

# Today's beauty pressures on girls and women

By Susie Orbach © 2005



Girls grow up knowing that how they look is important. And while girls and women enjoy beauty and fashion they can also worry about their looks, their hair, their tummies, their breasts, their legs, their size and their shape.

## Where do we get this idea at first?

We get our sense of how important this is as we watch our Moms and hear her sighs or, less frequently, see her smile of pleasure as she looks at herself in the mirror. That's not to say it is our Mom's fault. It is just that, as young girls, we absorb from her how very crucial it is to focus on our bodies.

## What about pressures outside the family?

Of course we get the idea that beauty is important from other girls, from Dads, from TV shows, pop videos and ads. We want to enjoy our beauty and be playful with it but often, too often, meeting our own beauty expectations is difficult because we just don't look like the models we see all around us.

## What's the downside of this kind of pressure to look beautiful?

Girls can grow up feeling inadequate, fret about their bodies and their looks and feel bad if they don't conform to the pictures of beauty they see projected on them from TV screens, billboards and ads. They can feel they need to change themselves, to diet away their natural shape, exercise compulsively and have cosmetic surgery to feel acceptable. Every girl and woman recognises that beauty is important. But often they do not see themselves as attractive because their uniqueness has not been reflected back to them. What they see in their mirror is someone who is unlike the models.

*“Some six year olds already don't go to the beach because they feel they are too chubby”*

## How sure are we that society out there plays a destructive role in the Beauty agenda?

For years, magazines and the fashion industry and Hollywood said that glamour was just fun. No negatives. Girls and women, so it went, like to dress up. They like to press their bodies into different shapes. Just look at the corsets of a hundred years ago. We aren't doing anything special say the fashion industry.

And of course they are right; women have always been involved in decorating themselves. But it was never imperative before. And it never involved so many women for so much of their lives. In our grandma's time it was important to be beautiful for a few years. Now girls as young as six and women in their seventies and eighties, worry if they aren't sufficiently beautiful and beautiful today means skinny, big breasted, long legged and so on. Some six year olds already don't go to the beach because they feel they are too chubby. 70% of 9 year old girls are dieting even if many of them are quite slim and most aren't by any means pudges. In some old people's homes, there are cases of anorexia because the older women feel too fat.