

Girls... in their own words

Children's Express reporters talk candidly about what it means to be a girl in the 21st Century.

Girls like Barbie, playing with dolls and giggling with their girlfriends - well at least that's what we're told. But in reality there's far more to "being a girl". Five young reporters from Children's Express, the UK's only news agency for young people, talk candidly about what it means to be a girl in the 21st Century.

Annabel McLeod, 16

I feel like I have to prove that I'm strong enough to be able to go out and look after myself

When girls are younger we're expected to like Barbie and dolls. So from the beginning we are stereotyped to be a certain way or to wear certain clothes. I go to a girls school and even though we wear a uniform, a lot of girls still make sure they wear nice shoes or make sure their hair and make-up is nice because they want to impress other girls around them. There is a lot of competition amongst us. To me, being a girl means spending a lot of time in a group and talking about things. Girls seem to be more able to sort out situations by being supportive and sharing things with each other. I think they are able to sort out situations that arise amongst their friends better than boys do. Mind you, there is still a lot of bitchiness amongst girls. Like they might compliment each other but not really mean it because they really just want a compliment in return. I don't think boys judge as much. They find it much easier to just start up a conversation, whereas a girl would look at the person and judge their personality by what they're wearing and then decide whether to talk to them or not.

I think of my Mum as a role model and she has influenced me in many ways but we are also very different, as we come from two different cultures - I'm from London and she's from Africa. She's got different views about manners and the way girls should behave and sometimes I don't conform to her ideals. Traditions are changing though. In the past a man was supposed to be the provider and to protect the woman. Now women have realised that they're stronger, that they're not vulnerable and don't need protecting.

Jade Burnett, 14

I attend an all girls school and because of that I feel that my relationship with boys is not as strong as it could be. I'm surrounded by girls all day long and my Dad's not around so often, so I don't have a lot of contact with men and therefore don't really have many friends that aren't girls. I'm worried that later on in my teens when I have to go to college, I won't be as comfortable around boys because of this. Even though boys are alien to us in school, we still enjoy talking about them. In fact sometimes it seems that's all we talk about. But to be honest I think there are a lot more important things going on in my life, such as my relationships with friends and families and my love of music.

I think that there are more pressures on young people today. Our problems are more serious and so we need to talk more to our friends rather than bottling things up. When I am low I listen to loud music and talk to other people in a similar position to me but sometimes just being alone helps because I can reflect and think about my problem. I like listening to rock music because it helps me to express what I'm feeling. If I was seriously upset, depending on the situation, I would visit a counsellor. I wouldn't be ashamed or feel uncomfortable because I know it would help me. At school there is support for me through mentors and counsellors but you can't just drop in to get help, you have to be seriously disruptive and obnoxious in lessons. I think that the mentors and school counsellors should be available to everyone who needs it.

Bethany Comdron, 16

I'd rather be a girl than a boy. I'm generalising a bit but I think boys mask over who they really are just to impress friends. Whereas girls are more individual and don't just follow the crowd to please others. Girls don't have a problem with comforting their friends but if a boy was seen doing this, other boys would jump to conclusions and tease him for being gay.

But being a girl is not easy because there's a lot of pressure on us to look good. Girls judge each other more based on appearance. I go to an all girls school and most of time we all look the same because we wear uniforms but when it comes to non-uniform days everyone comes in showing off their best clothes. It's like girls are making a statement about themselves through their clothing. They're giving off strong messages about who they are and what they're into. Boys appear to be a lot more confident than girls. They get into fights a lot more than girls. I've never been in a fight because I'm far too timid and afraid to confront people. I run away from conflict.

Gabriella Gay, 17

Being a girl means that you have to work harder for everything. Girls are often seen as vulnerable and less able than boys, so you have to prove yourself. My family is from Trinidad and Tobago and although I live in the UK I've spent quite a bit of time there. The way girls are treated in this country is very different to the way we're treated in the Caribbean. I find it unfair that I have to stay inside at night while boys are allowed to go out. I feel like I have to prove that I'm strong enough to be able to go out and look after myself.

In Britain it seems to me that women have taken on more male traits. There's a real "ladette" culture amongst young women. They drink as much as men, smoke as much as men and are loud. Nowadays girls and women are more into going out "on the pull" and they judge boys and men by their appearances, whereas in the past it seemed that it was men who were more hung up on the way women looked. I also think women are more sexually promiscuous than ever before. At work a lot of women have to be more aggressive in order to succeed. I think people often think of women who want to do well at work in a bad light but that is unfair because all they're trying to do is succeed in what still seems like a man's world. I feel like there's quite a bit of pressure on me to be able to balance still being seen as a "girl" but also being strong without acting masculine.

Sonti Ramirez, 12

There is a lot of competition amongst girls about the way we look. In my class there are a few really shallow girls who I avoid because all they really care about is looking good. I think there's also lots of falseness and "bitchiness" amongst girls, which can sometimes lead to a "showdown". Not necessarily a physical fight but lots of arguing.

But having said that, I think girls place a lot of importance on loyalty to their friends. Sometimes you can get jealous if you see friends getting close to other girls. I've experienced it from both sides - being jealous and having friends who get jealous. This can cause lots of arguments. I remember in Primary School once two girls had a fight and one of them got all the other girls in the class to ignore the other all day. She got really upset and was crying in the toilet.

About the team

This story was produced by Gabriella Gay 17, Annabel McLeod 16, Jade Burnett 14, Bethany Comdron 16, and Sonti Ramirez 12. It was published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy: Counselling in Education Journal.

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