The Real State of Beauty: A Global Report

Dove

20 years **Changing** Beauty

Contents

Trigger warning: Please note this report explores themes some readers may find distressing, including references to body weight/size, mental health conditions (including eating disorders), and discrimination based on race, gender, size, disability, and sexual orientation.

Foreword

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There can be a problematic tendency when discussing beauty – and the myriad of procedures, products, routines and rituals associated with it – to be dismissive. Historically, beauty has often been construed as a frivolous pursuit – one that was almost exclusively enacted by women to express and conform to dominant ideas about femininity.

Women have long existed in this paradox. Investing the time, labor and money required to conform to societal beauty standards, and gain access to the privileges they can afford, while simultaneously being admonished and patronized for fixating on physical appearance. While the Real State of Beauty report highlights the perils of a society that places too high a premium on physical attractiveness, it is important we do not villainize beauty. Beauty can be a source of pleasure, self-expression and creativity. Instead, we should reimagine a more inclusive, diverse and expressive form of beauty and rediscover ways to reconnect with beauty and our own bodies, on our own terms.

Throughout this report, you may find yourself confronted with seemingly contradictory findings. Women feel they are better represented in beauty advertising, yet only the most beautiful women are shown. Women feel pressure to look like the images of beauty they see online, yet most understand that these images often aren't real. However, this simply reflects the reality that our relationship with beauty is itself complex and often contradictory.

Beauty, for many people all over the world – not just women, people of all gender expressions – can be a great source of creativity, liberation, and community. Beauty practices can be used just as much as a means to defy societal conventions as to conform to them. Social media, meanwhile, has democratized the beauty industry. People who were previously underrepresented in mainstream media and beauty advertising have been able to build communities and find meaningful connection online.

Yet simultaneously we can also acknowledge the following truths: the beauty industry, for many, is a source of anxiety and trauma. Narrow beauty standards persist and their existence continues to marginalize swathes of people all over the world. Social media, while a catalyst for social change, is also a factory of ceaseless trend cycles, manufacturing innumerable new ways for us to feel insecure about ourselves. These barely scrape the surface of the nuances and contradictions inherent in beauty and the ways we engage with it.

So, where do we even begin to heal our relationship with beauty and with our own bodies? How do we reconcile these contradictions to determine the best path forwards?

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Clearly, there is no silver bullet. But the findings of the Real State of Beauty report support decades of research that tells us body esteem has far-reaching impacts on our physical and mental health, workplace and academic aspirations, and quality of life. Throughout the report, you will see evidence that those with high body esteem possess greater resilience in the face of societal pressures and more compassion toward themselves.

Therefore, rather than rejecting beauty outright, we must create space for everyone – regardless of gender expression, race, body type, sexual orientation or disability – to rediscover the inherent joy of beauty on their own terms. This will take a multilevel approach, encompassing systemic change as well as fostering body esteem on an individual-level. We must pull both of these levers at once in order to enact meaningful change at scale.

We should equip people with the resources to support body esteem at every life stage – from puberty to menopause – empowering them with the resilience to confidently challenge beauty standards, advocate for themselves, and feel connected to and grateful for their bodies. However, we must also acknowledge that no amount of body confidence can insulate an individual from institutionalized discrimination.

Around the world, people continue to face oppression and ostracization based on their skin color, age, gender identity, body size, sexuality and disability. Therefore, in tandem with self-esteem education, we must continue to confront and dismantle the beauty standards, social norms and systems that perpetuate appearance-based discrimination. This will not only benefit those marginalized groups, but all of us. Importantly, this goes beyond the scope of just improving representation in media and beauty advertising – that is only part of the equation.

To cut to the very heart of the issue, we must transform the systems in place that objectify our bodies – especially feminine-presenting bodies – and that tell us a narrowly defined view of perfection should be our ultimate aspiration. These include, but are not limited to, the beauty and media industries and social media platforms, which are the focal points of this research, as well as educational, healthcare and legal systems.

By decentering physical attractiveness and narrowly defined ideals in beauty, we can all give ourselves permission to be playful, creative and authentic. We can reengage with beauty as something that makes us feel good and that builds community, rather than something that penalizes and constrains us. And we can begin to loosen the grip that non-inclusive beauty ideals have on society, so that everyone can pursue beauty, health and wellness in the bodies they have now, rather than viewing their bodies as a problem to be fixed.

Thank you
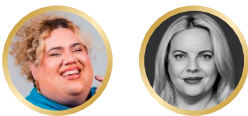
Beta and Phillippa

Preface: Real Beauty in a digital world

Author:

Alessandro Manfredi, Dove Global Chief Marketing Officer

In 2004, Dove conducted its first study, called The Real Truth About Beauty. In that same year, the social media giant Facebook was created and would go on to completely transform the way we engage with each other online. This year, in 2024, Dove has now created the Real State of Beauty report, representing the most comprehensive study to have ever been conducted by a beauty brand. Importantly, it offers unique insight into how technology – particularly the explosive growth of social media – is continuing to shape our perceptions of beauty and the way we feel about our bodies.

The world has changed a lot since 2004. Today you can be whoever you choose to be online through virtual avatars. You can change your eye color and hair color, even completely transform your facial features, using increasingly sophisticated filters and editing tools. And these beauty enhancements are no longer confined to the digital realm. We're in the midst of a cosmetic surgery boom. From buccal fat removal to fillers, advancements in cosmetic science have made it possible for people to transform their face and body shape to achieve their desired appearance. On top of this, the skincare market has exploded in recent years, offering a vast array of products claiming to reduce visible pores and even "blur" skin in the same way that a digital filter would.

Cosmetic surgeries are more accessible than ever, with average costs decreasing. Going under the knife – or in many cases, under the needle – is no longer just for the rich and famous. Many surgeons even offer appealing payment packages allowing people to spread the cost. The procedures are getting less invasive too. You can achieve dramatic changes through injectables that can be completed over a lunch break with minimal recovery time. Given the ubiquity of cosmetic procedures and skincare products, it's unsurprising people are becoming aware of these beauty treatments from a very young age. 45% of girls told us they believe there is no excuse *not* to be beautiful with everything that is available to people today.

Social media has completely transformed our visual landscape, pushing beauty standards further into unreality. Women and girls today are often comparing themselves to a standard of beauty that is, in reality, only a mirage. So, it's no wonder that, according to the findings of this report, 2 in 5 young girls feel pressured to alter their appearance based on the images of influencers they see on social media.

The next wave of technology will be generative AI and its impact will likely be even more dramatic. Nina Schick, a global expert on generative AI, predicts that in the next few years as much as 90% of all online content could be AI generated[1]. We'll no longer be wondering whether an influencer has doctored their images, we'll be asking ourselves whether the influencer is a real person at all. We will be confronted with a reality where people will be comparing their appearance to images and videos of artificial bodies. While I don't mean to sound alarmist, we can't afford to underestimate the impact this technology will have on beauty standards and the way people perceive themselves and others.

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1 – Nina Schick. Deepfakes: The Coming Infocalypse (2010)

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As dystopian as all of this may sound, I do believe there's hope. It's too easy to get swept up in the negativity and moral panic surrounding generative AI. It's human nature to want straightforward answers, to determine something as either good or bad, when the reality is far more complex than that.

Despite its undeniable pitfalls, AI has equal potential to be a transformative force for good. For example, researchers are already exploring how AI can assist in the early diagnosis of cancer[3]. Meanwhile, technology companies tell us that AI will boost productivity, taking over the more menial aspects of our jobs and allowing us to focus on the things we enjoy most.

The birth and exponential growth of social media, in many ways, echoes the current AI conundrum. While we can point to some of the negative influences social media has had on today's beauty standards, we also cannot deny that it has had positive outcomes as well. Young people today have grown up exposed to far more diverse images of beauty than any other generation, thanks in no small part to social media platforms and the social justice movements they have enabled. And we're seeing the impacts of this play out in our data. Young people have a more flexible definitions of beauty, one that goes beyond just physical attractiveness, or what society tells them is beautiful. 68% of girls and 64% of boys say that even if a physical feature isn't considered attractive to others, or by society, they think it can be. For many young people, real beauty is about authenticity.

So, the real question is: how can we preserve real beauty in an increasingly digital world?

For the last 20 years, our Dove Self-Esteem Project (DSEP) has taken an evidence-based approach to empower young people with the body confidence to reject narrow beauty standards and embrace diverse beauty. Since its inception, we've reached over 114 million young people across 153 countries with educational content that promotes self-esteem and body confidence. In that time, we have continued to evolve our approach in step with societal and cultural changes, but one thing has always remained consistent: our unwavering commitment to celebrating real beauty. And that isn't about to change. In fact, this message has never been more important than it is at this very moment.

We have an opportunity to harness these new technologies as tools for positivity and creativity, and as a way to reach millions more women and girls with content that inspires confidence and challenges narrow beauty standards. At Dove, we seek a future in which women get to decide and declare what real beauty looks like, not algorithms. To ensure that generative AI doesn't undo decades of positive gains in beauty inclusivity and representation, we must ensure everyone is able to distinguish between what is real beauty and what is manufactured by AI, empowering them to define beauty on their terms.

Generative AI, like any new technology, is simply a tool – how it is used is up to us. So, let's make sure we use it the right way. Together, let's change beauty.

Thank you,

Alessandro Manfredi,
Dove Global Chief Marketing Officer

3 – Hunter B, Hindocha S, Lee RW. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Early Cancer Diagnosis. 2022, Cancers.

Introduction

Dove's Real State of Beauty report collates feedback from more than 33,000 respondents from across 20 countries, sharing their views on a variety of topics relating to their bodies and beauty. Where possible, we draw on comparisons to previous Dove research conducted in 2004 and 2016, measuring how these trends have changed over time[4].

Compared to our earlier studies, in this year's report we have expanded our sample size to be as inclusive and representative as possible. As well as now including men and boys, the report encompasses broader audience groups, including people with disabilities, people with mental health conditions, and a variety of sexual orientations and gender expressions.

Through our survey, we were able to listen to feedback from real people, all over the world. In doing so, we can examine the interplay between narrow and unrealistic beauty standards and body esteem and, importantly, how they impact people's everyday lives. Therefore, it is beneficial to first establish what we mean by body esteem, and why it has been the focal point, not only in Dove's own research, but of experts all over the world over the last two decades.

Body esteem, appearance and identity

Body esteem – referred to interchangeably with body image or body confidence – describes how a person feels and behaves in relation to their body, the way they look, and what their body is capable of doing. Body image isn't static – the way we feel about our bodies can change over time, sometimes on a day-to-day basis. This isn't just skin deep – our appearance connects deeply with our identity and sense of self. When this sense of self is knocked off balance it can have a dramatic impact on our mental and physical wellbeing.

Such an imbalance can occur when we undergo a dramatic change in our lives – such as during adolescence when our bodies go through puberty, or as we age and go through andropause (male menopause) or menopause. But instances of low body esteem can also be linked to triggers external to ourselves – such as stressful life events, when we internalize harmful beauty standards, or when we compare our appearance to others.

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"It's usual for body confidence to fluctuate over time – particularly when we go through stressful periods or when our bodies undergo physical changes, such as during puberty or pregnancy. However, this can become problematic when our self-esteem and sense of self-worth, which are closely tied to our appearance and body image, are shaped by external forces – such as what we see in advertisements or on social media. Social media and visual media encourage us to compare our appearance to others, and when these have been digitally altered it is disconcerting and confusing. This is when dissatisfaction occurs and we can internalize beauty ideals and the struggle to enjoy our own beauty can escape us."

Dr Susie Orbach, Psychotherapist, Psychoanalyst, Writer and Co-Author of Dove's 2004 The Real Truth About Beauty report.

4 – See the full methodology on page 66
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Beauty standards represent a set of ideals, defined by society at large, that determine what physical features are deemed attractive and socially acceptable – ranging from body size and shape to skin color, hair texture and more. These standards typically center around masculine and feminine traits, dictating how a person should look to conform to rigid societal expectations.

The origins of today's beauty standards are multifaceted and deeply complex, and likewise can vary from culture to culture. But according to the widely-accepted tripartite influence model, these appearance pressures can be traced back to three main 'modifiable' sources – family, peers, and traditional media[5]. These are known as 'modifiable' because we are able to exercise some control over them, whereas other sources – such as genetics – are largely beyond our control.
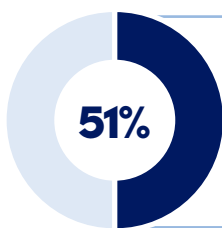
Low body esteem: a social justice, economic and public health issue

When we compare ourselves to unrealistic beauty standards, it can have a detrimental impact on how we feel about ourselves and how we show up in the world. Low body esteem doesn't just affect how we see ourselves in the mirror, it can have profound and far-reaching consequences.

We know from decades of previous research, for example, that women who have lower body esteem are less likely to take on leadership positions in the workplace. People who have body image issues are more likely to develop psychological and physical health problems – such as low self-esteem, depression, stress, anxiety, and disordered eating. What's more, young people who develop body dissatisfaction don't typically grow out of it – this is something they carry with them for the rest of their lives.

The Real State of Beauty report demonstrates that, when women and girls have low body esteem, they are more vulnerable to the burden of societal beauty standards. They are more likely to feel they need to be perfect in all aspects of their lives and to compare themselves with their peers and friends.

Dove's previous Real Cost of Beauty study in 2022, found that body dissatisfaction also has a very real financial impact, costing the US economy alone around $305 billion[6]. Beyond just impacting how we feel about ourselves, these beauty ideals can shape how we view others, leading to appearance-based discrimination. The same study found that appearance-based discrimination costs in total around $501 billion, which includes the costs associated with loss of wellbeing, engagement at work and school, and in life more broadly (such as the higher likelihood of conviction or stricter sentencing depending on skin color).

51% **Half of women with low body esteem would give up a year or more of their life if it would mean achieving their ideal appearance or body size.**

Body esteem, therefore, is a social justice, economic, gender, and public health issue, and should be treated as such. **It impacts us all.**

5 - Body image, social comparison, and eating disturbance: a covariance structure modeling investigation – Thompson et al. 1999
6 - Yetsenga R, Banerjee R, Streatfeild J, McGregor K, Austin SB, Lim BWX, Diedrichs PC, Greaves K, Mattei J, Puhl RM, Slaughter-Acey JC, Solanke I, Sonneville KR, Velasquez K, Cheung S. The economic and social costs of body dissatisfaction and appearance-based discrimination in the United States. Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention (In press).
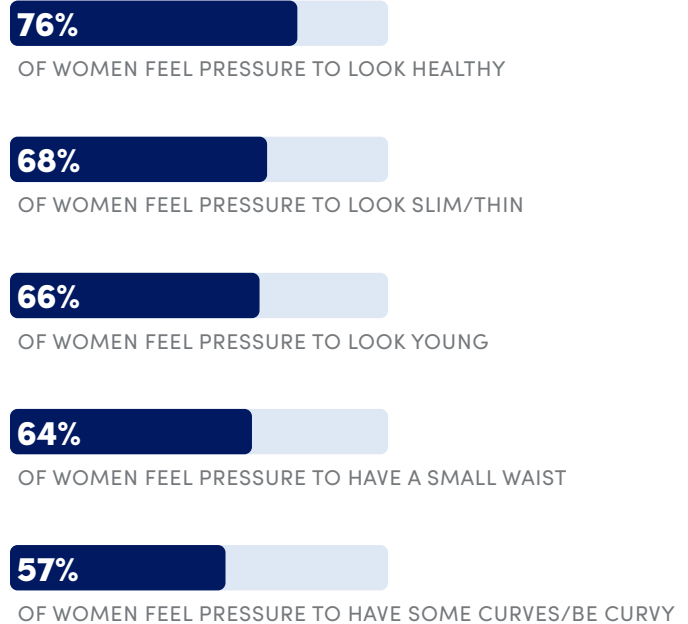
Examining the beauty checklist

In Chapter 1, we take a closer look at today's **'beauty checklist'** – the list of beauty ideals that women feel they must conform to – and we explore why women feel such intense pressure to conform to these unrealistic, complicated and often conflicting ideals. We discover that, for many women and girls, being closer to the beauty standard can feel like a gateway to privilege due to the high value society places on appearance. As such, many would be willing to make dramatic life sacrifices to achieve their beauty goals.

In fact, globally, our report reveals that **almost 2 in 5 of ALL women surveyed would give up a year or more of their lives if they could achieve their ideal appearance or body size** – a statistic that trended highest among women in India and China. While the specifics of the beauty checklist may vary depending on cultural nuances, every region shares an increasing preoccupation with achieving physical perfection, with beauty becoming a powerful social currency everywhere.

THE 'BEAUTY CHECKLIST'

76%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK HEALTHY

68%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK SLIM/THIN

66%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK YOUNG

64%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO HAVE A SMALL WAIST

57%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO HAVE SOME CURVES/BE CURVY

In pursuit of perfection

"

"In 2014, Danielle Sheypuk became the first model to work the runway at New York Fashion Week in a wheelchair. In 2015, it became more normalized for women to grow out their armpit hair and dye it rainbow colors. In 2016, Ashley Graham Ervin became the first plus-sized model to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated. So, is beauty becoming more inclusive? I think so. Does that mean we can pat ourselves on the back and say, "job done"? Absolutely not. Beauty standards still tell us beauty looks like a certain body shape, a certain hair type, a certain skin tone. I want us to get to a point where inclusivity isn't radical. Where seeing someone with armpit hair or facial acne, or someone with a physical disability in advertising isn't revolutionary. Where embracing our own definitions of beauty isn't a brave act of rebellion."

Jess Weiner, Cultural Expert and CEO of Talks with Jess

In Chapter 2, having established the specifics of today's beauty checklist, we ask ourselves how we arrived here. We turn our attention to the forces that have contributed to the creation of a society that places such a high premium on physical attractiveness and perfection. Specifically, we delve further into the third prong of the tripartite model – the mainstream media, and particularly beauty advertising.

Historically, the beauty industry was one of the key culprits responsible for perpetuating beauty standards. Brands would leverage beauty ideals as a tool to persuade consumers, typically women, to purchase certain products. These advertising techniques preyed on women's insecurities – and even created new ones – using celebrities or airbrushed models to depict a very narrow definition of beauty for women to aspire to, while presenting a product as the means to achieving this desired look.

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Beyond just esthetics, such advertisements served to connect women's beauty with the promise of happiness and success in every area of their lives, ultimately selling a desirable lifestyle only achievable through conforming to a particular beauty standard. As a result, beauty itself became synonymous with happiness. This phenomenon is what inspired Dove, in 2004, to launch the Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) and to commission The Real Truth About Beauty study, with the intention of countering such toxic beauty ideals.

> "In 1913, Webster's dictionary defined beauty as "properties pleasing the eye, the ear, the intellect, the esthetic faculty or the moral sense." But by 2004, the default definition of beauty had shriveled pitifully. The contributions of the ear, the intellect, the broader esthetic faculty or the moral sensibilities were gone. Beauty was about the visual – the eye popping features and stunning proportions of a few handpicked beauty icons. No wonder many people turned away from beauty. In the 1980s and 1990s, beauty fell out of academic discourse. Some people waved it away, denying its reality or power. But beauty never went away and it is time to reclaim it. As we used to know, beauty is so much more. Dove's The Real Truth About Beauty study was a landmark, a revolutionary step forward in reclaiming beauty and re-examining it with a new point of view. It realizes that beauty is never going away and that it has enormous power. It knows that beauty should not be reduced to a political or cultural problem but understood as a basic human pleasure. Let us enjoy all forms of beauty and take pride in our diversity and our power."
>
> *Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Harvard Medical School and co-author to*
> *Dove's 2004 The Real Truth About Beauty report*

Back then, in 2004, we see that women were already craving more diverse and authentic representations of beauty from the mainstream media and the beauty industry. In Chapter 2, we explore the progress that has been made over the last two decades toward achieving this objective. Our research found that 43% of women and 47% of girls feel better represented in beauty advertising and the media now compared to five years ago.

However, the results also offer a somber reminder that true inclusivity remains a work in progress. Many women agree that despite inclusivity gains, it is still only the most physically attractive women who are shown in popular culture. And this was most acutely felt by those who, historically, have been the most underrepresented in mainstream media – such as plus-sized and disabled women – as we explore in Chapter 3.
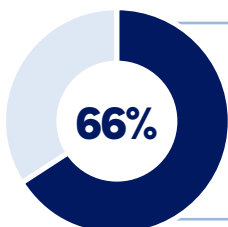
66% — **More women (66%) in 2024 now feel that it is only the most physically attractive women who are portrayed in popular culture. In 2004, 50% of women felt this way.**

Digital distortions and the comparison trap

Today it is not only the mainstream media and beauty industries, alone, that are responsible for contributing to a society where women and girls are under unprecedented pressure to achieve physical perfection. It would be remiss not to address the dramatic impact that Highly Visual Social Media (HVSM) has had on our society, particularly the beauty landscape. This is the focal point of Chapter 4.

At the time of this report, social media usage is continuing to grow exponentially with no sign of slowing down. Approximately 5.04 billion people use social media globally – that's more than half of the world population – and the average user spends around 2 hours and 23 minutes a day online[7].

In this always-on, digital world, we are exposed to beauty standards at a far higher frequency than ever before. And the criteria that women and girls are expected to adhere to are becoming increasingly narrow and difficult to achieve.

Whereas in years past, beauty ideals were primarily amplified through the mainstream media – such as on billboards or in print magazines – online they are now inescapable. Before, it was only highly-trained professional photographers and editors who could manipulate images to make models in advertisements appear flawless. Now, anyone with a smartphone can do it, as photo editing tools and blemish-erasing filters become ubiquitous.

Additionally, image editing software is becoming increasingly sophisticated, with some manipulations so subtle and natural-looking they are almost undetectable. These airbrushed images are contributing to a culture of perfectionism, with people often unwittingly comparing themselves to images of peers that aren't authentic or accurate. This kind of comparison can be incredibly insidious, leading to problems like low self-esteem and even having an impact on mental health. Even though some people may be cognizant of the fact that most of what they see online isn't necessarily real, paradoxically this doesn't seem to lessen the pressure they feel to emulate these unrealistic beauty standards.

This pressure can lead some to take drastic steps to alter their appearance, occasionally even through unhealthy means such as disordered eating or extreme overexercising. But as beauty standards continue to become increasingly detached from any biological reality, many women must turn to surgical interventions to achieve a look that is difficult or even impossible to obtain naturally. It's perhaps unsurprising that, in 2024, the plastic surgery industry is projected to see revenue of around $28.36 billion, and that this is expected to grow to approximately $34.25 billion by 2028[8]. In Chapter 4, we explore women and girls' attitudes towards cosmetic surgery and how social media and influencer culture are contributing to the pressures they feel to go under the knife.
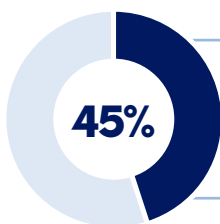
45% | **45% of young girls believe there is no excuse not to be beautiful, with everything that is available to women today.**

Of course, these challenges aren't unique to any gender. Unfortunately, no one is immune to societal beauty standards. That's why, to make this year's report as comprehensive and representative as possible, we expanded our survey sample to include men and boys in the conversation for the first time. In Chapter 5, we explore the 'beauty checklist' through the eyes of men and boys, as well as how this culture of comparison, particularly in digital spaces, tangibly impacts their lives.

7 - Data Portal: Digital 2024 – Global Overview Report [Accessed – February 2024]
8 - Statista: General & Plastic Surgery Devices Worldwide [Accessed – March 2024]

Supporting body confidence at every age

Amid some disheartening findings, there is cause for optimism. Our research indicates girls all over the world are growing up with a healthier relationship with their bodies than previous generations, as well as more flexible definitions of beauty. In Chapter 6, we learn that girls view the future as a place where everyone has access to the same opportunities, regardless of their body type, gender, or ethnicity/skin color. We discover they are also less self-critical and less likely to feel bad about the way they look when they catch sight of themselves in the mirror.

> **In 2024, girls aged 10-13 are more likely to feel satisfied with their lives, compared to their counterparts in 2016.**

However, this positive trend also serves as an urgent reminder that more must be done to support body esteem in people of all ages – especially older women, who can struggle with the added pressure of ageist beauty standards.

Since the inception of CFRB in 2004, Dove has become the biggest provider of body confidence and self-esteem education in the world. Working in partnership with several global experts, including those at the Centre for Appearance Research, we created educational materials for the Dove Self-Esteem Project. Now, these materials are embedded into school curriculums and used by youth groups and parents all over the world.

Beyond our work with young people, we are also taking action to address the systemic issues that continue to impact the body esteem and wellbeing of people of all ages. We acknowledge that the onus should not be on women and girls themselves to take on the burden of unlearning societal beauty standards. It is our responsibility, in partnership with others in the industry as well as policymakers, to dismantle these ideals, promote diverse beauty and change social norms.

In 2018, for example, we launched #ProjectShowUs in partnership with Getty Images, the largest international stock photo distributor, and Girlgaze, a collective of female-identifying and non-binary photographers. Together, we built the world's largest stock photo library of its kind, depicting a more inclusive image of beauty – a collection that continues to grow. Our hope is to encourage others in the media and advertising industries to use these images to reflect the authentic experiences of women all over the world.

We also understand that many of today's beauty standards are still deeply rooted in Eurocentric ideals and, as such, perpetuate appearance-based discrimination against marginalized groups of people all over the world, including people of color, people in larger bodies and people with disabilities. We are therefore committed to creating a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable world for everyone. One step on this journey was the formation of the CROWN Coalition, which we co-founded in 2019 in the United States.

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

The Coalition was convened to help advance and advocate for legislation to end race-based hair discrimination, known as the CROWN Act in the United States. CROWN stands for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair," and strives to ensure protection against race-based hair discrimination based on texture and protective styles in workplaces and K-12 public and charter schools. At the time of this report, the CROWN Act and legislation inspired by the Act has been passed in 23 States and over 50 municipalities.

In the United States, we supported the launch of the Campaign for Size Freedom, co-led by the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and Solovay Law's Fat Legal, Advocacy, Rights and Education Project (FLARE). The Campaign works to strengthen legal protection against body size discrimination. Dove's support included funding a first-of-its-kind legal fellowship, which utilizes legal strategies, research, and community engagement to enact meaningful change in policies, practices, and public perceptions that perpetuate weight-based discrimination. Additionally, the FLARE Fellowship is working to document and expand access to critical medical services that impact marginalized people in larger bodies.[9]

Meanwhile, in Brazil, Dove launched a summer campaign in 2023 to support size inclusivity on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. The project followed a survey that found 50% of people with disabilities and 42% of plus-sized people have stopped going to the beach because of the lack of amenities that allow them to be comfortable while there. 20% of plus-sized people said that one major challenge was finding accessible beach chairs that could accommodate their body type.

In response, Dove worked with creative agency Soko to redesign the classic folding beach chair, creating one that was larger, sturdier and inclusive for people with larger bodies. The chairs are available to borrow, free of charge, along the Rio de Janeiro coast. Additionally, instructions for building more of these chairs have been published as an open source file to help other companies to continue producing more inclusive beach equipment.

These examples only represent a small selection of the global and regional projects Dove has launched all over the world to deliver on our Real Beauty Pledge, which remains our North Star. We firmly believe that beauty is for everyone and that it should always be a source of confidence, not anxiety. This belief has been at the very heart of everything we have done as a brand over the last 20 years and continues to shape our vision for the future. In the final chapter, called Looking Ahead, we outline how Dove is leveraging the insights of this report to refresh our Real Beauty commitments.

Shaping a beautifully inclusive future

Our Real State of Beauty report strives to present an honest and impartial reflection on today's beauty landscape. However, today's beauty standards are the product of decades of social change, as well as intersecting issues of gender identity, race, sexual orientation and more. The report provides a snapshot of attitudes towards beauty today and has been developed with the input of a diverse panel of self-esteem, body image and psychology experts from all over the world to ensure it is as representative as possible – but it is not exhaustive. It is not possible to capture within the scope of this report the full breadth of global beauty standards, their various nuances, and their deep-rooted historical origins.

But it is our hope that the Real State of Beauty report will act as a barometer for evolving beauty standards. With Nina Shick's prediction that, in the next few years, as much as 90% of online content could be AI-generated[10], AI is currently one of the biggest threats to the representation of real beauty, and so this is an area we are directing significant attention.

We share the opinion of women and girls all over the world, who believe real beauty should mean authenticity. That's why we are committing to accelerate our efforts to champion transparency and diversity, taking action to shatter beauty stereotypes in new and emerging media, and renewing our vows to protect real beauty. Clearly, the work we began back in 2004 is far from over. We will never stop campaigning for better representation and working to ensure beauty is a source of pleasure, inspiration, and self-expression for everyone.

10 - Nina Schick. Deepfakes: The Coming Infocalypse (2010)

Chapter 1:
Beauty is a powerful currency

When Dove first created CFRB in 2004, women were already craving greater inclusivity from the media and beauty advertising industries, wishing to be liberated from the rigid definitions of beauty imposed upon them. **Nearly 8 in 10 women (79%) told us in 2004 that they wished the media did a better job of portraying women of diverse physical attractiveness** – whether that be age, race, skin color, body shape, or physical abilities.

Twenty years on, unfortunately many of the same beauty ideals women were beholden to in 2004 are still impacting women in 2024. In fact, in Italy, Argentina, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, women feel beauty has become even more narrowly defined now than it was 20 years ago.

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"The attributes of female beauty have become very narrowly defined in today's world"

■ 2004 ■ 2024

	USA	BRAZIL	FRANCE	ITALY	ARGENTINA	UK	CANADA	NETHERLANDS
2004	70%	67%	67%	63%	60%	59%	57%	42%
2024	64%	64%	64%	69%	66%	65%	69%	53%
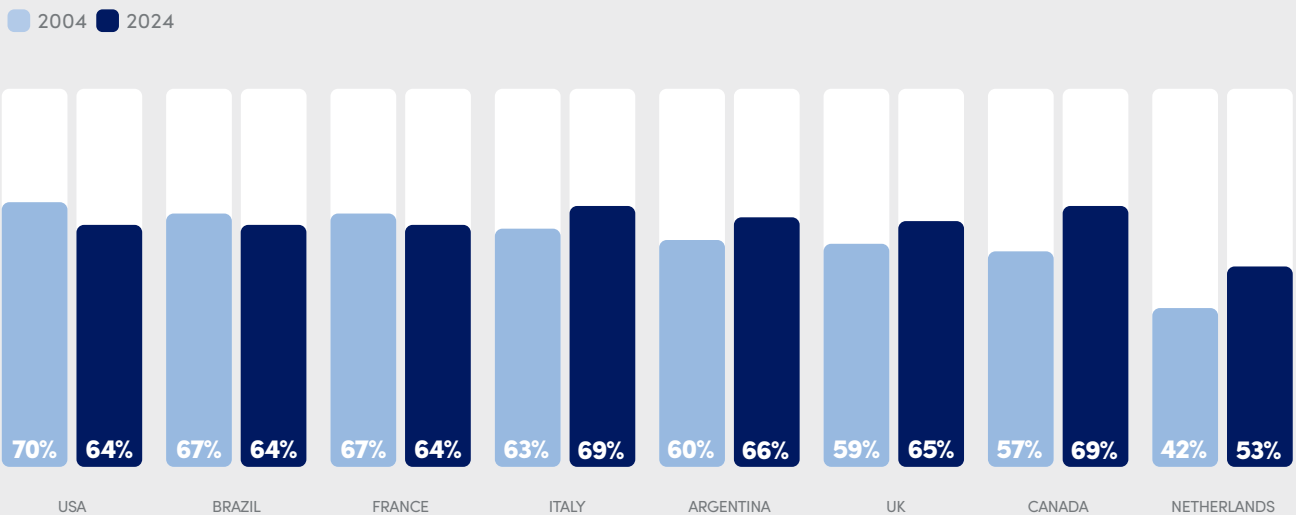
From a specific body type to a flawless complexion, less body hair or a darker or lighter skin tone – the beauty checklist that women feel they must adhere to in order to be found conventionally attractive can be long and, more often than not, contradictory. Not to mention that it is forever changing.

THE 'BEAUTY CHECKLIST'

76%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK HEALTHY

64%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO HAVE A SMALL WAIST

68%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK SLIM/THIN

57%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO HAVE SOME CURVES/BE CURVY

66%
OF WOMEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK YOUNG
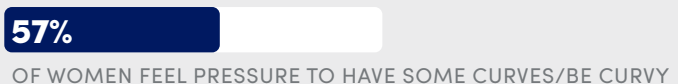
While the specific criteria may vary broadly across countries and cultures, regardless of geography women and girls everywhere are subject to the high premium society places on being beautiful. In fact, today, **6 in 10 women (61%) say they are expected to be more physically attractive than their mother's generation was.**

WOMEN WITH LOW BODY ESTEEM ARE THE WORST IMPACTED BY SOCIETAL BEAUTY STANDARDS.

81%
OF WOMEN WITH LOW BODY ESTEEM
FEEL PRESSURE TO BE BEAUTIFUL

VS. **43%**

THOSE WITH HIGH BODY ESTEEM

77%
OF WOMEN WITH LOW BODY ESTEEM
FEEL PRESSURE TO HAVE A SMALL WAIST

VS. **35%**

THOSE WITH HIGH BODY ESTEEM

83%
OF WOMEN WITH LOW BODY ESTEEM
FEEL PRESSURE TO BE SLIM/THIN

VS. **36%**

THOSE WITH HIGH BODY ESTEEM

65%
OF WOMEN WITH LOW BODY ESTEEM
FEEL PRESSURE TO BE CURVY/HAVE CURVES

VS. **34%**

THOSE WITH HIGH BODY ESTEEM

75%
OF WOMEN WITH LOW BODY ESTEEM
FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK YOUNG

VS. **42%**

THOSE WITH HIGH BODY ESTEEM

Across generations, both women and girls (67% across both groups) share the view that society places too much emphasis on beauty as a source of happiness – although this has decreased nominally since 2016.

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

The cost of "pretty privilege"

Beauty – often determined by thinness, youthfulness, clear skin, and a myriad of other narrow requirements – has become a powerful currency, one that people feel will open more doors for them. **61% of women today say that those who are beautiful have access to better life opportunities**, whereas only 46% felt this way in 2004. In fact, in the last couple of years, this line of thought has been articulated in online spheres as **"pretty privilege"**, a phrase used to describe the numerous social and material benefits associated with physical attractiveness. In a society where being beautiful is as much about survival and success as it is about esthetics, women and girls are willing to go to drastic lengths to achieve their beauty goals. Many would even be willing to make dramatic sacrifices.

"Pretty privilege can be a bit of a problematic term because it implies that women who are 'conventionally attractive' are exempt from societal pressures," says, Professor Phillippa Diedrichs. "It's important to remember, even those who conform or come closest to matching mainstream beauty ideals are susceptible to low body esteem and the pressures associated with conforming to a certain image of beauty."

"The term 'pretty privilege' also trivializes alarming biases in society when it comes to beauty and appearance – biases that perpetuate gender stereotypes, racism, weight bias and ageism," Professor Diedrichs continues. "We should be more concerned about why pretty privilege is able to exist at all. Why do we live in a society where a woman's value is determined primarily by the way she looks and by non-inclusive and prejudiced beauty ideals?"

Because women and girls must exist in a society that overvalues physical appearance over qualities such as intelligence, career success, leadership skills, kindness and honesty, many would be willing to sacrifice these qualities to achieve "pretty privilege."

Almost 2 in 5 women would give up a year or more of their lives if they could achieve their ideal appearance or body size. This was particularly high among younger women (aged between 18-24), half of which would shave at least a year off their lives in exchange for beauty. Likewise, this was especially high among women with low body esteem, and those who were plus-sized, part of the LGBTQ+ community, women with mental health conditions and those with physical disabilities. Shockingly, **1 in 5 women would even go as far as giving up five years of their life, if it would mean conforming to society's definition of beauty.** 20% of women told us they would be willing to give up their dream job if it would mean achieving their ideal appearance.
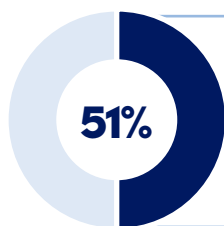
51% Half of women with low body esteem **would give up a year or more of their life** if it would mean achieving their ideal appearance or body size.

Materially, women are also investing a significant amount into reaching their beauty ideals – 19% of women say they spend more each month on their appearance than on groceries, in hopes of achieving a particular look or a better body. **3 in 10 girls likewise say they would be willing to give up good grades to be beautiful and 32% would rather spend money on their appearance than on going out and enjoying themselves.**

"Spending money or time on your appearance isn't inherently a negative thing, though I'd encourage thought and care around what you do and why," explains **Anna Ciao, Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Cross-Cultural Research at Western Washington University.** "These activities can be a form of self-care and self-expression, as well as a gateway to building community. People deserve to feel authentic – and safe – in the way they present themselves to the world. However, it can become problematic when people begin to conflate their sense of self-worth exclusively with a very specific definition of beauty – one that is almost impossible to achieve easily or naturally. This version of beauty excludes many people and the narrative that we must continuously invest money and time in order to match someone else's ideal version of ourselves is quite toxic."

Women and girls are under intense scrutiny

Historically, women have had a complex relationship with beauty and their own bodies, notions which are tightly bound up with ideas of morality and sexuality. Women have been told by society they must conform to specific beauty standards in order to be deemed attractive to the opposite sex. Yet, paradoxically, they have also been reprimanded for doing so – told that focusing too much on their appearance or taking pride in their looks is shallow and vain. Being under such intense scrutiny – and having to exist within the parameters of such contradictory ideals – continues to shape how women feel about their own bodies and the bodies of others.

Women in India and China were the most likely to feel heavily judged by those around them. **Dr. Megha Dhillon, Professor of Psychology at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University,** explains: "In India, it's socially acceptable in some context (such as during time spent with extended family members) to comment on other people's appearance – and this is doubly true for women. The social commentary on their physical appearance can be relentless. If you gain or lose weight or if you look too tanned, certain people will comment on your appearance and tell you to change it."

Dr. Dhillon continues, "This judgement can come from many different areas, but particularly from the family pressure that surrounds arranged marriages. It's important that women are deemed conventionally attractive in order to find a suitable husband. To do so, they must conform to very traditional views of femininity – such as maintaining long hair."

"Most people judge me based on how I look…"

CHINA	**62%**
	OF GIRLS AGREE
INDIA	**61%**
	OF GIRLS AGREE
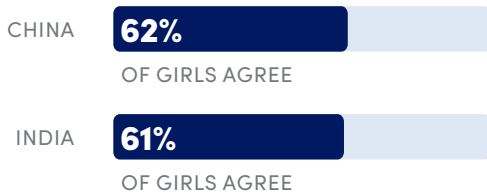
"When I was a teenager, people on the street used to admire me and my male classmates liked me. I feel like being young is an advantage."
Woman, aged between 40–44, from China

"I feel beautiful when I receive compliments from the opposite sex."
Woman, aged between 18–21, from China

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

In a society where being conventionally attractive is often a gateway to privilege, beauty has become increasingly tied to comparison and competition. **62% of women tend to judge the physical appearance of other women more harshly than men judge women.** It's worth noting that this is actually marginally lower than previous years, however clearly peer-based judgement remains high.

Jaime Slaughter-Acey, Associate Professor at University of North Carolina, says: "Beauty can be an incredible force for connection and community. In many cultures around the world, throughout history, beauty practices have brought women together. In ancient African cultures, for example, braiding your hair wasn't just about esthetics, it was about communicating who you are. Braiding is an intricate process that takes hours and women from across the community would all work together, with techniques being passed down through generations. But in today's society, beauty has become increasingly individualistic and, as a result, often viewed as a competition."

"I hope those in power or those who have a voice would advocate more for the kind of beauty that does not cater to the male gaze or the patriarchy. I hope our girls will grow up and live their lives to be more accepting of themselves and their female peers."

Woman, aged between 25-29, from the Philippines

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO FEEL MOST PEOPLE JUDGE THEM BASED ON THE WAY THEY LOOK

2016   2024

47%   **38%**

2016   2024

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO FEEL THAT WOMEN JUDGE THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF OTHER WOMEN MORE

2016   2024

79%   **62%**

2016   2024
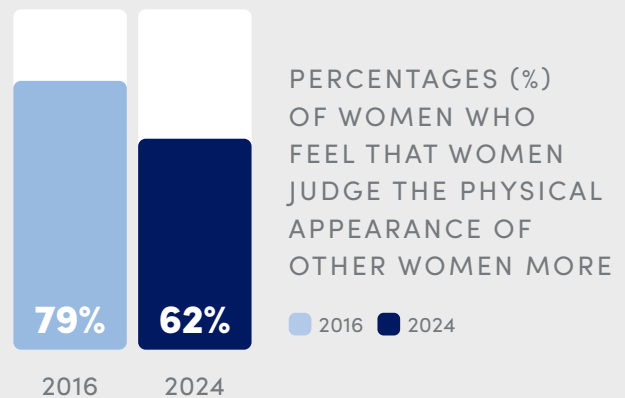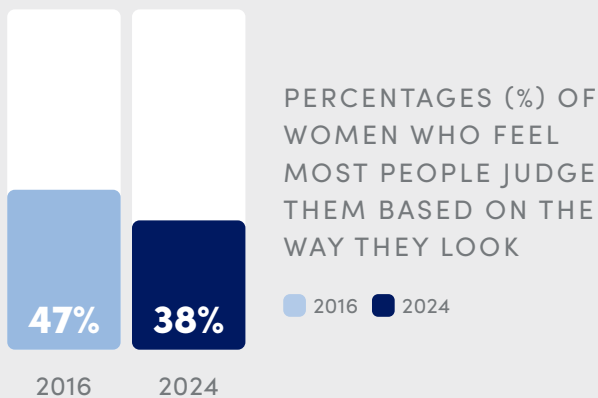
Sadly, but perhaps not all that surprisingly when you take into account the huge pressure women and girls are under not only to look beautiful but to look "perfect," women in 2024 report feeling less confident in their own beauty than they did back in 2016. There are numerous factors that may contribute to this finding, many of which we shall explore in more depth in subsequent chapters.
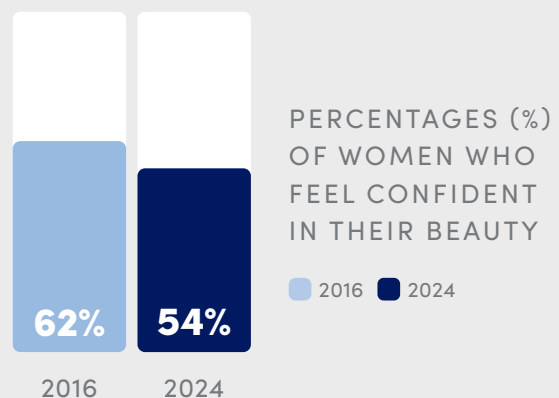
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO FEEL CONFIDENT IN THEIR BEAUTY

2016   2024

62%   **54%**

2016   2024

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I would give up one year or more of my life if that would mean achieving my ideal appearance/body size"

Country	%
INDIA	59
CHINA	57
AUSTRALIA	44
UK	44
SAUDI ARABIA	43
SWEDEN	43
CANADA	42
NETHERLANDS	40
BELGIUM	38
FRANCE	36
GERMANY	36
MEXICO	36
TURKEY	36
USA	36
BRAZIL	34
SOUTH AFRICA	32
ARGENTINA	28
ITALY	27
PHILIPPINES	26
INDONESIA	25
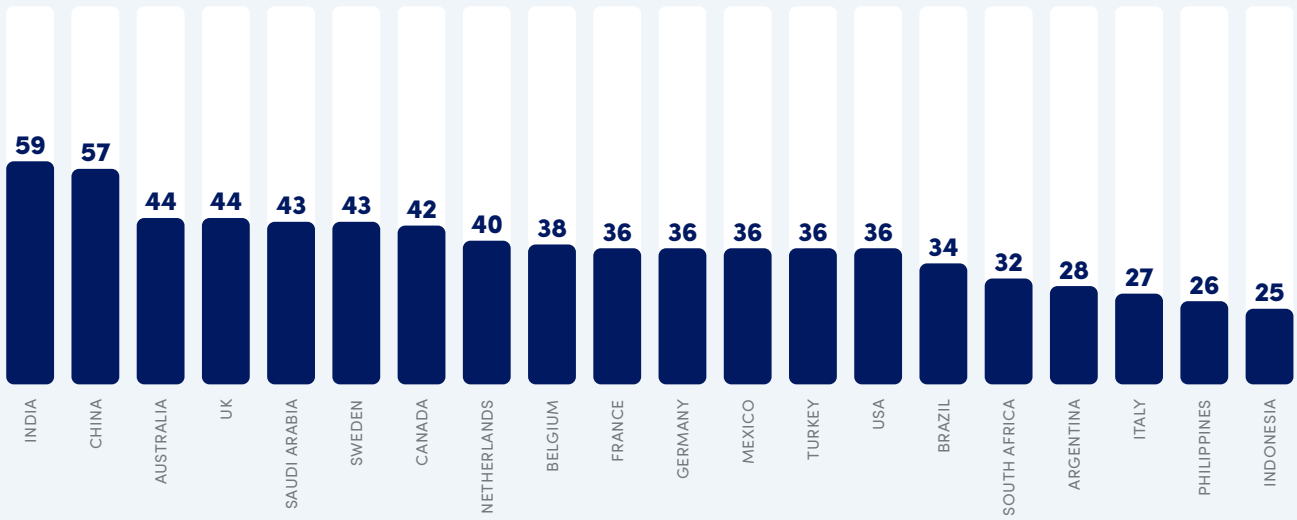
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I would give up five years of my life if that would mean achieving my ideal appearance"

Country	%
INDIA	44
CHINA	37
SAUDI ARABIA	26
UK	24
CANADA	24
AUSTRALIA	23
NETHERLANDS	21
TURKEY	21
USA	21
SWEDEN	20
GERMANY	20
MEXICO	20
BELGIUM	19
FRANCE	19
BRAZIL	18
PHILIPPINES	17
SOUTH AFRICA	15
ARGENTINA	15
ITALY	14
INDONESIA	13
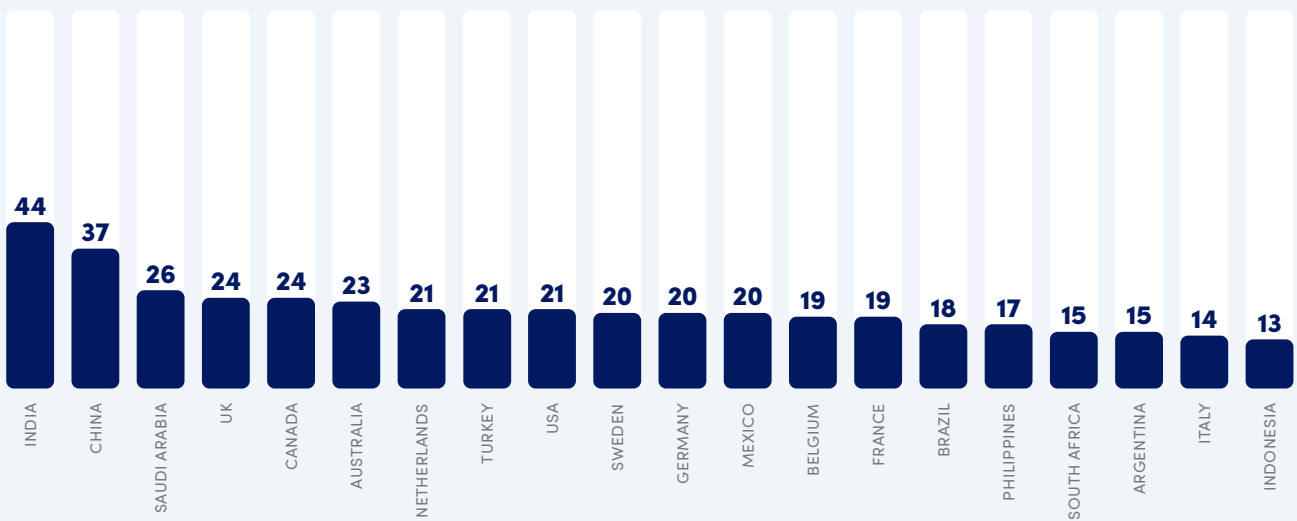
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I would give up my dream job if that would mean achieving my ideal appearance."

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
INDIA	40	49
CHINA	39	52
TURKEY	26	23
UK	25	19
AUSTRALIA	23	30
CANADA	21	22
SAUDI ARABIA	20	26
USA	20	21
FRANCE	18	18
GERMANY	18	22
NETHERLANDS	18	14
BELGIUM	17	18
BRAZIL	16	22
MEXICO	16	13
SWEDEN	15	18
ARGENTINA	13	13
INDONESIA	13	24
ITALY	12	13
PHILIPPINES	11	12
SOUTH AFRICA	10	12
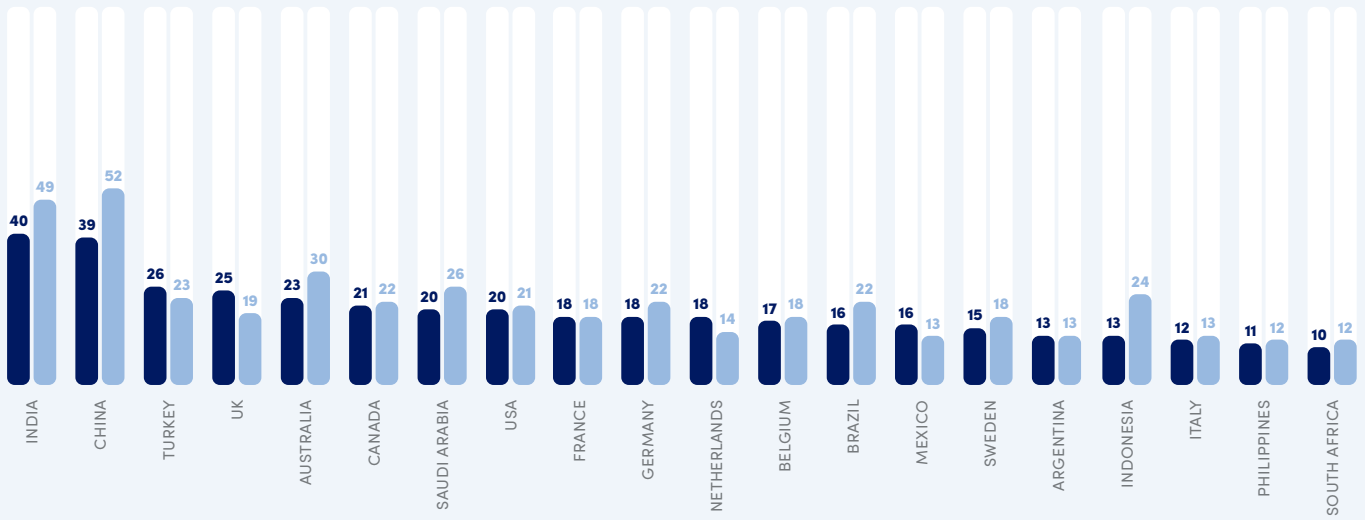
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I would be willing to be 25% less intelligent if I were to be 25% more beautiful"

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
INDIA	40	48
CHINA	39	50
UK	29	28
AUSTRALIA	22	30
SAUDI ARABIA	20	20
CANADA	19	25
NETHERLANDS	19	17
TURKEY	19	33
USA	17	26
BRAZIL	16	26
PHILIPPINES	16	13
SWEDEN	16	20
BELGIUM	15	23
FRANCE	14	18
MEXICO	14	20
GERMANY	13	21
SOUTH AFRICA	13	20
INDONESIA	12	25
ARGENTINA	11	19
ITALY	11	12
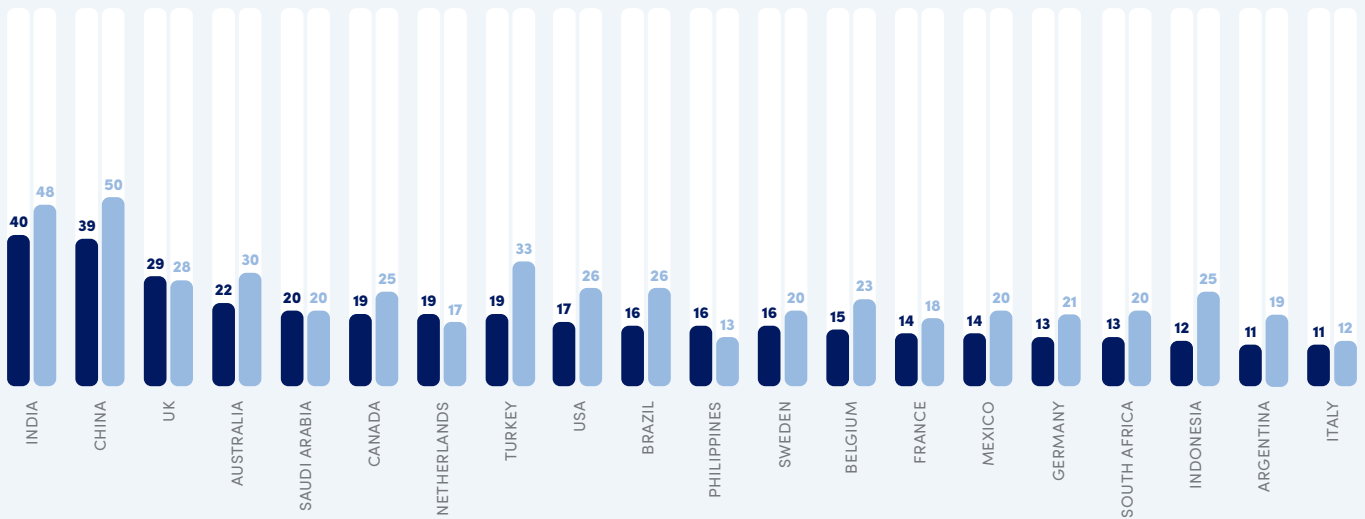
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I would give up good grades to achieve the ideal appearance or body size/weight"

Country	%
CHINA	69
INDIA	65
AUSTRALIA	42
TURKEY	38
INDONESIA	36
SAUDI ARABIA	36
BRAZIL	30
CANADA	30
SWEDEN	30
BELGIUM	28
GERMANY	28
USA	28
UK	26
FRANCE	25
NETHERLANDS	22
ITALY	20
MEXICO	19
SOUTH AFRICA	18
ARGENTINA	17
PHILIPPINES	17
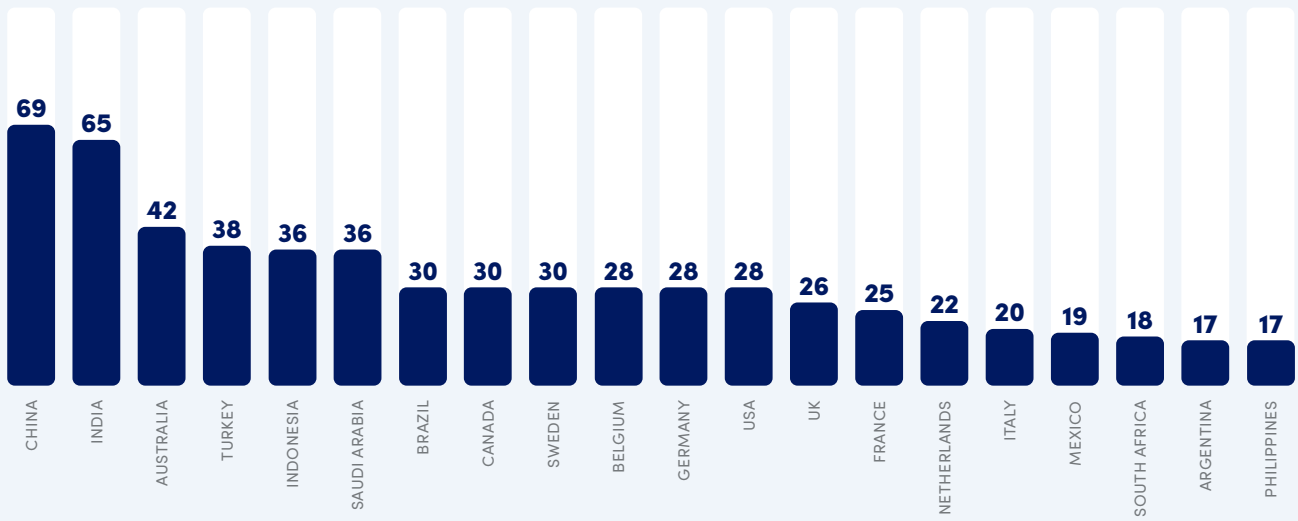
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TODAY VERSUS IN 2004

"Women who are beautiful have greater opportunities in life"

2004   2024

Country	2004	2024
BRAZIL	68%	71%
ARGENTINA	52%	59%
ITALY	50%	59%
FRANCE	49%	54%
USA	44%	59%
NETHERLANDS	40%	60%
UK	37%	57%
CANADA	28%	68%
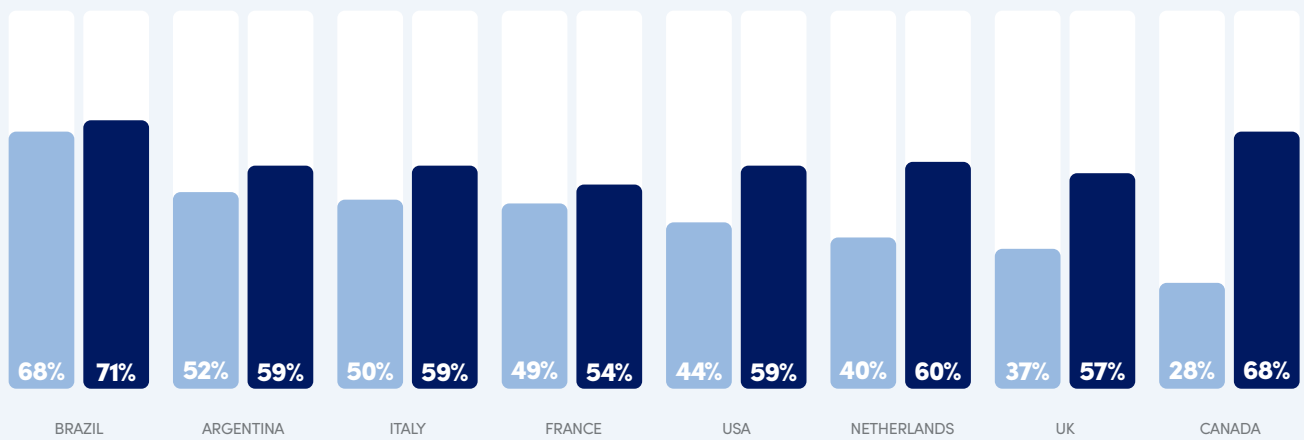
Chapter 2:
Beauty becomes more diverse, but perfectionism abounds

Historically, beauty advertising has both contributed to and perpetuated societal beauty standards. For decades, women and girls were exposed to images that depicted a homogeneous version of beauty that left very little space for individuality or self-expression. It was this phenomenon that first inspired Dove to conduct The Truth About Real Beauty study in 2004, which uncovered the detrimental impact narrow beauty standards can have on women's body confidence. Twenty years on, beauty advertising has fortunately taken steps toward depicting beauty as a broader spectrum, though true representation remains a work in progress.

From brands releasing more inclusive makeup shades to Danielle Sheypuk becoming the first model in a wheelchair to appear on the runway at New York Fashion week, the industry has made significant strides towards showcasing a more inclusive version of beauty. **Today, 43% of women and 47% of girls say they feel better represented in beauty advertising now than they did five years ago. 54% of women and 58% of girls recognize the industry is working to expand beauty ideals.** In countries like Brazil (62%), India (62%), Indonesia (60%) and Saudi Arabia (60%), young girls were more likely to feel well-represented and, encouragingly, women of color everywhere feel that beauty advertising is doing a better job of representing them. However, as **Tigress Osborn, Executive Director of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA)** warns, there remains room for improvement.

Tigress Osborne explains: "When we discuss representation it's important to acknowledge that the bar was pretty low to begin with. So, while I do agree that women of color are better represented now compared to five years ago, I also feel there is more we should be doing. I'm happy that we are starting to see women of different races, body sizes, and ages represented in the beauty industry, however there are still people who are underrepresented or inauthentically represented and we must work to address that."

True representation remains, in part, hindered by the heavy emphasis society places on physical appearance and flawlessness – abetted by the growth of social media platforms, where it has become common practice to doctor images or use filters (which we explore in more depth in Chapter 4). As such, despite greater diversity, beauty standards all over the world remain narrow and restrictive.

Women continue to point to the beauty industry – followed closely by the mainstream media and social media – as the primary source of their appearance anxiety today. **73% of women feel that advertising sets an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women will never achieve** – which is sadly almost on par with how women felt back in 2004 (74%). Women and girls in countries such as Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, and Canada strongly feel that society places too much emphasis on beauty as a source for happiness, contributing to the pressures they feel to be physically attractive.

46%
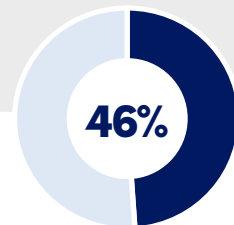
46% of women of color feel better represented in beauty advertising and the media now compared to five years ago

Sources of pressures that have a negative impact about how they feel about their appearance

	WOMEN	MEN	GIRLS (10-17)	BOYS (10-17)
Media e.g. online news, billboards, magazines	27%	20%	21%	16%
The beauty industry	27%	19%	20%	15%
My social media feed	24%	17%	18%	14%
Diet apps / tracking devices *only asked to 14-17 year olds*	16%	13%	13%	8%
My parents / Legal guardians	15%	12%	6%	6%
Peers / Friends	14%	12%	11%	10%
PE Teachers / Fitness coaches	14%	12%	9%	9%
Fitness apps / tracking devices *only asked to 14-17 year olds*	14%	12%	10%	9%
Siblings	13%	12%	8%	8%
Healthcare providers	13%	12%	8%	6%
Teachers	9%	10%	6%	7%
My children	9%	11%	–	–

[2024] What level of impact would you say each of the following have on the way you feel about your appearance?
Please select one option or each row. – NET: Negative Impact | Base: Women=14,673, Men=3,776, Girls=9,475, Boys=4,753

Many feel that the version of beauty they see reflected in advertising and the media doesn't line up with what they see reflected back at them in the mirror. Only the most physically attractive women are shown in pop culture and the women in advertisements, movies, on television, and on social media don't resemble women and girls seen in the real world. For women with physical disabilities, mental health conditions, and women in larger bodies, this disconnect is even greater.

Professor Nina Vasan, Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine, explains: "At first glance, the findings of Dove's Real State of Beauty report may appear contradictory. How can it be that so many women feel the beauty industry has become more inclusive in the last five years and yet, at the same time, so many feel this huge disconnect between reality and what they see in the media? Especially those who are plus-sized or who have physical disabilities. But those two notions can be true at once."

Professor Vasan continues: "We can recognize that, while some progress has been made toward better representation over the last decade, the majority of the images that we see are still not truly representative of real beauty. We are at a place now where we need to go beyond just improved diversity. We must also overcome our preoccupation with perfection and show an authentic, nuanced depiction of beauty that isn't hung up on being flawless."

66%
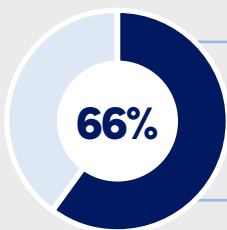
66% of women feel only the most physically attractive women are portrayed in pop culture – an increase from only 50% in 2004

Bombarded by images of beautiful, flawless models, celebrities and – as we explore more in Chapter 4 – social media influencers, many women and girls today feel pressure to embody this perfection in their own everyday lives. This can be particularly harmful for women who struggle with body confidence. **57% of women with low body esteem agreed with the statement that "women my age have to be perfect in all aspects of their lives"** – a sentiment that was particularly common among women aged between 18-24.

"The media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can't ever achieve"

WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN WITH LARGER BODIES	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN OF COLOR	OTHER WOMEN
79%	67%	73%	68%	73%	70%	72%	75%
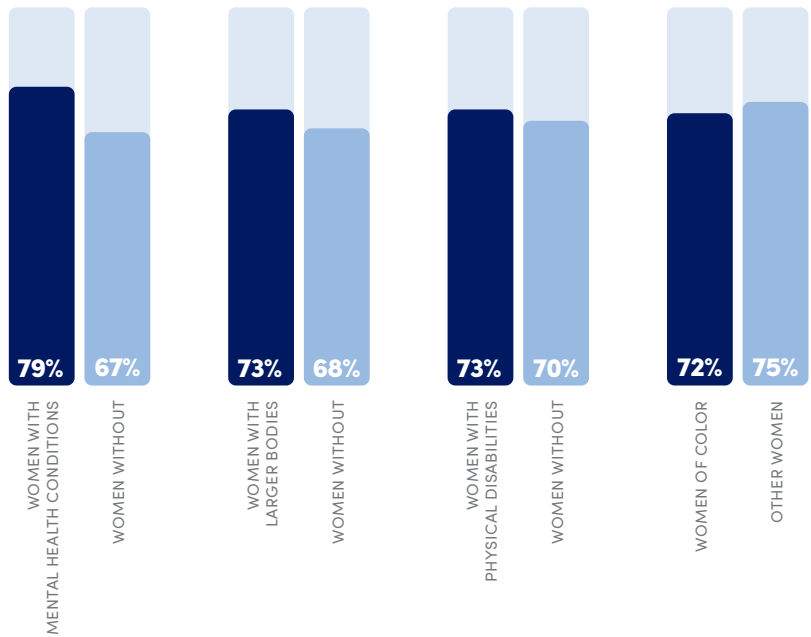
"Very few real women and girls look like the women and girls in ads, movies, television, social media etc."

WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN WITH LARGER BODIES	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN OF COLOR	OTHER WOMEN
74%	64%	71%	64%	71%	66%	69%	72%
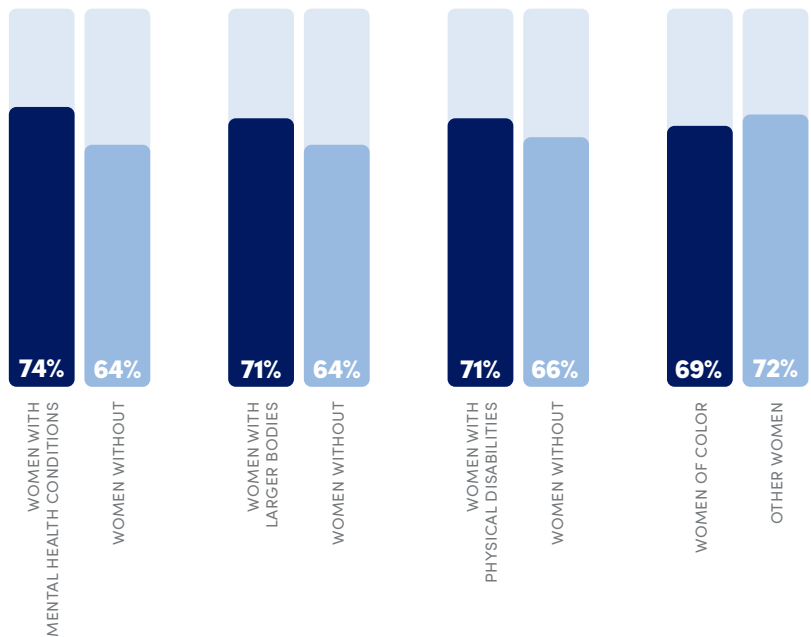
[2024] Thinking about what you read or see in television, movies, magazines, news and social media, to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? | Base: Women with mental health condition n=3,897, Women without mental health condition n=11,350, Women with larger bodies n=6,164, Women without larger bodies n=8.892, Women POC= n3,172, Women White n=6,278, Women with physical disability n=2,358, Women without physical disability n=12,660

Furthermore, despite overtures towards broader representation, people with physical disabilities, older people, and people of diverse body sizes remain the most underrepresented in beauty advertising. **21% of plus-sized women and 24% of women with physical disabilities disagree that they are better represented in media and advertising now compared to five years ago. 57% of plus-sized women say there is a "long way to go" before beauty companies are inclusive.** We explore the impact of this underrepresentation further in Chapter 3.

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"The beauty industry is trying to expand appearance ideals"

■ Women ● Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
BRAZIL	68	72
INDONESIA	68	69
SOUTH AFRICA	68	70
PHILIPPINES	65	77
INDIA	63	70
MEXICO	57	65
ARGENTINA	56	57
CANADA	55	64
ITALY	55	60
SAUDI ARABIA	54	63
TURKEY	54	54
USA	52	54
CHINA	50	60
AUSTRALIA	47	53
GERMANY	47	43
FRANCE	46	46
UK	45	54
SWEDEN	42	34
NETHERLANDS	41	41
BELGIUM	40	40
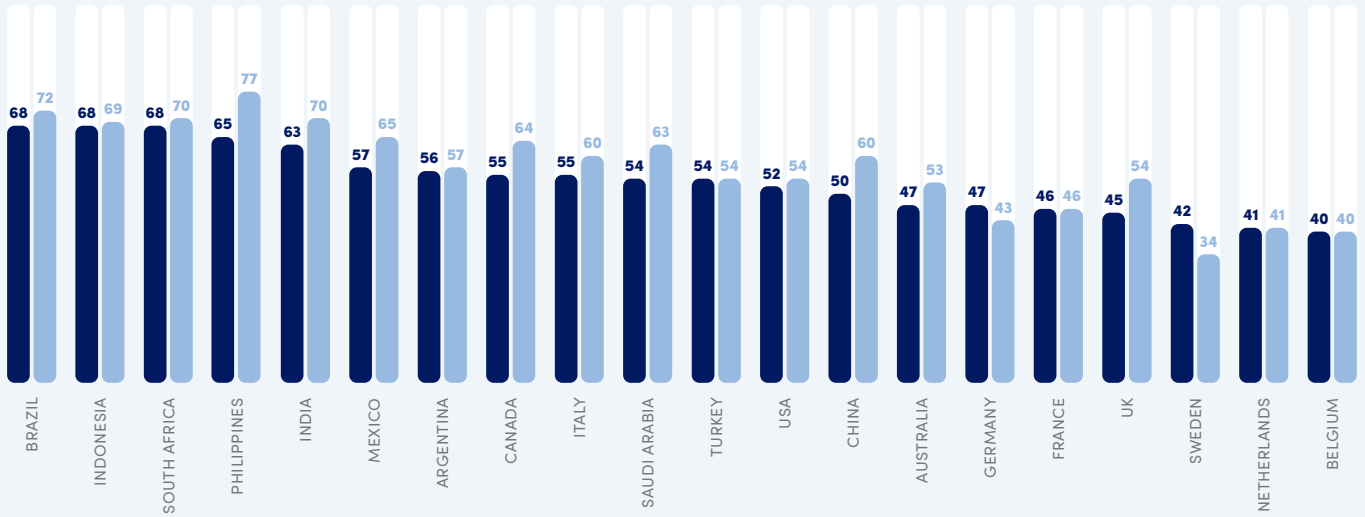
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"People like me are better represented in beauty advertising and media than five years ago"

■ Women ● Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
BRAZIL	56	62
INDIA	55	62
CHINA	50	55
TURKEY	49	50
SOUTH AFRICA	48	52
ARGENTINA	47	43
CANADA	47	49
MEXICO	47	52
SAUDI ARABIA	46	60
USA	45	52
PHILIPPINES	44	50
ITALY	42	41
UK	41	43
AUSTRALIA	39	45
INDONESIA	39	60
SWEDEN	37	27
FRANCE	35	28
NETHERLANDS	32	35
GERMANY	31	33
BELGIUM	29	29
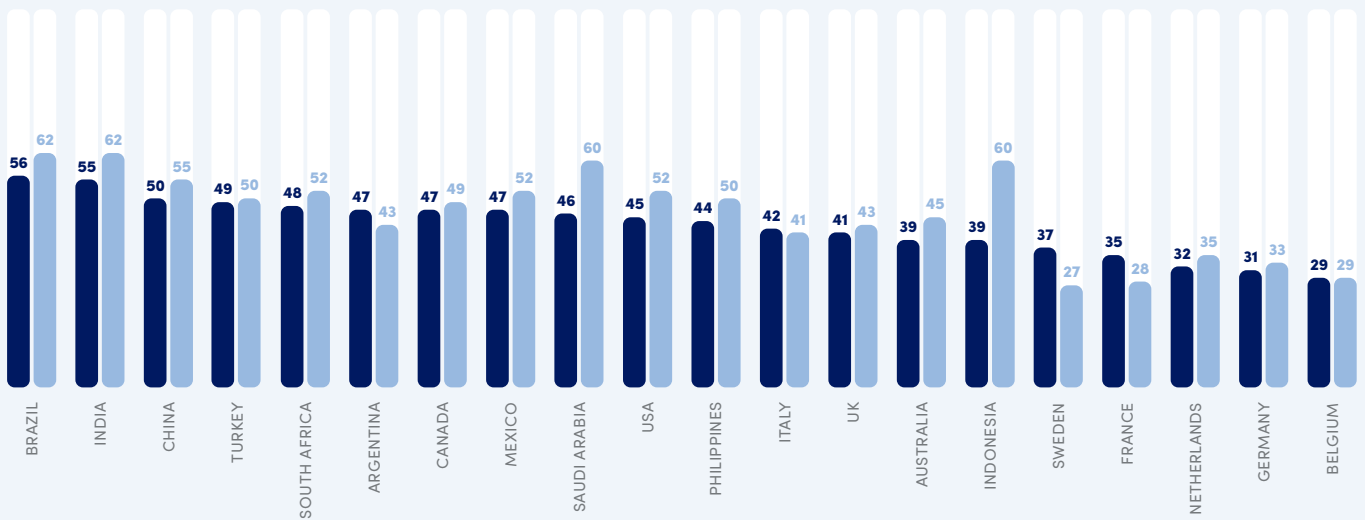
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TODAY VERSUS IN 2004

"The media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can't ever achieve."

● 2004 ● 2024

	USA	ITALY	ARGENTINA	UK	FRANCE	NETHERLANDS	CANADA	BRAZIL
2004	81%	80%	77%	74%	72%	72%	69%	66%
2024	69%	68%	77%	73%	68%	70%	78%	81%
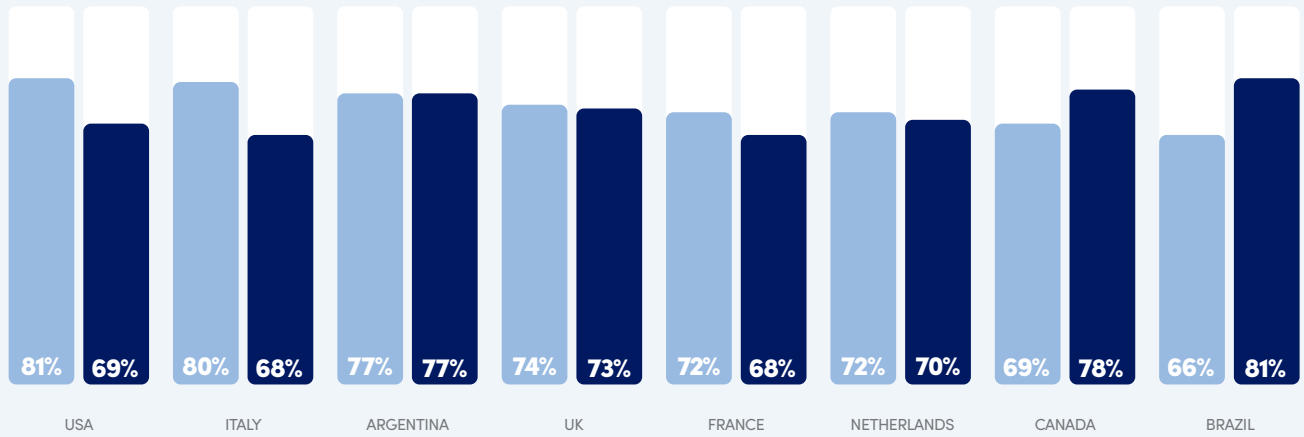
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TODAY VERSUS IN 2004

"Only the most physically attractive women are portrayed in popular culture"

● 2004 ● 2024

	ARGENTINA	USA	CANADA	UK	NETHERLANDS	FRANCE	BRAZIL	ITALY
2004	59%	59%	53%	51%	51%	47%	46%	33%
2024	75%	64%	71%	67%	66%	61%	70%	57%

Chapter 3:
Appearance-based discrimination continues to hold women and girls back

Beauty was once exclusively defined as being able-bodied, slim, young, heteronormative, and white by mainstream media and advertising – to the exclusion of disabled women, plus-sized women, women of color, women with mental health conditions and the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, there was once a time – sadly, not all that long ago – when these groups were all but invisible.

While this is thankfully beginning to change, centuries of erasure cannot be undone overnight. The damage this lack of visibility, as well as the internal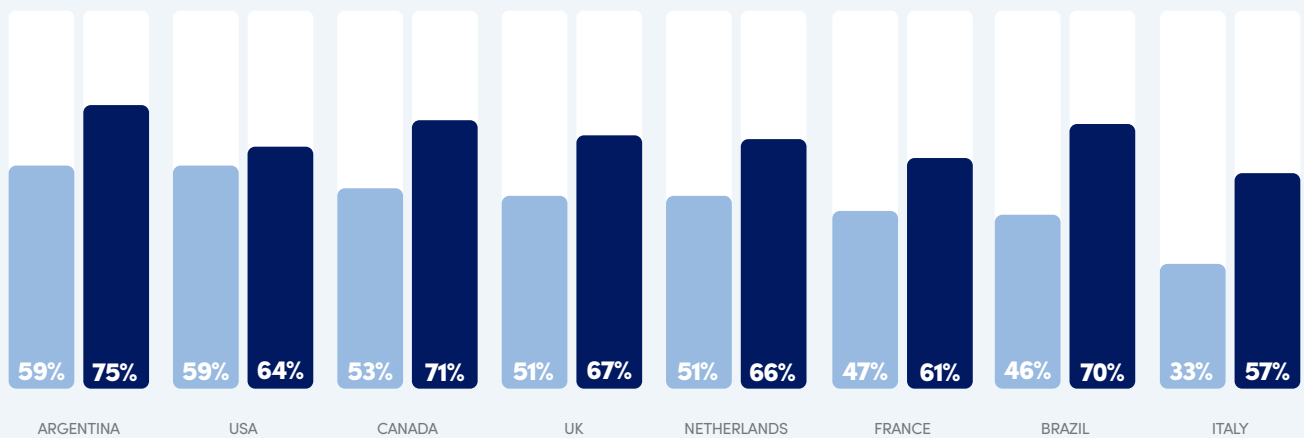ization of beauty standards, has caused to people's self-worth and body confidence will be even harder to rectify. Likewise, recent gains made in media representation do not negate the fact that people all over the world remain subject to systemic appearance-based discrimination.

In a society that covets perfection – and where this perfection is typically defined through a Eurocentric, heteronormative, ableist and ageist lens – those who exist outside of such narrow definitions of beauty suffer the most. Our research found women and girls in larger bodies, as well as those who have a physical disability or a mental health condition, were statistically more likely to feel pressure to conform to societal beauty standards, such as thinness and youthfulness, and were more likely to feel judged because of the way they look. Over time, this pressure can erode their body esteem, impacting the way they view themselves, their sense of self-worth, and their self-compassion. **Women in larger bodies and those with mental health conditions or a physical disability were far more likely to be self-critical and to compare themselves with others.**

"People who don't conform to a heteronormative, ableist, or gendered norm have likely grown up never seeing themselves in mainstream media, or at least not portrayed in a favorable way," explains Professor Phillippa Diedrichs, Professor of Psychology at the Centre for Appearance Research. "This poor representation sends a very problematic message that people who look like them are not considered worthy, beautiful, desirable or successful. As such, they are much more likely to be penalized by narrow beauty standards."

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

The impact of heteronormative beauty standards on the LGBTQ+ community

Many of today's most popular beauty trends were first pioneered by the LGBTQ+ community, where individuals adopted make-up as a tool for self-expression, liberation, and as a rejection of heteronormative ideals. For example, contouring – a makeup technique used to accentuate certain features, such as cheekbones – was first popularized by the drag community before it became a staple of many people's everyday beauty routines. The LGBTQ+ community has long pushed boundaries and defied beauty and gender norms.

However, in a society where beauty standards are often gendered and men and women are expected to conform to traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity, individuals who exist outside of the binary continue to face discrimination.

Our research found that 41% of LGBTQ+ people feel judged based on how they look (compared to 32% of non-LGBTQ+ women). The study also found this group were more likely to compare aspects of their appearance to others (54% of LGBTQ+ people versus 48% of non-LGBTQ+ women). They were more likely to be willing to give up a year or more of their life to achieve their ideal appearance or body size (49% versus 35%). And many LGBTQ+ survey respondents told us they have avoided a social engagement because they didn't feel good about the way they looked (80% versus 68%).

"I compare aspects of my appearance to others"

54%
LGBTQ+ PEOPLE
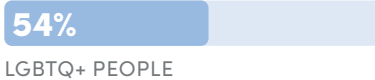
48%
NON-LGBTQ+ WOMEN

"I would give up a year or more of my life to achieve my ideal appearance/body size"

49%
LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

35%
NON-LGBTQ+ WOMEN

"I have avoided a social engagement because I didn't feel good about the way I looked"

80%
LGBTQ+ PEOPLE
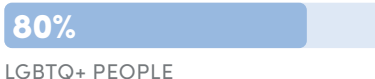
60%
NON-LGBTQ+ WOMEN

When it comes to societal beauty standards, Beta Boechat, a Diversity & Inclusion consultant based in Brazil who identifies as non-binary, explains that as well as being exposed to many of the same restrictive, heteronormative ideals as other groups, LGBTQ+ people can also face their own unique challenges.

Beta Boechat says: "Transgender women and non-binary people not only have to contend with all the same unrealistic beauty standards that cis women[11] are held to, we also have to deal with the idea of 'passability' – meaning how much a trans person can conform to heteronormative body and appearance ideals and essentially hide or erase their own transsexuality. People still have a pretty fixed mental image of what a trans person should look like and trans people are expected to conform to this."

"

"Please include more LGBTQ+ people [in beauty advertising]. Most of my life has included people that don't look androgynous and that has made me feel left out."

Woman, aged 18-24, from Canada

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11 – "Cis women" is shorthand for "cisgender women" and describes those who identify as female and who were assigned female at birth.

Bridging the gap between online body positivity and real-world size inclusivity

WOMEN WITH LARGER BODIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WITH DISABILITIES OR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, FACE HEIGHTENED BEAUTY PRESSURES

		STATISTICALLY HIGHER				
% OF WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE **ANY PRESSURE**	WOMEN WITH LARGER BODIES	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS	WOMEN WITHOUT	WOMEN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY	WOMEN WITHOUT
To look healthy	81%	73%	86%	74%	80%	76%
To be beautiful	75%	67%	81%	67%	72%	70%
To be slim / thin	80%	61%	79%	65%	71%	67%
To look young	70%	64%	74%	64%	67%	66%
To have a small waist	73%	58%	74%	60%	66%	63%
To be curvy / have some curves	63%	54%	64%	55%	59%	57%

[2024] Do you experience any of the pressures listed below in your life? By pressure, we mean things you feel you have to do/are expected to do. | Base: n=3,897 for women with mental health condition, Women without mental health condition n=11,350, Women with larger bodies n=6,164, Women without larger bodies n=8,892, Women with physical disabilities n=2,358, Women without physical disabilities n=12,660.

SIMILAR PATTERNS ARE OBSERVED AMONG GIRLS, WHERE SOME GROUPS ARE EVEN MORE VULNERABLE TO THESE PRESSURES

		STATISTICALLY HIGHER				
% OF GIRLS WHO EXPERIENCE <u>ANY PRESSURE</u>	GIRLS WITH LARGER BODIES	GIRLS WITHOUT	GIRLS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS	GIRLS WITHOUT	GIRLS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY	GIRLS WITHOUT
To look healthy	78%	67%	85%	68%	80%	69%
To be beautiful	72%	60%	81%	61%	72%	62%
To be slim / thin	74%	52%	74%	55%	67%	56%
To have a small waist	71%	48%	73%	51%	63%	53%
To be curvy / have some curves	65%	47%	70%	49%	63%	50%

[2024] Do you experience any of the pressures listed below in your life? By pressure, we mean things you feel you have to do/are expected to do. | Base: Girls with mental health condition n=950, Girls without mental health condition n=8,563, Girls with larger bodies n=2,277, Girls without larger bodies n=7,349, Girls with physical disabilities n=854, Girls without physical disabilities n=8,653.

Women in larger bodies have had a complex and difficult relationship with media representation over the decades. The body positivity movement first originated among LGBTQ+, Black, plus-sized women, but most people know of it today thanks to social media[12]. Through social media platforms like Instagram, the movement has gained mainstream traction at a scale that previously wasn't possible, with women in larger bodies engineering for themselves the representation they had craved for so long from the mainstream media.

12 –Griffin M, Bailey KA, Lopez KJ. #BodyPositive? A critical exploration of the body positive movement within physical cultures taking an intersectionality approach. [Accessed: March 2024]

However, as Beta Boechat explains, while in recent years the body positivity movement has helped to promote better size representation on fashion catwalks and in beauty advertisements – particularly in Western countries – many feel there is still a long way to go toward true inclusivity.

Beta Boechat says: "Despite the body-positivity movement, most larger bodied people still don't see themselves in the mainstream media. Instead, we are fed a more 'palatable' version of fatness, with plus-sized models who are the 'right' kind of fat. In other words, their weight is well-distributed and they have curves in all the places that society says it's okay to have curves. But there is still a huge group of plus-sized women who aren't represented at all – or when they are, it isn't in a positive way. I think, as a society, we still struggle to see beauty in being fat."

43%

43% of plus-sized women feel people judge them based on how they look.

There exists a gap between improved representation in the media and real-world size inclusivity. Many women in larger bodies, for example, still struggle to find clothing in their size, with many brands only carrying "straight sizes" – or in other words, clothing lines that don't go up to plus sizes. Those that do often only sell these online rather than stocking them in stores. From airplane seats to theme park rides, in many places the world remains unaccommodating to larger bodies. That's why, as Tigress Osborn explains, we must go beyond just appearance-based discrimination and consider issues of access-based discrimination for plus-sized people.

Tigress Osborn comments: "Body confidence isn't just about feeling good in your body, it's about what you are able to do with your body. Better representation of fat bodies in the media, alone, isn't enough. We also need to address the fact that, in many countries, the very architecture of society is hostile to fatness. When the world around you isn't accommodating – when you go to hospital and they don't carry gowns that fit you, or you're made to purchase two seats to fly on a plane – it contributes to this message that your body is the problem and that you should try to change it to conform to societal ideals."

Likewise, people in larger bodies continue to face discrimination in the healthcare sector, with previous research even finding that as a person's body mass index increases, physicians report having less patience, less respect, and less desire to help[13]. Dove's Real State of Beauty report echoes this, finding **1 in 5 women with larger bodies say healthcare providers have negatively impacted how they feel about their appearance.**

Rejecting Eurocentric beauty standards

It would be remiss to overlook the reality that many of today's beauty standards are deeply rooted in Eurocentrism. During the period of mass European expansionism that began around the 1400s, beauty ideals were formed through a predominantly White, European lens. Centuries later, while these beauty standards may have taken on new guises, many are still shaped by this history. As such, typically European appearance ideals – spanning everything from desirable skin color to hair type and even body type – have historically been transposed onto people of color. The ramifications are still being felt by people all over the world today.

13 - Huizinga, M., Cooper, L., Bleich, S., Clark, J. & Beach, M. (2009). Physician respect for patients with obesity. Journal of General Internal Medicine, 24, (11), 1236–-9.

Many women of color, particularly those in the Black community, can feel disillusioned by mainstream beauty standards, which are centered around Eurocentric ideals that are impossible for them to achieve. As Tigress Osborn suggests, some women of color reject these beauty standards altogether, which they feel simply aren't applicable to them. Our research found women of color were statistically less likely to be self-critical of their appearance or compare themselves to others.

45%

of women of color said they compare aspects of their appearance to others, compared to 51% of white women. 50% of women of color said they were "their own worst critic" when it came to their appearance, versus 63% of white women.

Tigress Osborn explains: "When you live closer to the beauty standard you might not reject it in the same way as those who exist further from it. In other words, if you know that there is nothing you can do, ever, to make yourself the beauty standard, you might be more inclined to reject it altogether. We've been having this debate for decades in Black American culture – these beauty standards are made by White people for White people, they're nothing to do with us. So, why should we try to meet them? But the reality is, no matter how protected we are within our own communities, we still have to interact with people from different communities – especially in the Western world – so you're still subjected to those beauty standards."

Tigress continues: "We have to remember that no one can self-esteem themselves out of oppression. You may have self-love, you may be less self-critical, but that alone doesn't shield you from systemic oppression and from being discriminated against because of your skin color, body shape, gender, and so on."

For many years, body dissatisfaction was often considered to be an issue that disproportionately impacted white women. For example, it was once assumed that Hispanic women's cultural acceptance of more curvy body types offered protection against such body dissatisfaction[14]. But this has since been disproved.


14 - Chamorro & Flores-Ortiz, 2000
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

In fact, previous research has found that not only do Hispanic women experience similar rates of body dissatisfaction as White women, as a population spreads across multiple countries they can experience added cultural pressures as a minority ethnicity[15] – and Dove's research supports this.

In the United States for example, which has one of the largest Hispanic minority populations in the world[16], **54% of Hispanic/Latinx women said they would give up at least a year of their lives to achieve their beauty ideals.** Hispanic/Latinx women were among the most likely to feel pressure to be beautiful, with 82% sharing this view.

54%

of Hispanic/Latinx women said they would give up at least a year of their lives to achieve their beauty ideals.
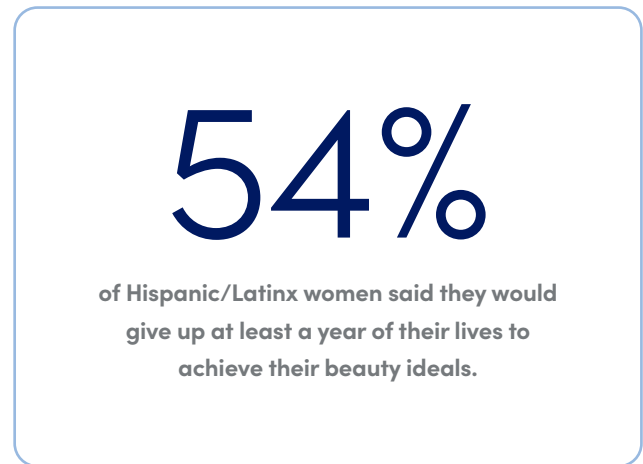
Marisol Perez, Professor in the Department of Psychology at Arizona State University, explains:

"The increase in Western market globalization (i.e., the marketing and selling of Western products to Latin America) has yielded an increase in the marketing of Eurocentric beauty standards, which may account for the increased pressure to be beautiful by Hispanic/Latinx women. Indeed, billboards selling American products with Eurocentric models can be seen even in rural areas throughout Latin American countries."

Professor Perez continues: "Our research on Hispanic/Latinx women residing in the United States indicates that the majority endorse multiple ideals of beauty. The two most commonly endorsed ideals are the Eurocentric beauty ideal that promotes thinness, and an hourglass body shape ideal that has been historically promoted by some Hispanic/Latinx cultures. Regardless of the ideal endorsed, Hispanic/Latinx women report increased pressure and lower self-esteem. Further, the stress of constantly navigating and adapting to different cultures (i.e., acculturative stress) contributes to feelings of pressure to conform to beauty ideals and body dissatisfaction. But it is important to keep in mind that the Hispanic/Latinx label represents a large heterogenous group spanning many countries, races, dialects, skin color, hair type, identity, values and beliefs. Further, Hispanic/Latinx identity can vary across situation and context."

Women of color, therefore, certainly aren't exempt from societal pressures to look a certain way. Indeed, they have had to contend with centuries of appearance-based discrimination. Sadly, women all over the world continue to face racism, colorism, and natural hair discrimination, as well as intersectional pressures of sized-based discrimination, ableism, gender inequality, heteronormativity and the stressors associated with being a minority population.

15 - Chamorro & Flores-Ortiz, 2000: Acculturation and disordered eating patterns among Mexican American women
16 - Pew Research Center: A brief statistical portrait of US Hispanics [Accessed: March 2024]

Natural hair discrimination and colorism persists globally

Perhaps nowhere is the impact of Eurocentrism more apparent than in the complex relationship people of color, especially women and girls, have with skin tone and hair texture.

Colorism, or skin tone prejudice, can have very real consequences for people of color all over the world, contributing to low self-esteem, poor physical and mental health outcomes, and many other economic and educational disadvantages. In some instances, in an effort to achieve a fairer skin tone, people may turn to products or procedures that promise to help them to achieve a paler complexion.

In 2022, the global skin lightening market was valued at around $9.9 billion – and this is projected to grow to $14.57 billion by 2030, with Asia Pacific expected to be the fastest growing region[17]. **The Real State of Beauty report found that 10% of women, globally, have tried skin lightening or skin bleaching products. This was highest in Brazil (56%), China (27%) and India (26%).**

46%
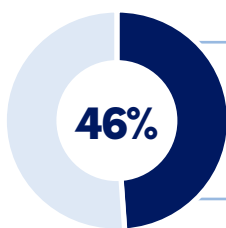
Almost 1 in 2 (46%) of women of color wish their skin was lighter – which is twice more than white women.

Colorism in India has a long and complex history associated both with British colonialism as well as the caste system where, historically, upper castes tended to have lighter complexions that afforded certain social privileges. As Dr. Megha Dhillon explains: "For women and girls in India, when we go out in the sun, we're not afraid of getting burnt, we are afraid of getting tanned. That's why people avoid going out in the sun during the hot summers, or they will cover up their arms and legs with clothing to prevent tanning."

Dr. Dhillon continues: "In recent years, some Bollywood stars have started to speak out against colorism, revealing how they struggled to find roles because of their skin tone. But there hasn't been much of a movement to address colorism in Indian culture. Many leading actors and actresses you see in Bollywood today are still light-skinned or attempt to look so through make-up and lighting."

Colorism is likewise prominent in the Middle East and Far East regions, as **Atika Khalaf, Associate Professor in Health Sciences at Kristianstad University, Sweden,** explains. "In many areas, including in the Middle East and Far East, we are still experiencing the long-lasting ramifications of a post-colonial White norm. People are raised to believe that lighter skin tones are indicative of beauty, wealth and social status – and this isn't specific to any gender or age group, it is a ubiquitous belief that is deeply entrenched in our society today."

"Women and girls in Saudi Arabia – and in the Middle East more broadly – compare themselves to the light-skinned women they see in advertisements or on social media," she adds. "However, these beauty standards are impossible for the majority of people to achieve. Most can't afford the procedures or cosmetic surgeries that would allow them to achieve a lighter skin tone, contributing to appearance anxiety and low self-esteem."

17 – According to Kings Research: https://www.kingsresearch.com/skin-lightening-products-market-362 [date accessed – February 2024]
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Natural hair discrimination, on the other hand, is the idea that certain hair types are in some way superior to others. In the 1990s, celebrity hairstylist Andre Walker coined a hair classification system designed to help people, particularly Black women, to identify the texture of their hair and find the right products to work with their specific hair type. The Andre Walker system is still widely used today and is not intended as a system of ranking. However, historically, Eurocentric beauty standards have dictated that some hair textures – usually those that have straighter hair or looser curls – are more desirable than others, such as those that have denser curl patterns or tighter, coily textures. This belief is still prevalent in many countries and many people continue to face hair-based discrimination in the workplace and educational system to this day. **Dove's research found over half (59%) of women of color wish they had straighter hair.**

Tigress Osborn says" **"While there is certainly better representation of natural hair and protective styles in the beauty and media industries today than there was 10 or 20 years ago, we still need to examine and undo some of the stereotypes and stigmas around natural hairstyles. For example, in many places, natural hair is often still viewed as 'unprofessional'. Some women feel they have to straighten their hair to make it appropriate for formal events."**

⊕ | The global view

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT
"There is still a long way to go before beauty companies are inclusive"

■ Women ● Girls (14 –17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
BRAZIL	72	75
MEXICO	65	70
ARGENTINA	64	64
SOUTH AFRICA	64	62
CANADA	63	65
AUSTRALIA	61	56
INDONESIA	60	63
INDIA	59	66
TURKEY	58	51
UK	57	58
USA	57	58
PHILIPPINES	54	56
SWEDEN	54	50
FRANCE	51	55
SAUDI ARABIA	51	62
CHINA	50	55
ITALY	49	49
BELGIUM	46	50
NETHERLANDS	46	45
GERMANY	44	44
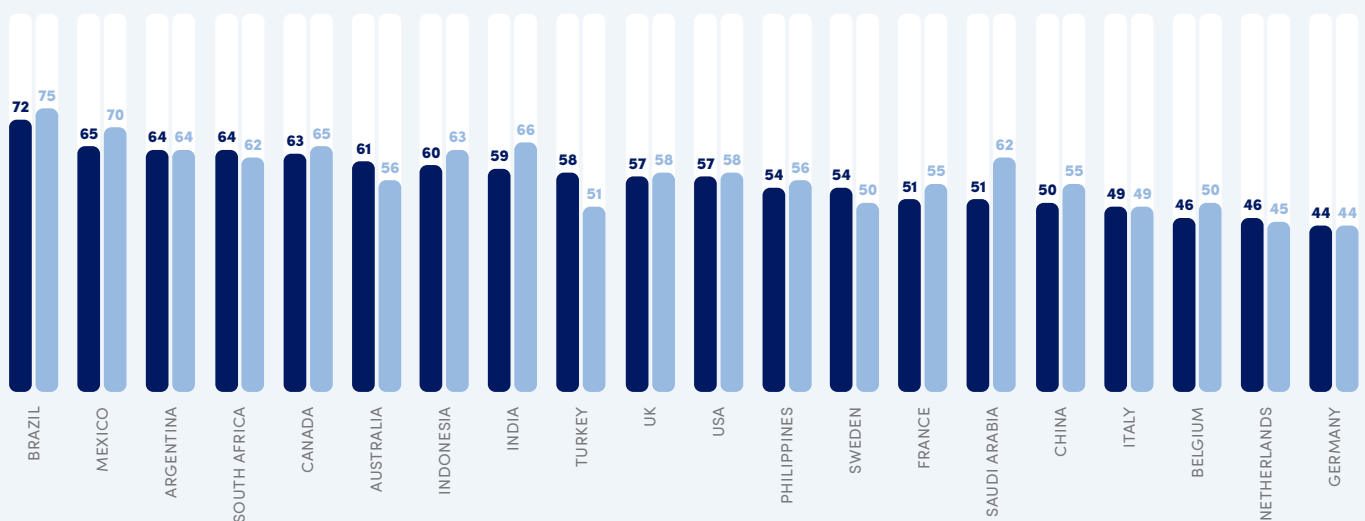
Chapter 4:
Distorted reality, AI and the pressure to achieve "perfection"

Social media can be an incredible tool for representation. Anyone with a smartphone and access to the Internet can now garner a huge platform, with the ability to reach audiences of people all over the world. As referenced in Chapter 3, this democratization has allowed many to establish meaningful communities online, find and connect with people who share their unique interests or experiences, or people who look like them and may not be as visible in mainstream media. Social media has allowed social movements, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), #MeToo, the body positivity movement, and many other regional, political, or community-specific causes, to elicit attention and support on a global scale.

However, despite its numerous positive use cases, the proliferation of **HVSM** – and the host of new technologies surrounding it – has undeniably contributed to the rise of an image-saturated society, where beauty has become more commodified than ever before.

48% of women and 42% of girls feel bad about themselves when they compare their life to images of their friends on social media. 64% of women and 68% of girls with low body esteem feel this way (compared to only 24% of both women and girls who have high body esteem).

Professor Phillippa Diedrichs explains: "Social media has facilitated the rise of **'selfie culture'**, where we are more preoccupied than ever before with self-presentation. We know that, when we share our image online, it has the potential to be viewed by a very large group of people – possibly from all over the world – so we very carefully curate an online persona for ourselves."

"We also have more opportunities to compare ourselves to others online than we ever have before," she adds. "We scroll through our feeds and see celebrities, models, peers and total strangers – and just like you, they are all doing their best to show themselves in a favorable light. In the past, we would compare ourselves to the odd model in a magazine or on a billboard, or we'd see people out and about in the real world. But today, any time we pick up our smartphone, we have the potential to be exposed to hundreds of images that we can compare ourselves to – it's relentless."

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Smile, you're on camera

Technology to fine-tune your facial features, erase blemishes, even dramatically transform your hair and eye color, have gone from the tools of the trade for professional photographers to an in-built feature of every major social media platform, easy for anyone, of any age, to access and use. With just a few taps, it's possible to achieve your beauty ideals – the catch being that it is only a fleeting illusion.

We are able to curate the perfect online persona, one that often doesn't exist in any biological reality – or at least, one that is not possible to achieve naturally. Social media feeds often therefore represent a distorted reality, one where the majority of people seem to align with mainstream beauty standards – or, in other words, where everyone is perfect.

As such, social media has contributed to the rise of this perfectionist culture, generating beauty standards that are more detached from reality than in the pre-digital era. This fundamental shift is mounting unprecedented pressure on people, especially women, to achieve appearance ideals that are increasingly unattainable. It's therefore unsurprising that **1 in 3 (38%) of women say they feel pressured to alter their appearance because of what they see online.**

As well as having the potential to "go viral", or at least be perceived by hundreds of your peers online, people are increasingly conscious of their **digital footprint** – the idea that, when something has been posted online, it is there forever. Even once an image or video has been deleted there is the chance someone else may have downloaded it or shared it with their friends, so it may still linger out there, somewhere in the digital ether. Therefore, the pressure to only show our best selves online is insurmountable – **6 in 10 women and girls agree there is a lot of pressure to show your best self on social media.**

> "Social media and influencers have added more pressure on society to look good. It's difficult being confident in one's own skin because of this. We all need to be real to ourselves and do what makes us happy."
>
> *Woman, aged between 45-49, from South Africa*

Professor Phillippa Diedrichs says: "Without careful curation, our social media feeds can be an alternate dimension where everyone has the 'perfect' smile, the 'perfect' body, the 'perfect' hair, the 'perfect' pose. It can make beauty ideals seem obtainable, as though we should all be able to achieve these standards when most people (including the people in the images themselves) don't even look like that in reality. The few that come closest to matching these ideals have won the genetics lottery or have undergone cosmetic procedures and spent countless dollars and time to achieve that look."
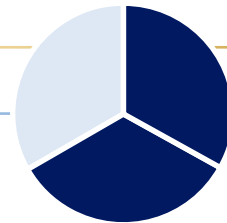
2 in 3 women and girls agree that social media creates more pressure for people to look a certain way.

Our research indicates that most people are well aware that many of the images and even videos they see online are manipulated. Afterall, anyone can easily edit their photos. The vast majority of people not only know these tools exist but they also use them regularly, so it should come as no surprise to them that others do the same. **In fact, 7 in 10 women and girls agree that images of women in the media are digitally altered or airbrushed.** However, this doesn't lessen the impact these images have on their body image. Women can, and do, internalize the beauty standards these distorted images create.

Malleable bodies

This is further compounded by the relatively recent rise of the social media influencer, who are blurring the lines between celebrity and the general public. One of the greatest appeals of social media platforms is the idea that, at least in theory, anyone can become an influencer – a label that has grown to become more than just a social status but a legitimate career option for many people.

However, the unfortunate reality is, many influencers achieve this status thanks, at least in part, to being deemed as conventionally attractive by their peers. This is certainly not the case for all influencers – indeed, some have built their platforms as representatives of those who, historically, have been marginalized in mainstream media, such as body positivity creators or disability advocates. However, many, particularly those in the online beauty community, do conform to conventional standards of beauty and therefore, intentionally or not, come to perpetuate these standards.

"Social media influencers are different from traditional celebrities," explains Professor Phillippa Diedrichs. "They often present themselves as being more relatable than celebrities. But this notion of being an 'everyday person' or someone who is just like us becomes problematic when influencers' content creation involves stylists, make-up artists, professional photographers, filters, and photo editing. This is further complicated when influencers use cosmetic procedures or non-surgical enhancements to achieve a certain look. Before, these sort of beauty procedures and standards were only available to celebrities or the very affluent, now they are far more affordable in many countries, which makes these unrealistic beauty standards seem somehow more obtainable."

As a result, women and girls feel increased pressure to look like their favorite influencers – because if they can do it, surely anyone can. **2 in 5 young girls feel pressured to alter their appearance based on images of influencers they see on social media.** Perfection seems more achievable than ever – there is no excuse not to be beautiful. The body is increasingly viewed as malleable, our appearance not something that is fixed or determined by genetics but something that can be edited and enhanced, if not through beauty products and makeup then through more invasive, even problematic, means such as restrictive eating or cosmetic procedures. In fact, our research found that **45% of young girls believe there is no excuse not to be beautiful, with everything that is available to women today.**

"I think social media has created a challenge for young girls as more and more of them compare each other online. It has become a toxic and mentally challenging place. As someone in her early 20s, I struggled with my appearance all through high-school and still battle beauty standards daily."

Woman, aged between 18-24, from Australia

65%
of women and 61% of girls believe viewing posts or interacting with people on social media can make young people want to change their appearance.

45% OF WOMEN HAVE TRIED DIETING

27% OF WOMEN HAVE TRIED INTERMITTENT FASTING

19% OF WOMEN HAVE TRIED TEETH WHITENING

10% HAVE TRIED CHEMICAL PEELING
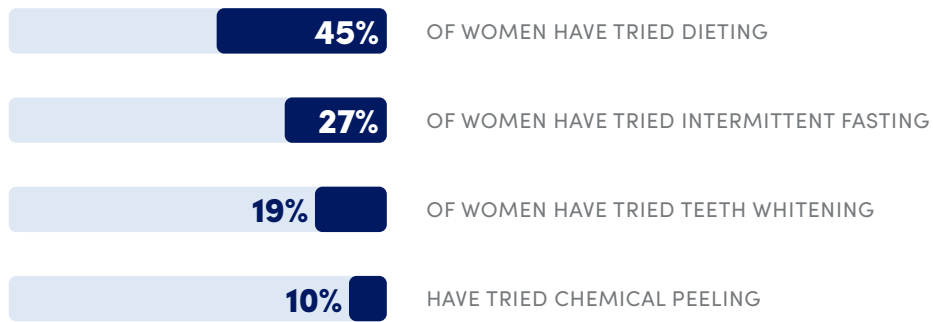
From nonsurgical enhancements like injectables, to more invasive procedures like breast implants, not to mention a booming skincare market, advances in beauty science and innovation mean women and girls can access a growing list of beauty products and procedures. Young people today are becoming aware of the existence of cosmetic procedures such as Brazilian Butt Lifts (BBLs), liposuction, and fillers from a young age.

"Social media has made it worse, especially for young women, with unobtainable body goals. In the gym, I see women only working out their glutes to achieve the current popular look. Others save for BBLs. It's a terrible pressure to be desirable. They don't realize the fakery on social media. I am constantly being told, by women and men, "ooh you don't want to look too muscular" i.e. too masculine. Well yes actually, I do. I want to age with strength and be able to look after myself. I am done being skinny and small. I want to take up space."
Woman aged 55-64 from the United Kingdom

Regarding the recent trends of tweens use of anti-ageing products and adding them to their gift lists. "When did 10-year-olds start worrying about wrinkles and getting older? It is time to speak up to highlight the absurdity and protect their self-esteem," **says Firdaous El Honsali, Global Vice President, Dove.** "At Dove, we believe beauty should be a source of happiness, not anxiety. For two decades, we have taken action to build confidence and self-esteem for millions of girls. Today, our girls are anti-ageing before they've even started to grow up and need us more than ever."

"I don't feel comfortable in my body every day... having liposuction would make me feel better."

Boy, aged between 14-17, from France

% OF PEOPLE WHO KNOW ABOUT EACH PROCEDURE...   —— GIRLS —— BOYS

94%
89%
84%
79%
74%

LEAST INVASIVE BEHAVIORS AND PROCEDURES   MOST INVASIVE BEHAVIORS AND PROCEDURES

OVER EXERCISING | DIETING | INTERMITTENT FASTING | FACIAL WAXING | SUN CONTOURING / TANNING | WAIST TRAINING | TEETH WHITENING | VENEERS | CHEMICAL PEELING | SKIN BLEACHING OR LIGHTENING | MICRO-NEEDLING | LIP FILLERS | BOTOX / FILLERS | LIPOSUCTION | NOSE JOB / RHINOPLASTY | BREAST SURGERY | MUSCLE IMPLANTS | BRAZILIAN BUTT LIFTS
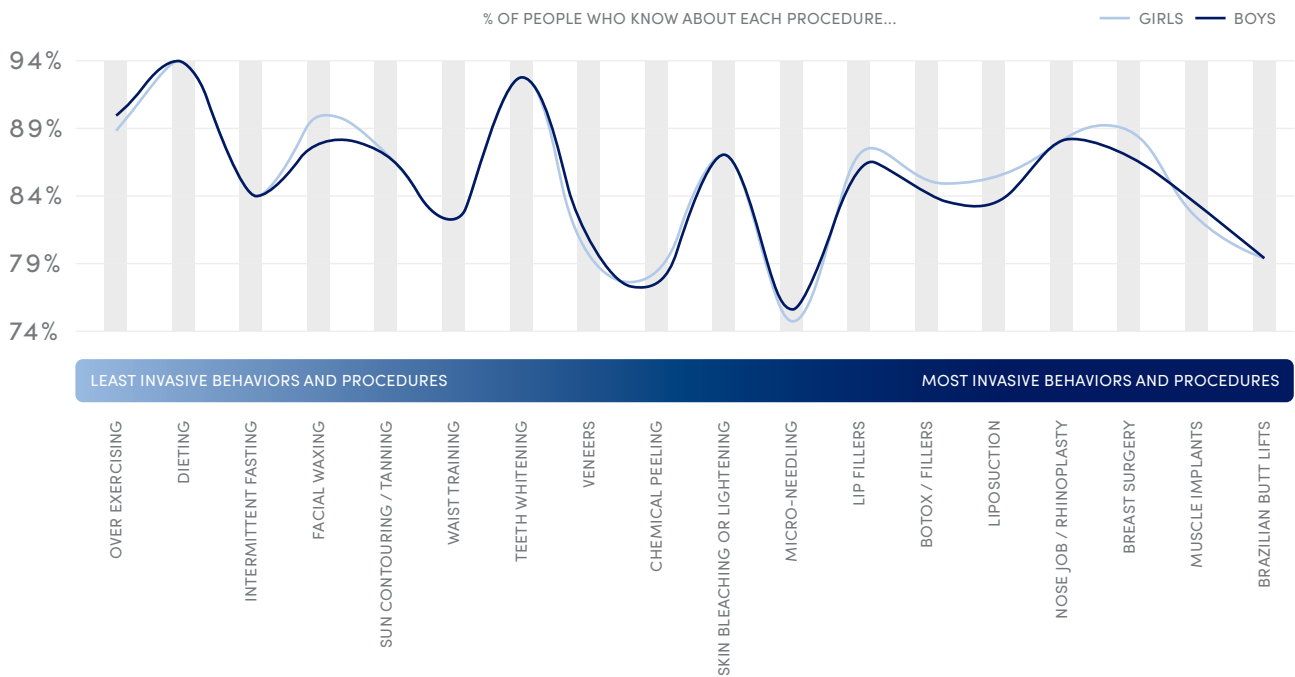
Having the choice to change your appearance isn't in itself problematic – everyone should have autonomy over how they look and be able to find pleasure and joy in playing with beauty. However, this can become concerning when, coupled with the distorted reality generated by social media, we learn to never be satisfied with our appearance and feel pressured to constantly upgrade the way we look to emulate specific beauty trends. Fleeting microtrends can turn this into a Sisyphean effort.

Dr. Nina Vasan, Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine explains: "Social media is a constant churn of microtrends. Recently, it's 'glass skin,' which originated in South Korean pop culture – whereby women and girls aspire to have skin that is so clear and so hydrated it almost resembles glass. Various cosmetic surgeries are themselves becoming trends, such as the recent surge in buccal fat removal procedures. A couple of years ago, the big thing was getting BBLs. These trends are further objectifying women's bodies and adding to the immense pressure we feel to constantly pursue beauty ideals."

Globally, half of all women and girls 14 to 17 believe plastic surgery is a way to feel better in their own bodies. This was especially high among women with mental health conditions as well as women in Brazil (69%), Turkey (57%), China (56%), Mexico (54%), and India (48%).

In Brazil – the country with the second highest share of plastic surgery procedures and where, in 2022, the number of cosmetic surgery interventions carried out surpassed 3 million[18] – **women were most likely to say that influencers create pressure to use cosmetic procedures to change appearance (71%).**

Beta Boechat, explains: "Carnival culture is very important in our country and sensual, physically attractive women have become its symbol. Other countries seem to have this stereotype of Brazilian women all being sexy, young, and beautiful – so, women in Brazil have become incredibly sexualized and objectified. There is immense social pressure to conform to a particular image of what a Brazilian woman should look like. And if you don't fit this narrow stereotype, cosmetic surgery is a way of achieving your desired body type."

18 –According to Statista: https://www.statista.com/topics/11862/cosmetic-procedures-in-brazil/#topicOverview [Accessed – February 2024]
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Real Beauty in Virtual Worlds

Things are further complicated when we consider the implications of new technologies, such as VR and recent breakthroughs in generative AI, which allow people to create entirely new personas, completely detached from any physical or biological reality. While on the one hand, these technologies open up near-infinite opportunities for creativity, self-expression and medical advancement, they also pose the risk of warping beauty standards beyond any semblance of real life.

Already, for some time now, the gaming industry has fallen short in its representation of girls and women, often featuring objectified and unrealistic depictions. These latest findings in the Real State of Beauty report support earlier Dove research, which indicates around 62% of women feel misrepresented in gaming[19]. As this technology becomes more sophisticated, and the use of virtual reality (VR) more widespread, we clearly must pay closer attention to the way people of all genders, sexualities, ages, races, and body types are represented in the virtual worlds we create. And these challenges are set to be amplified tenfold by recent generative AI breakthroughs.

Many people are already concerned about the implications of AI. **47% of women and 48% of girls feel that being able to create a different version of yourself using AI can have a negative impact on how you view yourself**, and this was particularly high among women with mental health conditions and low body esteem. Likewise, **41% of women and 44% of girls feel avatars in video games or VR are negatively impacting the way people feel about their appearance.**

> ❝
>
> "Generally, on the internet, I tend to use profile photos of characters I like. Not needing to show myself makes me feel confident. If I were exposed it would prevent me from being comfortable."
>
> *Non-binary child, aged between 10-13, from Brazil*

"Nina Schick, a leading expert in generative AI, has predicted that in the next few years as much as 90% of all the content we see online could be AI-generated[20]," says **Firdaous El Honsali, Global Vice President, Dove** "There isn't much research yet around how these images will impact beauty standards and body esteem, because the rate of innovation has been changing too rapidly. But what is clear is that we need to encourage media literacy, ensuring people are equipped to identify when content is real and when it is AI-generated."

"There's a lot of doomsaying around AI today, but really it is just a tool. Like any tool, we have to understand how to use it responsibly," **Firdaous El Honsali, Global Vice President, Dove** continues. "That's not to say the potential pitfalls of the technology should be ignored – for example, the concerns surrounding AI models perpetuating problematic biases is something we must take seriously and work to address. But that simply underscores why media literacy is so vitally important. To counteract these issues, we must ensure people are alert to AI-generated content and are able to approach it through a critical lens."

19 –Dove research, co-published with Women in Games and the Centre for Appearance Research: https://www.dove.com/uk/stories/about-dove/dove-gaming.html [Accessed - February 2024]
20 - Nina Schick. Deepfakes: The Coming Infocalypse (2010)
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"There is no excuse not to be beautiful, with everything that is available to women today"

■ Women ● Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls (10–17 years)
PHILIPPINES	57	68
INDONESIA	56	69
TURKEY	56	52
KSA	53	62
INDIA	52	59
CHINA	50	60
MEXICO	48	54
BRAZIL	47	59
SOUTH AFRICA	39	50
ARGENTINA	38	43
ITALY	29	32
CANADA	26	43
UK	24	31
USA	24	35
FRANCE	23	32
SWEDEN	21	27
AUSTRALIA	20	32
GERMANY	20	29
NETHERLANDS	18	22
BELGIUM	17	27
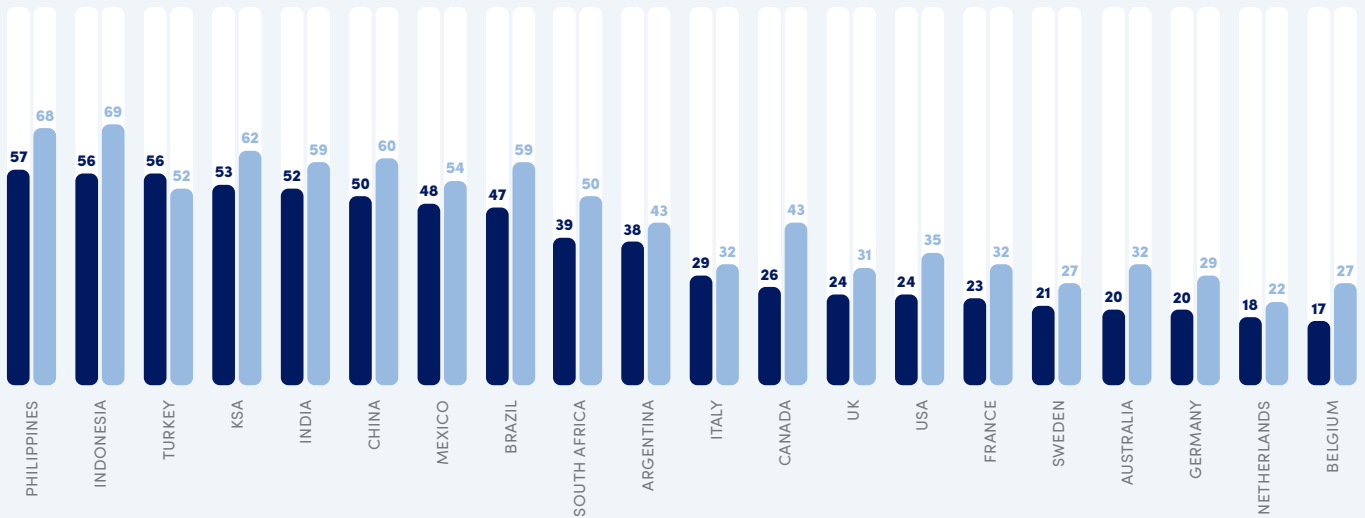
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"When I compare myself to the pictures of my friends on social media, it can sometimes leave me feeling bad about myself"

■ Women ● Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls (10–17 years)
AUSTRALIA	60	57
UK	57	51
CANADA	56	48
USA	56	44
INDIA	52	58
CHINA	51	58
SWEDEN	51	42
BRAZIL	49	44
SOUTH AFRICA	49	43
PHILIPPINES	49	27
ITALY	48	33
TURKEY	48	42
MEXICO	47	33
INDONESIA	46	43
FRANCE	42	34
ARGENTINA	41	27
SAUDI ARABIA	40	39
GERMANY	39	36
NETHERLANDS	39	30
BELGIUM	38	35
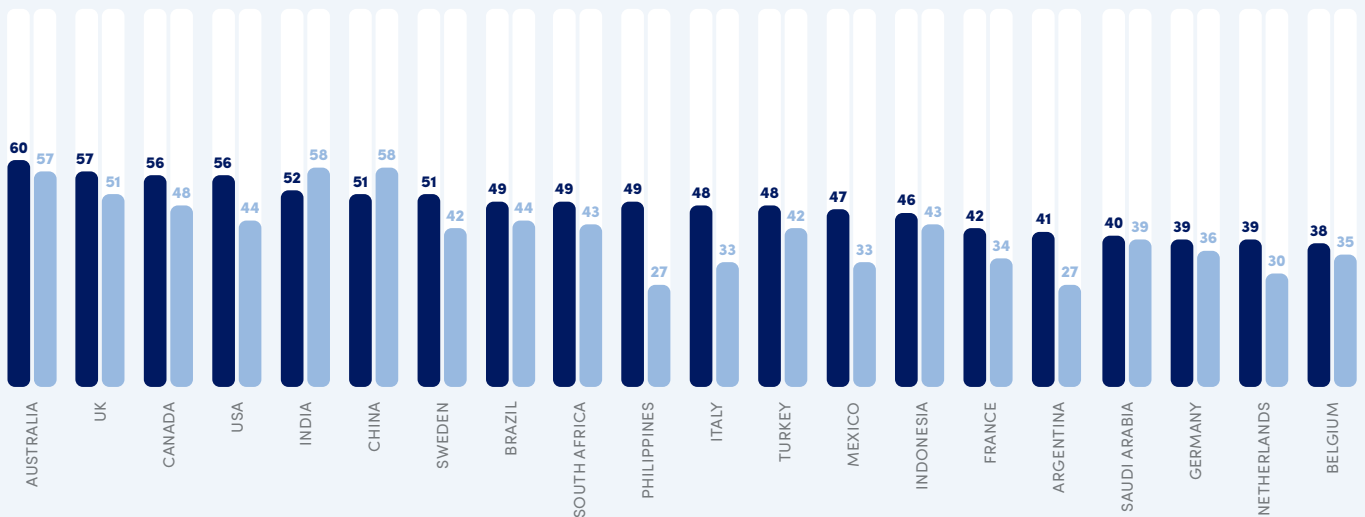
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"Social media creates more pressure for people to look a certain way"

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls (10–17 years)
SOUTH AFRICA	84	77
BRAZIL	81	78
SWEDEN	79	71
UK	73	74
AUSTRALIA	71	69
USA	70	65
CANADA	69	62
PHILIPPINES	69	63
ARGENTINA	68	63
MEXICO	66	63
GERMANY	65	58
ITALY	65	62
NETHERLANDS	64	63
SAUDI ARABIA	63	54
TURKEY	63	56
BELGIUM	62	58
FRANCE	61	57
INDIA	60	64
INDONESIA	58	55
CHINA	54	63
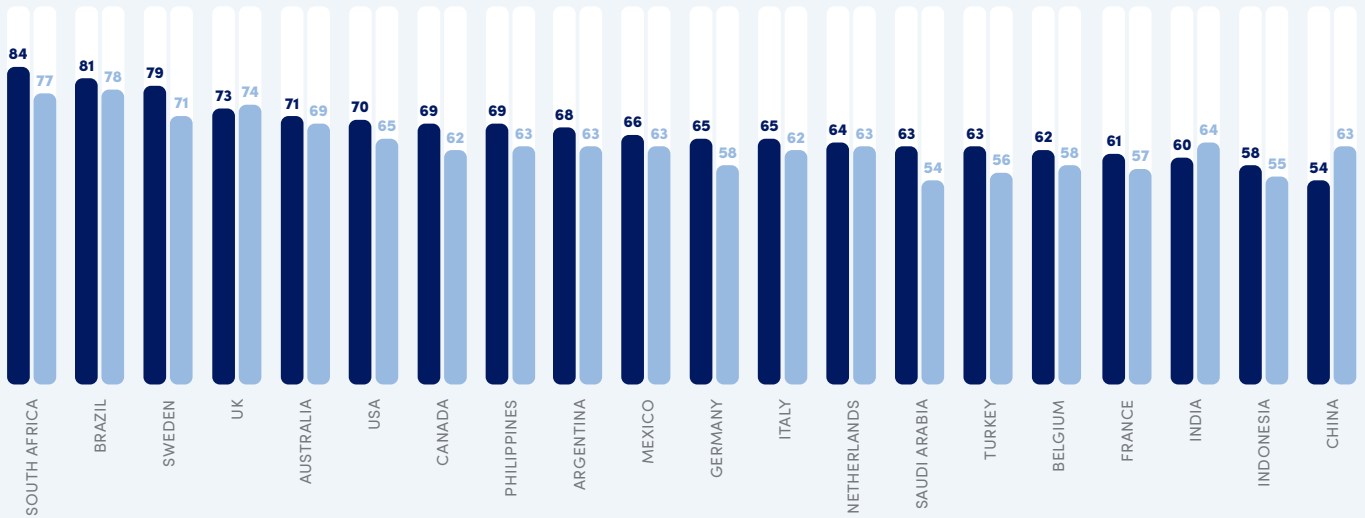
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I feel pressure to alter my appearance due to images of influencers I see on social media"

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)
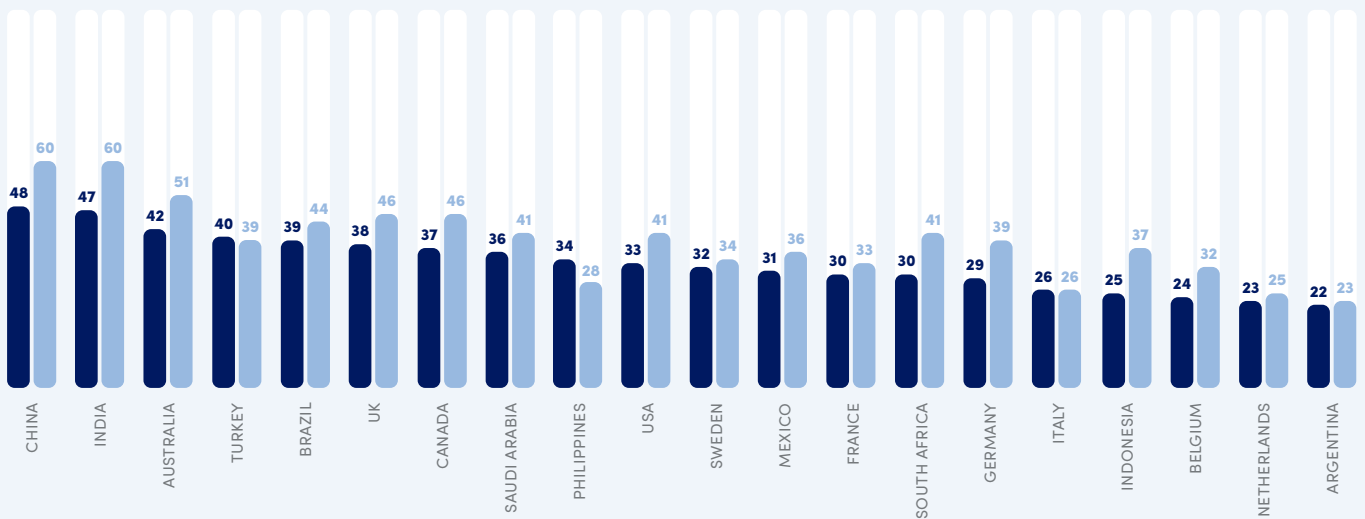
Country	Women	Girls (10–17 years)
CHINA	48	60
INDIA	47	60
AUSTRALIA	42	51
TURKEY	40	39
BRAZIL	39	44
UK	38	46
CANADA	37	46
SAUDI ARABIA	36	41
PHILIPPINES	34	28
USA	33	41
SWEDEN	32	34
MEXICO	31	36
FRANCE	30	33
SOUTH AFRICA	30	41
GERMANY	29	39
ITALY	26	26
INDONESIA	25	37
BELGIUM	24	32
NETHERLANDS	23	25
ARGENTINA	22	23

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"Influencers on social media create pressure to use cosmetic procedures to change appearance"

■ Women ● Girls (10 –17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
BRAZIL	71	72
SOUTH AFRICA	68	73
SWEDEN	63	56
PHILIPPINES	61	57
INDIA	60	65
AUSTRALIA	59	59
UK	59	57
TURKEY	58	52
SAUDI ARABIA	56	58
USA	56	59
ITALY	54	52
CANADA	53	53
CHINA	52	62
MEXICO	51	53
GERMANY	50	45
FRANCE	48	49
INDONESIA	48	61
NETHERLANDS	48	42
BELGIUM	47	49
ARGENTINA	45	44
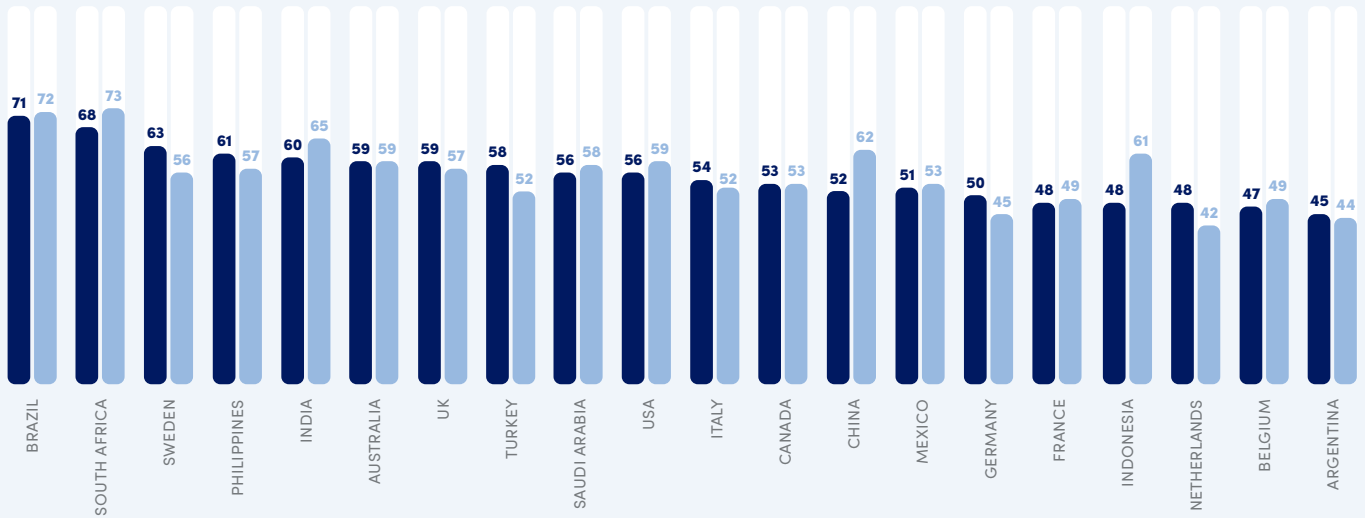
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"Plastic surgery is a way to feel better in your own body"

■ Women ● Girls (14 –17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
BRAZIL	69	70
TURKEY	57	52
CHINA	56	57
MEXICO	54	54
CANADA	48	48
INDIA	48	54
USA	48	45
ITALY	47	48
SAUDI ARABIA	47	53
SWEDEN	47	38
ARGENTINA	45	46
AUSTRALIA	45	46
FRANCE	45	46
UK	45	44
BELGIUM	44	47
PHILIPPINES	44	38
NETHERLANDS	43	43
SOUTH AFRICA	39	44
GERMANY	35	34
INDONESIA	32	47
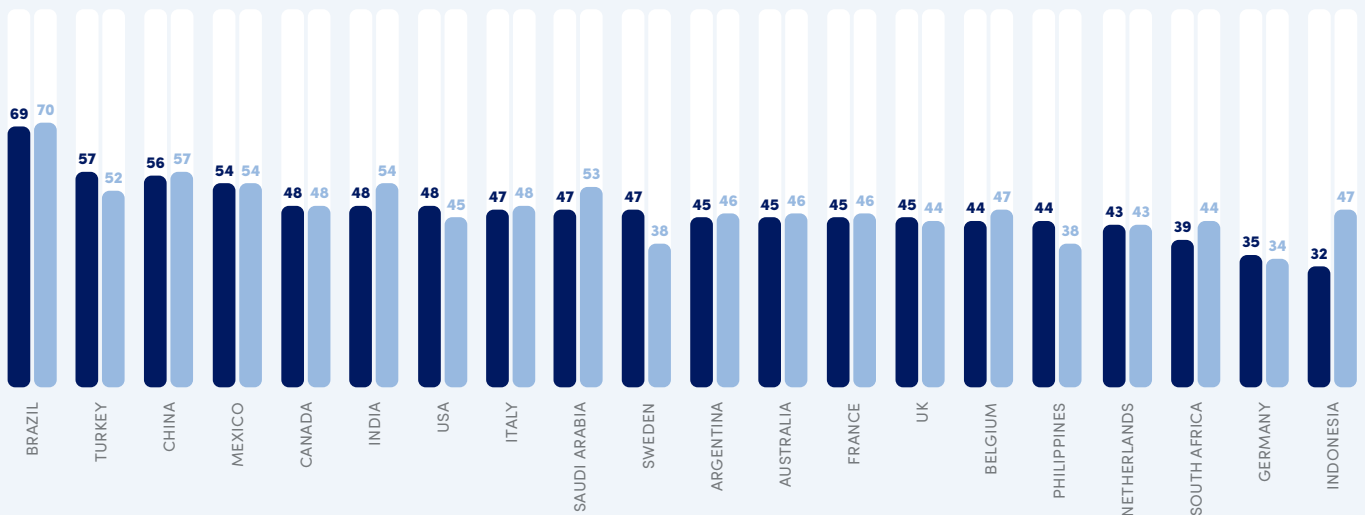
PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"Being able to create different versions of yourself using AI can have a negative impact on how you view yourself"

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
ARGENTINA	38	34
AUSTRALIA	45	54
BELGIUM	44	45
BRAZIL	59	53
CANADA	48	51
CHINA	50	62
FRANCE	43	42
GERMANY	44	45
INDIA	55	61
INDONESIA	42	54
ITALY	45	47
MEXICO	41	45
NETHERLANDS	44	40
SAUDI ARABIA	43	43
SOUTH AFRICA	55	56
PHILIPPINES	43	41
SWEDEN	50	39
TURKEY	48	45
UK	49	49
USA	46	46
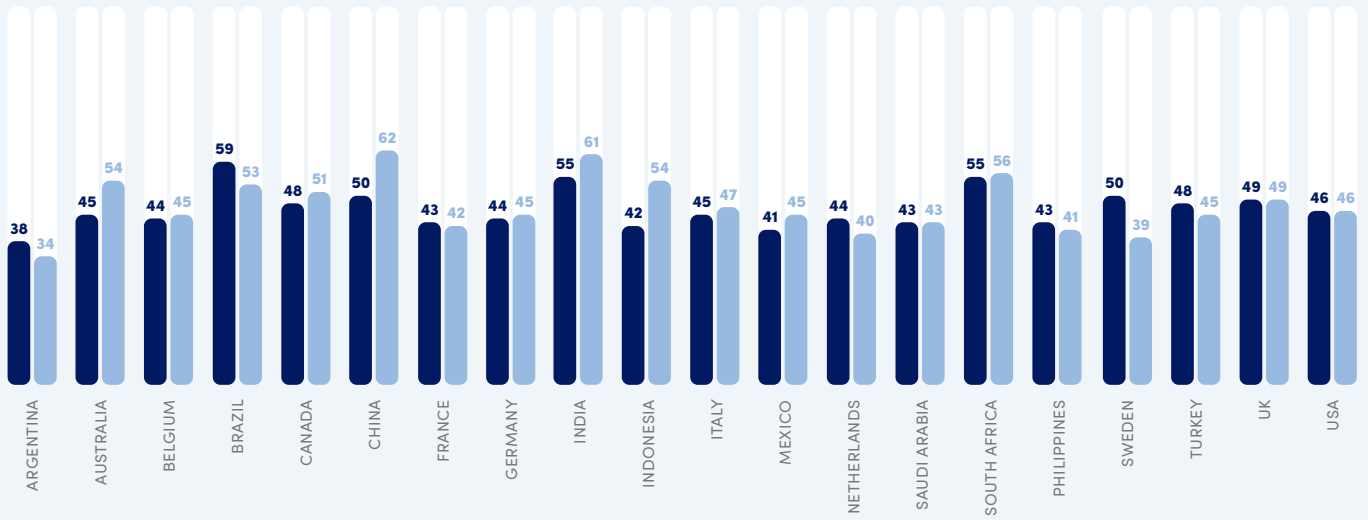
Chapter 5:
#Gymspiration and the comparison trap – beauty standards and their impact on men and boys

No one is exempt from societal beauty standards. To create a truly representative study into the state of beauty today, men and boys should not be excluded from the conversation. In the past, women an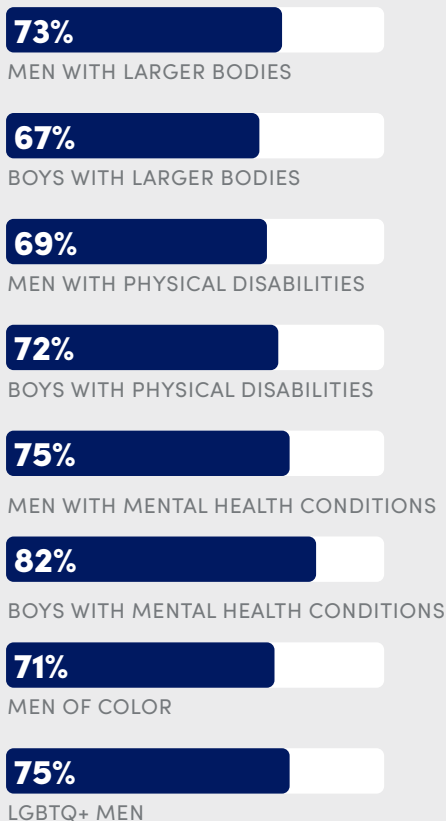d girls were the main focal point of research in the field of beauty standards and body image. In a society where gender inequality persists all over the world and where women's bodies have long come under the most scrutiny, this is understandable.

Previous research has found that the unfortunate reality is, women and girls are disproportionally impacted by beauty standards – women, for example, are more likely to be dissatisfied with their own body and physical attractiveness than men. Historically, in cultures all over the world, men have also been valued for attributes beyond the physical, such as their confidence, intelligence and ability. However, that does not mean men are entirely free from societal pressures to look a certain way.

Globally, 68% of men and 59% of boys feel pressure to be physically attractive. Men in Sweden (75%) and the United States (73%), as well as boys in China (77%), Sweden (70%) and India (70%), especially feel pressure to be attractive. Notably, this was also highest among plus-sized men and boys, those with mental health conditions, physical disabilities, LGBTQ+ men and men of color.

PERCENTAGES (%) OF MEN SAYING THEY FEEL PRESSURE TO FEEL ATTRACTIVE

73%
MEN WITH LARGER BODIES

67%
BOYS WITH LARGER BODIES

69%
MEN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

72%
BOYS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

75%
MEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

82%
BOYS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

71%
MEN OF COLOR

75%
LGBTQ+ MEN

When it comes to defining physical attractiveness, our research indicates that similar beauty ideals placed on women can also be applicable to men – particularly the need to appear young, healthy and slim. However, men and boys also face additional beauty standards that are closely tied with traditional views of masculinity, such as the desire to be muscular and tall.

65%
of men and 68% of boys say they wish they were taller while 79% of men and 74% of boys feel they aren't muscular enough.

Professor Phillippa Diedrichs says: "Beauty standards for both men and women are still very heteronormative. For women, this manifests as stereotypically feminine ideals – long hair, thinness, full lips, curves, for example. Meanwhile, men are subject to equally as stringent beauty ideals, but at the opposite end of the spectrum – essentially, they are expected to be the antithesis of femininity, demonstrating strength, dominance and stoicism through muscles and hyper-defined facial features. Either way, such binary beauty standards are restrictive and leave little space for freedom of self-expression or for those who identify outside of binary gender expression or traditional notions of femininity and masculinity."

Like older women, older men feel largely overlooked by the beauty industry. And while colloquialisms like "silver fox" arguably romanticize aging in men in a way that isn't replicated in older women, such terms can also imply there is a right and a wrong way to age, mounting pressure on men to maintain their physical attractiveness even as they get older. **Only 34% of men feel the beauty industry does a good job of celebrating their physical attractiveness throughout different life stages.**

"The more physically attractive people will always have advantages over those who are less attractive."

Man, aged between 55-64, from the United States

54%

of boys aged 14-17 and 43% of men feel there is still a long way to go before beauty companies are truly inclusive.

Toxic gym culture

Men and boys are equally exposed to the culture of comparison on social media. Gym culture, in particular, has exploded across all social media platforms in recent years. Gym-goers share progress pictures, film themselves working out, or share workout routines to a dedicated community of followers – and this is especially prevalent among young men. However, encouragement and inspiration can very easily veer into comparison and toxic competitiveness. **Our research found that 53% of men 55% of boys feel there is a lot of pressure to show their best selves on social media.**

48% and 52%

of men   of boys

say influencers on social media create pressure to use cosmetic procedures to change their appearance.

"Whereas beauty standards geared toward women often revolve around feminine ideals of softness and daintiness, male beauty standards often fixate on physical ability, muscle mass, and strength," says psychotherapist, psychoanalyst and writer, Dr. Susie Orbach. "Gym culture on social media has certainly added to the pressure many, particularly younger men, feel to not only achieve a certain physique, but also to keep it."

"Exhortations to physically exercise can turn a pleasure into a must and then an obsession," she continues. "Many people don't realize that maintaining a very muscular physique for an extended period of time is actually really difficult, especially if you're not genetically predisposed to that body type. It demands constant work and adherence to a strict diet which can very easily slip into disordered eating – it's something that really isn't talked about enough."

79% and 74%

of men   of boys

feel they are not muscular enough

Our research found **56% of men and 53% of boys have put their health at risk because they didn't feel good about the way they looked.** This was especially prevalent among men and boys in Argentina (men: 62%, boys: 50%), Germany, (men: 60%, boys: 52%) and Turkey (men: 60%, boys: 60%). Among boys in India, this figure is even higher, at a worrying 74%.
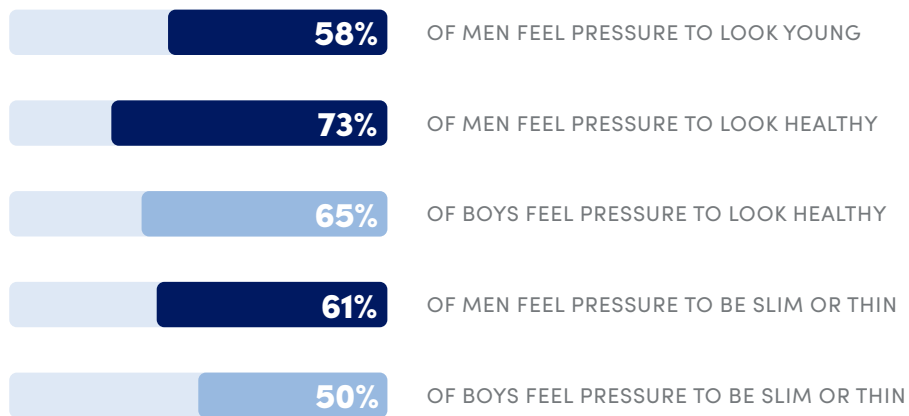
Globally 34% of men and 31% of boys have stopped themselves from eating, binge ate, or skipped meals to achieve their appearance ideals. 27% have adopted unsafe exercise behaviors, such as doing more exercise than their body can handle. Men and boys with larger bodies can particularly struggle against male beauty ideals that center around being visibly strong and muscular. 73% of men and 67% of boys in larger bodies say they feel pressure to be physically attractive and they were more likely to have adopted unhealthy exercise behaviors (34% for men and 39% for boys) or have stopped themselves from eating, binge ate, or skipped meals to try and achieve their appearance ideals (43% for men, 47% for boys).

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Beauty standards that revolve heavily around physical prowess can also have a detrimental impact on those with physical disabilities. **69% of men and 72% of boys with physical disabilities feel under pressure to be physically attractive.**
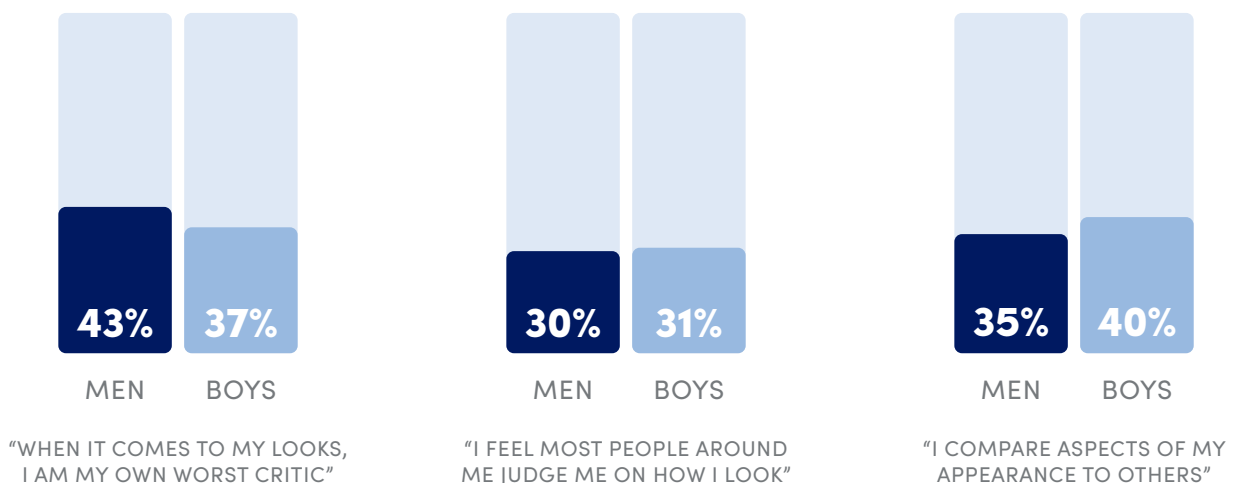
58% OF MEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK YOUNG

73% OF MEN FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK HEALTHY

65% OF BOYS FEEL PRESSURE TO LOOK HEALTHY

61% OF MEN FEEL PRESSURE TO BE SLIM OR THIN

50% OF BOYS FEEL PRESSURE TO BE SLIM OR THIN

> "Having alopecia, vitiligo and psoriasis of the nails has greatly affected how I see myself and how much I have been bullied by friends and family. On top of that, I have hypothyroidism so I carry weight differently than others and I have always been called fat, especially by friends and coaches."
>
> *Man, aged between 40-44, from Canada*

Body esteem is certainly not unique to any gender. However, societal expectations of masculinity mean that many men can struggle to open up about issues related to body image and mental health, as heteronormative ideals can undermine male vulnerability. But male beauty standards can have a profound impact on men and boys of all ages, contributing to negative self-talk and appearance anxiety. **31% of men and 28% of boys have tried to hide or alter aspects of their appearance and 30% of men and 26% of boys feel like they speak more critically to themselves than they do to others.** 31% of men and 28% of boys have tried to hide or alter aspects of their appearance – this was especially high among men and boys in larger bodies (37% for men and 39% of boys) and those with mental health conditions (40% for men and 55% for boys). Additionally, 30% of men and 36% of boys feel like they speak more critically to themselves than they do to others.

Like women and girls, men and boys are also willing to make sacrifices to achieve their appearance ideals – **20% of men and 21% of boys would be willing to become 25% less intelligent if they could become 25% more attractive.** This was highest among boys in China (46%) and India (38%).

43% MEN **37%** BOYS	**30%** MEN **31%** BOYS	**35%** MEN **40%** BOYS
"WHEN IT COMES TO MY LOOKS, I AM MY OWN WORST CRITIC"	"I FEEL MOST PEOPLE AROUND ME JUDGE ME ON HOW I LOOK"	"I COMPARE ASPECTS OF MY APPEARANCE TO OTHERS"

Appearance anxiety can hold men and boys back in various areas of their lives, causing them to miss out on social engagements and even pass up opportunities in the workplace. In fact, 45% of men have held themselves back at work because they didn't feel good about the way they looked.

"There's a lot of research demonstrating the dramatic impact appearance anxiety can have on women and girls, but for men and boys this research is still in its infancy," says Professor Phillippa Diedrichs. "It's encouraging that Dove's research is illuminating the impact of beauty standards on men and boys' body confidence, particularly as acknowledging and discussing male mental health has historically been stigmatized and overlooked. Men and boys aren't immune to feeling self-conscious about their bodies and appearance or being self-critical, but many struggle to talk about it openly because of the very nature of harmful masculine societal stereotypes and expectations."

60%
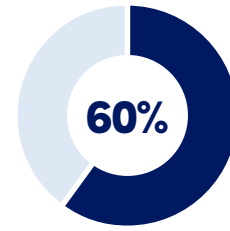
60% of men and boys have missed a social event because of how they felt about their appearance.

"I dream of a world where beauty transcends conventional norms and embraces the uniqueness that resides within each individual. Let us celebrate the diversity of shapes, sizes, colors, and expressions that make us who we are. In this redefined paradigm, beauty is not confined to external appearances but radiates from the authenticity, kindness, and resilience that characterize a person."
Man, aged between 45-49, from South Africa

Raising a body-positive generation of boys

As Professor Phillippa Diedrichs points out, throughout history, men have contributed to the pressures women feel to conform to narrow beauty standards. "Historically, there has long existed this cultural tension between women being perceived primarily as sexual objects both by and for men, while simultaneously being admonished and even punished for expressing their sexuality,"

Professor Diedrichs explains. "Women are still to this day objectified in popular culture through the lens of the male gaze. So, when we consider societal beauty standards and their impacts on women, we cannot overlook the significant role that men play in perpetuating these beauty standards."

To truly dismantle societal beauty standards for both men and women, it's therefore critical to address the role that men and boys in particular play in upholding these ideals. Fortunately, our research suggests that a positive societal shift is already beginning to take place among the next generation. Today, boys are beginning to embrace more diverse definitions of beauty and are hopeful for a more inclusive future. **68% of boys say a wide variety of body shapes are beautiful, compared to 55% of men. 69% of boys feel that everyone has something beautiful about them**, versus 57% of men.

Professor Phillippa Diedrichs says: "Over the past two decades, we've seen more concerted efforts to educate young people of all genders about body confidence – the Dove Self-Esteem Project is an obvious example of this. So, we're seeing a generation of young people who have grown up with access to more resources and in a climate where, at least in some regions, notions of mental health, body confidence, and gender fluidity are increasingly recognized, legitimized and less stigmatized."

"

"I wish that we could embrace each other and accept each other as we are. Body shaming is so vast nowadays, we are made to be conscious about everything. It's overwhelming and I don't want anyone to have to feel the pressure to enhance or change themselves"

Boy, aged between 14-17, from South Africa

65%
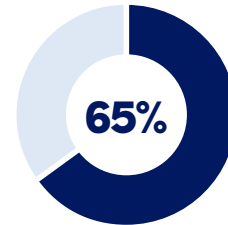
65% of boys 14-17 think a person's soul or inner spirit can change their perception of their physical beauty – versus 55% of men.

A generation of boys have grown up surrounded by greater representation of diverse gender-identities, sexual orientations, races, physical abilities and body sizes in the media, beauty advertising and on social media. For young people today, definitions of beauty are already significantly more diverse than those of previous generations, and they are hopeful that this inclusivity will only continue. **63% of boys believe that, in the future, people will be able to use their bodies to express themselves freely. 68% believe people will have access to the same opportunities regardless of their body type – that's compared to 51% of men.** This trend is echoed with women and girls, as we explore in Chapter 6.

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND MEN WHO FEEL ANY PRESSURE "TO BE PHYSICALLY ATTRACTIVE"

■ Men ■ Boys (10–17 years)

Country	Men	Boys
ARGENTINA	63	48
AUSTRALIA	68	65
BELGIUM	66	56
BRAZIL	69	63
CANADA	69	62
CHINA		77
FRANCE	67	50
GERMANY	69	65
INDIA		70
INDONESIA		58
ITALY		60
MEXICO		44
NETHERLANDS	68	44
SAUDI ARABIA		57
SOUTH AFRICA	69	65
PHILIPPINES		61
SWEDEN	75	70
TURKEY	48	43
UK	70	57
USA	73	58
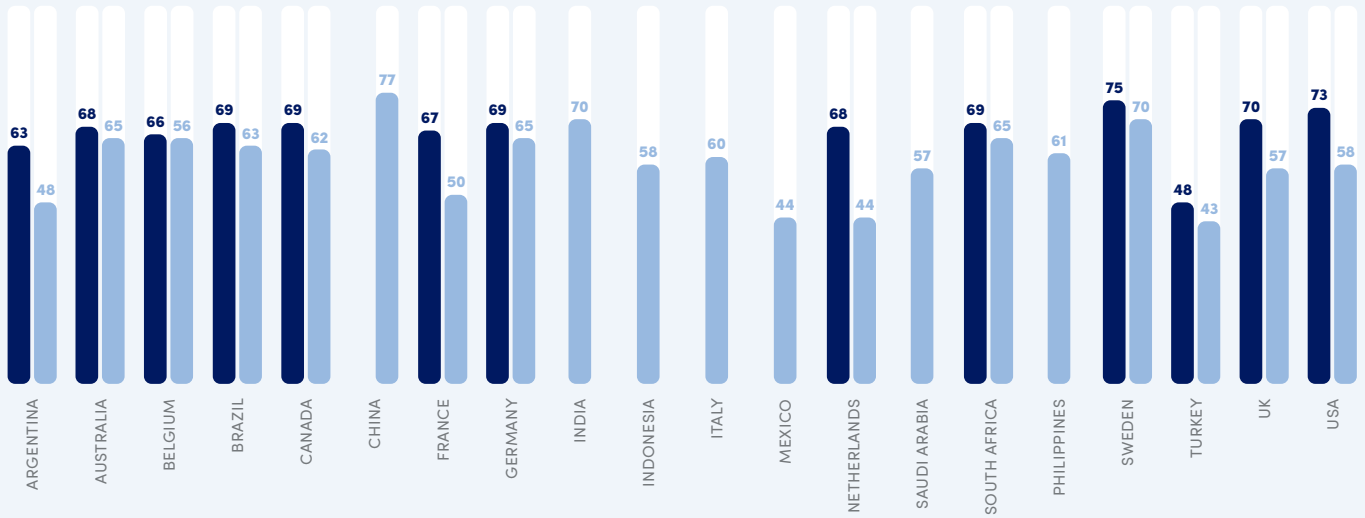
PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND BOYS WHO HAVE EVER FELT "I WISH I WAS TALLER"

■ Men ■ Boys (10–17 years)

Country	Men	Boys
ARGENTINA	62	62
AUSTRALIA	66	68
BELGIUM	65	66
BRAZIL	70	72
CANADA	72	71
CHINA		96
FRANCE	72	68
GERMANY	63	62
INDIA		69
INDONESIA		82
ITALY		68
MEXICO		60
NETHERLANDS	60	56
SAUDI ARABIA		70
SOUTH AFRICA	52	56
PHILIPPINES		72
SWEDEN	67	68
TURKEY	65	69
UK	71	57
USA	66	66
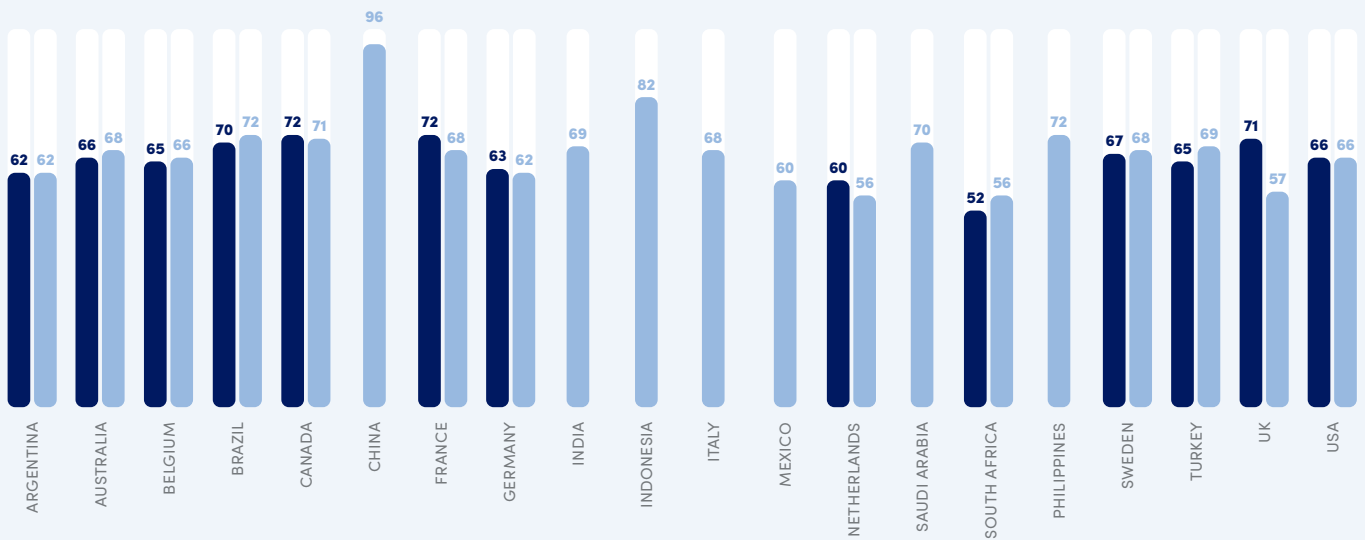
PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND BOYS WHO HAVE EVER FELT
"I FEEL I AM NOT MUSCULAR ENOUGH"

■ Men ■ Boys (10 –17 years)

Country	Men	Boys (10–17 years)
ARGENTINA	77	73
AUSTRALIA	82	78
BELGIUM	82	76
BRAZIL	77	77
CANADA	81	81
CHINA		86
FRANCE	84	80
GERMANY	76	79
INDIA		62
INDONESIA		75
ITALY		74
MEXICO		70
NETHERLANDS	78	73
SAUDI ARABIA		73
SOUTH AFRICA	70	66
PHILIPPINES		72
SWEDEN	82	80
TURKEY	72	74
UK	83	69
USA	79	66
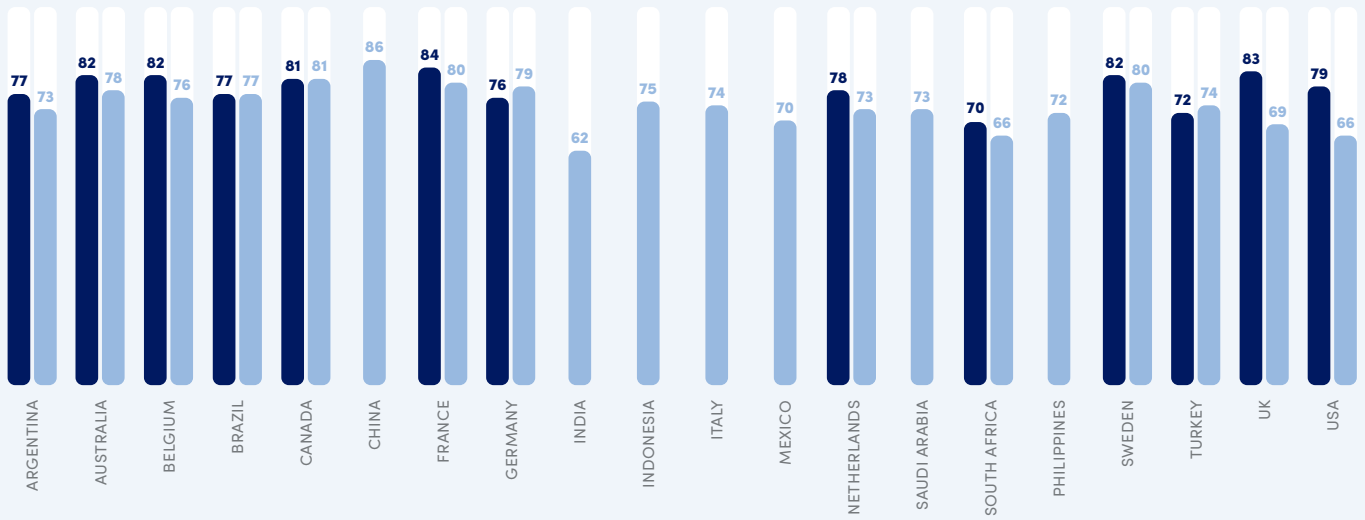
PERCENTAGES (%) OF MEN AND BOYS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT
"There is a lot of pressure to show your best self on social media"

■ Men ■ Boys (10 –17 years)
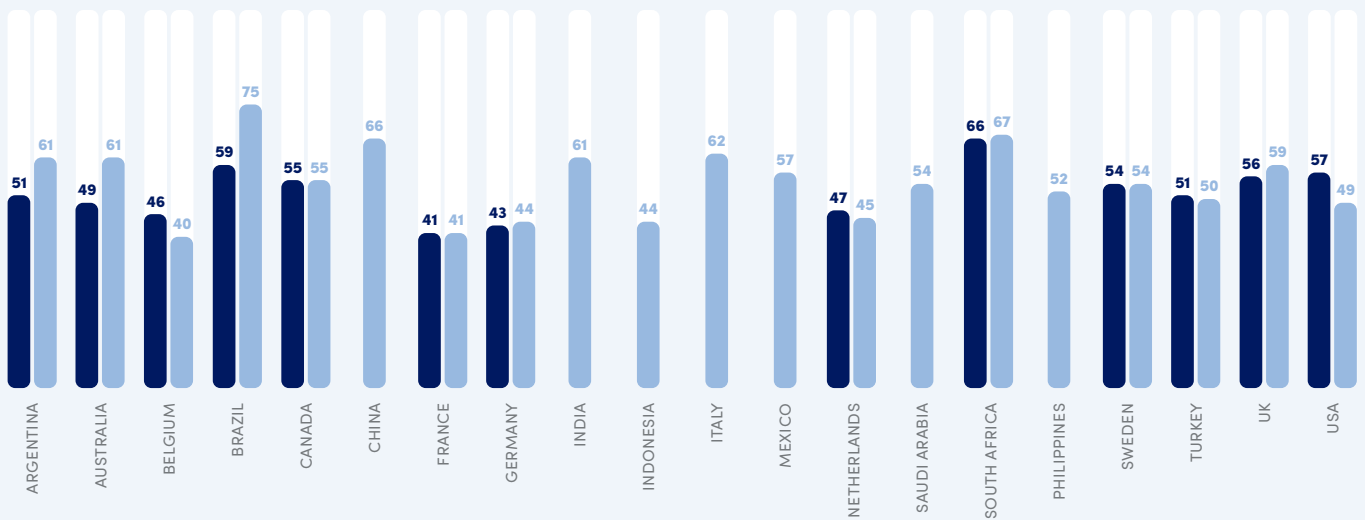
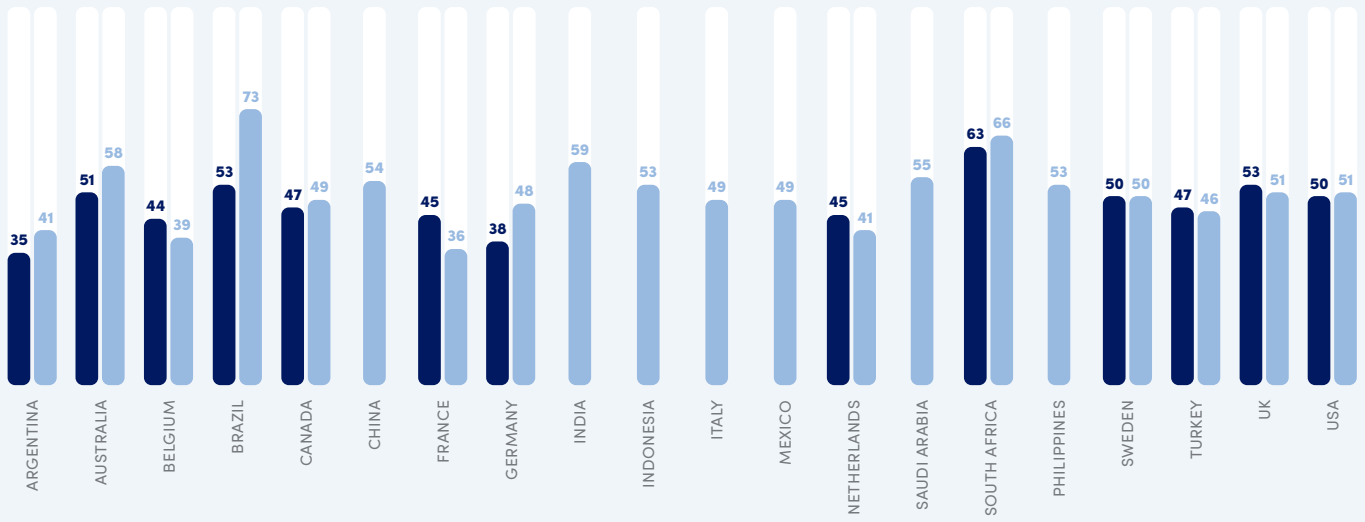| Country	Men	Boys (10–17 years)
ARGENTINA	51	61
AUSTRALIA	49	61
BELGIUM	46	40
BRAZIL	59	75
CANADA	55	55
CHINA		66
FRANCE	41	41
GERMANY	43	44
INDIA		61
INDONESIA		44
ITALY		62
MEXICO		57
NETHERLANDS	47	45
SAUDI ARABIA		54
SOUTH AFRICA	66	67
PHILIPPINES		52
SWEDEN	54	54
TURKEY	51	50
UK	56	59
USA	57	49

PERCENTAGES (%) OF MEN AND BOYS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"Influencers on social media create pressure to use cosmetic procedures to change appearance"

■ Men ● Boys (10–17 years)

Country	Men	Boys (10–17 years)
ARGENTINA	35	41
AUSTRALIA	51	58
BELGIUM	44	39
BRAZIL	53	73
CANADA	47	49
CHINA		54
FRANCE	45	36
GERMANY	38	48
INDIA		59
INDONESIA		53
ITALY		49
MEXICO		49
NETHERLANDS	45	41
SAUDI ARABIA		55
SOUTH AFRICA	63	66
PHILIPPINES		53
SWEDEN	50	50
TURKEY	47	46
UK	53	51
USA	50	51

Chapter 6:
Evolving beauty standards and celebrating authenticity

Dove's research has uncovered some undoubtedly troubling findings, indicative of the dramatic impact beauty standards continue to have, not only on women and girls, but on people of all gender expressions. However, there is cause for optimism. Social media, the very tool that has contributed to today's image-saturated society, can also be a catalyst for change.

Through social media platforms, people are able to hold brands and the mainstream media accountable, demanding improved representation. Online communities are bringing together like-minded individuals from every corner of the globe and, in these online spaces, anyone is free to express themselves in their own unique way. Members of subcultures that once only existed on the fringes of society, are now able to find each other and flourish online. Beauty itself is becoming more pleasurable – more about experimentation, individuality, and creativity than simply aspiring to look the same as everyone else.

Real beauty isn't homogenous

Many women and girls are forming their own, broader, definitions of beauty, rejecting the restrictive standards imposed on them by mainstream society in favor of their own interpretations. In a world where the media and beauty advertising have long told women to fear the natural aging process, **74% of women and 72% of girls today say that women can be beautiful at any age.** In fact, **71% of girls, and 72% of women believe that everyone has something about them that is beautiful.** Likewise, the body positivity movement has gone mainstream in a way it wasn't able to before social media. Today, beauty doesn't look like only one body type – **69% of women and 72% of girls think a wide variety of body shapes are beautiful.**

> **66% of women and 68% of girls 14-17 say that, even if a physical feature isn't considered attractive by others – or by society – they think it can be.**
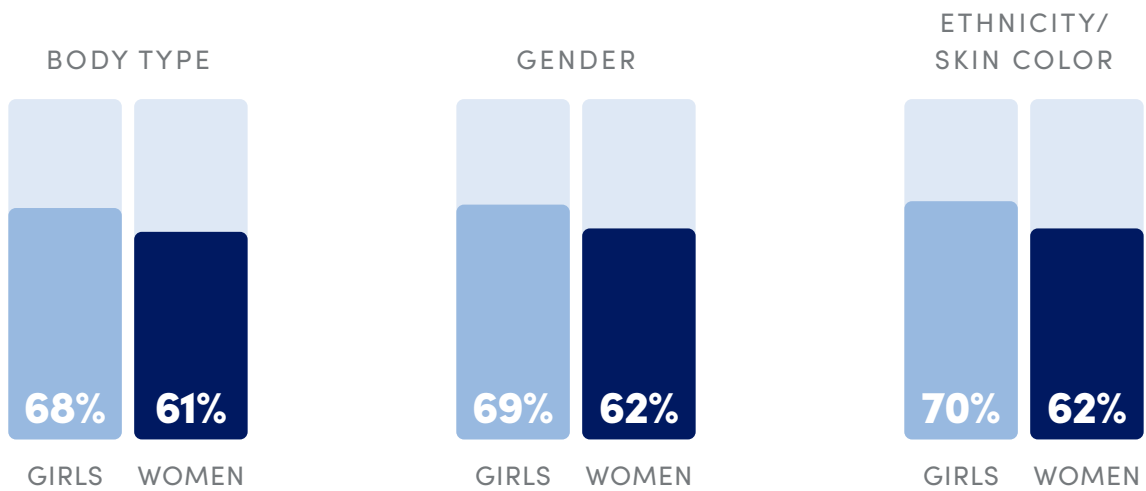
Women and girls are questioning the narratives told to them by the media, particularly younger girls – **65% of girls 14-17 and 63% of women say they define beauty differently to how it's portrayed in the media.** In a highly visual society that is so fixated with physical perfection, many women and girls are decentering physical attractiveness, saying they value more what is on the inside. **67% of women and 68% of girls say that a person's soul or inner spirit can change their perception of their physical beauty.** Likewise, they are rejecting perfection in favor of authenticity, accepting that beauty can be messy. Beauty is expanding to look beyond just appearance ideals – it is becoming more holistic, inclusive of how women and girls feel in their bodies, the joy of movement, and the pleasure they get from engaging with certain beauty practices or dressing a certain way.

88%
of women and

90%
of girls

define real beauty as being authentic, who you are, and embracing your flaws.

GIRLS WERE MORE LIKELY TO SEE THE FUTURE AS A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES, REGARDLESS OF...

BODY TYPE

68% GIRLS
61% WOMEN

GENDER

69% GIRLS
62% WOMEN

ETHNICITY/ SKIN COLOR

70% GIRLS
62% WOMEN

> "I feel most confident and comfortable in my own skin when I embrace authenticity and self-acceptance. Being true to myself and acknowledging both strengths and areas for improvement contributes to a positive self-image. Achieving personal goals and cultivating positive relationships provide a strong foundation for confidence, fostering a sense of accomplishment and social support. Physical well-being, through exercise and self-care, enhances my overall comfort in my body"
>
> *Girl, aged between 10-13, from India*

As Professor Phillippa Diedrichs explains: "We're seeing a generation of young adults who are digital natives – they've grown up with social media and have never known life without the Internet. Unlike previous generations, who were exposed to a relatively one-dimensional version of beauty in the mainstream media, today's young people have grown up with access to better representation and diversity via social media and the internet. They're certainly not immune to societal beauty standards, but they are more likely to expect and demand diverse and inclusive representation from companies and brands and, as such, have a more flexible definition of what it means to be beautiful."

> "I feel most confident with my body when I am strong at the gym, when I eat properly and when I wear comfortable clothes. Strength training, with a focus on being strong instead of thin, has really helped me!"
>
> *Woman, aged between 25-29, from Sweden*
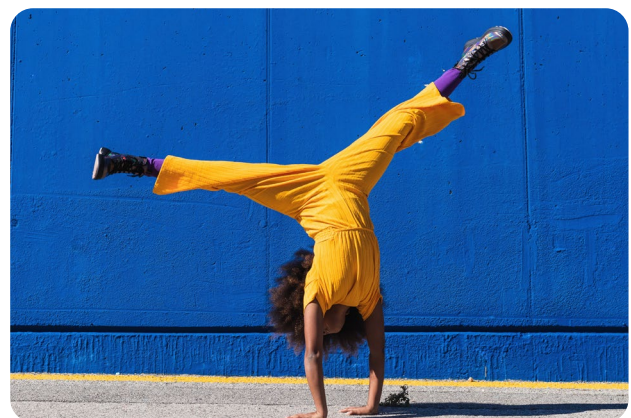
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

The erasure of older women

However, when we turn our attention to older demographics of women, this picture becomes markedly less cheerful. **Our research uncovered that older women are less likely to feel satisfied with their lives, with rates of satisfaction reaching the lowest between the ages of 55-64.** There appears to be an anxiety cliff that many women fall into as they mature into middle age. **Older women were more likely to be self-critical about their appearance than girls – 53% versus 45%, respectively.** There are many possible reasons as to why this trend has emerged. As aforementioned, throughout history, aging in women has been largely demonized in mainstream discourse – and this aversion to aging certainly hasn't dissipated in recent years, in fact, it has only intensified.

In 2021, the global anti-aging product market was valued at around $62 billion. By 2027, this is projected to increase to around $93 billion[21]. Such products are sold by reinforcing the belief that people, especially women, should strive to turn back the clock and look younger than they are. Smile lines, crow's feet, and other wrinkles have long been depicted in beauty advertising as flaws that need to be fixed. This is compounded by the general lack of visibility of older women in popular culture and beauty advertising. When older women are shown, they're more often than not celebrities or models who have greater access to beauty treatments and cosmetic procedures that enable them to appear younger, or their wrinkles and grey hairs have been intentionally edited out.

Professor Phillippa Diedrichs explains: "With the growing popularity of cosmetic and non-surgical procedures – from the dizzying array of anti-aging products available on the market today to fillers and facelifts – women are expected to esthetically freeze in time. Not too long ago, these procedures were almost exclusively available to the rich and famous, so we've become accustomed to seeing augmented supermodels, pop stars and actresses who are in their 50s, 60s, even 70s not aging naturally. But now you don't need to be a celebrity to access these treatments. They're widely available and increasingly normalized."

Professor Diedrichs continues: "I avoid casting judgement on anyone who chooses to get these procedures as they too have grown up in an environment saturated with narrow beauty standards and appearance stereotypes and pressures. Nonetheless, it deeply concerns me that the vast majority of people, an estimated 90%, who undergo cosmetic surgery today are women. This means that women are primarily bearing the financial costs, recovery times and medical risks associated with these procedures. We really need to question why women, especially, are under such pressure to halt or reverse the aging process and what long-term impacts these products and procedures are having on our ideas about ageing, beauty and women's roles in society."

21 -Statista: Anti-aging statistics and facts [Accessed: March 2024]
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

> **"**
>
> "Unfortunately, with menopause, my confidence in my physical appearance has greatly decreased."
>
> *Woman, aged between 50-54, from Italy*

> **"**
>
> "Most of my life I have not followed trends and did not care much about what others thought. However at my age, nearly 60, there are things that have hurt my confidence such as losing hair, losing teeth, too much skin over my eyes etc."
>
> *Woman, aged between 55-64, from Canada.*

Older women also face the added pressure of menopause and perimenopause, and all the physical changes that occur during this time. Menopause is when women stop menstruating and their periods cease, usually occurring between the age of 45 and 55, while perimenopause refers to the time around menopause when this transition first begins.

Menopause and perimenopause are caused by hormonal changes. While this is a completely natural part of the lifecycle, both menopause and perimenopause can trigger some uncomfortable symptoms, such as hot flashes, changes in weight, and even low mood. It's projected that, by 2030, over 1 billion women across the globe will be perimenopausal or postmenopausal[22].

Although there are some treatments available to support women experiencing these symptoms, menopause often isn't talked about enough. In fact, our research found **68% of women feel more education is needed about hormonal changes and the challenges they can cause throughout people's lives.**

"Perimenopause and menopause are something pretty much every woman will go through and it really is as life-altering as puberty," explains **Stacie June Shelton, Doctoral candidate in Public Health, Global Head of Education and Advocacy, Dove Self-Esteem Project** "I can speak from my personal experience, that unlike puberty, we're not taught what to expect. In fact, one study by UCL found around 9 in 10 women have never been educated about menopause[23]. When we don't talk about this natural part of the aging process, it can be terrifying. Our bodies are undergoing all these physical and mental changes and we don't know how to cope. It can have a huge impact on women's self-esteem and body confidence. We really need to break the taboo around aging in women and, specifically perimenopause and menopause."

22 – Kenneth Hill: The demography of menopause [Accessed: March 2024]
23 –Rawan Aljumah, Samantha Phillips, and Joyce C Harper: An online survey of postmenopausal women to determine their attitudes and knowledge of the menopause
Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

The value of body confidence & self-esteem education – for every generation

The Real State of Beauty report provides valuable quantitative evidence of the importance of nurturing body confidence in all generations. For example, while fewer girls (45%) reported being self-critical about their looks compared to women (53%), these figures dramatically increase in both girls and women who had low body esteem. **70% of women and 69% of girls with low body esteem say they are "their own worst critic" when it comes to their appearance – compared to just 26% of women and 28% of girls with high body esteem.**

Throughout the report, we have seen evidence that low body esteem can affect the way women and girls feel about their appearance and the degree to which they are impacted by societal beauty standards. This can be a perpetual, vicious cycle, as the way women and girls feel about their appearance and bodies impacts their body esteem, and vice versa. To help break out of this cycle, more must be done to promote high body esteem in *all* generations of women and girls.

People of all ages should have the confidence to feel beautiful. It is imperative that everyone, at every age, is equipped with the resilience to question societal beauty standards and to define beauty in their own terms. The findings of this report underscore the fact that self-esteem education is not only essential, it is also clearly effective.

> "Feeling confident and comfortable in your own skin is a personal and unique journey. But sometimes feeling lost and not knowing where to start is difficult. It takes time and effort but have patience and try to love yourself."
>
> *Woman, aged between 40-44, from Brazil*

This has been the focal point of the Dove Self-Esteem Project (DSEP) for the last two decades. Our approach follows an evidence-based framework to build body confidence and self-esteem. The framework encompasses various themes proven to impact self-esteem, including family, friends and relationships, media influencers and celebrities, appearance-based teasing and bullying, appearance-based discrimination and prejudice, comparing looks, body talk, sexual and self-objectification and body functionality.

"Dove partners globally and locally with like-minded partners to develop and deliver Body Confidence education across any channel we can reach young people. We are in schools, working with youth leaders and have implemented content direct to young people via cartoons, gaming and social media films." Stacie June Shelton, Global Head of Education and Advocacy, Dove Self-Esteem Project "This is content I needed when I was a young person and that drives me everyday to make the world a better place for adolescents and improve their mental health by addressing pressures on our appearance and body image issues."

Within this framework, our educational materials set out clear objectives, which include ensuring young people are savvy, critical consumers of media and advertising, that they have the skills to manage appearance-based bullying and that they actively reject appearance-based prejudice and discrimination. As a next step, there must be a renewed focus on older generations of women too, and those already struggling with low body esteem.
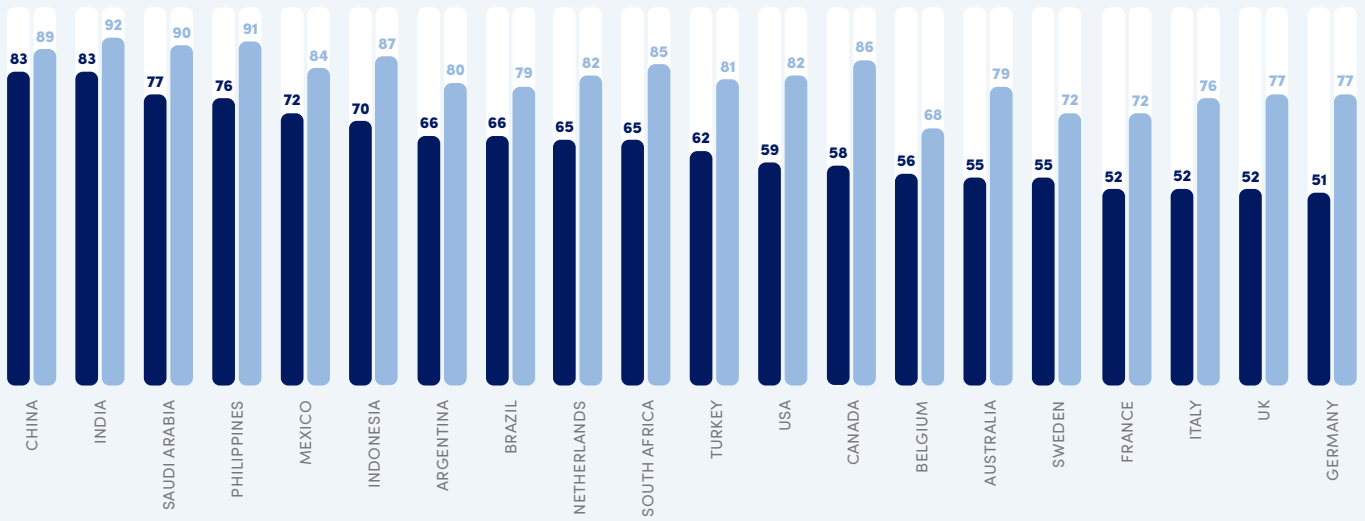
"Every insight we gather, every statistic we analyze, is not just data—it's a testament to our dedication to developing body confidence and self-esteem in all generations," says Zuraida Jardine, Integrative Wellbeing Strategist, "may we continue to listen, learn, and lead with compassion, ensuring that everyone, regardless of identity and its extensions, feels empowered to define beauty on their own terms. It's clear that Dove believes that together, we can create a future where self-love is not just a goal, but a reality for all. There is a wonderful South African greeting that sits close to my heart, 'Sawubona' which translated means 'I see you'. Dove sees us."

WOMEN AND GIRLS' LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH LIFE AND OVERALL HAPPINESS

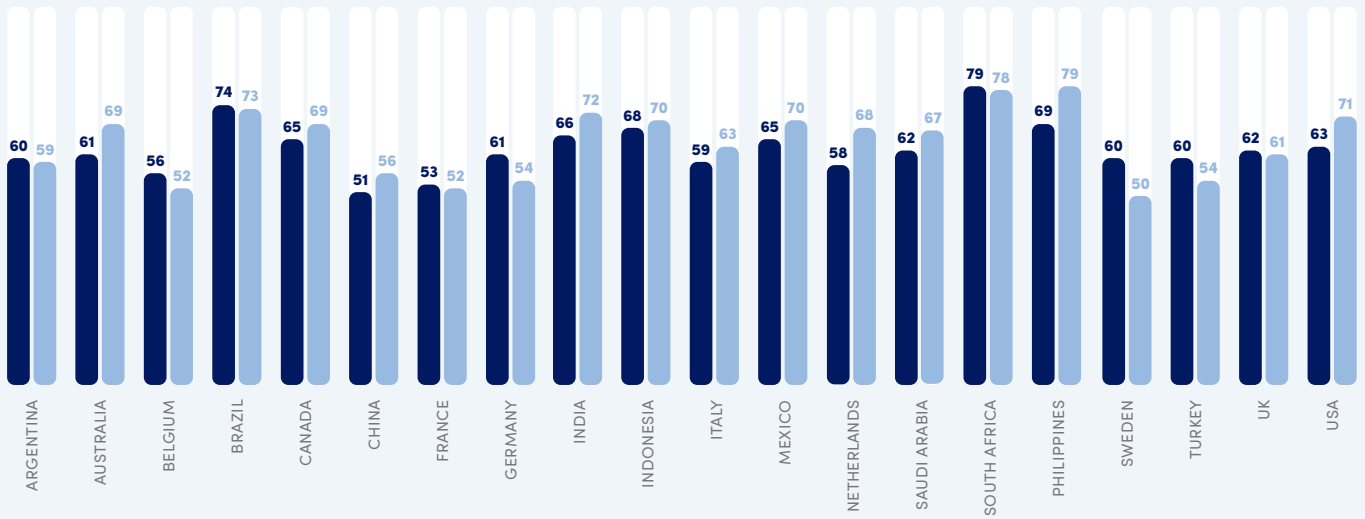■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
CHINA	83	89
INDIA	83	92
SAUDI ARABIA	77	90
PHILIPPINES	76	91
MEXICO	72	84
INDONESIA	70	87
ARGENTINA	66	80
BRAZIL	66	79
NETHERLANDS	65	82
SOUTH AFRICA	65	85
TURKEY	62	81
USA	59	82
CANADA	58	86
BELGIUM	56	68
AUSTRALIA	55	79
SWEDEN	55	72
FRANCE	52	72
ITALY	52	76
UK	52	77
GERMANY	51	77

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"I define a person's beauty differently than how it is portrayed in the media"
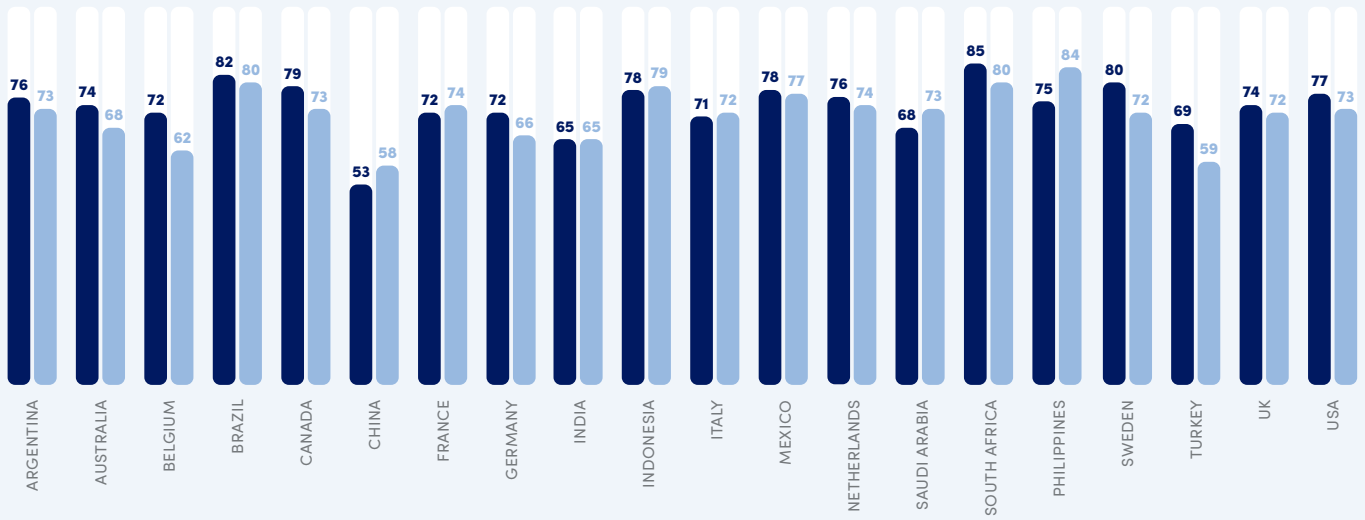
■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

Country	Women	Girls
ARGENTINA	60	59
AUSTRALIA	61	69
BELGIUM	56	52
BRAZIL	74	73
CANADA	65	69
CHINA	51	56
FRANCE	53	52
GERMANY	61	54
INDIA	66	72
INDONESIA	68	70
ITALY	59	63
MEXICO	65	70
NETHERLANDS	58	68
SAUDI ARABIA	62	67
SOUTH AFRICA	79	78
PHILIPPINES	69	79
SWEDEN	60	50
TURKEY	60	54
UK	62	61
USA	63	71

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"A woman can be beautiful at any age"

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

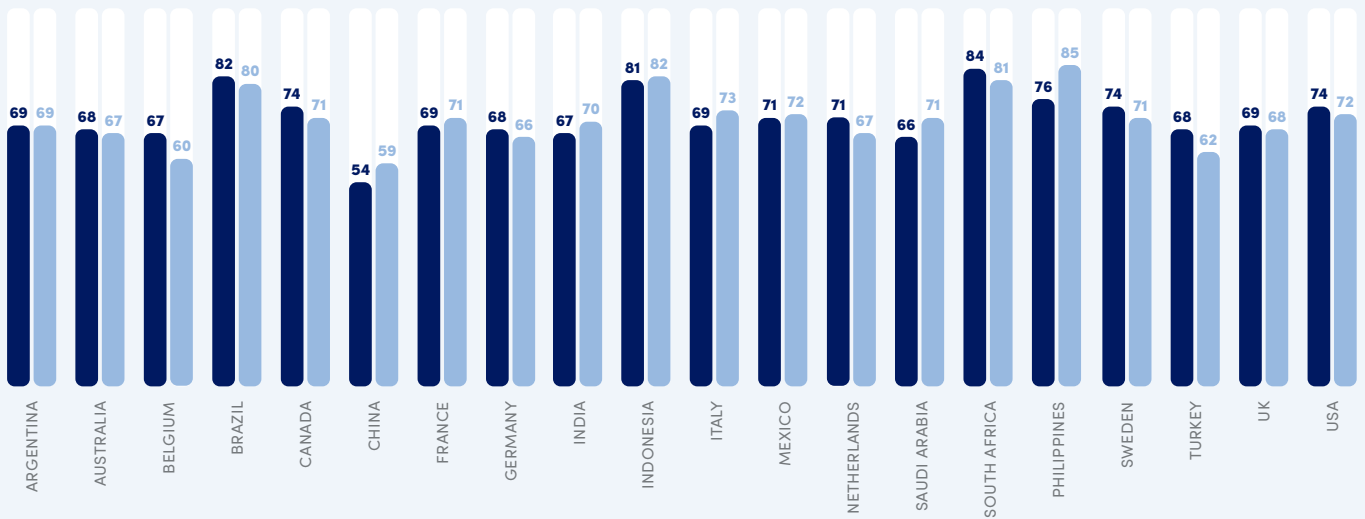| Country	Women	Girls
ARGENTINA	76	73
AUSTRALIA	74	68
BELGIUM	72	62
BRAZIL	82	80
CANADA	79	73
CHINA	53	58
FRANCE	72	74
GERMANY	72	66
INDIA	65	65
INDONESIA	78	79
ITALY	71	72
MEXICO	78	77
NETHERLANDS	76	74
SAUDI ARABIA	68	73
SOUTH AFRICA	85	80
PHILIPPINES	75	84
SWEDEN	80	72
TURKEY	69	59
UK	74	72
USA	77	73

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

"Everyone has something about them that is beautiful"

■ Women ■ Girls (10–17 years)

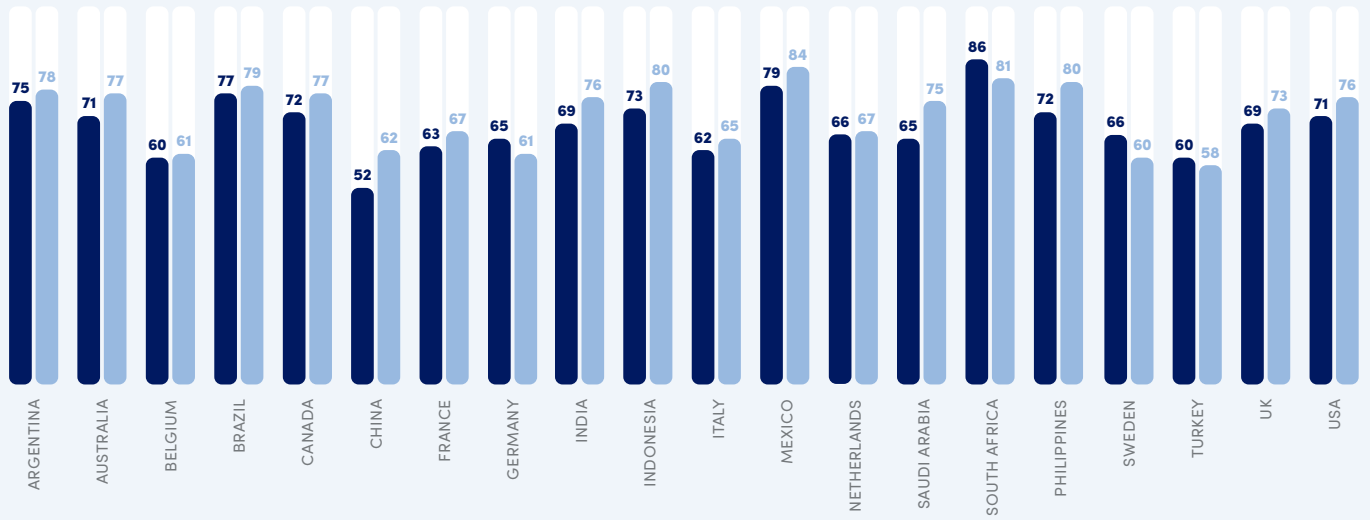| Country	Women	Girls
ARGENTINA	69	69
AUSTRALIA	68	67
BELGIUM	67	60
BRAZIL	82	80
CANADA	74	71
CHINA	54	59
FRANCE	69	71
GERMANY	68	66
INDIA	67	70
INDONESIA	81	82
ITALY	69	73
MEXICO	71	72
NETHERLANDS	71	67
SAUDI ARABIA	66	71
SOUTH AFRICA	84	81
PHILIPPINES	76	85
SWEDEN	74	71
TURKEY	68	62
UK	69	68
USA	74	72

PERCENTAGES (%) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
WHO AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT
"A wide variety of body types are beautiful"

■ Women ■ Girls (10 –17 years)

Country	Women	Girls (10–17 years)
ARGENTINA	75	78
AUSTRALIA	71	77
BELGIUM	60	61
BRAZIL	77	79
CANADA	72	77
CHINA	52	62
FRANCE	63	67
GERMANY	65	61
INDIA	69	76
INDONESIA	73	80
ITALY	62	65
MEXICO	79	84
NETHERLANDS	66	67
SAUDI ARABIA	65	75
SOUTH AFRICA	86	81
PHILIPPINES	72	80
SWEDEN	66	60
TURKEY	60	58
UK	69	73
USA	71	76

Looking ahead

The question remains – what comes next? The 2024 Real State of Beauty report paints an interesting, occasionally even controversial, picture of today's complex beauty landscape. As vital as this snapshot into past and present beauty standards is, our ability to leverage these insights to determine a path forward toward meaningful change is equally critical.

Based on the findings of the report and having listened to the real feedback of people all over the world, Dove is revitalizing the commitments of our Real Beauty Pledge for 2024 and beyond, to ensure beauty is a source of happiness, not anxiety, for women today and for generations to come.

Dove's Real Beauty Pledge

Real – We always feature real women as they truly are.

We value the real beauty of all women and our content will keep beauty real: free of digital distortion, AI and unrealistic beauty standards of any kind. That means we never use AI imagery in place of real women and we never present unachievable, manipulated, flawless images of "perfect" beauty, which the use of retouching tools can promote. And we never use professional models or celebrities to portray real women.

Diversity – We strive to represent the diversity of all women.

We believe in authentically representing our diverse community, including those who are often unseen and unheard. We feature women of different ages, sizes, ethnicities, abilities, sexes, hair color, type and style. Our diversity work is never done. Our campaigns will continue to reflect the evolution of our diverse community and its intersections, and we will remain vigilant on inclusivity of the underrepresented.

Autonomy – We uphold a woman's vision of her own beauty.

We believe that each woman gets to define what Real Beauty means to her, so we always share women's authentic stories and voices. Women have control over how they dress, how they portray their beauty and how they tell their own story. That means we always introduce women by their real names and all images and stories we use are approved by the women featured.

Body confidence – We build body confidence and self-esteem.

We believe that a positive relationship with the way you look starts early, lasts a lifetime, and is something you can learn at any age. We take action to help generations of girls and women to grow their body confidence and self-esteem. We're the leading provider of self-esteem education, via the Dove Self-Esteem Project, which has reached over 114 million young people so far, raising their self-esteem and helping them to realize their full potential. Our ambition is to educate a quarter billion young people around the world on body confidence and self-esteem by 2030.

To learn more about Dove's Real Beauty journey and to join us on our mission to redefine beauty,
visit: Dove.com/keepbeautyreal

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

End note

Authors:

Jaime Slaughter-Acey, Associate Professor at University of North Carolina

Atika Khalaf, Associate Professor in Health Sciences at Kristianstad University, Sweden

Dr Megha Dhillon, Professor of Psychology at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University

Many of the findings of Dove's Real State of Beauty report are extremely disheartening and distressing, but for those who have dedicated decades of their lives to research and advocacy in this space, they are sadly not all that surprising. Some people who read this report may find the data painful to digest but not shocking, as it reflects their own lived experiences.

The study builds on decades of previous research, including previous Dove studies, that demonstrate the calamitous impacts of low body esteem and narrow beauty standards on the lives of people all over the world. But it also illuminates several areas where further research, advocacy and education is clearly needed, underscoring the importance of continued funding and research in this space.

There is clear value in pursuing future studies to identify the specific needs of people in groups whom the report has identified to have statistically lower body esteem – such as plus-sized individuals, those with physical disabilities, and older women. We must direct attention to the factors that may contribute to instances of low body esteem across all groups in society and follow an evidence-based approach to develop the tools and resources to support self-esteem in people of all ages and genders. We hope these findings provoke deep reflection, debate and even controversy. The report should serve as a rallying cry for further research, discussion and, importantly, meaningful change.

Thank you

| Jaime | Atika | Megha |

Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Methodology

The Real State of Beauty report builds on 20 years of insights Dove has collected by listening to real women and girls. The research offers a global snapshot of the beauty industry, societal beauty standards, and how they impact women and girls today.

An online survey was conducted by Edelman DXI (Data x Intelligence), a global, multidisciplinary research, analytics, and data consultancy, in November/December 2023. All of the participants in the study were asked to answer a 25-minute survey containing 40 to 45 questions.

The survey was carried out in 20 countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, KSA, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, the USA, and the UK.

Researchers spoke with more than 33,000 respondents, including 19,306 respondents aged between 18-64 (14,673 women, 3,776 men*) and 14,292 respondents aged 10-17 years old (9,475 girls, 4,753 boys[24]).

15 experts, ranging from academics to body image consultants and activists, were approached to assess the research questions and outputs. We ensured the survey was representative of various subgroups, including people with larger bodies, physical disabilities, mental health conditions, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color.

All interviews were conducted in local languages and dialects with region-appropriate questions.
The methodology was consistent with the level of national online penetration required to avoid sampling bias.

24 - Note: Other gender identities and non-binary respondents were surveyed but are not included in the report due to the limited sample sizes

Audiences

- Women, Men, and gender expansive adults aged 18- 64.

- Girls, Boys, and gender expansive young people aged 10-17. The children were recruited through their parents or guardians, who gave informed consent for their participation in the report.[24]

In the 2024 research, we sought to represent the diversity of our audiences, ensuring representation of different cultures, races, body sizes, abilities, mental health conditions, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and belief systems. Examples of the key sub-groups included in the study include:

> **People with disabilities:** Those who report being diagnosed with a physical disability, such as a visual, hearing or mobility impairment.

> **People with a mental health condition:** Those who indicate they have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder or eating disorder, such as anxiety, depression, anorexia, or bulimia.

> **Ethnic minorities:** This sub-group varied depending on market. There are some markets where we were not able to collect this information, such as in France. In markets where we were able, we gathered a complete list of various ethnic groups.

> **Sexual orientation:** Options offered in the survey included: aromantic, asexual, bisexual, bi-curious, gay curious, gay man, gay woman/lesbian, heterosexual/straight, pansexual, pan-curious, queer, questioning/exploring my identity. There are some markets where we did not have permission to collect this information, such as China, KSA, Philippines, India, Indonesia, and Turkey.

> **Gender:** Options offered in the survey included: cisgender man, cisgender woman, non-binary, transgender man, transgender women, agender, genderqueer, I'm questioning (exploring my identity), prefer not to say and prefer to self-describe. There are some markets where we were not able to display all gender expansive options, such as China, KSA, Philippines, India, Indonesia, and Turkey

> **LGBTQ+ individuals:** Those who identify with any of the following options (excluding heterosexual/straight): aromantic, asexual, bisexual, bi-curious, gay curious, gay/lesbian, pansexual, pan-curious, queer, questioning/ exploring their identity. This also includes those who identify as transgender.

> **Body size:** In our research, we were able to analyze data among those who define themselves as having "a body size larger than what is typically considered average in their culture". Various terms were provided for people to choose from, all approved by experts, including plus size, larger than average body size, fat, higher weight, etc.

> *Note this is not an exhaustive list of the subgroups featured in the data, which included representation of different socioeconomic backgrounds, religions, and other characteristics.*

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24 - Note: this is the first time that men and boys have been included in the Real Beauty study

Note on the comparative analysis – People of color (POC) and White people

At a global level, when analyzing all markets together, we also provided a comparative analysis between people of color (POC) and White people. This was based on 13 markets and allowed for a comparative analysis with individuals who self-identified as White.

The term POC encompasses a diverse group of individuals who do not identify as White and this can differ across markets. For a comprehensive global analysis, we have grouped POC into one single group. However, on a market-level, we were able to separate POC into specific sub-groups, such as Black, Asian, mixed-race and so on.

Academic Scales

Two academic scales were used to calculate respondents' levels of body-esteem and body appreciation.

- The Mendelson BESAA scale (author: B. Mendelson, M. Mendelson, D. White)

- The Body Appreciation scales (BAS-2) (author: T. Tylka, N. Wood-Barcalow).

Academic experts were consulted to ensure the incorporation of the latest methodologies for calculating these scales, including the adaptation of statements and languages which are validated in local markets.

Comparison over time

Comparison with the original 2004 study:

This research forms part of a longitudinal study initiated in 2004. Throughout this research, historical comparisons were drawn where applicable, referencing the original research conducted in 2004. The initial study solely involved data from women and encompassed 10 markets. However, the 2024 research expanded to include data from a total of 20 markets and multiple audiences.

To ensure consistency in historical comparisons with the 2024 data, the data from both 2004 and 2024 was recalibrated using the same list of common markets. This recalibration facilitated precise comparisons, focusing specifically on the eight countries overlapping with those surveyed in 2024: the United Kingdom, Italy, France, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina.

Comparison with the 2016 study:

The same process was followed when comparing 2024 results with the 2016 Real Beauty Study, which included data from both women and girls. To ensure consistency in comparisons between 2016 and 2024, the data was recalibrated using the same list of 14 common markets, listed below:

- **For comparisons among women:** Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Philippines, Mexico, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States

- **For comparisons among girls aged 10-17:** Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, KSA (girls only), Mexico, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States

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Our expert advisory panel

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Images used are for visual aid only and do not represent research participants or those quoted.

Glossary

Appearance-based discrimination

The differential, unfair or prejudicial treatment of someone on the basis of their physical appearance. This can encompass numerous features, including weight, natural hair, and skin tone.

Body esteem

In this report, we refer to body esteem interchangeably with body image or body confidence. Body esteem refers to how a person feels and behaves in relation to their body, the way they look and/or what their body is capable of.

Colorism

Colorism, which is used interchangeably with skin tone or skin shade discrimination, refers to the unfair or prejudicial treatment of someone based on their skin shade or color.

Highly Visual Social Media (HVSM)

Examples of Highly Visual Social Media include platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, where users primarily communicate through images rather than text. These platforms typically attract a large adolescent audience.

Larger bodies

People with larger bodies or plus-sized people are referenced in this report based on those who self-reported in our survey as having a body that is larger than what is typically considered average in their society. Various terms were provided for people to choose from, including plus-size, larger than average body size, fat, and higher weight. This approach was verified by a range of experts. We recognize that some plus-sized individuals prefer the use of the term "fat" or "fat bodies", while others can find such language triggering or harmful. Therefore, for inclusivity purposes, throughout the report we have opted to use the terms "larger bodies" or "plus-sized", unless otherwise stated in expert commentary.

Low body esteem

In this report, low body esteem is referred to interchangeably with body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety. Low body esteem describes a person's persistent negative thoughts and feelings about their body and/or physical appearance.

Mental health conditions

In this report, we refer to people with mental health conditions. This describes people who self-reported in our survey to have a diagnosed mental health condition such as anxiety, depression or an eating disorder.

Natural hair discrimination

Natural hair discrimination, which encompasses texturism, refers to the unfair or prejudicial treatment of someone on the basis of their natural hair texture or use of protective styles, which are typically associated with the Black community. Such textures or protective styles can include kinky or coily curl patterns or styles such as locs, braids and afros.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem encompasses how a person feels about and values themselves emotionally, mentally, and physically. Self-esteem is sometimes also referred to as self-confidence. This varies from body esteem, which refers exclusively to how a person feels about their body or physical appearance.

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