



The State of GENDER EQUALITY for U.S. Adolescents

Gender-Based Pressures

In 2018, Plan International USA, an international organization that advances girls' equality and children's rights, commissioned leading non-partisan public opinion research firm, PerryUndem, to conduct an extensive public opinion study of adolescents, ages 10 to 19, on issues and experiences related to gender equality. The goal of the research is to provide a resource for policymakers, media, and others who want to understand how adolescents feel about gender equality and what shapes their views, as well as inform solutions to achieve gender equality in the U.S.

The survey looked at gender-based pressures among girls and boys.

GIRLS

Adolescents are facing many pressures—particularly around getting good grades and focusing on others' emotional and mental needs. Girls, especially older teens, report feeling pressure to manage other people's emotions, be physically attractive, not to brag or be too confident, and get positive feedback on social media.

BOYS

Boys perceive and internalize societal pressures to be tough, physically strong, and for some, ready for violence.

- Thirty-five percent of boys say that society most values strength and toughness in boys. Only two percent say honesty / morality and eight percent say ambition or leadership.
- Seven in 10 boys in the survey (72 percent) say they personally feel pressure from parents, friends, teachers, or society to be physically strong. The strongest correlation with feeling pressure to be physically strong and ready to fight is exposure to boys making sexual comments and sexual jokes about girls.
- Forty-four percent of older boys (14 to 19) feel pressure to be "willing to punch someone if provoked." About one in three younger boys feels the same (35 percent).

One in three boys (33 percent) feels pressure to dominate or be in charge of others. Feeling pressure to dominate others is correlated with:

- Feeling pressure to be physically strong, pressure to punch someone if provoked, and pressure to join in when other boys talk about girls in a sexual way.
- Feeling pressure to hide their feelings when they feel sad or anxious.
- Being around boys frequently making sexual jokes and sexual comments about girls.
- Having friends who have asked girls for sexy or naked pictures.

% GIRLS WHO FEEL "A LOT" OF PRESSURE



Base n = 187 (10 to 13) n = 316 (14 to 19)

GIRLS

Adolescents perceive societal pressures for girls around dealing with emotions. When asked about what society expects girls to do when feeling sad or scared, or feeling angry, respondents said:

What do you think society expects girls to do when they feel sad or scared?



Base n = 259 girls

What do you think society expects girls to do when they feel angry?



Base n = 244 girls

BOYS

When asked about what society expects boys to do when feeling sad or scared, or feeling angry, respondents said:

What do you think society expects boys to do when they feel sad or scared?



Base n = 234 boys

WHAT DO YOU THINK SOCIETY EXPECTS BOYS TO DO WHEN THEY FEEL ANGRY?



Base n = 264 boys

Many boys also face pressures around sex.

- Four in 10 heterosexual boys ages 14 to 19 feel pressure to "hook up with a girl" (40 percent v. 29 percent of heterosexual girls 14 to 19 who feel pressure to "hook up with a boy").
- One in three boys ages 14 to 19 (32 percent) feels pressure to "join in when other boys talk about girls in a sexual way."
- Feeling pressure to join in is most strongly correlated with having male family members who make sexual comments and sexual jokes about women and frequent exposure to boys making sexual comments and sexual jokes about girls.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STUDY AND PLAN'S CAMPAIGN TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE U.S., VISIT PLAN4GIRLS.ORG.

