

December 2, 2009

Girl Scout Study Finds That More Youth Today Say They Would Make Responsible Choices than Predecessors 20 Years Ago

A nationwide survey released today by Girl Scouts of the USA finds that more American teenagers say they would make responsible decisions on a range of issues from lying and cheating to smoking and drinking than young people just a generation ago.

The study, conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI), is nearly identical to one Girl Scouts commissioned in 1989 and a comparison of the two shows a marked shift toward more ethical and responsible beliefs and values and civic involvement among teens and tweens.

Nearly two out of three young people (62 percent) surveyed in 2009, for example, say they would not cheat on a test compared to about half in 1989. Fifty-eight percent say they would refuse an alcoholic drink if offered one at a party. That's compared to fewer than half (46 percent) in 1989. And only 18 percent say they believe smoking is acceptable if a person finds it enjoyable. In 1989, more than a quarter of those surveyed thought smoking was acceptable.

The survey, *Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today*, involved a nationwide survey of 3,263 girls and boys from the third through twelfth grades that queried them on issues ranging from ethics and diversity to civic involvement and peer pressure. The study was conducted with Harris Interactive (formerly Louis Harris Inc., the same firm that worked on the 1989 study.)

The study also finds that that one third of teenagers say they intend to wait until they are married to have sex compared to less than a quarter (24 percent) in 1989. And two decades later, youth are more accepting of gay relationships. Fifty-nine percent of teenagers agree with the statement, "Gay and lesbian relationships are OK, if that is a person's choice." Only 31 percent agreed in 1989.

"There's clearly a generational change taking place," said Kimberlee Salmond, senior researcher at GSRI and lead author of the study. "These young people strongly value diversity,

acceptance and civic involvement, and almost across the board they're more committed to these values than were their predecessors 20 years ago.”

The study also surveyed young people about issues that have become prominent with the advent of new media and technology. Only six percent say they would engage in cyberbullying by forwarding an embarrassing picture of a classmate to their friends. Some 40 percent would take the extra step of telling the originator of the e-mail what he or she did was wrong.

In addition, the data show that youth today value diversity. Among 7th- to 12th-graders, nearly six in 10 (59 percent) say that being around people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds is important to them. This appears to be particularly important to girls (63 percent versus 55 percent of boys) and youth from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds. (This question was not asked in 1989.)

And young people today appear to have a stronger sense of civic engagement. Compared to 20 years ago, youth today are more likely to say they intend to vote in the future (84 percent vs. 77 percent), as well as give to charity (76 percent vs. 63 percent). Some 79 percent say they will volunteer in their communities.

In addition, 71 percent say their religious beliefs are important to them, and this group is not as likely as less religious or nonreligious young people to say they would lie, cheat, drink and have sex.

The study also uncovered differences among boys and girls. Among teenagers, girls are less likely than boys to say they would have sex (18 percent vs. 38 percent) or advise an abortion (6 percent vs. 12 percent), and are more likely to give to charity (80 percent vs. 72 percent) and volunteer in their community (81 percent vs. 77 percent.)

Methodology

Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today was conducted among a national sample of 3,263 students—boys and girls in grades 3 through 12 both in and out of Girl Scouting—using online and school-based techniques between October 2, 2008, and January

23, 2009. The data were weighted to key demographic variables to align with the national population of U.S. students in this age group.

About Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois

Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois (GSNI) was established on October 1, 2009, with the joining together of four area Girl Scout councils; Girl Scouts - Fox Valley Council (Sugar Grove), Girl Scouts - Green Hills Council (Freeport), Girl Scouts - Rock River Valley Council (Rockford), and Girl Scouts - Sybaquay Council (Elgin). GSNI helps build the courage, confidence, and character of over 22,000 girls served in 16 counties across northern Illinois, including Boone, Carroll, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Jo Daviess, Kane, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Winnebago, and Whiteside counties. Visit us online at www.girlscoutsni.org.

About Girl Scouts of the USA

Founded in 1912, Girl Scouts of the USA is the preeminent leadership development organization for girls with 3.3 million girl and adult members worldwide. Girl Scouting is the leading authority on girls' healthy development, and builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place. The organization serves girls from every corner of the United States and its territories. Girls Scouts of the USA also serves American girls and their classmates attending American or international schools overseas in 90 countries. For more information on how to join, volunteer, reconnect or donate to Girl Scouts, call (800) GSUSA 4 U (800-478-7248) or visit www.girlscouts.org.

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