

## Why Girls Only? Making the Case for Girls Incorporated

*In research commissioned in 1999 by Girls Incorporated and conducted by Harris Interactive, more than half of high school girls are very dissatisfied with the role gender stereotypes play in their lives.<sup>5</sup>*

56% of girls – 78% of high school girls – said that, in schools, boys think they have a right to discuss girls' bodies in public.

65% of all girls said girls are expected to spend a lot of their time on housework and taking care of younger children.

75% of girls – 81% of high school girls – said girls are under a lot of pressure to dress the right way.

Nearly twice as many girls as boys (47% compared to 29%) believe that girls and boys are more the same than different.

Girls with the highest scores on quality of life were more likely than girls with low scores to feel that girls have the same abilities as boys – 50% versus 42%.

Of the girls surveyed, those who believe that boys and girls have the same abilities and strengths (82%) are more likely to plan to go to college than are girls who believe they are very different from boys (68%).

### Girls who...

- ✓ Are involved with sports, clubs, or organizations
- ✓ Receive high levels of support from adults
- ✓ Believe that boys and girls are more similar than different
- ✓ Can name three adults who could help with a problem

### Are more likely to...

- ✓ Be satisfied with their bodies
- ✓ Want to go to college
- ✓ Have a high quality of life
- ✓ Overcome the effects of gender stereotypes

*(Girls' Rights Survey — Harris Interactive. 2000.)*

*Does co-ed programming mean equal opportunity? A Community Counts report has found that very few youth development programs are created with girls in mind.<sup>6</sup>*

A higher percentage of young women felt more respected in after-school community-based organizations than they did at school: 85% versus 75%.

Public and philanthropic dollars often focus on the non-school hours of young men, especially African-American boys in urban settings. Girls appear to be afterthoughts as after-school programs “go coed.”

Too many after-school activities for girls involve standing around watching the boys play pool rather than those constructed specifically for and by young women.

It was discovered that a very high level of underservice to girls overall exists, along with too many instances of girls being treated as second-class citizens in coeducational programs.

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## Talking Points (2)

### *For girls to exercise their rights, youth programs must go beyond “add girls and stir.” Findings from a report on the status of programming for girls aged 9-15 in New York City:<sup>1</sup>*

Of 67 agencies that served youth in New York City and participated in the research project, fewer than one-fourth of the total program participants were girls (23%).

In the over 100,000 girls served in the New York City area, approximately 1% were served by girls-only programming.

Although fewer than one-fourth of the total participants were girls, they comprised the majority of participants in after-school programs that encouraged career development, performing arts, and parent-child programs. However, for the sports and recreation programs, girls represented fewer than half the participants.

More than two-thirds of the agency representatives reported that they do not do anything special to recruit girls to their programs.

What works when strategizing ways to create after-school programs specifically for girls?

- ✓ Developing opportunities for girls to meet and interact with female role models.
- ✓ Being conscientious about gender interaction.
- ✓ Listening to what girls have to say about their own lives.
- ✓ Encouraging equal participation in athletics.
- ✓ Fostering a sense of camaraderie and belonging among girls.

At five Girls Inc. sites providing facility-based programs to teens, percentage of young women who:<sup>2</sup>

- |  |     |  |     |
|--|-----|--|-----|
| ✓ Thought adults provided good leadership:           | 86% | ✓ Were actively involved in decision-making: | 66% |
| ✓ Obtained the social support they need:             | 78% | ✓ Felt safe:                                 | 67% |
| ✓ Engaged in challenging and interesting activities: | 63% | ✓ Participated in community service:         | 36% |
| ✓ Felt a sense of belonging:                         | 65% |  |     |

*(Safe Havens: The Contributions of Youth Organizations to Healthy Adolescent Development. 1997.)*

### *In a well-rounded program in the 21st century, wouldn't boys feel free to choose music and girls feel free to choose football?*

The literature indicates that boys and girls are not significantly different from each other in inherent abilities and capacities. The attributable differences appear to be in opportunity and experience.

“We’re all the same” kinds of programs are seemingly based on concepts of equality, but they also ignore discrimination and generations of gender stereotypes. Sound co-ed programming needs to level the playing field for both girls and boys.

Confronting societal bias that values stereotypical male behaviors requires more than simply “putting out the welcome mat” for girls.

*“Teachers treat the guys differently than the girls. It’s almost like they like the girls better, but they respect the guys more. I think maybe because we don’t give them as many problems, they’re glad we’re there, but they seem to expect the guys to think better and be better at things like physics and computers. I don’t think they think guys are more intelligent, but they seem more interested in them when they say things, and they take the girls for granted.”<sup>8</sup>*

— Holly, age 17

*(The Girls Report: What We Know & Need to Know About Growing Up Female. 1998.)*



## Talking Points (3)

*“I think it’s ridiculous that there supposedly is some psychological makeup that makes us (boys and girls) act so differently. I think it’s just the way we’ve been treated. People make more of gender differences than there really are.”<sup>4</sup> — Member, focus group of high school girls.*

### *How do we construct programs for girls, in particular, without reinforcing gender stereotypes?*

Because gender discrimination can be subtle or blatant, we start by being aware of our own and others’ attitudes, expectations, and assumptions about gender.<sup>8</sup>

Girls may be left out of the highest expectations and opportunities in leadership development, math and science, technology preparation, sports performance, and academic and artistic achievement.

Youth-serving organizations differ in the amount of emphasis they place on achieving equity for girls. Only

by paying explicit attention to equity can organizations keep this focus from getting lost.

Girls require and deserve the awareness, attention, and commitment of a wide range of individuals and institutions to promote their healthy development. Girls can benefit from programs and strategies that build on their strengths and encourage them to explore meaningful possibilities for their futures.

*“[Girls Inc.] helped me to find my self-esteem, and be proud of who I am. They welcomed me with open arms and put no limitations on dreams and talent.” — Nancy Taylor, 17*

It may be twice as hard to do quality programming for girls when boys are around. A publication of the United Way asks the question as succinctly as possible: Why girls?<sup>7</sup>

- ✓ While society’s expectations affect both boys and girls, studies show that girls are more disadvantaged by them.
- ✓ Assumptions about the distinct abilities and interests of boys and girls can limit their opportunities.
- ✓ Simply the idea of equity doesn’t always work when girls haven’t had the same opportunities all along. Is offering a girl machine shop activities really the best way to achieve equity?
- ✓ The all-girl option allows girls to plunge into activities without worrying about whether they “belong” or not — or whether they’re more or less skilled than boys.
- ✓ A program is shaped and constrained by the ideas about gender it embodies.
- ✓ Gender-specific programming lets girls focus on their real interests, at their own pace, free from distractions and comparisons.

*“What I find aggravating is when one of my friends or someone I know calls me a “tomboy” just because I like to play basketball. They automatically assume that I hate wearing dresses and that I think ballet is prissy. It stinks that other girls would label someone like that. How aggravating.”<sup>3</sup> — Jessica Bruhn, age 10*

**Girls Inc. reaches out to girls wherever and wherever they are. With programs that are grounded in research and tested in the field, our organization celebrates and empowers girls, and advocates for an equitable world. Girls Inc. continues to pledge to inspire one million girls per year to be...**

**strong**

**smart**

*and*

**bold**



***Girls have the right to programs that help them realize and exercise their rights:***

**Girls have the right**

*to be themselves and to resist gender stereotypes.*

**Media Literacy**

Programs that join with girls in critiquing the shallow images of girls in popular culture.

**Girls have the right**

*to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm.*

**Discovery — A Leadership Program for Girls and Women<sup>SM</sup>**

Programs that put girls ages 9 to 11 together with women as partners, finding one another's strengths.

Programs that celebrate younger sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and foremothers of all cultures and times — girls and women who change the community and the world for the better.

**Girls have the right**

*to take risks, to strive freely, and to take pride in success.*

**Economic Literacy**

Programs that assume girls are risk-takers and want to climb a mountain and earn a black belt and run a city and invest in a promising dotcom, programs that teach girls to yank away from sticky floors and break glass ceilings in a single bound.

**Girls have the right**

*to accept and appreciate their bodies.*

**Friendly PEERsuation<sup>SM</sup>**

Programs that make girls experts on the media hype about drugs and body types and recognize their expertise in communicating to younger kids.

Programs that attack the reasons girls resort to harmful substances, that prepare them to manage stress without self-medicating, go for a *healthy* body, not a thin one.

**Girls have the right**

*to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world.*

**Project BOLD<sup>SM</sup>**

Programs that let girls know they have a right to be safe from predatory relatives in the home, from creeps in the mall, from bullies at school. Programs that give girls the tools to avoid, cope with, and reduce the violence in their lives.

**Girls have the right**

*to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.*

**Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy<sup>SM</sup>**

Programs that tell girls straight stuff about their bodies and why and how to plan a career and get through school. Programs that trust girls with the knowledge and skills to make good decisions.

**Operation SMART<sup>®</sup>**

Programs — and people — who will take girls' curiosity seriously, inspire them to ask questions, assume they are astronaut material, and link them to the opportunities to go into outerspace.



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