



**Inspiring all girls to be  
strong, smart, and bold**

## **Choosing Community: Girls Get Together to Be Themselves**

### **Introduction**

The Girls Inc. Girls' Bill of Rights® states that girls have the right:

- to be themselves and to resist gender stereotypes
- to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm
- to take risks, to strive freely, and to take pride in success
- to accept and appreciate their bodies
- to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world
- to prepare for interesting work and economic independence

In 2000, Girls Inc. released *Taking the Lead: Girls' Rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a nationwide survey of school-aged children, conducted by Harris Interactive<sup>SM</sup>. That research clearly showed that “while today’s girls are confident in their abilities and ambitious in their goals, they are frustrated by outmoded stereotypes that place

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roadblocks in their paths.” Girls recognize and embrace their rights but need support from society at large in overcoming limiting gender expectations.

*Choosing Community: Girls Get Together to Be Themselves* is the first of several planned follow-up studies to explore how society can support girls in confronting gender inequality. This survey—which included a nationally representative sample of 1,933 public-school students in grades 3 through 12 and a nationally representative sample of 2,447 adults—was conducted by Harris Interactive and focused on the role of girls’ communities\* in supporting girls in exercising their right to be themselves and resist gender stereotypes. (\* We defined girls’ communities as girls-only groups, such as Girl Scout troops, Girls Inc. centers, sports teams, etc.)

The message is clear: Girls are indeed strong, smart, and bold. They are optimistic about the future and confident about their abilities. They recognize the extent of gender inequality in our society and see girls’ communities as playing an important role in helping them be themselves and in overcoming the limitations of gender stereotypes. Unfortunately, not all girls have equal access to girls’ communities.

Girls and boys agree that girls’ communities offer girls the opportunity to say what they really feel, to be listened to, to try new things, and to be leaders. Young people and adults believe that girls’ communities reinforce girls’ sense of confidence, independence, and safety. It is important to note that perception of girls who participate in girls’ communities is wholly positive; there is little belief among students and adults that girls in such groups “do not know how to live in the real world” or “are not popular.”

Girls who participate in girls’ communities are more likely to read books and to play sports. Importantly, girls who are current participants of girls’ communities are

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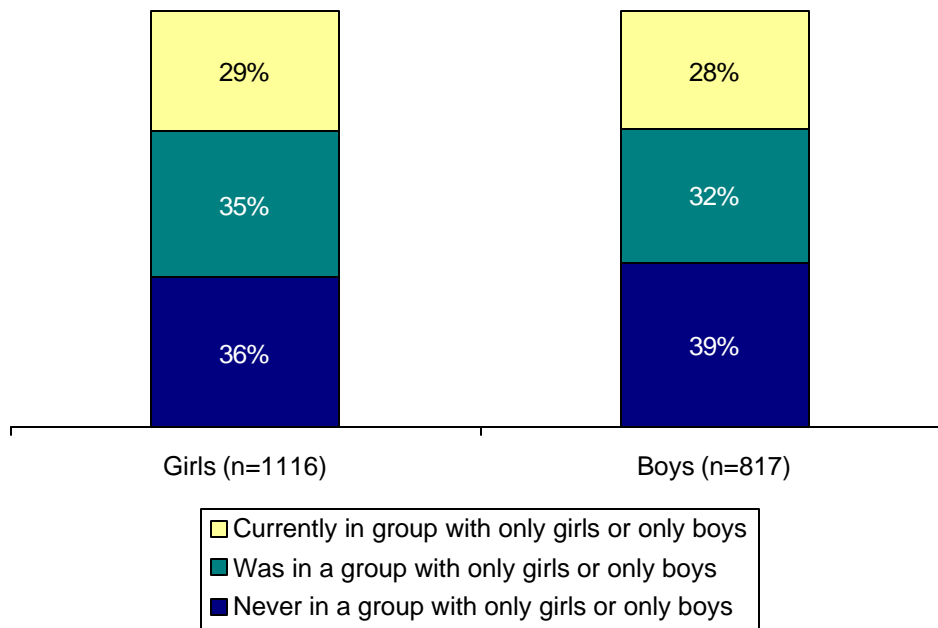
significantly more likely to expect to go to college than girls who have never participated. Access to girls' communities appears to correlate strongly with economic circumstances: Girls whose mothers have a high school degree or less are almost twice as likely to report never having participated in a girls' community as girls whose mothers have completed college.

At Girls Inc., we have been building girls' communities since 1864, when the first Girls Club was founded in Waterbury, CT. We define girls' communities as groups of girls who come together—in physical or virtual spaces—around an idea, interest, issue, topic, or just for the sake of being with other girls. Through community girls find support to resist gender stereotypes, express themselves freely, take pride in their successes, feel comfortable with their bodies, have confidence, and explore a world of opportunities. Belonging to such supportive networks of girls, as *Choosing Community* indicates, reinforces girls' sense of empowerment.

Please join us in expanding the opportunities for *all* girls in this country—all 36 million of them—to experience the empowering benefits of girls' communities.

### **Girls' Communities Offer Girls Opportunities to be Themselves**

Both girls and boys participate broadly in youth communities, such as clubs or sports teams. Seventy-three percent of girls and seventy-four percent of boys participate in such groups, either in school or outside of school. In addition, sixty-four percent of girls and sixty percent of boys have first-hand experience with single-gender communities. Twenty-nine percent of girls are current members of girls' communities, and twenty-eight percent of boys are current members of boys' communities.



Elementary school girls (39%) are more likely than those in middle (22%) or high school (22%) to be current participants in girls' communities. Race and economic circumstances also determine degree of participation. White (65%) and African-American (72%) girls report having more frequent direct experience with girls' communities than Hispanic (51%) girls. Girls whose mothers have no more than a high-

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school diploma are less likely to be current or past participants of girls' communities (55%) than girls whose mothers have attended (70%) or graduated college (76%).

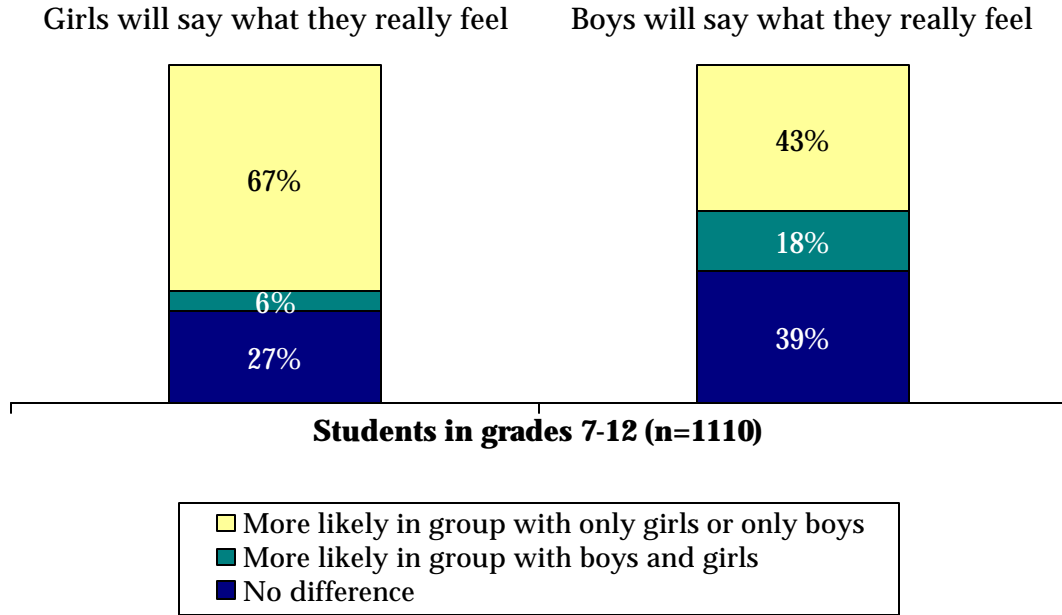
***Girls' Participation in Girls' Communities***

	Total	Grade Level			Race/Ethnicity			
		3-6	7-9	10-12	White	Black	Hispanic	Black/ Hispanic
Base:	1116	472	317	327	840	104	116	220
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, now I am in a group with only girls or only boys	29	39	22	22	31	28	20	24
Yes, I used to be in a group with only girls or only boys	35	26	38	43	34	44	31	37
No, I never was in a group with only girls or only boys	36	34	40	35	34	28	49	39

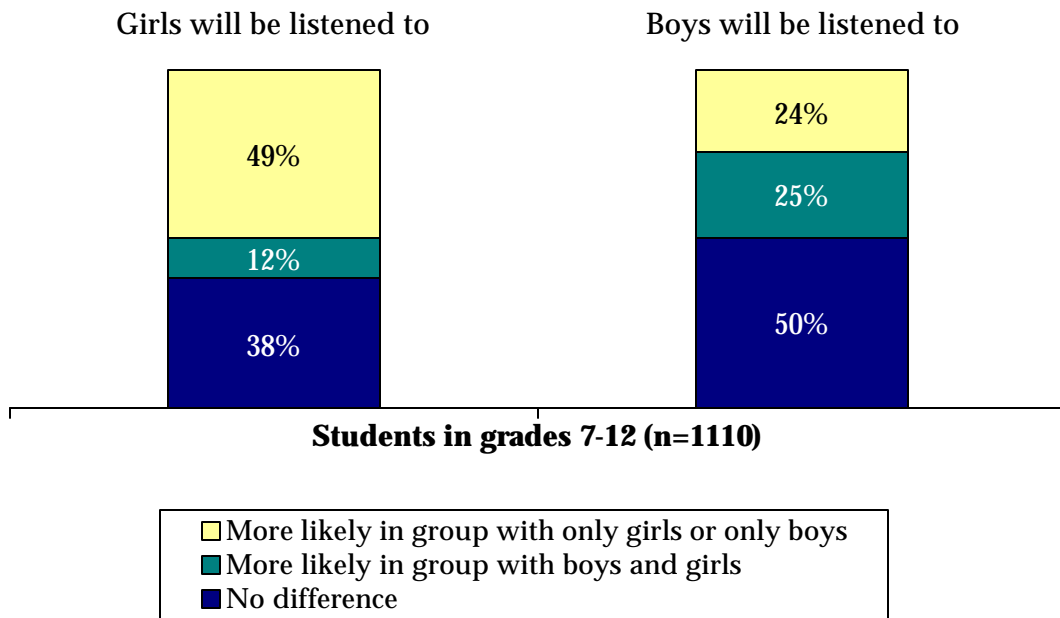
	Total	Mother's Education		
		HS or Less	Some College	College or Beyond
Base:	1116	350	297	319
	%	%	%	%
Yes, now I am in a group with only girls or only boys	29	21	34	38
Yes, I used to be in a group with only girls or only boys	35	34	36	38
No, I never was in a group with only girls or only boys	36	45	30	23

Both girls and boys recognize the special value of girls' communities as places that afford girls the opportunity to be themselves. Two-thirds of students (67%) believe that girls are more likely to say what they really feel in a group with only girls, while only forty-three percent of students believe that boys are more likely to say what they really feel in a boys-only group.

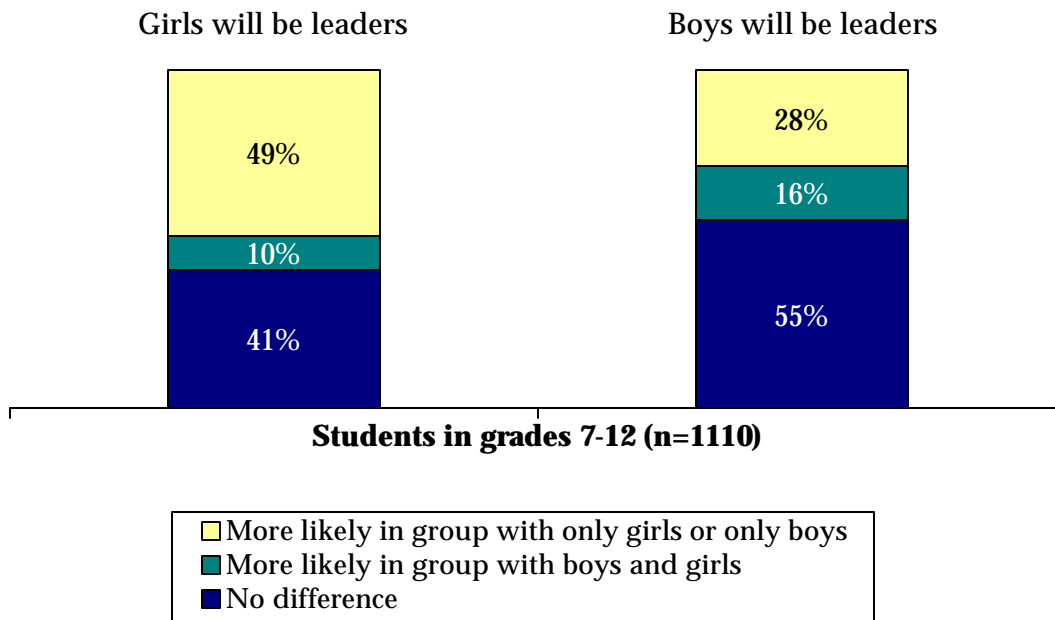
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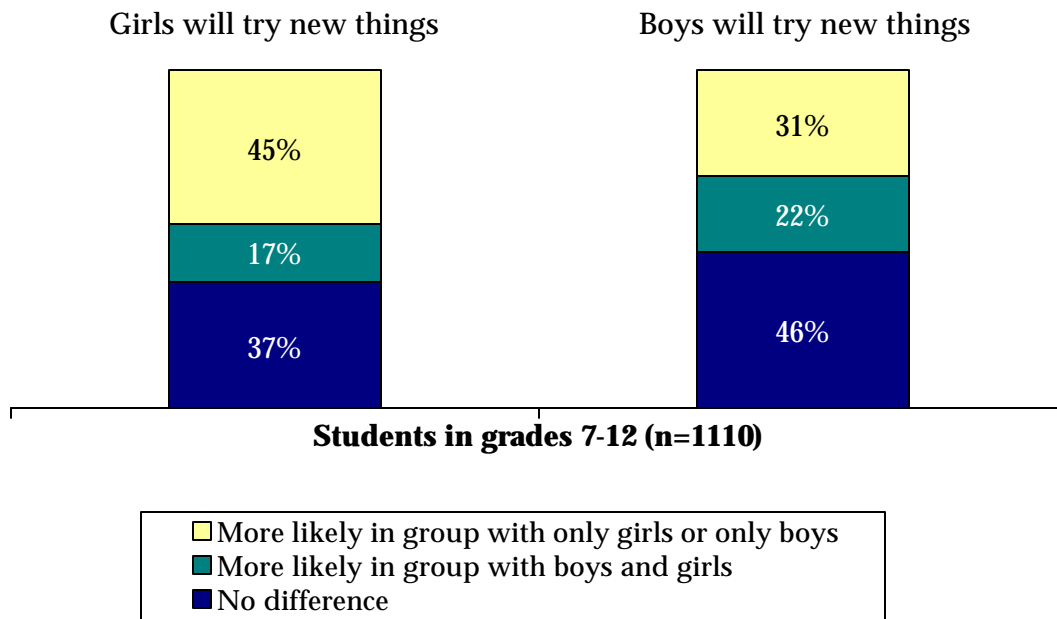
Half of secondary school students also believe that girls are more likely to be listened to (49%) and to be leaders (49%) in groups with only girls, while only twenty-four percent and twenty-eight percent believe that boys are more likely to be listened to and to be leaders in boys-only groups.



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A plurality of secondary school students (45%) also believes that girls are more likely to try new things in a group with only girls, while only thirty-one percent believe that boys are more likely to try new things in boys-only groups.



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In the areas where students believe that participation in girls' communities has the most impact, girls are more likely than boys to perceive a difference. Girls are more likely than boys to believe that girls in girls-only groups will say what they really feel (74% vs. 60%), be listened to (56% vs. 43%), and be leaders (52% vs. 45%).

Students and adults see girls who participate in girls' communities as being secure, confident, and serious. Girls and boys are most likely to strongly agree that the following are characteristics of girls who participate in girls-only groups. They believe that girls in girls-only groups:

- Can be serious (52%);
- Act the way they want (41%); and
- Feel safe (37%).

Girls and boys are least likely to believe that girls who participate in girls-only groups:

- Don't know how to live in the real world (9%);
- Are not interested in "girl" things (8%);
- Are not popular (7%);
- Don't date a lot (6%).

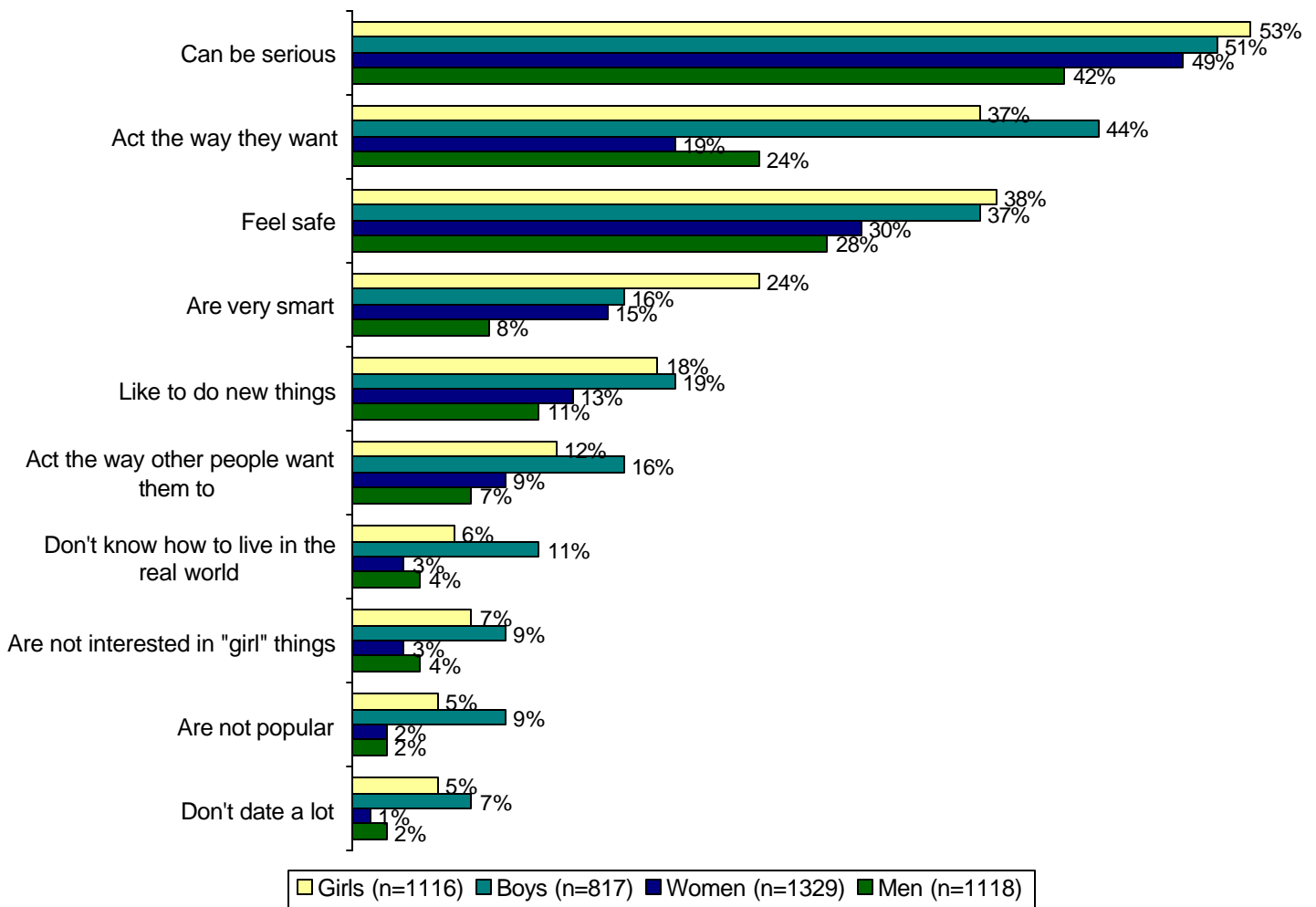
Men and women are most likely to believe that girls in girls-only groups have the following characteristics:

- Can be serious (45%);
- Feel safe (29%); and
- Act the way they want (21%).

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Women are more likely than men to believe that girls in girls-only groups can be serious (49% vs. 42%); and are very smart (15% vs. 8%). Men are more likely than women to believe that girls in girls-only groups act the way they want (24% vs. 19%).

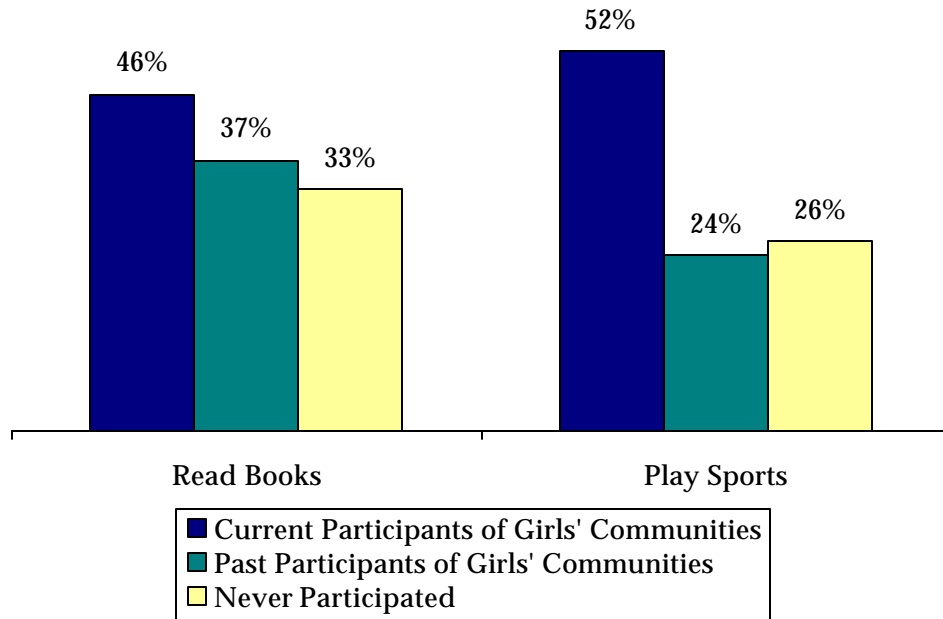
*Students' and Adults' Views of Girls in Girls' Communities*



Girls' interests, aspirations, and feelings of safety are also influenced by their involvement in girls' communities. Girls who currently participate in girls' groups are

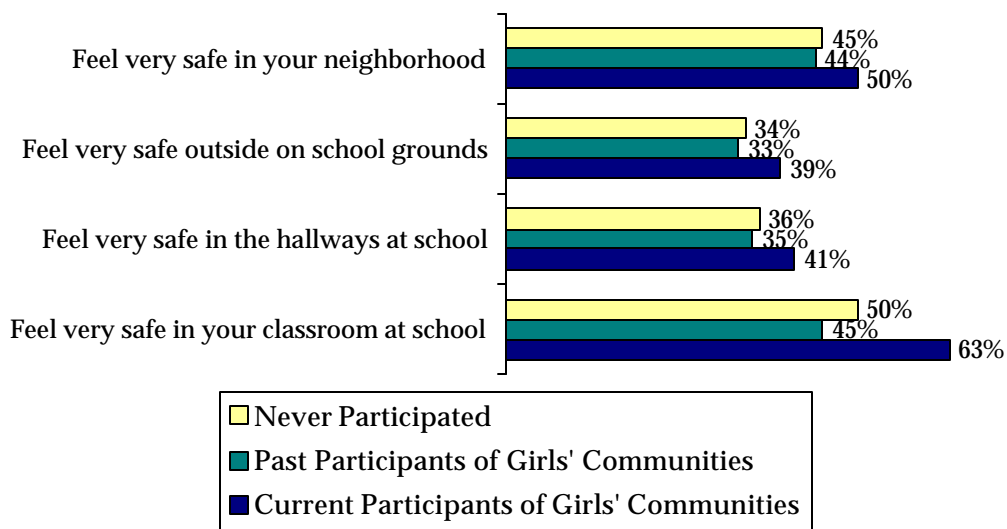
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more likely than girls who participated in the past or have never participated to read books (46% vs. 37% vs. 33%) and to play sports (52% vs. 24% vs. 26%), a fact that may



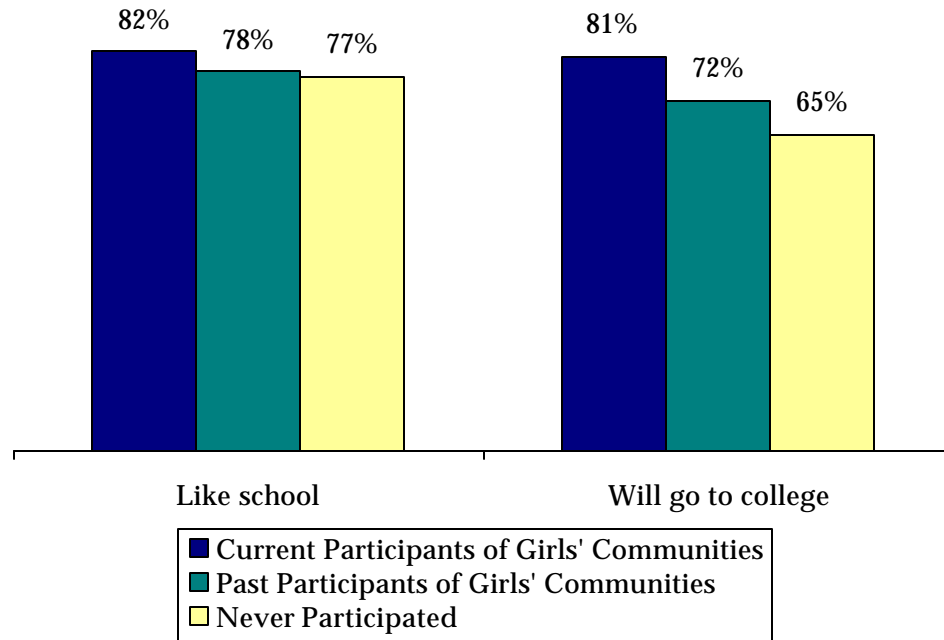
be explained by the prevalence of involvement in girls-only sports teams.

Girls who participate in girls' communities are also more likely to report feeling safe in their classrooms in school.



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Most significantly, girls who participate in girls' communities are much more likely to expect to go to college (81% vs. 65%) than girls who have never participated.



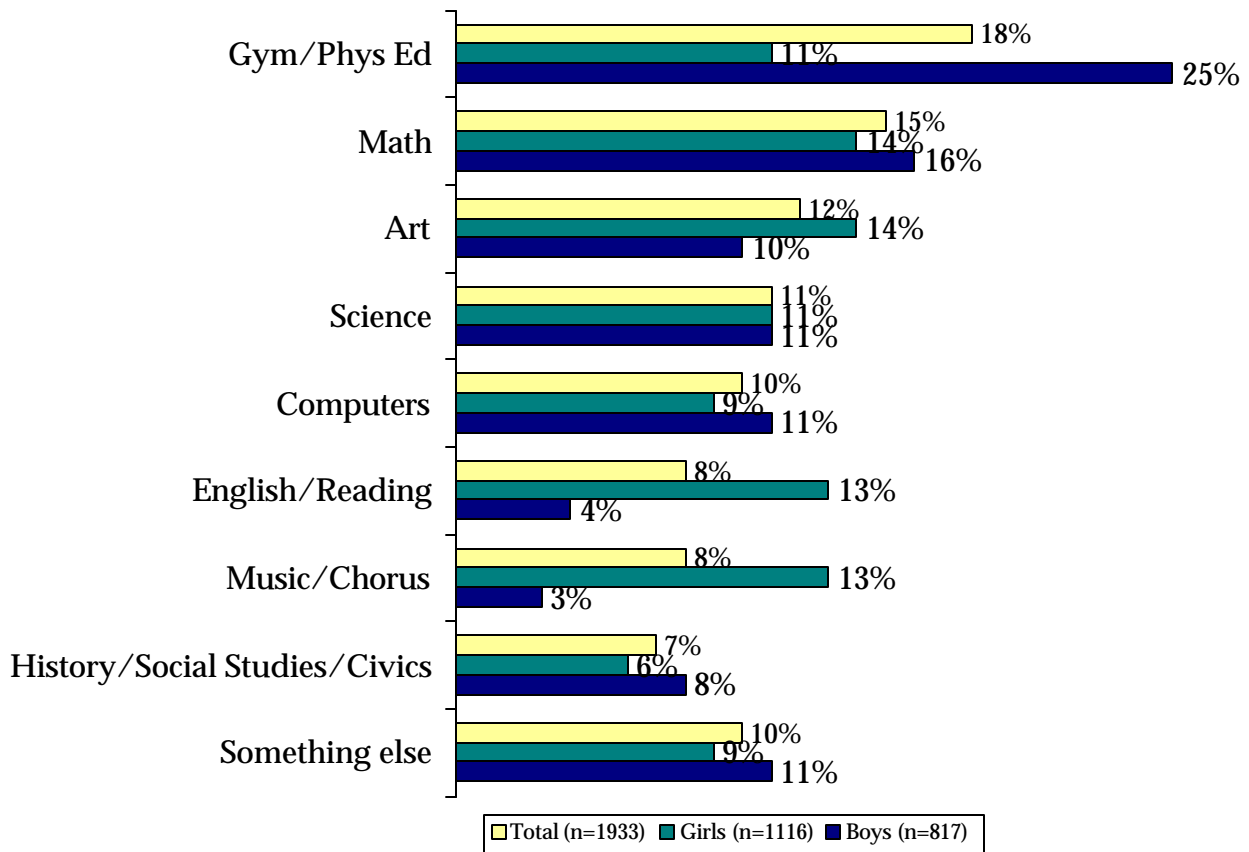
It is important to note grade level, race/ethnicity, and mother's education affect significantly girls' satisfaction with school and their aspirations for college. Younger girls, grades 3-6, are more like to enjoy school than girls in middle and high school (89% vs. 75% vs. 68%). African-American and White girls are more likely to expect to go to college than are Hispanic girls (83% vs. 74% vs. 51%); and girls whose mothers have graduated or attended college are more likely to expect to go to college than girls whose mothers finished their education in high school (87% vs. 79% vs. 61%).

### **Amid General Optimism, Gender Still Affects Hopes for the Future**

Young people express positive attitudes about their lives and prospects for the future. Seventy-two percent of students say they like school. Sixty-six percent expect to go to college. Girls are more likely than boys to like school (79% vs. 65%) and to expect to go to college (72% vs. 60%).

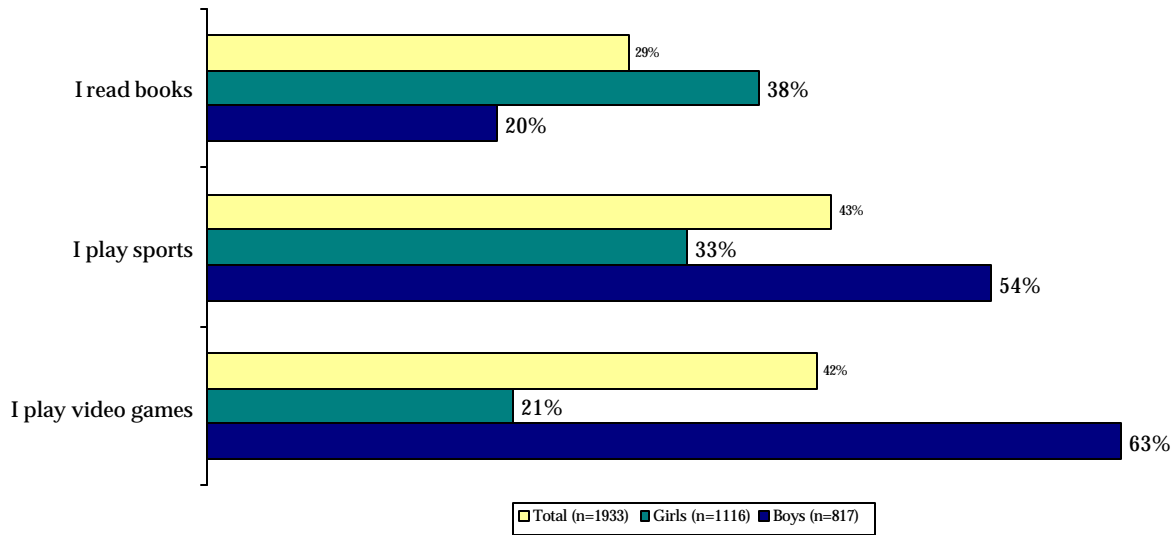
Girls and boys are quite close in their academic interests, enjoying math, science, computers, and social studies in equal proportions. Girls are more interested in reading and music, while boys are more interested in physical education. These differences are also reflected in girls' and boys' extracurricular pursuits and their career aspirations.

*Students' Favorite Subjects*

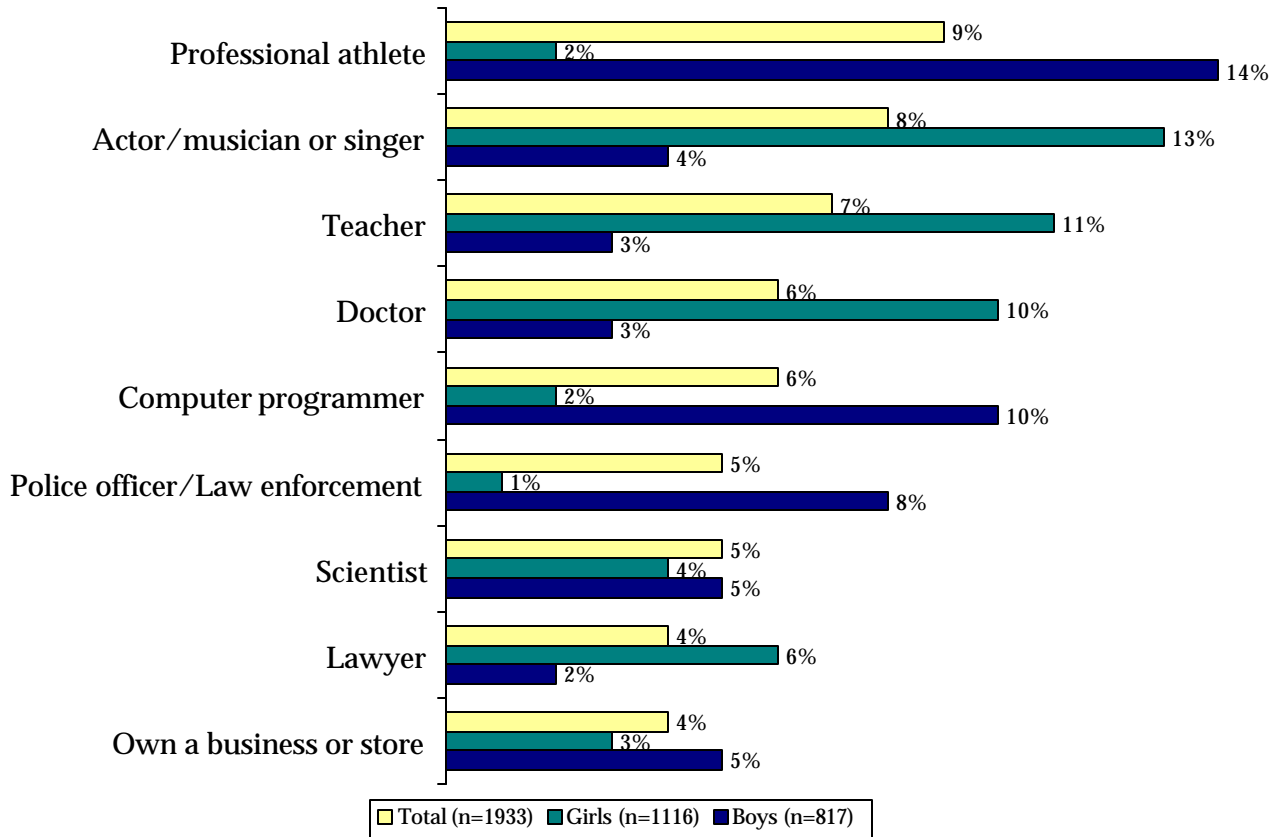


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*Students' Interests*  
 (% saying "Describes me a lot")

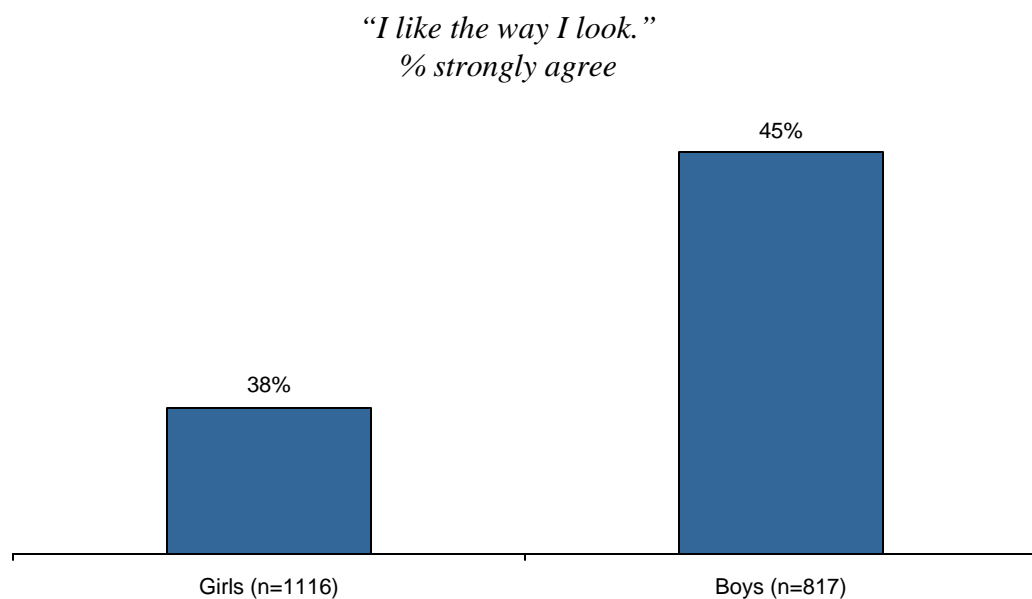


*Students' Career Goals*



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Students have generally positive perceptions of themselves and their abilities. Six in ten (63%) students indicate that they strongly agree with the statement “I can do anything I set my mind to.” Half (50%) of all students strongly agree with the statement “If I make up my mind to, I can make things better for myself and for other people.” Four in ten students (42%) strongly agree with the statement “I like the way I look.” Only one in ten students (8%) strongly agrees with the statement “I feel I do not have much to be proud of.” Girls and boys do not differ in these views, although boys are more likely than girls to strongly agree that they like their own looks (45% vs. 38%).



Black girls are more likely than White or Hispanic girls to strongly agree with the statements “I can do anything I set my mind to,” (86% vs. 63% vs. 59%) and “I like the way I look” (56% vs. 35% vs. 35%).

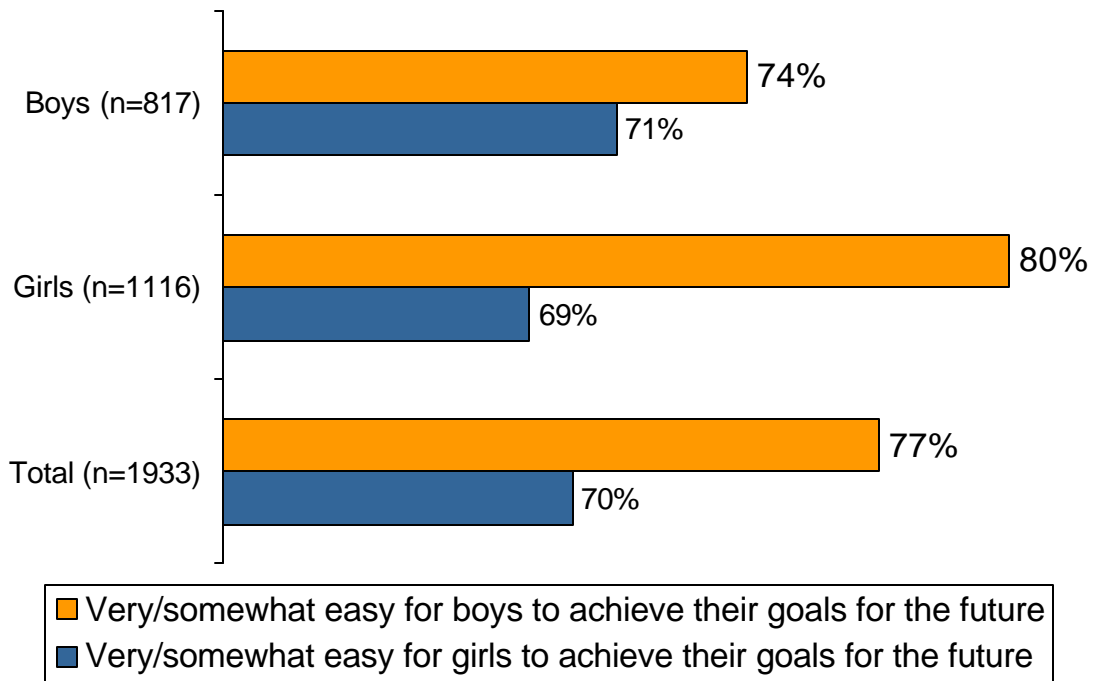
Middle school girls offer contrasting views of their inner life. While girls in grades 7-9 are more likely than girls in grades 10-12 to agree strongly that they feel they

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do not have much to be proud of (12% vs. 4%), they are also more likely to strongly agree that they like the way they look (37% vs. 15%).

Girls and boys are generally optimistic about the future. Almost eight in ten students (77%) believe it is somewhat easy or very easy for boys to achieve their goals for the future. Seven in ten of all students (70%) believe it is somewhat easy or very easy for girls to achieve their goals for the future.

Gender still plays a significant role in young people’s views of the future. Girls believe that it is easier for boys to achieve their goals than it is for girls (80% vs. 69%). Boys believe that it is nearly as easy for girls as it is for boys to achieve their goals (74% vs. 71%).

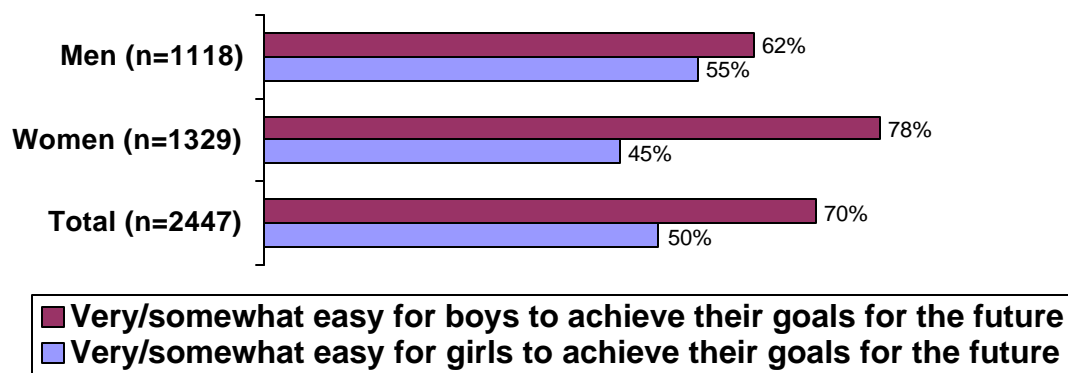


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Girls in grades 10-12 are more likely than girls in grades 3-6 to say it is somewhat or very easy for boys to achieve their goals (86% vs. 77%). White girls are more likely than Black/Hispanic girls to say it is somewhat or very easy for boys to achieve their goals (82% vs. 73%). Girls in grades 3-6 are more likely than girls in grades 7-9 and 10-12 to say that it is somewhat or very easy for girls to achieve their goals (78% vs. 63% vs. 64%).

Adults are much more pessimistic than students about the impact of gender limitations on girls' aspirations. Only half (50%) of all adults believe that it is very easy or somewhat easy for girls to achieve their goals for the future. Seven in ten (70%) of all adults believe that it is very easy or somewhat easy for boys to achieve their goals for the future.

Women believe that gender is a significant barrier to girls' ability to achieve their goals. Forty-five percent of women say it is very easy or somewhat easy for girls to achieve their goals for the future, compared to seventy-eight percent who say it is very easy or easy for boys to achieve their goals. Men attach less significance to the role of gender, with sixty-two percent saying it is very easy for boys to achieve their goals and fifty-five percent saying it is very easy or easy for girls to do so.



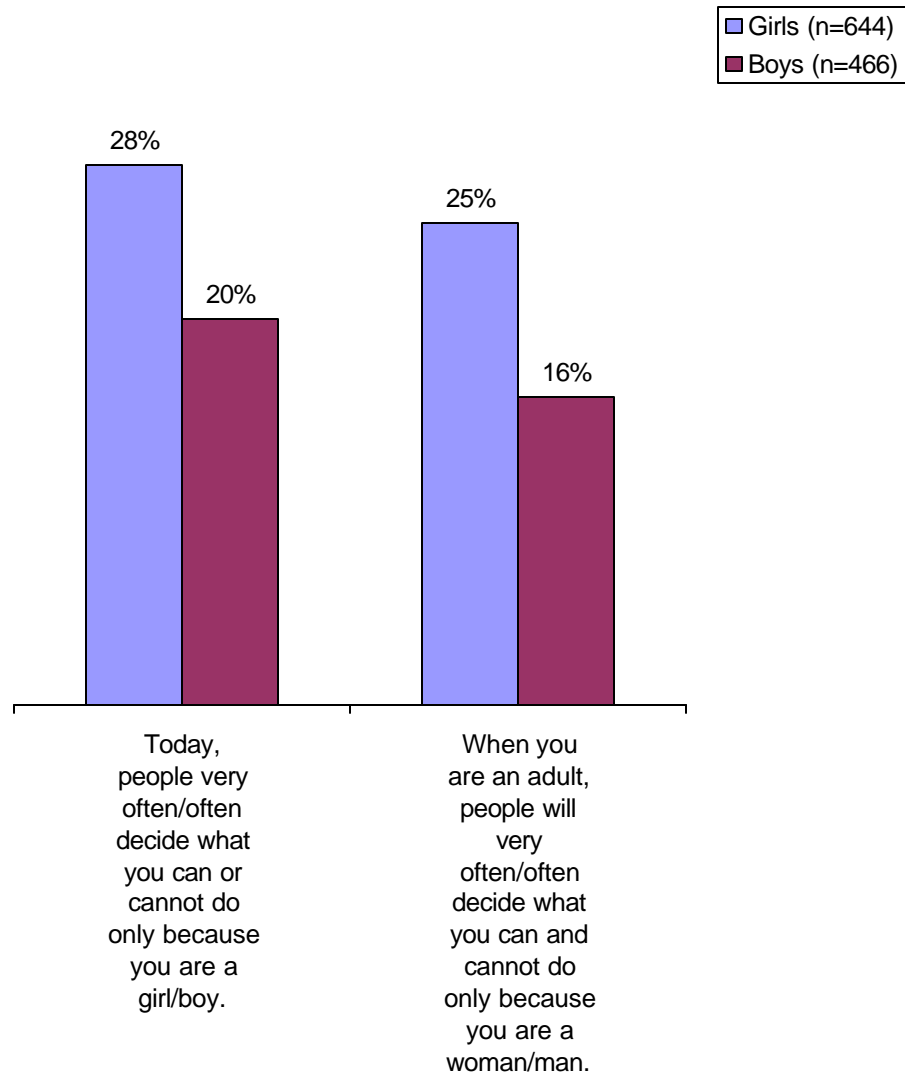
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Adults aged 18-34 are more likely than adults aged 55 and over to believe that it is very easy or somewhat easy for girls to achieve their goals (56% vs. 42%). No age differences distinguish adults' estimates of how easy/difficult it is for boys to achieve their goals.

Girls' and boys' views of how gender affects their future goals are reinforced by personal experiences with limiting gender expectations. A sizable minority of girls and boys say that they experience gender discrimination, although girls are more likely to have this experience. One-quarter (28%) of girls in grades 7-12 indicate that today, people often or very often decide what they can or cannot do only because they are a girl, and not because of their abilities as individuals. In addition, one-fourth (25%) of girls in grades 7-12 believe that when they are adults, people will often or very often decide what they can or cannot do only because they are women, and not because of their abilities as individuals.

Boys also experience gender discrimination, but to a lesser extent. One-fifth (20%) of boys in grades 7-12 indicate that today, people often or very often decide what they can or cannot do only because they are a boy, and not because of their abilities as individuals. In addition, almost two in ten (16%) boys in grades 7-12 believe that when they are adults, people will often or very often decide what they can or cannot do only because they are men, and not because of their abilities as individuals.

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Girls and boys recognize that although men and women are equally as likely to have a college degree and to have a full-time job, women still earn less than men and are underrepresented in some careers. Students believe that the following statements are most likely to describe a man solely: “is the head of his or her household” (44%); “is a doctor” (39%); and “earns a lot of money” (38%). In contrast, students are most likely to believe that “is poor” describes a woman solely (20%).

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Adult views reinforce students' perceptions. Sixty-one percent of adults believe that "earns a lot of money" describes a man exclusively. Thirty-four percent say that the statement "is poor" applies to a woman exclusively. Forty percent believe that the phrase "is the head of his or her household" describes a man; and forty-five percent hold that "is a doctor" is most likely to define a man.

### **Conclusion**

In a world where gender expectations still play a significant role in defining young people's lives and their aspirations for the future, girls' communities help girls build their sense of self and develop their confidence by offering them opportunities to express themselves, be heard, and explore their world in a safe environment.

### **Survey Methodology**

#### *Students*

A nationally representative sample of 1933 public school students in grades 3 through 12 were interviewed. A total of 1003 students were surveyed during an English class using a self-administered questionnaire, and a total of 930 students were interviewed online using a self-administered questionnaire. Interviews averaged 15 minutes in length and were conducted between February 6, 2002 and April 5, 2002.

#### *Adults*

A nationally representative sample of 2,447 adults were interviewed online. Interviews of adults averaged 15 minutes in length and were conducted between February 25, 2002 and February 27, 2002. Adult online interviews were conducted using Harris Interactive Quick Query<sup>SM</sup> omnibus survey.

## **Project Responsibility and Acknowledgments**

This study was designed by Harris Interactive and Girls Inc. The Harris Interactive team responsible for the design and analysis of the survey included Dana Markow, Ph.D., Senior Research Manager, and Marc Scheer, Research Associate. Heather Johnston Nicholson, Director of Research and Alexander Kopelman, Director of Communications led the Girls Inc. team.

Harris Interactive was responsible for final determination of the topics, question wording, data collection, analysis, and interpretation in the report.

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### **About Girls Inc.**

Girls Incorporated is a national nonprofit organization that inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold<sup>SM</sup>. With local roots dating to 1864 and national status since 1945, Girls Inc. has responded to the changing needs of girls and their communities through programs and advocacy that empower girls to reach their full potential and understand, value, and assert their rights. Girls Inc. public education extends the values of girls' rights to adults, as well, giving them the tools they need to assist girls' efforts to access their rights.

Programs focus on science, math, and technology, health and sexuality, economic and financial literacy, sports skills, leadership and advocacy, and media literacy for girls ages 6 to 18 throughout the United States. While our goal is to reach all girls, we recognize that girls in at-risk communities have an even greater need for our programs. Of those we serve, a majority are girls of color, girls who come from single-parent households, and girls in households with incomes under \$25,000.

In 2000, Girls Inc. reached more than 900,000 girls through Girls Inc. affiliates, our website, and educational products, including action kits, and posters. An additional 2 million girls heard or read the Girls Inc. strong, smart, and bold message and the Girls Inc. Girls' Bill of Rights through the Girls' Rights Campaign. Guided by our vision of empowered girls and an equitable society, Girls Inc. is committed to reaching millions more girls through its ever-growing program outreach and public education efforts.

For more information, please visit [www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org).

### **About Harris Interactive<sup>SM</sup>**

Harris Interactive is a worldwide market research and consulting firm, best known for *The Harris Poll*<sup>®</sup> and its pioneering use of the Internet to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Strengthened by its recent merger with Total Research Corporation, the Company now combines the power of technology with international expertise in predictive, custom, strategic research. Headquartered in the United States, with offices in the United Kingdom, Japan and a global network of local market and opinion research firms, the Company conducts international research with fluency in multiple languages. For more information about Harris Interactive, visit [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com). EOE M/F/D/V

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup>, and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com).