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Civic Engagement and Volunteering



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Girls and boys participate in civic engagement activities and volunteering in different ways, venues, and times throughout their adolescence and young adulthood. From what the following statistics and trends indicate, there is much opportunity for youth development, civic, political, and educational organizations to positively affect how youth contribute to society as they grow older.

Statistics

- For girls ages 11-12, 73% reported improving the world around them as their favorite activity (i.e., activities related to the environment or helping others). (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The Ten Emerging Truths: New Directions for Girls 11-17 (2002)*)
- Girls ages 11-17 participate in student government at markedly increasing levels: 5% of girls ages 11-13; 12% of girls ages 13-15; and 20% of girls ages 16-17. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The Ten Emerging Truths: New Directions for Girls 11-17 (2002)*)
- **More** young women aged 15 to 25 participate in the following activities than young men: raising money for charity (27% for women vs. 22% for men); regular volunteering for non-political groups (21% vs. 16%); active group membership (22% vs. 18%); membership in political groups (17% vs. 15%); and, participating in a run/walk/ride for charity (20% vs. 15%). (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, *The Civic and Political Health of a Nation, 2006*)
- **Less** young women aged 15 to 25 participate in the following activities than young men: regular voting (ages 20 to 25) (25% for women vs. 28% for men); persuading others to vote (31% vs. 39%); donating money for a political campaign (5% vs. 9%); and, regular volunteering for a political group (1.3% vs. 2.4%) (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, *The Civic and Political Health of a Nation, 2006*)
- In the 2004 election, 55% of females ages 18-24 reported registering to vote, compared with 48% of males the same age. Similarly, 45% of females reported actually voting, compared with 39% of males. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Youth Voting, 2006*)
- Voter turnout rates among voters ages 18-29 declined: women (27% in 1994 versus 24% in 2002) and men (25% in 1994 versus 21% in 2002). (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, *Quick Facts about Young Voters: 2006*)
- From 1990 to 2000, consistent young volunteers were more likely to be female (14 percent) than male (11 percent). They were also more likely to be from higher SES households. (National Center for Education Statistics, *Volunteer Service by Young People from High School through Early Adulthood, 2003*)
- From 1990 to 2000, females (50%) were more likely than males (38%) to volunteer in high school, but no differences were detected between the sexes two years out of high school (38% for males and 39% for females). Male volunteering declined further to 29% by the eighth year after scheduled high school graduation; no change was detected in female volunteering (37%). (National Center for Education Statistics, *Volunteer Service by Young People from High School through Early Adulthood, 2003*)
- As of 2003, female college graduates were more likely than their male counterparts to have volunteered in the past year (50% vs. 43%). Among those who had volunteered, women were more likely than men to have served in educational or religious institutions, while men were more likely than women to have done other volunteer work with children or to have participated in poverty or neighborhood improvement projects. (National Center for Education Statistics, *Where Are They Now? A Description of 1992-93 Bachelor's Degree Recipients 10 Years Later, 2006*)
- College students follow the national trend in volunteering, with females (33%) volunteering at a higher rate than males (26.8%). Both male and female college students were more likely to volunteer for an educational or youth services organization than any other type of organization: 33.6% of male college students, and 30.2% of female college students volunteered at an educational or youth services organization. With a little over 22% of both male and female college students, religious organizations remained the second most popular place for volunteering among both genders. (Corporation for National and Community Service, *College Students Helping America, 2006*)

Also See:

[Exploring Girls' Leadership](#)

[The Community Connection](#)

[The Ten Emerging Truths: New Directions for Girls 11-17](#)

[Voices of Volunteers 18-29](#)



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Education

Education remains a critical factor in the lives of youth today, especially with the advent and consequences of No Child Left Behind (2001), and continued changes in demographic, academic, and technological demands of the workforce. With girls and boys exhibiting different educational trends and needs from K-16, there is opportunity for out-of-school time and youth development programs to benefit girls and boys socially, emotionally, as well as academically.

Statistics

- Female kindergarteners (83%) are somewhat more likely than their male counterparts (79%) to exhibit the following positive social behaviors: ease in joining others in play; ability to make and keep friends; and positively interacting with peers. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Kindergartners' Social Interaction Skills, 2006*)
- In 2005, female fourth- and eighth-graders both scored higher on average in reading than their male counterparts. (National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2005*)
- In 2005, female fourth- and eighth-graders scored lower on average in mathematics than their male counterparts. However, both male and female fourth-graders' average scores were higher in 2005 than in any previous assessment year. (National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2005*)
- In 2005 eighth- and twelfth-grade male students outperformed female students in science. (National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Science 2005*)
- A slightly higher percentage of females than males completed high school in 2005 (87% compared with 85%, respectively). In 2005, females were also more likely than males to have completed some college (62% compared with 52%, respectively) and to have received at least a bachelor's degree (32% compared with 26%, respectively). (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Educational Attainment, 2006*)
- In 2004, 9% of females ages 16 to 24 were high school dropouts, compared with 12% of males. Females comprise one-half of the population and make up 43% of the dropouts in this age group. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: High School Dropout Rates, 2006*)
- In 2005, high school females (14.8%) were nearly half as likely as high school males (27.4%) to use computers more than 3 hours on an average school day for something **not** related to school work (e.g., played video or computer games). (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- In 2000, the majority of students who took AP tests received a passing score that would earn college credit, but female test takers were less likely than their male counterparts to earn passing scores. (National Science Foundation, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2006*)
- In 2000, sex differences occurred in science coursetaking but not in mathematics. More females than males completed courses in advanced biology, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) biology, and chemistry. Males completed physics and AP/IB physics courses at higher rates than females. (National Science Foundation, *Science and Engineering Indicators, 2006*)
- In 2000, women earned more than half of the degrees awarded in psychology (78%), biological/agricultural sciences (59%), and social sciences (55%), and almost half (47%) in mathematics. However, women received 21% of bachelors degrees awarded in engineering, 27% in computer sciences, and 43% in physical sciences. (National Science Foundation, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2006*)
- For girls ages 8-12, aspirations after high school are largely educational and professional: 93% for college education; 76% for a career; 67% for marriage; and, 63% for children. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *Teens Before Their Time (2000)*)

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[Teens Before Their Time](#)

[The Girl Difference](#)

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Physical and Mental Health

Girls and boys from childhood to young adulthood experience varying degrees of physical and mental health. Although recent statistics show a disturbing trend among of youth health behaviors, there is opportunity for youth development and community-based organizations, health and education field, and public policy makers to engage and empower youth in healthy practices.

Statistics

- More than 10 percent of children between the ages of 2 and 5 are overweight, double the proportion since 1980. (Fitness.gov, The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports)
- In 2003–2004, Black, non-Hispanic girls were at particularly high risk of being overweight (25%), compared with White, non-Hispanic and Mexican American girls (16% and 17%, respectively). (Childstats.gov, *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*)
- A daughter's dissatisfaction with her weight is greater if her mother is also dissatisfied with her own weight, in spite of how much a daughter *actually* weighs. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living* (2006))
- In 2005, females were more likely than males to engage in disordered eating with 6% of females reporting vomiting or using laxatives to control weight compared with 3% of males. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Disordered Eating—Symptoms of Bulimia, 2006*)
- Although about two-thirds of girls aged 8 to 17 correctly identified themselves as being either normal weight or overweight, one-third have a distorted idea about their weight—either perceiving themselves as too heavy when they are, in fact, of normal weight, or feeling their weight is "about right" when they actually are too heavy. Specifically, 45% of girls that were overweight and 61% of girls at risk of being overweight see themselves as normal weight, while 14% of normal weight girls believe they are overweight. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living* (2006))
- In 2005, female youth were nearly twice as likely as male youth to report seriously considering suicide (22% versus 12%) and attempting suicide (11% versus 6%). However, males were far more likely to succeed in committing suicide. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Suicidal Teens, 2006*)
- Overall, the prevalence of having seriously considered attempting suicide was higher among white female (21.5%) and Hispanic female (24.2%) than black female (17.1%) students. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- In 2005, there were 5.5 million youths aged 12 to 17 (21.8%) who received treatment or counseling for emotional or behavior problems in the year prior to the interview. Adolescent females were more likely than adolescent males to report past year treatment for mental health problems (23.6% vs. 20.0%). (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2005*)
- In 2005 high school females (8.1%) were nearly twice as likely as their male counterparts (4.6%) to take diet pills, powders, or liquids without a doctor's advice to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight. Further, high school females (6.2%) were three times as likely as their male counterparts (2.8%) to vomit or take laxatives to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- For many girls, health is the absence of illness or of unhealthy behavior. Being free of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco was cited by the greatest number (87%) of girls as being very important. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living* (2006))

Also See:

*The New Normal?
What Girls Say
About Healthy
Living*

*Weighting In:
Helping Girls Be
Healthy Today,
Healthy Tomorrow*

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Safety

The safety of girls and youth is always a concern, whether in everyday life or cyberspace. That safety extends to girls and youths' physical and emotional safety. Adults and youth in all fields—youth development, education, sports, out-of-school time—can play an integral part in empowering girls and youth to be safe and in ensuring their safety.

Statistics

- For girls aged 8 to 17, 72% defined safety as not being physically hurt and 46% defined it as not having their feelings hurt. But when asked what actually **worried** them the most, the number one concern, noted by 32%, was being teased or being made fun of. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *Feeling Safe: What Girls Say* (2003))
- Bullying or harassment is a particularly prominent problem at the junior high or middle high school level. Three-quarters of junior high or middle high school principals say that bullying or harassment is a serious problem at their school, compared to 43% of elementary school principals and 45% of senior high school principals. (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying, and Harassment*, 2008)
- Teens aged 13 to 17 were less likely than preteens aged 8 to 12 to feel physically (62% vs. 72%) and emotionally (57% vs. 64%) safe. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *Feeling Safe: What Girls Say* (2003))
- Almost one quarter of teenage girls (23%) have fewer than three adults they could go to if they were in trouble or needed help, compared with only 11% of preteen girls who feel this way. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *Feeling Safe: What Girls Say* (2003))
- Seventy-one percent of girls aged 13 to 18 believed that it is wrong to meet people off-line that they have initially met through online communications. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The Net Effect: Girls and New Media* (2002))
- After experiencing cyberbullying, over half of teen victims aged 13 to 17 claim to have been angry (56%), one-third feeling hurt (33%) and embarrassed (32%), and over one in ten feeling scared (13%). Females are more likely than males to report all these emotions; especially females aged 13 to 15. (Harris Interactive, *Trends and Tudes: Cyberbullying*, April 2006)
- An alarming percentage of girls aged 13 to 17 report posting personal information online: their real age (72%), a fake age (23%), photos or videos of themselves (70%), photos or videos of friends (61%), city they live in (55%), name of school (48%), and cellphone number (7%). (Cox Communications, *Teen Internet Safety Survey Wave II*, March 2007)
- In 2002, 75% of girls aged 13 to 18 reported being given Internet rules by their parents, however, 43% also reported breaking those rules at least once. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The Net Effect: Girls and New Media* (2002))
- An increasing percentage of girls aged 13 to 17 say their parents talk to them about the dangers of sharing personal information online: 78% in 2007 versus 72% in 2006. (Cox Communications, *Teen Internet Safety Survey Wave II*, March 2007)
- In 2005, the prevalence of having ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol was higher among female high school students (29.6%) than male high school students (27.2%). (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- In 2005, the prevalence of having driven when they had been drinking alcohol was higher among white female (10.1%) than black female (3.5%) and Hispanic female (6.4%) high school students. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- The number one concern, noted by 32% of girls ages 8-17, was being teased or being made fun of. (GSRI, *Feeling Safe: What Girls Say* (2003))
- Three-thirds (74.2%) of LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race or ethnicity, a real or perceived disability, or their actual or presumed religion. (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, *The 2005 National School Climate*, 2005)
- Elementary and secondary school principals reported that while nearly all (96%) of their schools have anti-bullying policies, less than half specifically mention sexual orientation (46%) or gender identity or expression (39%). (Gay,

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Also See:

[Feeling Safe: What Girls Say](#)
[How America's Youth Are Feeling Since September 11](#)
[The Net Effect: Girls and New Media](#)
[The Ten Emerging Truths](#)

Lesbian, and Straight Education Network and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying, and Harassment, 2008*)

- Students from schools with an inclusive policy are more likely to feel very safe at school (54% vs. 36%) and one-third as likely to skip a class because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe (5% vs. 16%) (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, 2005*)
- Seven in ten (69%) elementary and secondary school principals believed that professional development for school personnel would be most helpful in reducing bullying or harassment of LGBT students in their school. (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying, and Harassment, 2008*)

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Sexual Activity and Pregnancy

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Girls and boys from early ages are exposed to varying messages about sexual activity and pregnancy from intended and unintended sources. Those varying messages influence the decisions youth make. Youth development, education, health, out-of-school time, social services, and government organizations can have a positive effect on girls and boys as they face decisions related to sexual activity and pregnancy.

Also See:

*Teens Before Their
Time*

Statistics

- In 2005, roughly a third of both male and female high school students reported being sexually active. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Sexually Active Teens, 2006*)
- In 2005, 44.1% of sexually active female high school students did **not** use a condom at their most recent sexual intercourse compared with 30% of males. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- Females and males report similar levels of any oral sex experience; in 2002, 54% of teen females and 55% of teen males reported engaging in oral sex. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Oral Sex, 2006*)
- In 2005, 12% of high school females had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their lifetime compared to 16.5% of high school males. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- Annually, there are over 750,000 teen pregnancies. Eight in ten of these pregnancies are unintended and 81% are to unmarried teens. (*The Guttmacher Institute, U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity, 2006*)
- After increasing 23% between 1972 and 1990 to an all-time high, the teen pregnancy rate for girls aged 15-19 declined 36% between 1990 and 2002 (the most recent year that nationally-representative data is available). (*The Guttmacher Institute, U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity, 2006*)
- Teen pregnancy rates vary among the three largest racial/ethnic groups. Between 1990 and 2002, rates for African-American and non-Hispanic white teens (aged 15-19) declined 40% and 34% respectively. The rate for Hispanics teens aged 15-19 declined 19% during the same time period. (*The Guttmacher Institute (2006) U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*)
- Teen girls (50%) are far less likely than teen boys (69%) to say the decision to use contraception is shared equally by both partners. (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Science Says: American Opinion on Teen Pregnancy and Related Issues 2007*)
- Six in ten sexually experienced teens (60%) say they wish they had waited longer to have sex, including 67% of those aged 12-14 and 57% of those aged 15-19. Almost equal proportions of teen boys (73%) and teen girls (78%) say that being a virgin is not embarrassing. (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Science Says: American Opinion on Teen Pregnancy and Related Issues 2007*)
- The overwhelming majority of teens (90%) think it is important for teens to be given a strong message that they should not have sex until they are at least out of high school. It is also the case that a clear majority of teens (56%) believe young people should be getting information about abstinence and contraception, rather than either/or. (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Science Says: American Opinion on Teen Pregnancy and Related Issues 2007*)
- Just as young girls are confronted with difficult "teen" issues like dating and sex at an increasingly early age, they are learning that their family confidantes are often unwilling or unable to discuss such issues. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *Teens Before Their Time (2000)*)

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Sports and Physical Activity

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Although sports and physical activity are a part of girls' and boys' lives in and out of school at varying levels, girls tend to be less active than boys. The sports, education, youth development, and out-of-school time fields can provide opportunity for girls to engage in positive, healthy physical activity.

Statistics

- High school females were much more likely (51.7%) than their male counterparts (40%) to **not** attend physical education class one or more days in an average school week. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 2005*)
- In 2005, a much higher percentage of adolescent males participate in vigorous physical activity than do their female peers. Within all racial and ethnic subgroups, activity levels for males are between 13 and 19 percentage points higher than for females. For all grades, activity levels for males are between 10 and 20 percentage points higher than for females. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Vigorous Physical Activity by Youth, 2006*)
- In 2005, more high school females (72.2%) than their male counterparts (56.2%) did **not** meet currently recommended levels of physical activity—doing any kind of physical that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard for a total of at least 60 minutes per day. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 2005*)
- The more physically active girls are, the greater their self-esteem and the more satisfied they are with their weight, regardless of how much they weigh. Eighty-three percent of very active girls say that physical activity makes them feel good about themselves. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living (2006)*)
- For girls ages 11-17 it is the *perception* of being overweight, not just weight alone, that inhibits participation in sports and physical activities. (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living (2006)*)
- For teen girls, being both physically active and a team sports participant is associated with a lower prevalence of sexual risk-taking behaviors. (Kulig, K., Brener, N. & McManus, T. *Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 2003*)
- Many girls ages 11-17 say they do not play sports because they do not feel skilled or competent (40%) or because they do not think their bodies look good (23%). (The Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living (2006)*)
- A study of school reading texts found that boys were represented in physical activities 65% of the time, while girls were represented 35% of the time. In addition, boys dominated throwing and catching activities, while girls dominated dance and swing-set activities. (Henschel-Pellet, H.A. *Research Quarterly, 2001*)
- In 2001, 1 in 2.5 girls participated in high school sports—up from 1 in 27 in 1971. That figure represented an 800% increase from 1971. For boys, the figure has remained constant at 1 in 2. (Women's Sports Foundation, *Women's Sports and Physical Activity Facts and Statistics, 2007*)
- Overall, females are somewhat less likely than their male counterparts to watch four or more hours of TV on an average weekday. The largest difference appears among twelfth graders, where 17% of females watch four or more hours of TV on an average weekday compared to 24% of males. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Watching Television, 2006*)

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[The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living](#)
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Tobacco Use and Substance Abuse

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Even though cigarette smoking may be in decline for teenage girls and boys, substance abuse continues. Organizations from all fields—youth development, education, health, government, media—can serve as a positive force in helping youth make healthy decisions about tobacco and illicit drug use.

Also See:

*The New Normal?
What Girls Say
About Healthy
Living*

Statistics

- Approximately 41.6% of females ages 12 or older reported using an illicit drug at some point in their lives. Approximately 12.1% of females ages 12 and older reported illicit drug use in the past year and 6.1% reported illicit drug use in the past six months. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*)
- Approximately 35.9% of female high school students surveyed nationwide in 2005 used marijuana during their lifetime. This is down from 7.6% in 2003 and 38.4% in 2001. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 2005*)
- For 8th-graders, female and male students continued to have similar rates of daily smoking (4%) in 2005. White 8th-graders (5%) continued to smoke at a higher rate than either their Black or Hispanic peers (2% and 3%, respectively). (Childstats.gov, *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*)
- Among youth aged 12 to 17, the rate of current illicit drug use was similar for boys (10.1%) and girls (9.7%). While boys aged 12 to 17 had a higher rate of marijuana use than girls (7.5% vs. 6.2%), the rate for nonmedical use of prescription-type psychotherapeutics was similar for boys and girls (3.1% and 3.6%, respectively). (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2005*)
- In 2005, among youth aged 12 to 17, the percentage of females who were current drinkers (17.2%) was higher than that for males (15.9%). (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2005*)
- In 2005, 23.5% of high school females engaged in episodic heavy drinking (i.e., had more than 5 drinks of alcohol in a row on more than one day) compared to 27.5% of their male counterparts. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 2005*)
- In 2005, among youths aged 12 to 17, current cigarette smoking in 2005 was equally prevalent among females (10.8%) and males (10.7%). The rate for females in this age group declined from 13.6% in 2002 to 10.8% in 2005. The rate for males in this age group declined from 12.3% in 2002 to 10.7% in 2005. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2005*)
- In 2005, the rate of substance dependence or abuse among females aged 12 to 17 was similar to the rate among their male counterparts (8.3% vs. 7.8%). (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2005*)
- In 2005 high school females (13.5%) were more likely than high school males (11.3%) to have used inhalants one or more times during their life (e.g., sniffed glue, breathed the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high). (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- Females generally have had lower rates of heavy drinking; however, this has not been true at 8th grade in the last several years, and at 10th grade, girls overtook boys in 2005 in their 30-day prevalence of alcohol use. And for the last four years, 8th-grade girls have had a higher 30-day prevalence of smoking than boys. (Monitoring the Future, *National Results on Adolescent Drug Use: Overview of Key Findings, 2006*)
- One in four high school females was offered, sold, or given an illicit drug on school property in the past year. (OJJDP, *Juvenile Victims and Offenders: 2006 National Report*)

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Youth experience varying forms and degrees of violence and in different environments. Some experience violence at alarming rates and some less frequently. Some experience violence because of real or perceived characteristics. In whatever form against youth, violence leaves a negative and lasting effect. There is much opportunity for all fields to mitigate the experience and effects that violence, in all its forms, has on youth.

Statistics

- Nationwide, the prevalence of having been in a physical fight was higher among 9th grade female (37.2%) than 10th grade female (27.6%), 11th grade female (25.0%), and 12th grade female (20.3%) students. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- In 2005, 9.2% of students nationwide had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend (i.e., dating violence). Overall, the prevalence of dating violence was higher among black female (12.0%) than white female (8.5%) and Hispanic female (9.0%) high school students. (Centers for Disease Control, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—2005*)
- In 2005, while the overall percentage of students reporting being victims of hate speech is not significantly different for females and males, females were more likely to report being targets of hate-related words based on gender discrimination than were males (3% compared with 1%). However, males were more likely to report being targets of hate-related words based on race discrimination compared with females (5% compared with 4%). (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Victims of Hate Speech*)
- Two-thirds (65%) of LGBT teens report that they have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion. (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, *From Teasing to Torment: A Survey of Students and Teachers, 2005*)
- In 2005, female high school students were more than twice as likely as their male peers to report being physically forced to have intercourse (11% compared with 4%). Eight percent of all students in grades 9 through 12 reported having been raped at some time in their lives. (ChildTrends.org, *Child and Youth Indicators Databank: Adolescents Who Have Ever Been Raped*)
- Female teens aged 12 to 17 are more likely than males to be victims of physical abuse in the home though the opposite is true for children under the age of eight. (ChildTrends Databank: *CrossCurrents: Violence in the Lives of Children, August 2003*)
- By the time they are in high school, one in ten females reports that she has been raped in her lifetime, compared with one in 20 males. (ChildTrends Databank, *CrossCurrents: Violence in the Lives of Children, August 2003*)
- An estimated 1,600 persons under age 18 were murdered in the U.S. in 2002—10% of all persons murdered that year. About one-third (36%) of these juvenile murder victims were female. About 4 in 10 (39%) of these victims were under age 6, 1 in 10 (10%) were ages 6–11, 1 in 10 (8%) were ages 12–14, and 4 in 10 (43%) were ages 15–17. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Victims and Offenders: 2006 National Report*)
- Among kidnap victims under age 6 known to law enforcement, the numbers of male and female victims were essentially equal. For victims ages 12 to 17, the ratio was almost three female victims for each male victim. For victims ages 25–34, the ratio was almost 4 to 1. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Victims and Offenders: 2006 National Report*)
- About two-thirds of female victims ages 15–17 were kidnapped by an acquaintance, and one-quarter by a stranger. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Victims and Offenders: 2006 National Report*)
- Compared to other students their age, girls' playing violent video games differs from boys' playing: 52% of tween females (8 to 12 year-olds) and 38% of teen females (13 to 18 year-olds) never play violent video games versus 11% of tween boys and 10% of teen boys. (Harris Interactive, *Trends and Tudes: Video Gaming: General and Pathological Use, March 2007*)
- One in four girls was involved in physical fights. (OJJDP, *Juvenile Victims and Offenders: 2006 National Report*)
- Half (51.4%) of LGBT students reported having had their property, such as their car, clothing or books stolen or

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deliberately damaged at school in the past year with about a tenth (11.3%) reporting that it happened frequently or often. (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, *The 2005 National School Climate, 2005*)

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RESEARCH SUMMARY: WHAT GIRLS SAY

While the topic of gender and leadership has been widely explored by social scientists and management practitioners, little or no specific in-depth research has been done on how youth, especially girls, view leadership itself. In particular, little is known about how they understand their leadership experiences, their motivations for pursuing these opportunities, or the implications of their current behaviors and attitudes on their future lives. What kind of leadership does this generation of girls aspire to and connect with? What do we need to know in order to support the next generation of girl and women leaders?

Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership presents findings from a national study of almost 4,000 girls and boys on a broad spectrum of issues related to leadership: how they define it; their experiences, failures, and successes with leadership experimentation; their aspirations, hopes, and fears; the effect of gender biases and stereotypes; and predictors of leadership aspiration. From the evidence of this report, girls are clearly saying we need to "change it up" in how we define and think about leadership.

MAJOR FINDINGS

INSIGHT #1

GIRLS ARE REDEFINING LEADERSHIP IN MEANINGFUL TERMS

The conception of leadership in today's culture is too limiting. Even at a young age, girls have well-formed ideas about what it means to be a leader. The top-of-mind definition of leadership is expressed in terms of authority exercised through command and control. However, both girls and boys find this definition of leadership the least appealing or aspirational. **Their preferred definitions of leadership imply personal principles, ethical behavior, and the ability to effect social change.**

The gap between the kind of leadership girls aspire to and the conventional command-and-control definition may help explain some of this ambivalence. Girls are also more likely to be driven toward leadership by altruistic motives, whereas boys are more likely to be motivated by power and money.

- Youth set the benchmark for leadership skills very high. Leadership is highly idealized and perceived to require a wide range of skills and qualities that do not seem attainable. **Only 21% of girls believe they currently have most of the key qualities required to be a good leader.**
- The desire to be a leader among Asian American (59%), African American (53%), and Hispanic girls (50%) is higher in comparison with Caucasian girls (34%).
- Over 90% of girls say they want to or would not mind being leaders.

INSIGHT #2

SELF-CONFIDENCE + SKILLS = NEW GIRL LEADERS

Self-confidence is the strongest driver of leadership aspirations. **Youth who report high self-regard on a number of leadership skills and qualities are more likely to aspire to leadership.**

- **Girls from higher income and diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are more likely to desire leadership.** These girls rate themselves higher on leadership skills and dimensions, are more likely to report having had a leadership experience, and are more likely to think of themselves as leaders. It is these attitudes, self-perceptions, and experiences that drive leadership aspirations in youth, not their race/ethnicity or income.
- The greatest single barrier to leadership seems to be low self-regard about skills and qualities.
- Barriers to leadership are consistent among girls and boys, but **girls experience fears and inhibitions about social acceptance more acutely**, in the form of stress, fear of talking in front of others, aversion to seeming bossy, and peer pressure.
- **External barriers in the general environment still exist for girls and young women.** While most youth (82%) agree that girls and boys are equally good at being leaders, 52% also agree that "girls have to work harder than boys in order to gain positions of leadership." Women are still judged to be better than men at stereotypically "female" things like "taking care of others" and "running a household," while men are judged to be better at things such as "running a state or country" and "running a business."

INSIGHT #3

OPPORTUNITIES + EXPERIENCES + SUPPORT = NEW GIRL LEADERS

Other factors influencing girls' leadership aspirations include family, particularly mothers, and peers—who can play both a negative and a positive role. Participation in organized and informal activities and exposure to leadership opportunities are strongly correlated with leadership aspirations. Yet girls relate that environments in which they can develop leadership skills are scarce. **Notably, youth do not feel they have much power to change things or teach/help others in many environments, which is the kind of leadership they aspire to the most.**

- **Overall, four in six girls (67%) believe they have had some opportunity to be a leader.** The large majority (86%) say their most recent experience being a leader was a positive one. African American and Hispanic girls are more likely than Caucasian girls to report enjoying their experiences as leaders.
- Girls derive greater satisfaction from learning (31% vs. 22%) in leadership experiences; boys derive greater satisfaction from being in charge (26% vs. 16%). Girls and boys equally cite "being able to effect change" as a reason for their positive experiences.

- Girls say their mothers are the most likely to encourage them to be leaders, followed by teachers and fathers. However, 39% of girls report having been discouraged or put down, usually by peers and classmates, when they were trying to lead.
- Youth do not feel they have much power to change things or teach/help others in any environment. When asked to rate environments in which they felt they could effect change, "school" is the highest—at 23%—but "none" gets the same rating. After-school environments are rated significantly lower at 7%.

INSIGHT #4

GIRLS HAVE A RANGE OF LEADERSHIP IDENTITIES

Girls vary widely in terms of their leadership aspirations and self-perceptions and fall into five categories of leadership identity. The categories range from girls (and boys—both sexes fall into exactly the same categories in exactly the same proportions) who think of themselves as leaders and actually want to be leaders to those who do not think of themselves as leaders and do not want to be leaders. A comparison of these groups reveals substantial differences not only among their respective orientations to leadership, but also in relation to their general attitudes, goals, aspirations, and behaviors.

- (36%) **LEADERSHIP VANGUARD:** Youth already think of themselves as leaders and actively desire to be leaders. They have the highest self-confidence, higher focus on academic, personal, and career success, and high social change values.
- (25%) **AMBIVALENT LEADERS:** Youth think of themselves as leaders and would not mind being leaders, although leadership is not expressly a goal for them. They share most of the attributes and behaviors of Vanguard leaders, only to a lesser degree.
- (4%) **HOPEFULS:** Youth want to be leaders but do not think of themselves as leaders. They are not as confident as the Vanguard leaders, or even the Ambivalent leaders.
- (26%) **UNMOTIVATED:** Youth would not mind being leaders but do not think of themselves as leaders. They have relatively low self-confidence and are unmotivated in pursuing leadership opportunities.
- (8%) **REJECTERS:** Youth do not want to be leaders and do not think of themselves as leaders. This group of girls and boys has the lowest self-confidence, feels powerless to change the world, and is more likely to believe that leadership cannot be learned.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Girls today aspire to leadership not in the form in which it most commonly appears in the culture—command and control—but to a model that is purpose-driven and oriented toward social change. As well, the leadership aspirations and experiences of youth are greatly dependent on their perceptions of their own abilities and their opportunities and experiences to exercise leadership.

Opportunities to develop leadership skills are scarce, and youth-developing organizations such as the Girl Scouts need to give youth the opportunity to effect change, which is what they are passionate about. The impact of positive adult role models, especially mothers, and supportive environments cannot be underestimated.

Overall, to be relevant to and successful with girls, a leadership program must address their aspirational or preferred definition of leadership, their need for emotional safety, and their desire for social and personal development. To encourage future girl leaders and support those already interested in leadership:

- **Frame communications about leadership in ways that are appealing to girls.** Understand the types of leaders girls want to become and help them realize that vision. Emphasize the skills and activities associated with the program, not just the end result.
- **Help girls see leadership as attainable.** Girls do not need to have all the skills and qualities they associate with being a leader to actually be one.
- **Work on enhancing girls' self-confidence in their skills and abilities.** Leadership can become a natural by-product of this skill and confidence development.
- **Create opportunities for girls to experience a broad range of leadership activities in a supportive environment.** Make clear that leadership is multi-dimensional and encourage girls to experiment with different roles and types, from social change and political activism to the more traditional, in a supportive environment that allows them to attempt new things and "try leadership on."
- **Understand the barriers to leadership for girls, including the fear of peer ridicule and persistent stereotypes about what it means to be "feminine."** Things like speaking in front of others and not wanting to upset anyone can be prohibitive.
- **Do not treat girls as one homogenous group.** Understand where girls already are in terms of leadership and help guide them forward in the most appropriate way for them.
- **Identify and create opportunities to engender positive leadership aspirations, behaviors, goals, and self-perceptions across environments.** This includes school, home, house of worship, peer group, community organizations, and the Internet, among others.

METHODOLOGY

The study combined qualitative and quantitative research from the Girl Scout Research Institute and Fluent, a New York based research firm. In January of 2007, researchers conducted focus groups and ethnographies with 165 girls, boys, and mothers in four regions across the country. Upon completion of the qualitative research, a nationwide online survey was administered to a national stratified sample of 2,475 girls and 1,514 boys between the ages of 8 and 17 years. The online survey was fielded from June 22, 2007, to June 29, 2007. The margin of error did not exceed 1.5%. The sample was weighted to reflect the U.S. Census representation of racial/ethnic groups among the target-age population.

is the preeminent organization for and leading authority on girls, with 3.6 million girl and adult members. Now in its 96th year, Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

, formed in 2000, is a center for research and public policy information on the healthy development of girls. Its main goal is to elevate the voices of girls on key issues that affect their lives, such as their emotional and physical health and safety. The GSRI originates national projects and initiatives, synthesizes existing research, and conducts outcomes evaluation to support the development of Girl Scout programs and to provide information to educational institutions, not-for-profits, government agencies, public policy organizations, parents seeking ways to support their daughters, and girls themselves. The GSRI includes staff and advisers who have expertise in child development and advisers from academia, industry, government, and not-for-profit organizations.

, located in Washington, D.C., educates representatives of the legislative and executive branches of federal, state, and local government and advocates for public policy issues important to girls and Girl Scouting.

Source: *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership* (2008)