



**Idaho  
Coalition**

Against Sexual &  
Domestic Violence

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**May the odds be ever in your favor  
Unless you are a teenager**

(BOISE, IDAHO) – Start Strong Idaho and the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships, projects of the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence, conducted a hi-tech interactive survey at the midnight premiere of *The Hunger Games*. Boise area teen activists asked over three hundred 11-to 18 year olds about gender equality and the messages in the record-breaking movie *The Hunger Games*, which features Katniss, a strong, capable 16-year old female character as well as Peeta, a strong teenage male character with traditionally feminine characteristics of sensitivity, emotional dependence, and self-sacrifice. Although the movie provides excellent messages around gender equality, the survey provided some alarming results.

“We conducted this survey because young people were telling us that Katniss was the strongest female character they had ever seen in popular culture,” said Kelly Miller, Executive Director, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence. “*The Hunger Games* has so many characters that dispel gender stereotypes at every turn. Katniss is Gale’s hunting partner, and she rescues Peeta, while Peeta shows us that you do not have to be aggressive to be a strong male character.”

“When asked if they experience gender equality in their own life, 78% of 11 to 12 year olds experienced gender equality most or all of the time,” said Dr. Lisa Growette Bostaph, Associate Professor of criminal justice at Boise State University and advisor to Start Strong Idaho. “It is distressing that there is a significant difference across age groups when it comes to teens experiencing gender equality with only 54% of 13- to 14 year olds and 59% of 15-to- 16 year olds experiencing gender equality in their own lives most or all of the time. Even older adolescents ages 17-to 18 only experience gender equality 62% of the time.”

Even though almost 40% of the teens surveyed never experience gender equality in their own life, 69% of the young people surveyed thought that gender equality was the most important message in *The Hunger Games* – how Katniss, Peeta, and Gale showed different but equally good ways to be strong, how Katniss makes her own choices, and how gender equality changes everything.

The survey also found that 11-to 18 year olds believe that society values couples more than people as individuals - 89% said the gamemakers and sponsors in *The Hunger Games* valued Katniss and Peeta more as a couple than individuals; 69% said media sends messages that

individuals are more valued if they are in a relationship; and 73% said teens are pressured in to be in a relationship to have more value.

“It was troubling that 69% of 13- to 14 year olds and 86% of 15 to 16 year olds said they were pressured to be in a relationship to have more value,” said Kelly Miller. “Parents need to connect with their pre-teens and teens, and talk about healthy relationships based on individuality, respect, and equality. No one should believe they have more value as a human being simply because they have a boyfriend or girlfriend.”

“After seeing these results, we are going to respond by sending a brief gender equality and relationships intervention activity to middle and high school teachers as a discussion aide within classrooms and at home,” said Brandy Sutherland, Program Manager of the Center for Healthy Teen Relationships, Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence.

Promotion of healthy relationships rooted in gender equality prevents unhealthy or abusive relationships because it teaches adolescents their value as individuals and the skills they need to negotiate relationship issues, including responding to pressure to be in a relationship and to participate in risk behaviors. Melissa Ruth, Licensed Professional Counselor and Program Manager for Start Strong Idaho, encourages parents to start relating before teens start dating, and to model healthy relationships in their own lives. “Even when you think they aren’t watching or listening, they are. And as parents, we need to listen too.”

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### **About the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence**

The Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence (Idaho Coalition) engages voices to create change in the prevention, intervention, and response to domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual assault. Start Strong Idaho and Center for Healthy Teen Relationships are collaboration of the Idaho Coalition, Idaho Dept. of Education, St. Luke’s, domestic and sexual violence programs, and allies to engage and educate middle and high school students, parents/caregivers and other adults on the importance of building the skills for healthy teen relationships as way to reduce adolescent relationship abuse. [www.lovewhatsreal.com](http://www.lovewhatsreal.com)

### **Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships**

*Start Strong: Building Healthy Relationships* is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in collaboration with the Futures Without Violence. *Start Strong* is the largest initiative ever funded to prevent teen dating violence and abuse by teaching 11- to 14-year-olds about healthy relationships. *Start Strong* uses a multifaceted approach to promote healthy relationship behaviors among young adolescents in order to stop relationship violence before it starts. For more information on *Start Strong: Building Healthy Relationships*, visit [www.startstrongteens.org](http://www.startstrongteens.org)