

# In Their Words: How children are affected by gender issues

By National Geographic, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.11.18

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Image 1. Transgender girls Josefa, age 13, (left), and Selenna, age 8, pose for a picture as they twirl in traditional Chilean dance costumes before an event marking Transgender Children Day in Santiago, Chile, August 19, 2017. Chile's government has been pushing for greater acceptance of transgender children. Photo by: Esteban Felix for AP

If you want to know how gender affects a child, ask a 9-year-old. People once thought of gender as simply being a boy or a girl. But, gender is also how a society expects boys and girls to behave, and how people think of themselves. It is sometimes different from being born male or female.

At 9, a girl in Kenya already knows that her parents will marry her off to someone. At 9, a boy in India knows his friends will pressure him to bother women on the street.

Nine-year-olds all over the world have big dreams for their future. Most boys don't think their gender will limit them, but many girls do.

National Geographic decided to ask kids how they felt. We went to 80 homes on four continents. Many kids said that it can be hard to fit into their communities. They feel like they have to act the way people expect a boy or girl to act. It makes them frustrated, confused and lonely. But some kids are able to act like themselves. They are doing much better.

What's the best thing about being a girl?



"Everything about being a girl is good!" said Avery Jackson. She is from Kansas City, Missouri.

### **What's the worst thing about being a girl or boy?**

It's when people say, "That stuff isn't girl stuff — it's boy stuff," said Avery. She spent the first four years of her life as a boy, and was miserable. In 2012, she started living as a transgender girl. Transgender people have a different gender from what is on their birth certificate. For example, a person might be born as a boy, but feel like she is really a girl.

In India, Sunny Bhope had something to say about being a boy. His friends pressure him to bother women in public. That is the worst thing about being a boy, he said.

### **How might your life be different if you were a girl instead of a boy or a boy instead of a girl?**

Lev Hershberg is from Israel. He said that if he was a girl, he "wouldn't like computers." Shimon Perel, who is also Israeli, said if he was a girl he could play with a jump rope.

Pooja Pawara from India said she would ride a scooter if she was a boy.

Yan Zhu, who is Chinese, would swim in a river that her grandmother says is too cold for girls.

Eriah Big Crow is an Oglala Lakota Native American who lives on a reservation in South Dakota. She said that there's nothing that she can't do because boys and girls are "exactly the same."

Unfortunately, that is not quite true yet. Claudia Cappa works for UNICEF. UNICEF is a group that cares for children around the world. Cappa said that more girls under the age of 10 are going to school than before. But there are still many more boys than girls in high school. Many girls around the world are also getting married as teenagers.

### **What do you want to be when you grow up?**

Lokamu Lopulmoe lives in Kenya. She said that, when she gets married, her husband may beat her.

About 300 miles away, Chanelle Wangari Mwangi lives in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. She lives in a richer community than Lokamu's, and her ideas for the future are very different. She wants to be a pro golfer and help the needy.

In China, Yunshu Sang wants to be a police officer, but she said that "most police are men, so I can't."

In Pennsylvania, 9-year-old Hilde Lysiak wants to be a journalist when she grows up. She thinks the police would give a boy reporter more information, though.

**What is something that makes you sad?**

Rania Singla, who lives in the city of Mumbai in India, feels sad when her little brother hits her.

Lamia al Najjar lives in the Gaza Strip in the Middle East. She is sad because there was fighting in her area and her home was destroyed.

**What makes you most happy?**

For most kids, the answer is family, god, food, soccer and friends.

Bede Sheppard works at Human Rights Watch, which works to get people more rights around the world. Kids with the hardest lives can be the kindest and most giving, Sheppard said.

Lopeyok Kagete herds animals in Kenya, and dreams of giving away money and food for people to eat.

Sunny Bhope and his family live in a single room in India. But he's thinking about helping homeless people find a place to live.

**If you could change something in your life or in the world, what would it be?**

Clara Fraga, who lives in Brazil, would make thieves "good, so that they wouldn't steal." Abby Haas would kick the "bad guys" off her South Dakota Native American reservation. Fang Wang of China would change "what it's like when I'm lonely."

If Avery could change the world, there would be "no bullying, because that's just bad." Most kids around the world share that dream.

**Quiz**

- 1 Read the fourth paragraph of the article.

*National Geographic decided to ask kids how they felt. We went to 80 homes on four continents. Many kids said that it can be hard to fit into their communities. They feel like they have to act the way people expect a boy or girl to act. It makes them frustrated, confused and lonely. But some kids are able to act like themselves. They are doing much better.*

Which sentence explains WHY many kids around the world feel it can be difficult to fit into their communities?

- (A) National Geographic decided to ask kids how they felt.
  - (B) Many kids said that it can be hard to fit into their communities.
  - (C) They feel like they have to act the way people expect a boy or girl to act.
  - (D) But some kids are able to act like themselves.
- 2 Read the sentence below from the section "How might your life be different if you were a girl instead of a boy or a boy instead of a girl?"

*Pooja Pawara from India said she would ride a scooter if she was a boy.*

Which sentence from the section also shows that some girls think their lives would be different if they were boys instead of girls?

- (A) He said that if he was a girl, he "wouldn't like computers."
- (B) Shimon Perel, who is also Israeli, said if he was a girl he could play with a jump rope.
- (C) Yan Zhu, who is Chinese, would swim in a river that her grandmother says is too cold for girls.
- (D) She said that there's nothing that she can't do because boys and girls are "exactly the same."

3 Read the section "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Which answer choice BEST describes the structure of the section?

- (A) comparison
- (B) cause and effect
- (C) problem and solution
- (D) events in order

4 The overall structure of this article is question and answer.

Why do you think the author organized the article this way?

- (A) to show that girls liked answering some questions and boys liked answering other questions
- (B) to show that boys were asked different questions and had different answers than girls
- (C) to show that girls were always asked the questions first and then boys were asked the questions
- (D) to show that boys and girls were mostly asked the same questions and had many different opinions