are more likely to believe that the work they do in school is important to success later in life than boys are (72 percent vs. 60 percent). They are also more likely to “try to take the most difficult and challenging courses [they] can” (54 percent vs. 42 percent).¹²
- ◆ As of October 1999, women made up just under 30 percent of the Cabinet of the President.²⁹ In the 209 years of the U.S. Cabinet, only 5 percent of the 486 people serving as Cabinet members have been women.⁵ About half (49 percent) of all public administrators and officials in 1998 were women.²⁷

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- ◆ In 1999, 65 women (including 20 women of color) serve in the U.S. Congress. Women hold 9 seats in the U.S. Senate and 56 seats (13 percent) in the U.S. House of Representatives. The number of women in Congress has tripled in the last twenty years.^{4,5}
- ◆ In 1999, 6 percent of state governors, 36 percent of lieutenant governors, 20 percent of state attorneys general and 20 percent of state treasurers were women.⁵
- ◆ In 1998, about one in five mayors of American cities (21 percent) was a woman.⁵

Girls have the right to accept and appreciate their bodies.

Harris Interactive Survey Results

- ◆ Sixty two percent of girls said they experience stereotypes that limit their right to accept and appreciate their bodies. Older girls are more likely than younger girls to say this (59 percent vs. 37 percent).⁹
- ◆ Over half of girls (57 percent) said it is true and they don't like it that "in school boys think they have a right to discuss girls' bodies in public. Older girls were twice as likely as younger girls to say this (78 percent vs. 37 percent).⁹
- ◆ Fifty nine percent of boys believe that girls experience stereotypes that limit their right to accept and appreciate their bodies. Thirty one percent of boys like it that way.⁹

Other Sources

- ◆ One-third of girls in grades 9 through 12 (34 percent) consider themselves to be overweight.²⁵
- ◆ Weight management is a factor in many girls' decision to smoke. In a national study of students in grades 9 through 12, girls who engaged in extreme weight control methods (purging or diet pills) were twice as likely to be smokers as girls who were not employing these methods (50 percent vs. 22 percent).¹⁸
- ◆ Girls engaging in extreme weight control methods, such as vomiting or using diet pills, are more than twice as likely as non-dieters to use alcohol (42 percent vs. 20 percent) and nearly twice as likely as non-dieters to use marijuana (25 percent vs. 14 percent).¹⁸
- ◆ Once addicted, most girls will smoke at least 20 years before quitting. About half of those who do not quit by this time will die of smoking-related causes.⁷
- ◆ In a 1998 national survey of over 1,000 women and their teenage daughters, mothers were more likely to indicate that they would approve of their daughters' getting nose jobs or breast enlargements than daughters were to indicate that they would consider these procedures for themselves (39 percent vs. 12 percent and 15 percent vs. 11 percent, respectively).³⁵
- ◆ About one in four high school girls (26 percent) reports depressive symptoms, compared with less than one in five high school boys (17 percent). Girls with symptoms of depression are more likely than girls without these symptoms to smoke (23 percent vs. 11 percent), drink (25 percent vs. 11 percent) and use drugs (30 percent vs. 14 percent).⁶

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Girls have the right to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world.

Harris Interactive Survey Results

- ◆ Almost two-thirds of girls (63 percent) said it is true that “girls are under a lot of pressure to please everyone.” Older girls were slightly more likely than younger girls to say this (69 percent vs. 62 percent).⁹
- ◆ Fifty four percent of boys said that girls experience stereotypes that limit their right to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world. Twice as many boys as girls like it that way (25 percent vs. 12 percent).⁹

Other Sources

- ◆ In a 1997 survey of adolescent girls, about half (46 percent) did not always feel safe in the neighborhood where they lived.⁶
- ◆ In a four-year study of 1,000 7th and 8th grade students and their caregivers, children who witnessed violence at home were more likely to report committing violent acts themselves than children not exposed to such violence.²¹
- ◆ Studies indicate that young women who were sexually abused during childhood are more likely to report earlier intercourse and pregnancy than women who were not abused.^{8,13} In one study, young women who had been raped or coerced into having sex at least once were twice as likely to become pregnant during their teens as those who had not suffered abuse.¹³
- ◆ Three-quarters (72 percent) of girls report that adults who give teenagers information about sex treat them as if they are unable to make their own decisions. Two-thirds (64 percent) believe that adults tell teenagers things “when it’s too late.” More than half (57 percent) indicate that adults discuss things that fail to address the situations teenagers actually face. More than one in four girls (27 percent) says she wants more information on how girls get pregnant. About one in three wants more information about where to get (35 percent) and how to use (40 percent) different kinds of birth control methods. Half (50 percent) want more information on how to prevent AIDS or other STDs.¹⁰

Girls have the right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.

Harris Interactive Survey Results

- ◆ Four girls in ten (40 percent) said it is true that “people think girls don’t know how to take care of their own money.”⁹
- ◆ Over half of girls (53 percent) said it is true that “people think the most important thing for girls is to get married and have children.”⁹

Forty two percent of boys said that girls experience stereotypes that limit their right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence. More than twice as many boys as girls like it that way (22 percent vs. 9 percent).⁹

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Other Sources

- ◆ According to data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, among mothers who first give birth before age 18, only 22 percent of Hispanic teen mothers, 29 percent of white teen mothers and 50 percent of black teen mothers finish high school or earn a high school general equivalency certificate by their 25th birthday.¹⁵
- ◆ In 1999, women held just 11 percent of all board seats in Fortune 500 companies³ and less than one percent of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions in the Fortune 500.²
- ◆ Girls are less likely than boys to describe themselves as very knowledgeable (17 percent vs. 29 percent) or confident (24 percent vs. 35 percent) about financial issues and managing money.¹⁶
- ◆ Three out of four girls do not expect that their financial future will be made secure by the person they marry.¹⁶
- ◆ According to the Census Bureau, while earnings increase with the amount of education a person receives, gender is also a factor. On average, a woman with a Bachelors Degree in 1998 earned slightly less than a man with no college degree. A woman with a Masters Degree earned about \$8,000 less than a man with a Bachelors Degree.²³
- ◆ In 1998, women between the ages of 25 and 54 working full-time, year-round jobs earned an average of 76 cents for every dollar men in the same age group earned.³² One in five working women is a teacher (median salary elementary \$35,932, median salary secondary \$38,272), secretary (median salary \$22,412) or cashier (median salary \$13,884).^{27,31}
- ◆ Boys are four times more likely to report a career choice in computer software development or engineering than girls are (16 percent vs. 4 percent). However, boys and girls are about equally likely to list computer usage and programming, mathematics and science courses as important.¹²
- ◆ In a 1998 survey of over 1,000 mothers and teenage daughters, the number one concern of daughters and the number three concern of mothers was that they would not have enough money at some point in their lives.³⁵
- ◆ More girls than boys plan to attend a four-year college or university (62 percent vs. 54 percent). Over half of girls (57 percent) cite their major motivation for seeking further education as “a mechanism to getting a job/well-paying job,” independence or additional opportunity.¹²

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