Over the past four decades, activists, health professionals, university researchers, community organisations, socially minded businesses, and politicians have been campaigning for body image to be recognised as a pressing public health, social justice, and gender issue for girls and women around the world.

In 1978, world-renowned psychotherapist and activist Susie Orbach published the seminal text ‘Fat is a Feminist Issue’, in which she highlighted how women’s bodies are a frequent forum for society’s battles around gender, beauty, and health.

Researchers recognised in 1984 that it had become the norm for women to be dissatisfied with their bodies and coined this trend a ‘normative discontent’1. The British Medical Association hosted a body image summit in 2000 and called for more responsible media portrayals to address the cult of ‘bodily perfection’. In 2004, an international scientific peer-review journal ‘Body Image’ was created to publish the burgeoning academic research in this area.

In 2004, the Dove Self-Esteem Project was founded to deliver body image education to girls globally. The Australian Government launched a national body image strategy in 2009. Israel passed legislation in 2012 to address pervasive beauty pressures in advertising and fashion. Since 2015, the World Association for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts has advocated at the United Nations every year for body image to be addressed as a global issue affecting girls’ empowerment.

The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report demonstrates that despite these valiant efforts we still have an enormous amount of work to do.

The findings of this study, which surveyed 5,165 girls aged 10-17 in 14 countries using a mixture of academic and novel measures, show that body image remains a global issue for girls.

We still live in a world where girls and women are held back in life by pressures to conform to narrowly defined appearance ideals if they want to be perceived as not only beautiful, but also as worthy of an opinion, quality education, supportive relationships, and a seat in the boardroom or parliament.

The report shows that 6 in 10 girls globally believe that for girls to do well they have to look a certain way. Concurrently, 7 in 10 girls wish the media did not judge females on their looks alone, but on what they do and say instead.

Make no mistake; these widespread concerns about body image and appearance are not benign.

This report demonstrates a raft of real social and health consequences. 7 in 10 girls with low body esteem fail to assert themselves or ask for help in school because they do not feel confident about the way they look; 8 in 10 girls with low body esteem have put their health at risk, for example by not attending a doctor’s appointment; and 5 in 10 girls with low body esteem have stopped eating, binged, or skipped meals because they don’t feel good about the way they look.

The findings are supported by decades of academic research showing that body image concerns affect key areas of girls’ lives, including their health, education, work, and relationships.

Girls who experience body dissatisfaction are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, thoughts about suicide, drug and alcohol misuse, disordered eating, and engage in risky sexual behaviours. Speaking to the pressures for girls to conform to beauty ideals often characterised by thinness, girls in countries as far-flung as China, the United States, and Finland who think they are overweight, irrespective of their actual body weight, achieve poorer grades at school.

Importantly, the findings of this report must be considered in the context of today’s political, cultural, and social climate.
A climate in which women are still fighting for the right to make decisions about their bodies and their healthcare. A world in which it is common, socially acceptable, and legal to discriminate based on body weight and size. Societies in which women in positions of power – even those running for, or holding positions in, the highest political offices – are frequently critiqued in media commentary because of their hair styles and sartorial choices. A globalised economy in which women are subjected to pervasive marketing pressures to conform to homogeneous beauty standards. A climate in which women are abused if they don’t conform to traditional gender norms of femininity.

There is an urgent need for conversations, research, advocacy, and movements around body image to consider and acknowledge how it intersects with other social justice issues relating to able-ism, race, gender non-conformity, sexuality, and social class. We need to use the findings of this report and other research to spark conversation and action that pushes for social change.

Fortunately, there are nuggets of hope within this report. Girls are demanding change and appearance pressures are not defeating them. 81% of girls with high body esteem say they are proud to be girls. Social media, while in some instances can be a driver of body image concerns, also offers a channel for girls to take charge, to diversify the conversation and media landscape, and to showcase their advancements in science, technology, arts, business, and human rights. Just look at #BoPo #NotBuyingIt, #FreeBeingMe, #BlackGirlMagic, #LoseHateNotWeight, #EverydaySexism, #ThisGirlCan, #MyBeautyMySay and #IAmANastyWomanBecause.

The resurgence of feminism in contemporary mainstream culture in recent years – whether it be via international women’s marches, intersectional conversations on blogs and podcasts, hashtag campaigns, new feminist manifestos, or t-shirts emblazoned with ‘The Future is Female’ – shows women and girls are galvanised and persisting in their calls for social change. When diving into the findings of this report, let us reflect on the voices of girls around the world who are telling us that we must continue to pressurise governments, businesses, and communities to address the issue of low body confidence.

The evidence is clear that none of us should remain quiet. There is an urgent and ongoing need to work towards a society in which we value diversity in appearance and promote body acceptance.

As singer-songwriter MILCK sung in her Women’s March anthem this year, “I can’t keep quiet”.


6. e.g., Appearance Matters: The Podcast episode on feminism and body image https://soundcloud.com/appearance-matters/episode-16-feminism-and-body-image

7. e.g., Ngozi Adichie, C. (2015). Why we should all be feminists. Penguin Random House
Foreword

Jess Weiner
Cultural Expert and Adjunct Professor, University of Southern California, Annenberg School of Journalism

In the two decades that I’ve spent educating and studying the cultural lives of girls, I’ve found that, regardless of their cultural context, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to the crippling effects of appearance-related anxiety.

A significant global amplifier in the spread of this anxiety are the media images they consume and create every day. Compounded with the pressure to curate and promote an idealistic online persona in which all body flaws are filtered out, and fears and insecurities are carefully hidden, it’s no surprise that questions surrounding body esteem can be confusing and overwhelming.

It’s also unsurprising that overall anxiety levels in adolescents are at an all-time high. One of the most significant findings presented in the 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report outlines how “anxiety cliffs” – or pressure points in the lives of young women, often initially driven by appearance-related anxiety that morphs into general anxiety – can have detrimental long-term effects on the overall happiness of girls globally.

Of course, in identifying these pressure points, the report also serves as a kind of roadmap for the interventions needed to counter their harmful effects. Because, as studies like Dove’s have validated all over the world, the consequences of low body confidence, and thus the level of urgency needed to address them, is growing.

The report shows that more than half (54%) of all girls globally do not have high body esteem, and this can have a lasting impact on their overall confidence and life satisfaction.

And the problem doesn’t stop there – according to the National Institute of Mental Health, 30% of American teen girls have had an anxiety disorder, compared to 20% of American teen boys. High anxiety levels are contributing to more serious diagnoses in China as well, with 1.2 million young people aged 15 to 24 having depressive disorders. And these anxieties take hold early: a recent study in the UK revealed that “36% of girls aged 7 to 10 say they feel their most important trait is how they look, while 25% say they feel the need to be “perfect.”

For parents, educators, and mentors, these numbers should be alarming.

And yet, these numbers don’t necessarily tell the full story of the state of affairs for girls today.

While it’s true that media in general and social media in particular can be a relentless driver of unobtainable standards, compounded further by the ever-constant threat of bullying, social networks can also serve as positive platforms for self-expression.

Girls around the world, especially the digital natives of Generation Z, are taking back these platforms to cultivate communities of like-minded individuals that support and uplift their choices and experiences.

This generation of girls are inherently “Yes, And.” They are multidimensional and refuse to be defined by only a single attribute or interest. They like sparkles and science. They enjoy fashion and football And, perhaps a credit to Dove’s efforts in the space to date, girls today are much more savvy to what the media is pushing – 7 in 10 girls surveyed in this study are aware that the images they consume in media are digitally altered, while about the same number of girls (69%) wish the media did a better job portraying a diverse range of women.

Girls worldwide are harnessing the power of social media and revolutionizing the conversation whether we are a part of it or not. And their action and activism are not limited to just a digital existence. Girls worldwide are starting body esteem and self-confidence clubs in their classrooms and communities. They are organizing speaking events, writing plays, and using spoken word to creatively tackle the pressures they are facing in their lives. Girls are democratizing the beauty narrative by flooding the spaces (both IRL - In Real Life - and online) with their diverse stories and images. When the narrative is in their hands, they are the subject of their own stories and not the object of someone else’s.
However, not all girls are equipped with the tools necessary to maintain self-worth in the face of the onslaught of negativity that our popular culture and the images it breeds promote. Internet trolls can be relentless and cyberbullying is a real and dangerous problem globally. As of survey findings released this year, half of teens and young adults between the ages of 12 and 20 have reported being bullied4.

It is important we continue to support this generation of girls in dissecting and dismantling social norms and navigating the pressures of growing up in today’s technological landscape. Because, as this study shows, resilience to the effects of detrimental images and messages varies significantly depending on the degree of body esteem a girl brings to the table; for example, 65% of girls with low body esteem feel worse about themselves when they look at images of beautiful girls in magazines, compared to just 16% for those with high body esteem. And the younger a girl is, the fewer tools she has to fight off those messages and build that resilience.

The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report provides important insight into how girls aged 10-17 view the roles that beauty and confidence play in their lives.

This study further clarifies the need for proactive intervention during crucial moments in the lives of girls as they transition from childhood to young adulthood to prevent the toxic effects of anxiety and low confidence. It is an intervention that can and must be as multidimensional as the girls it’s trying to reach, running the gamut from in-person educational programming to online community building, to helping to change the very images girls are forced to consume on a daily basis.

The Dove Self-Esteem Project has already proven what one hour of specialized curriculum programming can do to start powerful conversations around body esteem. This new study will allow us to refine the tools girls need to stunt negative behaviours and attitudes before they become fixed.

It’s important to note that this study shows us most girls begin their adolescent journeys full of optimism and positivity. In fact, the report reveals the majority of girls think that all girls inherently have something about them that is beautiful.

With continued engagement, education and advocacy, we can help give them the tools to continue feeling that way.
Introduction

Dove believes beauty should be a source of confidence and pleasure for women and girls, rather than a source of anxiety or a barrier to success.

For more than a decade, we have been driving awareness of the issues around beauty and confidence through our ‘real beauty’ campaigns, and through the work of the Dove Self-Esteem Project.

With this latest, detailed look at the experiences of girls around the globe, Dove renews its commitment to helping them navigate the pressures, complexities and challenges around their own appearance and body confidence, and to help them build resilience to these pressures.

By continuing to highlight these issues and by offering practical, action-led, evidence-based advice and tools to young people, we believe we can lower anxiety and build body esteem – so girls of all ages live happier, successful and more self-determined lives.
Following the impact of the *Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report* in 2016, a need was identified for a detailed study around the lives and attitudes of girls around the world.

The 2016 Dove study revealed that the appearance and body image pressures, anxieties and behaviours impacting the lives of women and girls often begin in early adolescence, supporting findings from previous studies\(^1,2\).

Tackling body image issues at an early age is an essential step towards helping women and girls live more fulfilling, successful and empowered lives.

This latest study from Dove represents a significant step towards a more nuanced understanding of body image anxieties from a global perspective – and the mechanisms that drive them.

Focusing exclusively on the lives of girls around the world, the *2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report* examines the relationship between body esteem, confidence and life satisfaction.

To achieve the necessary depth of insight required, cross-cultural data collected for the 2016 global survey was segmented by age into two groups:

- **younger girls**, aged 10–13
- **older girls**, aged 14–17

This enabled researchers to assess the evolution of the key pressures as girls mature from childhood, through adolescence and into womanhood.

To help with the development of detailed cross-cultural insights, the study explored behaviours and attitudes across four distinct cultural types found around the globe:

- Traditionalists;
- Dualists;
- Ritualists; and
- Modernists.

(Detailed explanations of these cultural typologies can be found in Appendix A.)

Moving the research beyond ethnicity, age, religion, socio-economic background and education towards a more cross-cultural understanding helped counter the effects of Western bias, as it allowed us to create global classifications due to the size and significance of the global data set. Much of the existing research in the field is overshadowed by the issue of Western bias.

For the first time, we can reveal previously hidden truths about the importance of body esteem as a key factor in determining opportunities and life satisfaction for girls around the world.

The study concludes by highlighting the need for proactive intervention at critical points in a girl’s development to help prevent anxieties developing around low body confidence in their appearance as they grow and mature.

---


The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report was produced by Edelman Intelligence, a specialist applied research company.

We spoke to a total of 5,165 girls aged 10 to 17 in India, USA, UK, Brazil, China, Japan, Turkey, Canada, Germany, Russia, Mexico, South Africa, Australia and Indonesia. All respondents answered a 15 minute survey about their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. The sample was representative of the general population of girls within each country in terms of ethnic, socio-economic, cultural beliefs and social status.

All surveys were conducted in local languages and dialects, and the methodology was consistent with the level of national online penetration required to avoid sampling bias. In South Africa and India, face-to-face interviewing took place to avoid this sampling bias due to lower online market penetration.

The study also utilises driver (contributor) analysis, as well as further analysis of specific statements and factors through gamma and significance tests. Significant relationships were tested to help define and understand any correlations and direct relationships to factors such as body esteem.

Responses from the Indonesian girls in the report were gathered in 2017 – after the initial global research was conducted. Indonesia was identified as an important country that should be included in the study to help develop a more global picture. For the purpose of this report their inclusion in these analyses was considered important although this country’s data was not part of the driver (contributor) analysis or the gamma and significance tests on relationships.

The Academic Scales

For the 2016 global study, three standardized, scientifically developed scales – respected by academics, key opinion formers and institutions – were used to screen girls on their levels of self-esteem, body esteem and body appreciation. Below are the three scales used in the study:

- The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (author: Dr. Morris Rosenberg)
- The Mendelson Body Esteem Scale for Adults and Adolescents (author: Drs B. Mendelson, M. Mendelson, D. White)
- The Body Appreciation Scale (BAS-2) (author: Drs T. Tylka, N. Wood-Barcalow).

These scales have been tried and tested in the UK, US, Australia, Japan and Brazil, but not in all the countries included in the study so some of these scales are being used for the first time in some countries.

For this report, analysis is focused on the Mendelson Body Esteem Scale to help uncover how low or high body esteem was driving other variables in girls’ lives such as overall happiness and life satisfaction. Designed to help analyse the relationship between body esteem, happiness, satisfaction and confidence, the scale is widely respected and adopted by both psychologists and academics due to its high overall validity and reliability in the field.

Comprising 18 statements (appearance and weight subscales), the scale explores the way respondents feel about their bodies and appearance, including their satisfaction and anxieties. The scale highlights how these emotions differ between girls with high, medium and low body esteem.

The Relationship between Mendelson and Beauty Confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all confident in my own beauty</th>
<th>Not very confident in my own beauty</th>
<th>Neither confident nor unconfident in my own beauty</th>
<th>Somewhat confident in my own beauty</th>
<th>Very confident in my own beauty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low body esteem</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium body esteem</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High body esteem</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a strong relationship between girls’ level of body esteem and how confident they feel in their own beauty: all girls 10-17 years old

65% of girls with low body esteem are not confident in their own beauty

88% of girls with high body esteem are confident in their own beauty
Why Body Esteem Matters

The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report set out to explore new insights in beauty research: the link between body esteem and girls’ satisfaction with their lives and the world around them.

While the research affirms the powerful relationship between social and cultural beauty pressures and body esteem, it has also surfaced significant new insights into the complexity of that relationship.

For the past 7 years, Dove has specifically asked girls how confident they are in their own beauty. The current study has taken those principles and pushed it a step further. For the first time, rather than explicitly asking girls if they are confident in their own beauty, the Mendelson Body Esteem scale has been used to create an accurate measure of a girl’s level of body esteem.

The findings of the 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report reveal a powerful correlation between levels of body esteem and explicitly stated levels of beauty confidence and life satisfaction. Higher levels of body esteem are associated with increased levels of beauty confidence and life satisfaction. Similarly, the study found those with low body esteem reported significantly diminished levels of overall beauty confidence.

It was an important step in the research to understand if girls who state they are confident in their own beauty actually score high on the Mendelson Body Esteem Scale, as a key consideration from previous research was that girls might say they are confident in their beauty, when in fact we know this is not the case and there is a self-report bias. The relationship between body esteem and beauty confidence remains – for the most part – consistent, with a few exceptions:

- 56% of all girls with medium body esteem report feeling confident in their own beauty.
- 2 in 10 of all girls with low body esteem still report feeling confident in their own beauty.

Results were consistent among both the younger 10-13-year-old age group and the 14-17-year-old age group.

This correlation between a girl’s confidence in her own beauty and her body esteem levels was then compared with other pressures and factors in a girl’s life, such as school, ‘me time’ and self-care, having money, friendships, and being a valued member of society or of a family.

* Calculations of Mendelson Body Esteem scale are based on: Low body esteem: Mean 1 – 2.49, Medium body esteem: Mean 2.5 – 3.59, High body esteem: Mean 3.6-5
Compared to these other pressures, levels of body esteem appeared to be the strongest determining factors of a girl’s confidence in her own beauty.

This identifies high levels of body esteem as the most important predictor of high beauty confidence.

The following statements are the strongest drivers of higher levels of body esteem for both age groups:

- “I’m proud of my body”
- “I’m looking as nice as I would like to”
- “I’m pretty happy about the way I look”
- “I like what I see when I look in the mirror”

Girls who agree with these statements have higher body esteem, as they represent key drivers of positive overall appearance.

Across both age groups, the expectation that ‘girls should be beautiful’ is seen as the most significant contributor to other social and personal pressures they experience.

Other key contributors to a girl’s feeling of pressure include:

- Getting good grades at school
- Helping out in their local community
- Being clever and intelligent

Assessing the strong correlations between body esteem and a girl’s level of confidence in her own beauty, the study then explored the impact of body esteem on levels of life satisfaction. These findings highlight a significant correlation between high body esteem, wider life satisfaction and happiness in both age groups.

When comparing body esteem to other factors in a girl’s life, overall levels of body esteem proved to be the most powerful factor accounted for by the statistical contribution model in comparison to other factors in a girl’s life such as life satisfaction and happiness.

For 14-17-year-old girls, levels of body esteem could account for 49% of a girl’s life satisfaction and happiness in the statistical contribution model.

Compared to all other factors in a girl’s life, levels of body esteem could account for 75% of a 10-13-year-old girl’s life satisfaction and happiness in the statistical contribution model.

5 in 10 of all girls feel medium to high pressure to look beautiful

6 in 10 of all girls feel medium to high pressure to always look acceptable
The Four Cultural Types: Shared Stories, Different Lives

Using recognised global indices measuring inequality, economic development, wellbeing and happiness, four distinct cultural typologies were identified. These were combined with existing regional data to form the four cultural types used throughout the study. This approach helped counter the effects of Western bias while also providing a rich, new stream of data to holistically evaluate and compare the lives of girls worldwide.

Our Cultural Typologies

The Four Cultural Types:

- **The Traditionalists**
  - China, India, Turkey, RSA, Indonesia
  - Majority of the population have a traditional public and private life, strongly rooted in cultural and religious pressures. This differs for higher socioeconomic groups who are experiencing more modern freedoms in the public sphere, but not as yet in the private sphere.

- **The Dualists**
  - Russia, Mexico, Brazil
  - Dual Model Dominant - In their public life they are allowed to enter multiple educational paths and are encouraged to prioritise this. Public behaviour is liberal with freedom of speech.

  - Dualists Dual Model Dominant - In their private life they are still the main carer with responsibilities in being a good daughter and sister (traditionalist roles).

- **The Modernists**
  - United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, US, Germany
  - Public and private life are both modern, with huge amounts of freedom for women and girls to make choices at home, socially and in the workplace.

While the four Cultural Typologies do not define all girls within a culture, they do help identify common traits that unite and differentiate them around the globe. For a more detailed explanation of these four typologies see Appendix A.
Summary Of Key Findings

Body esteem has a significant and measurable impact on girls’ confidence and life satisfaction. This study found a strong correlation between levels of body esteem and the way girls experience the effects of the multiple pressures they face in their lives.

Girls with low body esteem are more vulnerable to the negative effects of beauty and appearance pressures. Whether it’s social anxiety, opting out of fundamental life opportunities or missing out on personal and social advancement, the symptoms of high pressure and low confidence are felt most acutely by those who experience lower levels of body esteem.

Girls appear to intuitively understand the link between body esteem, confidence and their own potential. Girls with higher levels of body esteem have increased drive and ambition, are more joyful and say they feel more positive about their lives.

Crucially, the tendency to opt out of life events and activities due to low body esteem is highlighted as a significant issue for girls.

Those with low body esteem are missing out disproportionately on important opportunities to develop and advance themselves. Whether it is being absent from social occasions, failing to assert themselves, reluctance in asking for help at school, or putting their health at risk through extreme dieting and avoiding doctor’s appointments, the effects have potentially long-term implications as girls develop into womanhood.

Girls believe that everyone can be beautiful and that being different or unique is something to be proud of.

Yet at the same time, girls are aware there is too much importance placed on beauty.
This is reinforced by girls’ perceptions of the media, which they see as promoting narrow, manipulated and unattainable beauty ideals. The pressures that arise from the desire to emulate digitally enhanced celebrities and models have a damaging impact on girls of all ages and across all cultures, but is felt more acutely by girls with lower levels of body esteem. There is a danger of this altered image being defined as the “ideal appearance”, when in fact it is just an unrealistic social construction of beauty, an “image myth”.

- **67% of all girls** agree that few women and girls look like those depicted in adverts, movies and television

Girls with high body esteem are more likely to respond better to the pressures of the media to achieve a perfect look. The study shows they have strong levels of self-belief in their own individual beauty narratives, regardless of the female stereotypes and image myths portrayed by the media.

- **79% of girls** with high body esteem agree with the statement “I feel like I am beautiful even if I am different from media images of perceived attractive people”

Girls are living in a high-intensity media landscape that creates contradictions, tensions and conflict with far-reaching impact throughout their lives. Worryingly, awareness of the way the media manipulates identity and image through airbrushing and digital body reshaping is lowest among those in more traditional cultures.

The study shows an overall fall in awareness of modern media practices among some of The Traditionalists when compared to a previous study in 2010. However, there is a growing movement among girls to prioritise a broader conceptualisation of body image – one that shifts from passive, traditional beauty drivers of weight and appearance to more active interpretations around fitness, ability, athleticism and a greater appreciation of the body’s functionality, a shift from an appearance only dialogue. This appetite for new narratives around body image and body ideals is present and pervasive across all cultures.

The social media landscape is mixed, complex and often contradictory. On the one hand, girls appear less aware of issues around the over-use of social media, appearance ideals, body shaming, emphasis on being skinny, airbrushing and competitive beauty behaviours. On the other, the study suggests social media use has many positive attributes that aid their development. Indeed, benefits such as the ability to be themselves, increased honesty, sharing problems and issues, and speaking openly about their feelings provide a valuable release across all cultures. Growing and equalising girls’ awareness of both the pros and cons of social media use is essential for their future ability to thrive.

The study also highlights the importance of self-care as a driver of confidence. Girls with higher levels of body esteem say self-care has a positive impact on other areas of their lives and use it to boost their confidence, and help them achieve more of their life goals.
Surprisingly, given its pre-eminence in traditional studies on beauty, weight is not the only key factor driving body esteem and confidence in many parts of the world. The rise of holistic fitness, both mentally and physically, and the portrayal of strong female bodies in the media are all symptoms of changing female narratives globally.

This provides evidence that positive alternatives to narrow beauty narratives around women and girls are beginning to gain traction. However, it is worth noting that recent studies show the emerging trend of ‘fitspiration’ – the sharing of inspirational messages tacked onto an image of a hyper-fit person – may be having a negative impact on body image.

Despite the many issues around beauty, confidence and the pressures on girls, a direct correlation was found between girls who have higher levels of body esteem and increased feelings of pride in being a girl. This underlines the importance of instilling a healthy self-concept and support structures early in their lives.

The study concludes there is an urgent need to intervene in the lives of girls around the time of the key pressure peaks occurring in adolescence. To prevent appearance anxiety from limiting their opportunities for advancement and fulfillment as they mature into adulthood, steps should be taken to address both the issues they face and the problems associated with low body esteem.

The implications for policymakers, educators and parents are clear: there is no one single answer, so there must be a comprehensive approach to continue to identify and reduce pressures, as well as build up coping skills to increase body confidence. Levels of body esteem must be proactively increased if we want to help girls lead happier, more productive lives and reach their full potential.

81% of girls with high body esteem say they are proud to be girls

The figure is just 47% for girls with low body esteem

The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report
Detailed Findings

It’s Complicated

Whilst affirming the strong links between body esteem and the intensity of beauty pressure experienced by girls, the study reveals the relationship is not straightforward. It’s no surprise that girls with low body esteem experience pressure about their appearance and feel pressure to be beautiful, however what this study has shown is that appearance and beauty pressures are experienced by all girls, even those with high body esteem.

From the research, it appears that girls with high body esteem have positive responses towards beauty pressures and have the coping mechanisms in place to gain a balanced view of beauty pressure when it surfaces in their lives. They have developed a more robust, well-balanced and individuated view of what beauty means and, for this group, beauty is something uniquely defined by the individual. Consequently, they are less likely to aspire to external beauty norms and pressures arising from the media.

Pressures that may otherwise prove corrosive for girls – driving them to emulate the look of models or celebrities and to an unattainable appearance ideal – are less evident amongst those with high levels of body esteem. Girls with low body esteem, however, are more likely to experience pressure negatively – seeking to emulate the look of celebrities or models. This further fuels the belief they need to change or enhance their appearance to meet these expectations.

At its most extreme, these attitudes can manifest in a desire for cosmetic surgery and procedures to reshape facial and body features to emulate images of celebrities and models. These forms of risky behaviour have been studied further by many academics and institutions, particularly by the Centre of Appearance Research at the University of West England, and they have seen that low body esteem can lead to disordered eating, substance use, avoidance of exercise, depression and social anxiety.

This has important implications for policymakers, parents and educators alike as they develop support structures and educational programmes. It is no longer enough to just reduce the external pressures girls are facing. There needs to be a comprehensive strategy that combines reducing external pressures in girl’s lives and builds body confidence, giving girls the coping mechanisms to deal with pressures that will always exist at some level.

At a societal level, it is important to talk about and build up a healthy self-concept in girls, helping them develop skills to maintain a balanced perspective on beauty and appearance pressures, putting appearance and beauty in its place.

This study has further highlighted the seriousness of the issue and the real and tangible pressures all girls are facing to meet societal beauty standards. Girls with high, medium and low body esteem start from a position where they do not feel intrinsically beautiful, or do not feel beautiful enough.

8 in 10 girls with high body esteem agree “I feel like I am beautiful even if I am different from media images perceived of attractive people”.

This is compared to 1 in 10 girls with low body esteem.

9 in 10 younger girls and 5 in 10 older girls with low body esteem wish they always or often looked like someone else.

2 in 10 younger girls and 1 in 10 older girls with high body esteem wish they always or often looked like someone else.

7 in 10 girls with low body esteem feel pressure to be beautiful.

For girls with medium levels of body esteem this is 6 in 10.

And for those with high body esteem this is 5 in 10.
The Global Impact Of Low Body Esteem

Girls increasingly describe themselves as feeling under pressure. Across all cultures, countries and ages, issues around appearance are having a major impact on the way they feel about themselves – and the kind of lives they are living.

At a time of youthful freedom, when girls should be experiencing greater confidence and higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, less than half identified as having high body esteem or being happy and satisfied.

Globally, over half of all girls aged 10-17 don’t have high body esteem

- **8%** of girls around the world have **LOW** body esteem
- **46%** of girls around the world have **MEDIUM** body esteem
- **46%** of girls around the world have **HIGH** body esteem

Levels of body esteem remain consistent across typologies, with the exception of Ritualists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Typology</th>
<th>LOW Body Esteem</th>
<th>MEDIUM Body Esteem</th>
<th>HIGH Body Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritualists</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernists</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dualists</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across the different cultural typologies, these figures are broadly consistent, except within Ritualist cultures, such as Japan. Here, significantly fewer girls identify as having high body esteem.

One explanation may be the way in which families and multi-generational households insulate their daughters from the more negative effects of beauty pressures as they grow towards womanhood, as well as their culture which insulates them from being too overtly proud and confident.
Missed Opportunities

Although the different cultural typologies present differing sources of pressures, the resulting impact on behaviour offers a similar picture globally. Across the board, girls with low body esteem miss opportunities to advance and develop, whether by opting out of social interaction and events, or by absenting themselves from culture.

The collective impact of lower social confidence and raised social anxiety is widely experienced at critical points in girls’ development. Whether in education, relationships, social/family life or health, the effect of low body esteem is felt at both a personal and societal level. Moreover, external judgment acts like an internal censor, causing girls to experience social anxiety and, ultimately, withdraw from the world around them.

- **Globally, 8 in 10 girls** with low body esteem have missed or opted out of social engagements because they don’t feel confident about the way they look. This decreases to just 4 in 10 for girls with high body esteem.
- **4 in 10 girls** with low body esteem have avoided playing sport or withdrawn from extra-curricular activities because they don’t feel confident in the way they look.

Girls with lower levels of body esteem are particularly vulnerable and disproportionately affected. They are increasingly at risk of opting out and failing to realise their full potential.

Fit Not Skinny

As well as highlighting the difficulties girls face as they navigate the pressures of modern living, the study reframes the traditional beauty narrative. Indeed, some surprising findings emerge around the factors now driving body esteem.

While traditionally, Western narratives have stressed the pre-eminence of weight, thinness and appearance as defining factors in female body esteem, the study reveals that weight is not the only significant factor in defining girl’s sense of self, her beauty or her levels of esteem and confidence. For the first time, this study gives us a more accurate global representation of body esteem levels. Pride in their bodies, as well as happiness and acceptance of the way they look, are now seen as more important than weight.

This is especially pronounced among Modernist countries, such as the UK and USA, where weight is becoming less of a preoccupation as it is among Traditionalist cultures like China and India. In Brazil, identified here as Dualist culture, cosmetic surgery is widely accepted as a way to perfect a woman’s or girl’s look, and is perceived to be strongly linked to success and attractiveness both personally and professionally.

- **7 in 10 girls** with low body esteem have failed to assert themselves or ask for help in school because they do not feel confident about the way they look. The figure is just 3 in 10 for girls with high body esteem.

Of greater concern are the study’s findings around girls’ attitudes to food, health and dieting. For Generation Z, wellbeing, fitness, self-care, diet and eating as an experience have become central to their evolving identity. For girls with low body esteem and confidence, distorted ideas around their appearance may lead to damaging, destructive and often secretive behaviours around food.

This is now an issue of global, cross-cultural concern. Coupled with the higher propensity to avoid or miss doctor’s appointments among girls with low body esteem, it becomes clear the possible implications for the future health of girls can and should not be ignored as there are costs to society. For example, it has been estimated that eating disorders – for which body dissatisfaction is a key risk factor – cost the UK economy £15 billion a year.4

- **5 in 10 girls** globally with low body esteem have stopped eating, binged or skipped meals because they don’t feel good about the way they look, compared to just 1 in 10 with high body esteem.
- **3 in 10 girls** with low body esteem have put their health at risk by not attending a doctor’s appointment, compared to just 1 in 10 with high body esteem.

‘Liking what I weigh’ was the 7th and 8th largest contributor to body esteem among girls aged 10-13 and 14-17, respectively.

‘Happiness with the way I look’ and ‘being proud of my body’ are among the top three contributors of body esteem for all girls.

Overall though, the rise of holistic fitness, the resilient female, and the portrayal of strong female bodies by the media in response to changing tastes are all symptomatic of evolving female narratives globally. Strength and pride in sporting prowess and fitness are emerging as key factors in defining female confidence. This is a good thing as there is a shift to more appreciation for body functionality and less on appearance.

The Importance Of Self-Care

Along with pride in their bodies, strength and acceptance of their appearance, self-care is emerging as a significant driver of body esteem globally. Doing things that make girls feel positive and happy about themselves, their bodies and their health is reframing the beauty confidence debate. That might mean finding time to relax, get fit or engage in hobbies. It could involve looking after their hair and skin. What’s true in each case is that time spent on pursuits solely for themselves is an important way for girls and young women to build confidence.

Girls with high body esteem feel THEY ARE MORE CONFIDENT when they care for themselves first

- **60%** Of girls with low body esteem agree when they care for themselves they feel more confident
- **75%** Of girls with medium body esteem agree when they care for themselves they feel more confident
- **91%** Of girls with high body esteem agree when they care for themselves they feel more confident

The numbers bear this out too. However, those in Traditionalist cultures experience more pressure to perfect their appearance generally. In a country like India, this has seen the continued prevalence of ancient beauty methods passed down through female generations.

Meanwhile, in the Ritualist culture of Japan, interpretations of self-care can be more dramatic. Here, girls can undergo maturing rituals around their transformation from girlhood into womanhood. For example, Kata, a routine for self-improvement, encourages girls to meet the ideals of pale skin and demur behaviour.

As well as a cumulative positive impact on confidence, wellbeing and happiness, self-care also helps girls believe they can achieve more of their goals.

- **91% of girls aged 14-17** with high body esteem say they are feeling the positive impact of self-care on their confidence
- **66% of girls aged 14-17** say that when they invest time in caring for and looking after themselves, they can achieve their personal goals

- **70% of girls aged 14-17** say that when they invest time in caring for and looking after themselves, they feel in control of their lives

Furthermore, evidence suggests that awareness of the positive impact of making time for self-care is part of a virtuous cycle that also promotes girls’ own sense of self and confidence.

- **85% of girls aged 14-17** with high body esteem say they value themselves more when they take time to self-care
- **89% of girls aged 14-17** with high body esteem say they can care more for others when they take time to care for themselves first
- **70% of girls aged 14-17** with high body esteem say they are seeing the value in self-care for getting noticed

Similarly, younger girls aged 10-13 feel that taking ‘me time’ to care for their bodies and minds can help them feel beautiful. In contrast, perfecting their ‘look’ and augmenting their general appearance is less relevant to their sense of wellbeing and confidence than previous studies have suggested.
One of the study’s most significant findings is that across all countries and cultures worldwide, the pressure on girls builds towards pressure peaks when the effects become critical.

While adolescence comes with its own anxieties for everyone, older girls entering adulthood experience alarmingly low levels of fulfillment and life enjoyment compared to younger girls.

These ‘anxiety cliffs’ in young women’s lives may result in them beginning to doubt themselves and their achievements at important points when the pressures around beauty and appearance tend to increase.

Globally all girls experience a 19-percentage point drop in life satisfaction and overall happiness between the ages of 10 and 22.

Dualist and Modernist cultures experience this major shift in life satisfaction most acutely. For example, Modernist British girls entering adulthood experience a 38-percentage point difference in levels of satisfaction and happiness, compared to girls under the age of 18. This is the largest difference seen across any of the cultural types or individual countries.

- **Girls in the UK** experience a 38-percentage point difference in life satisfaction and overall happiness between the ages of 10 and 22
- **Girls in the US** experience a 33-percentage point difference in life satisfaction and overall happiness between the ages of 10 and 22
The pressures on girls to look a certain way begin early before intensifying through late adolescence and into adulthood. And at the same time, we see a significant decline in general happiness and satisfaction.

A possible explanation for this global ‘happiness drop’ is the increase in anxiety that comes with the onset of adulthood.

Girls’ changing bodies and signs of sexual maturity, the rituals and pressures around finding a partner, sustaining relationships, and progressing with their careers are also linked to a perceived need to appear more attractive or ‘beautiful’. It is at this time that girls begin to shift focus from what their body does and how it feels, to how it should look.

This acute anxiety around appearance appears to coincide with an idea that success in life is connected to the way a girl looks. In some cultures, such as China, there are deeply ingrained traditional links between beauty, the ongoing struggle for perfection and success.

Whether this is driven by media, personal social media, culture, tradition or ritual, the effects are the same: diminishing confidence; raised body anxiety; and lower levels of happiness and satisfaction throughout their lives.

“This time of transition in focus from the body’s function to its aesthetic represents one of the most critical points for efforts to instill body confidence in girls. The fact that this time also often corresponds to girls’ increased freedom and exploration online (where body positive movements championed by young girls continue to thrive) also presents an ideal opportunity for body esteem education.”

Jess Weiner
The Juggling Act

This study reveals the true extent of the pressures on girls of all ages. It is important to note the differences between the types of pressures experienced by different age groups. Although both younger and older girls are united by a pressure to appear ‘beautiful’, to help within their household, to be clever and intelligent and get good grades, it is older girls who experience these pressures most intensely as they enter adulthood.

Pressure to be beautiful and to help out in the community contribute most to girls’ overall pressure

Similarly, while different cultural types experience these pressures in different forms, the expectations to achieve good grades, conform to dutiful roles and be visibly successful are pervasive across all cultures for older girls. In other words, their lives are being compromised by the need to perform a constant juggling act of meeting the idiosyncratic pressures and complex demands of the cultures and traditions they are part of.

- 70% of girls agree there is too much emphasis placed on beauty as a determinant of a girl's happiness
- 60% of girls feel pressure to always look ‘acceptable’

Pressure from external sources to marry well and at the right time is highest amongst Traditionalist cultures but is felt by all cultural types in the study. In Dualist cultures, like Brazil, there is a paradoxical demand to be a successful, modern girl in public and a traditional caregiver and homemaker behind the front door.

While for girls in Modernist cultures, in Europe and North America, greater equality and freedom is tempered by growing pressure to ‘have it all’ and ‘be more’ - from reaching their goals and having impressive careers to raising a perfect family and caring for elders.

The study also highlights that peer and friendship groups offer little respite from the pressure of expectation as girls compare their bodies, appearance, lives and achievements. For those with lower levels of body esteem, these pressures are felt more acutely than others.

- 7 in 10 girls aged 10-13 with low body esteem feel under immense pressure to compare themselves with their friends
- 7 in 10 girls aged 14-17 with low body esteem and 6 in 10 with high body esteem feel under pressure to compare and compete with friends
The Role Of Media

The media – in all its forms – plays a significant and increasingly challenging role in the lives of girls around the globe. Both professional and personal media now represent a highly contested and conflicted space.

On the one hand, it is a source of tension, anxiety and pressure due to the exacerbation of conformist beauty norms, competitive beauty rituals and unattainable expectation. Yet, simultaneously, it is a place where individualism, sharing and self-authorship can be promoted and flourish.

Girls enter this complex landscape believing every girl is beautiful in their own way and that being different is something to be proud of and celebrate.

However, as they attempt to navigate these spaces, this view can become challenged, with a subsequent effect on their sense of self, confidence and their ability to identify as individuals.

- **8 in 10 girls** globally think every girl has something about her that is beautiful. (9 in 10 for Dualist cultures)
- **8 in 10 girls** believe it is important to be your own person and not copy someone else. These results were similar across girls with high and low body esteem
- **5 in 10 girls** say they wish they looked like someone else. This is even higher for girls with low body esteem (88%) vs. those with high esteem (19%)

Increasingly, girls feel under siege from the media. Though they understand some of the ways in which it promotes and uses female identity, the narrow ideals around beauty perfection created by digital manipulation online, on TV and in magazines can be relentless.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the number of girls for whom images of attractive women in the media actively undermine their confidence. While most girls around the world understand that the images they see and the personalities they aspire to in the media do not represent real life, they nevertheless find it hard to break the cycle of wanting to be more like them.

This duality is especially acute in Traditionalist markets where the need for diversity in the media has been a talking point for several years. However, it has still not been enough to counter the narrow and pervasive beauty norms commonly portrayed. Indeed, evidence from the study suggests that the impact of unattainable beauty stereotypes and the media bombardment of altered and perfected images is having a significant negative impact on the way girls feel about themselves.

There is also a wide variation in awareness of how the media operates across the different cultural typologies. Girls in Modernist cultures understand the prevalence of image manipulation, although it does not significantly change their ability to manage the negative effects of unrealistic portrayals of women and girls. Meanwhile, Ritualist Japanese girls appear least aware of the ways in which images are manipulated digitally in the media, despite being enthusiastic users of image-perfecting ‘selfie’ apps.

- **7 in 10 girls** understand that images of girls in the media are altered or airbrushed. However, in countries such as Canada, India and China, awareness in airbrushing has dropped over the last 5 years.
- **7 in 10 girls** agree that very few women and girls in real life look like the ones they see on TV, commercials and in films

A culture of disappointment exists across all cultures around the failure of women and girls to live up to unattainable beauty norms that pervade the media. The dissonance between the aspirational beauty of celebrities and models, and what is practically achievable, produces negative emotions and damaging feelings of inadequacy that drive dysmorphic behaviours such as extreme dieting and even cosmetic surgery.

- **4 in 10 girls** with low body esteem say they try their best to look like the models and celebrities they see in magazines, compared to 2 in 10 girls with high body esteem

Girls are becoming increasingly aware of the media’s narrowing portrayal of beauty

---

**Tell me how much you agree or disagree with the statement ‘images of women and girls in the media are digitally altered or air brushed.’**

**Total base: Girls 4847, Dualists: 115, Traditionalists: 1213, Modernists: 2209, Ritualists: 310**
Although girls are aware of the narrow portrayal of beauty, they are still trying to imitate it, especially in TRADITIONALIST markets

- **3 in 10 of all girls globally** say they feel worse about themselves when they see beautiful girls in magazines.

  Amongst those with low body esteem, these feelings of inadequacy can become amplified to worrying levels, sometimes resulting in girls wishing to look like someone else entirely.

  However, among girls with high levels of body esteem, they report less of a tendency to feel bad after seeing beautiful girls in magazines. This could suggest that higher levels of body esteem are protective against the effects of media.

- **7 in 10 girls** with low body esteem say they feel worse about themselves when they see beautiful girls in magazines. This drops to just 2 in 10 for girls with high body esteem.

- **4 in 10 older girls** with low body esteem say they would have cosmetic surgery to correct their flaws. However, less than 1 in 10 older girls with high body esteem would consider this.

The media’s influence on the way women and girls feel about their bodies has far reaching implications. The constant ‘churn’ of images, ideas and beauty ideals make it difficult for them to feel valued and worthy. Manipulated, blemish-free images, photoshopped waist lines and the use of CGI are now widely exposed and discussed across the media – although girls still find it hard to ignore these images and the “image myth” they create.

This means that at moments of great potential empowerment in their lives, the high intensity, ‘always on’ media culture is actively undermining girls’ potential, leaving them less confident and less satisfied with their looks. And, with appearance intrinsically linked to the notion of success and value in many of the cultures surveyed, the pressure to look a certain way mounts up.

- **6 in 10 girls** believe that for girls to do well, they have to look a certain way.

- **5 in 10 girls** believe there is no excuse not to look beautiful with all that is available today.

It’s not all bad news. For example, the study reveals startling differences in the attitudes of younger and older girls towards images in the media. Older girls are significantly less likely to wish they looked like someone else after looking at images in magazines, TV and the media than younger girls. This may be attributable to the success of education, growing digital competency and growing societal debate around the manipulation of female identity in the media.

“Despite gains made in amplifying the voices against unrealistic standards of beauty, conventional beauty standards still dominate a majority of the media girls consume on a daily basis.”

Jess Weiner
Personal Social Media: A Contested Space

This study revisits the conversation around beauty diversity, social media and confidence. In doing so, it reveals the profound and deepening impact of a rapidly proliferating 24/7 social media culture on how girls lead their lives.

- 6 in 10 girls aged 10-13 use social media
- 8 in 10 girls aged 14-17 use social media

Unattainable digitally enhanced images of celebrities and the growing pressure from personal social media channels for girls to perfect their own image are contributing to a sense of being ‘landlocked’ by both media and technology. Regular users of social media have a more developed sense of the limitations and issues around beauty and social media use.

- 74% of social media users understand that images they see in the media and social media may be enhanced digitally; the figure is 56% for non-users

However, although girls are aware of the artificial nature of beauty ideals they see on platforms like Facebook, Weibo and Twitter, it doesn’t appear to reduce the pressure they feel to be like the women featured. Nor does it moderate the amount of personal social media content they consume or generate. After all, this is a world where blogger Zoella has more Twitter followers than the UK Prime Minister and where how-to make-up videos and beauty hacks rank consistently amongst the most-watched on YouTube.

- 69% of girls using social media believe they are put under pressure to be skinny; the figure is 57% for non-users
- 74% of girls who use social media believe they are put under pressure to look a certain way; The figure is 64% for those who do not use social media
- 43% of girls using social media state that when they see models and celebrities on social media, they want to look like them, a figure that is significantly higher among Traditionalist cultures such as India (72%) and China (51%)

More positively, social media can represent a relatively ‘safe-space’ where girls are able to develop their online persona and gain confidence as they interact successfully with others online. These positive effects are even more pronounced and important among those with low body esteem. Social media actively promotes greater interaction between girls and the sharing of problems and emotions. This, in turn, may have a positive impact on their levels of body esteem and overall confidence.

This makes the online space a particularly useful educational tool in which to explore the effects of low body esteem, as girls with low body esteem are more prone to be influenced by what they consume on social media.

- 56% of girls with low body esteem feel more confident interacting with people online

Social media provides a platform for girls to be confident, especially those with low body esteem

1 in 2 of all girls feel more confident interacting with people online (51%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditionalists</th>
<th>Modernists</th>
<th>Ritualists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>14-17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is true across both young and older girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls with low body esteem feel this even more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56% Low body esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42% High body esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We now want to ask you some questions about the social media sites you use and how you feel about them. Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with the statement, ‘I feel more confident interacting with people online’. When I say social media sites I mean Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Googles, Vine, Snapchat or WeChat. Total base: Girls 4847, 10-13: 2394, 14-17: 2453, Social media users: 2797, Non social media users: 1091, low body esteem: 322, High body esteem: 1615

- 60% of girls with low body esteem say they want to look like celebrities and models, compared to just 30% of girls with high body esteem

While it can act as a platform for new voices and a space in which girls can flourish, personal social media is still a contested – and often paradoxical – space. As a tool for empowerment and interaction, it has great potential. As a place for pressures, anxieties and unrealistic expectations to proliferate, it carries great risk. This means educating girls about how and when to use it will be critical – both now and for generations to come as we need to educate and help develop skills to manage those natural tendencies and feelings.

The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report | 25
Girls Want Change

Perhaps because of their experience of stereotypical beauty ideals promoted by the media, girls are asking for a change to the narrative around beauty and female identity. The study reveals a strong desire for increased diversity and more accurate representations of diversity in appearance and personality.

Girls are starting to challenge the narrow beauty norms that dominate most cultures. Though the signs are most visible in Modernist countries, there is a sense that women and girls in all cultures are asking for a new kind of narrative that prioritises some of the key drivers of body esteem. In particular, there is a desire to see a change in the way their lives are portrayed in the media.

Led by celebrities like Emma Watson and Forest Whitaker, and buoyed by the renewed power of modern feminism in many modern societies, the UN’s HeForShe movement is actively challenging the way in which women and girls are viewed, portrayed and empowered all over the world.

And, in an effort to change how women and men are portrayed in the media, Unilever has launched Unstereotype, a global initiative aimed at eliminating unhelpful gender stereotypes across its 400+ brands.

What’s more, girls themselves increasingly understand the media biases towards particular body types – and they are responding by asking for a more diverse, aspirational and realistic picture of what it is to be a young woman today. An image that reflects the variation in body size, shape, age, appearance, ethnicity and, crucially, aspirations of women and girls.

Additionally, fitness, strength, action, resilience and achievement are emerging as strong alternative themes to the traditional story of anachronistic femininity. It will be important for the media to promote a healthy self-concept and show a balanced and diverse view of women and girls.

- **7 in 10 girls** wish the media did a better job portraying women of diverse ethnicity, shape, size, age and appearance (except in Ritualist cultures)
- **7 in 10 girls** aged 14-17 wish women and girls in adverts, movies and television were not judged on their looks alone but on what they do and say instead

What’s more, the agenda is shifting from passivity to action. Girls are looking beyond appearance to ask what women in the public eye do, what they believe, what they aspire to be and why they are being talked about.

Once again, though, girls with higher body esteem fare better. They are more able to differentiate between altered images in the media and their own lives. This, in turn, has positive implications for their own sense of self.

In markets where traditional expectations and cultures dominate, the desire to be liked because of who they are rather than how they look is strongest.

- **80% of girls** in Traditionalist cultures say they want to look their personal best rather than follow what others consider to be beautiful

This move towards becoming more individual, rejoicing in diversity and wanting to be recognised for their personal attributes rather than just their looks is symbolic of a shift away from conformity. Of all the cultural types, it is the Traditionalists and Dualists – those with the highest expectations of conformity for girls – that show the greatest need for change in how they are valued.

In other words, more women and girls are saying ‘it’s ok to be me and to celebrate and appreciate my diversity’.

---

In markets where traditional expectations and cultures dominate, the desire to be liked because of who they are rather than how they look is strongest.

- **80% of girls** in Traditionalist cultures say they want to look their personal best rather than follow what others consider to be beautiful

This move towards becoming more individual, rejoicing in diversity and wanting to be recognised for their personal attributes rather than just their looks is symbolic of a shift away from conformity. Of all the cultural types, it is the Traditionalists and Dualists – those with the highest expectations of conformity for girls – that show the greatest need for change in how they are valued.

In other words, more women and girls are saying ‘it’s ok to be me and to celebrate and appreciate my diversity’.

---

In markets where traditional expectations and cultures dominate, the desire to be liked because of who they are rather than how they look is strongest.

- **80% of girls** in Traditionalist cultures say they want to look their personal best rather than follow what others consider to be beautiful

This move towards becoming more individual, rejoicing in diversity and wanting to be recognised for their personal attributes rather than just their looks is symbolic of a shift away from conformity. Of all the cultural types, it is the Traditionalists and Dualists – those with the highest expectations of conformity for girls – that show the greatest need for change in how they are valued.

In other words, more women and girls are saying ‘it’s ok to be me and to celebrate and appreciate my diversity’.

---

In markets where traditional expectations and cultures dominate, the desire to be liked because of who they are rather than how they look is strongest.

- **80% of girls** in Traditionalist cultures say they want to look their personal best rather than follow what others consider to be beautiful

This move towards becoming more individual, rejoicing in diversity and wanting to be recognised for their personal attributes rather than just their looks is symbolic of a shift away from conformity. Of all the cultural types, it is the Traditionalists and Dualists – those with the highest expectations of conformity for girls – that show the greatest need for change in how they are valued.

In other words, more women and girls are saying ‘it’s ok to be me and to celebrate and appreciate my diversity’.

---

In markets where traditional expectations and cultures dominate, the desire to be liked because of who they are rather than how they look is strongest.

- **80% of girls** in Traditionalist cultures say they want to look their personal best rather than follow what others consider to be beautiful

This move towards becoming more individual, rejoicing in diversity and wanting to be recognised for their personal attributes rather than just their looks is symbolic of a shift away from conformity. Of all the cultural types, it is the Traditionalists and Dualists – those with the highest expectations of conformity for girls – that show the greatest need for change in how they are valued.

In other words, more women and girls are saying ‘it’s ok to be me and to celebrate and appreciate my diversity’.
Recommendations: A Renewed Obligation To Girls

This study highlights the significant influence body esteem has on the lives of girls as they transition into womanhood. The message for policymakers, educators and parents is that reducing pressures around appearance is essential but that it is not, on its own, enough. Raising levels of body esteem and understanding the dynamic complexities of the relationship between body esteem and beauty pressures is also critical.

Girls are telling us the pressures, tensions and contradictions they face in their daily lives are amplified by issues around body esteem. Their ability to enjoy their lives, to take control, to become their ‘best selves’ and simply be happy with who they are is often governed by their relationship with, and confidence in, their own bodies. This, in turn, is largely driven by external pressures that are cultural and social in origin.

This twin offensive of lowering the sources of anxiety and raising body esteem will help mitigate the negative effects of the many pressure peaks affecting girls through their adolescence – and stop them falling off an anxiety cliff as they age.

It is imperative in all four of the cultural typologies identified by this paper that we provide the tools and support for girls at critical points in their development - whether that’s puberty, leaving home, finding a partner or transitioning into adulthood. They must not be left to experience the full force of these ‘pressure shocks’ alone. Media stereotypes should be challenged and actively debunked. Diversity must be championed and individuality celebrated.

Minimising the effects of low body esteem, educating girls, providing new and more diverse narratives, and disrupting ingrained beliefs and narrow beauty norms are the essential recommendations of this paper.

It is incredibly important to help girls develop healthy self-concepts, including a positive relationship with appearance that is also a balanced one.

We need to strive for more diversity in media as well as skills to be more media literate, it is not only about the images but what the images are intending to do, what are they trying to say or sell?

We want to empower young people to make educated decisions.

The study found strong pride in being a girl and the innate power and agency of girls to influence their own lives.

All girls need to be empowered, encouraged and supported in their attempts to grasp the opportunity to determine their own future, reach their potential and lead balanced, fulfilling lives.
Conclusions

Around the world, girls want social change when it comes to body image. This report has shown us that 7 in 10 girls globally wish women and girls were not judged by media on their looks alone, but on what they do and say instead. They say there is too much emphasis placed on beauty as a determinant of a girl's happiness. They wish the media did a better job portraying women of diverse ethnicity, shape, size, age and appearance.

Like all public health and social justice issues, there is no easy solution. Change will require action on multiple levels, from changes in cultural norms, government policies, and business practices through to changes in our individual behaviours and attitudes.

So, how can we achieve this and where might we start?

Personal Advocacy and Action

There are small steps we can take personally to promote a culture of body acceptance and confidence. By being a role model for body image for the girls in our lives, we not only help to create social change, but we also help ourselves to feel more comfortable in our bodies.

A powerful way to improve body image is to focus more on what our bodies allow us to do, rather than what they look like. This could include taking a moment to appreciate how our legs allow us to dance, our arms allow us to hug our loved ones, our hands allow us to create art, or our senses allow us to take in beautiful scenery. Studies by psychologists show that focusing on body functionality improves body image. It also has potential to counteract the idea that girls’ and women’s bodies are simply objects to be looked at, but rather they are power tools that help us engage with, and change, the world.

We can flip the script on narrow beauty ideals, sexism, and privilege through small actions every day. For example, we can use social media to post about the achievements of women we admire that have nothing to do with the way we look. Instead of praising our nieces, sisters, and daughters by telling them how pretty/cute/attractive they look, we can praise them for being funny, intelligent, creative, and brave.

We can also reflect on how certain ‘unearned’ characteristics – whether it’s being White, able-bodied, cis-gendered, middle-class, or heterosexual, for example – automatically afford us privilege in life, and educate ourselves on how to undermine oppression.

Community Advocacy and Action

There are many opportunities for promoting body confidence at a societal level. A lot of us walk around with tools for activism in our back pockets: a phone connected to the internet. Social media is a great way to challenge organisations, journalists, celebrities, and companies that perpetuate narrow beauty ideals and assumptions. We can also use it to highlight and support those who are celebrating diversity and making positive changes.

We can lobby politicians, governments, and regulators for policies that promote positive body image and avoid appearance-based prejudice. This includes removing adverts that promote unrealistic beauty standards, gender stereotypes, and the sexualisation and objectification of girls and women. We can also advocate for policies and legislation to rule out discrimination based on appearance, including body weight and size.

Asking curriculum authorities, and our children’s schools and youth groups, what they are doing to promote body confidence is another way to get body image on the agenda. There are many evidence-based body image programmes, including the Dove Self-Esteem Project’s education tools, which are fun, freely available, and can be delivered by teachers, youth mentors, and parents to improve young people’s body confidence.

These are just a few suggestions for how we can all take decisive action to support girls to appreciate, respect, and feel at home in their bodies. It is important that we remain impassioned and motivated to address the global issue of body image so that girls, the future leaders of the world, can reach their full potential.

What action will you take?

Dr. Phillippa Diedrichs

Associate Professor, Centre for Appearance Research, University of the West of England

Conclusions

Jess Weiner
Cultural Expert and Adjunct Professor, University of Southern California, Annenberg School of Journalism

A year ago, the 2016 Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report identified an urgent need to address the decline in body esteem and overall happiness that frequently occurs during young girls’ adolescence.

With Dove’s latest girls-only report, we hear loud and clear that girls aged 10-13 with low body esteem are especially vulnerable. These younger girls don’t yet have the tools to combat the negative images they see or to contextualize the comparisons they make. They have a harder time combatting the voices in their head that point out their flaws and drive them to opt out from life events, to the detriment of their health and wellbeing.

We know, however, that girls’ body esteem can be built up through education and open dialogue.

Just as girls are multidimensional in nature, the solution to this dilemma is also inherently multidimensional and “Yes, And”.

YES, we need increased media representation that shows girls from all cultural backgrounds and experiences, especially in media aimed at girls.

AND we need a curriculum focused on media literacy that can help girls identify and actively combat the negative gender stereotypes, violence, and hypersexualization they encounter on screen.

When a girl sees herself reflected back in the media she consumes, her sense of belonging is elevated. When she feels represented and accepted, she becomes much more likely to ‘opt in’ to the range of interactions, events, and activities society offers. When girls drop out of activities in society due to low body esteem, imagine what a deficit of human potential we face. Now, imagine what could be possible if those young women felt confident enough to opt in instead.

Girls around the world who have ‘opted in’ continue to rewrite the beauty narrative for themselves by forming both online and offline communities that further deconstruct societal pressures around beauty, body image, and self-confidence. We have both an opportunity and obligation to meet them where they are and help support them on this monumental mission.

Girls need to be exposed to curriculum that gives them the language to talk about and understand the mounting pressures that they face along this journey - a robust toolkit they can pull from to sort through the conflicting messages they receive on any given day.

In my global work with women and girls, exploring their experiences and uncovering the issues that they face, I have found that lasting confidence is not merely a destination but an ever-evolving journey.

We can – and must – create a world in which all girls are proud to be girls.

---

Traditionalists
China, India, Turkey, South Africa, Indonesia

Traditionalist cultures celebrate family, faith and duty. While wealthier and more educated women are exploring new opportunities in their public lives, most women and girls are expected to play time-honoured roles within a family setting. Traditionalist cultures tend to rank low on measures of gender equality, human development, human freedoms, but highest of all four cultural types in terms of life satisfaction.

The majority of the population are governed by traditional beliefs in both their public and private lives. Daily lives are strongly rooted in cultural and religious tradition, and there is a strong societal pressure to conform to these long-held expectations. This may differ for higher socioeconomic groups - who experience increasing freedom in the public sphere - but not, as yet, in the home.

Most girls within Traditionalist cultures are governed by deep-rooted religious and social conventions. High value is placed on a woman’s fertility and her child rearing abilities. Girls are expected to look their best at all times and to ready themselves for courtship, marriage and the demands of raising children.

Despite being educated and having careers, there is a strong expectation that girls will ultimately emulate their mothers becoming nurturers, wives, and homemakers. Because of the more traditional patriarchal values that underpin the culture, the appearance of women and girls in Traditionalist cultures is often linked to the values and honour of the family. Outward appearance – beauty, complexion, conformity to widely shared beauty norms, general appearance and dress – are strongly linked to social status and the wealth and standing of the family as a whole.

However, as more young women and girls pursue higher education and global culture encroaches on traditional modes of living, new tensions have arisen. As they start to redefine who they are, girls from Traditionalist cultures are starting to challenge the obligations and expectations of life in multi-generational households.

The study identifies, with the exception of China, that Traditionalist girls tend to have higher body esteem than any other cultural typology. Between some countries these differences are pronounced, with almost three times as many girls in South Africa reporting higher body esteem than in the UK.

Dualists
Mexico, Brazil, Russia

Dualists lead multi-layered lives. In public they are encouraged – and expected – to be educated and pursue independent careers. In private, women and girls are under intense pressure to meet a powerful set of ‘hidden’ expectations rooted in the traditional role of women as carers, nurturers, wives and homemakers.

Dualists need to be highly adaptable to live with the contradictions between the progressive freedoms of their public lives, and the traditional focus in the home. While this tension is relatively unacknowledged within the culture, it is experienced most deeply by girls.

Within Dualist cultures, beauty is an aspirational social currency. Consequently, there is significant pressure to achieve and perfect a look that is both considered attractive to men but also achieves and delivers on the aspirational aspects of women with agency within the culture. For example, for Dualist Brazilian women, cosmetic surgery is widely accepted as a way to perfect their look and is strongly linked to success and attractiveness both personally and professionally. The pressure on girls to perfect their appearance starts early, with many girls in Dualist cultures becoming sexualised earlier than others around the globe and pursuing cosmetic surgery to meet beauty norms.

Dualists girls share a similar story to the Traditionalists, with higher levels of overall body esteem than other types surveyed. The level of satisfaction Dualist girls experience contrasts sharply with the Ritualist girls who face the same tensions, but are overwhelmingly identifying themselves as having low body esteem and lower levels of overall happiness and satisfaction as a result.
Appendix
Cultural Typologies Explained

Modernists
Australia, Canada, UK, US, Germany

Modernist girls experience freedoms and increasing equality in many areas of their lives. At home, in education, the workplace and across all levels of culture and society, Modernists have the potential to be the most empowered of all four cultural types.

Girls are generally more empowered to make choices based on their own needs and aspirations rather than conform to traditional expectations. So much so that in some cases they are often encouraged to put their own goals ahead of family obligations, expectations and duty.

However there are tensions too - in the form of a pressure to ‘do it all’, ‘be more’ and to ‘have it all’. A culture of constant striving for more leads to intense pressure among many girls to meet standards set by an unforgiving and relentless media and those around them.

Saturation of social media with celebrity and instantaneous sharing of images – especially among the young – means pressure and judgment are a constant presence in the lives of many girls.

The study shows that something significant occurs in the lives of girls from the UK, Germany, US, Australia and Canada during adolescence that dramatically impacts body esteem – and, with it, life satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment.

Of all the cultural types in the study, Modernist girls experience the biggest differences in body esteem between young 10 to 17-year-olds and girls entering adulthood.

Ritualists
Japan

Ritualists share lives of exacting standards and high expectations established by the traditions and society around them.

Although opportunities for women in public life are opening up, Ritualists remain privately focused on meeting the demands of their culture. Success and progress in life often depend on being seen to be doing the right thing – and doing it to high standards. Value is put on appearance while personality is considered less important as women ritually defer to men in many social situations.

Girls can undergo maturing rituals around their transformation from girlhood into womanhood – Kata, a routine for self-improvement, stresses conformity and encourages girls to meet the ideals of pale skin and demure behaviour. Deference is seen as a personal virtue, one of the foundations of Japanese culture.

Though a majority of Japanese girls identify as having medium levels of body esteem, the difference between girlhood and adulthood is stark and pronounced. As they travel towards womanhood, personal appreciation of their own bodies falls away.
Dove
Unilever House
100 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DY
United Kingdom

Sarah Willer
M: +44 7432 190 955
Sarah.Willer@unilever.com
dove.com/selfesteem