

# Society Expectations For Females

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## How Society's Expectations of Females Shape Girls' Lives

Michelle Plante 10/10/12 How Society's Expectations of Females Shape Girls' Lives Society's high expectations of females guide their everyday actions and decision making whether consciously or subconsciously. In Stephen Hinshaw's essay "Impossible Expectations" he discusses what he calls the "Triple Bind" where girls are supposed to be good at both typical girl and guy things as well as conform to a specific set of standards created by society. These contradictory expectations shape girls' lives and drive their decision making from what type of career they will pursue to how they dress.

Hinshaw also explained that girls are supposed to fit a cookie cutter image portrayed by the media yet encouraged to break the mold at the same time, hence the title of his essay. Although the expectations are confusing, girls have a natural aim to please and want to be accepted by society. These learned expectations are passed on from one generation to the next. "Virgins" by Danielle Evans and "The Story of My Body" by Judith Ortiz Cofer provide great examples of female expectations and how they shape girls' lives. In both of the stories, the main characters are very concerned with their overall physical appearance and male approval.

In "Virgins", the main character plays the traditional female role according to Hinshaw's descriptions. In "The Story of My Body", the main character plays both the traditional female and male role expected from today's society. The details of the stories and how they support Hinshaw's essay are explained below. Girls have always been expected to play the stereotypical female role to be nice, look pretty, and help others before themselves. So much time and money is spent on beauty products because it is a top priority for girls to look good. In "The Story of My Body", the entire story is about the narrator's appearance.

It is even broken down into color, size and skin for topics of discussion. The narrator explained that she learned from her mother "...how to move, smile, and talk like an attractive woman" (Cofer 81). At a young age, her mother taught her the importance of being beautiful, wearing nice girly clothes, and having an overall acceptable appearance. This shaped her self-image in her adolescent life and affected her confidence since she already had an idea of what was expected of her according to her mother. Some examples of the "traditional girl stuff" Hinshaw talked about in his essay are displayed in "Virgins" in regards to how girls are supposed to be nice, pretty, and empathetic. Jasmine and Erica were both concerned with their looks and were very aware of how they were perceived physically by men. The girls dressed more provocatively when they were aiming for male attention and went out to an adult club to seek it. They also tended to others' desires before their own. Jasmine aimed to please men by giving herself up to them sexually, wh

Society expectations for females have evolved significantly over the years, but they remain deeply ingrained in cultures around the world. These expectations shape the way women are perceived and treated in various aspects of life, including family dynamics, career choices, and personal relationships. While progress has been made toward gender equality, many societal norms continue to impose limitations and pressures on women. This article will explore the historical context of these expectations, the current societal norms, their impact on women, and the ongoing movements challenging these constructs.

## Historical Context of Societal Expectations for Females

Understanding the current landscape of societal expectations for females requires a look back at history. For centuries, women have been pigeonholed into specific roles that often prioritized domesticity over individuality or career aspirations.

## **Traditional Roles**

1. **Caretakers and Nurturers:** Historically, women have been expected to fulfill roles as primary caregivers, responsible for raising children and managing household duties. This expectation was reinforced by cultural narratives and religious doctrines that emphasized a woman's place in the home.
2. **Marriage and Family:** The societal norm for women has often revolved around the idea of marriage as a primary goal. Women were encouraged to find suitable partners and focus on building families, often at the expense of personal ambitions or educational pursuits.
3. **Limited Access to Education:** In many cultures, women were denied access to education, as it was believed that their primary purpose lay in serving their families. This lack of educational opportunities contributed to a cycle of dependency and limited career options.

## **Feminist Movements and Changing Norms**

The 20th century saw the rise of various feminist movements that challenged traditional expectations. Key milestones include:

- **The Suffrage Movement:** Women fought for the right to vote, challenging the notion that they should be excluded from political life.
- **The Second Wave Feminism:** In the 1960s and 1970s, women advocated for reproductive rights, workplace equality, and an end to gender discrimination.
- **The Rise of Intersectional Feminism:** This contemporary movement recognizes the varied and overlapping social identities that influence women's experiences, including race, class, and sexual orientation.

These movements have led to significant changes in societal expectations, enabling women to pursue careers, education, and personal independence.

## **Current Societal Expectations for Females**

Despite advancements, societal expectations for females remain complex and multifaceted. Women are often expected to navigate a landscape that demands they excel in multiple roles simultaneously.

## **Professional Expectations**

1. **Work-Life Balance:** Women are frequently expected to manage their careers while also fulfilling traditional roles as mothers and homemakers. This often results in the "double burden," where women must excel in both domains.
2. **Leadership Roles:** While more women are entering leadership positions, they continue to face barriers such as gender bias and the "glass ceiling." Societal expectations can lead to the belief that women leaders must adopt traditionally masculine traits to be effective.
3. **Workplace Appearance:** Women are often judged based on their appearance in the workplace, leading to additional pressure to conform to beauty standards while striving to be taken seriously as professionals.

## **Personal Relationships**

1. **Romantic Partnerships:** Societal expectations often dictate that women should prioritize finding a partner and starting a family. This pressure can lead to feelings of inadequacy for those who choose to remain single or pursue non-traditional lifestyles.
2. **Friendship Dynamics:** Women are frequently expected to be the emotional caretakers in their friendships, often taking on the role of mediator and nurturer, which can create emotional labor burdens.
3. **Motherhood:** The ideal of motherhood is heavily romanticized, with societal narratives suggesting that women should find fulfillment solely through their roles as mothers. This expectation can lead to guilt and stress for those who struggle with parenting or choose not to have children.

## **Body Image and Beauty Standards**

Society imposes stringent beauty standards on women, influencing how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

1. **Media Representation:** Women are often bombarded with images of idealized bodies through advertising, movies, and social media. These representations can lead to unrealistic expectations and pressure to conform.
2. **Health and Fitness:** There is an expectation for women to maintain specific body types, which can result in unhealthy behaviors, such as extreme dieting or excessive exercise.
3. **Aging:** Societal norms often stigmatize aging in women, leading to pressures to appear youthful regardless of age, which can affect self-esteem and mental health.

# **The Impact of Societal Expectations on Women**

The weight of societal expectations can have profound effects on women's mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

## **Mental Health Issues**

1. **Anxiety and Depression:** The pressure to meet societal expectations can lead to increased rates of anxiety and depression among women, as they struggle to balance multiple roles and meet unrealistic standards.
2. **Imposter Syndrome:** Many women experience feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt, particularly in professional settings, which can be exacerbated by societal expectations to excel.
3. **Body Image Issues:** Constant comparisons to unrealistic beauty standards can lead to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and low self-esteem.

## **Social and Economic Implications**

1. **Economic Disparities:** Societal expectations can limit women's opportunities for advancement in their careers, contributing to the gender pay gap and economic inequality.
2. **Underrepresentation in Leadership:** The challenges women face in balancing societal expectations often result in fewer women in leadership positions, perpetuating cycles of inequality.
3. **Impact on Future Generations:** The expectations placed on women can affect how they raise their children, potentially perpetuating traditional roles and limiting future generations' choices.

## **Challenging Societal Expectations**

As awareness of the limitations imposed by societal expectations grows, movements and individuals are actively working to challenge and reshape these norms.

## **Empowerment Initiatives**

1. **Advocacy Groups:** Organizations focused on women's rights advocate for equal opportunities, rights, and representation in all areas of society.

2. **Education and Awareness:** Increasing educational initiatives aimed at both men and women can help dismantle harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality.

3. **Media Representation:** Diverse and realistic portrayals of women in media can help shift societal perceptions and encourage acceptance of different lifestyles and choices.

## **Individual Actions**

1. **Personal Choices:** Women are increasingly embracing their autonomy, choosing paths that align with their values and beliefs, regardless of societal expectations.

2. **Support Networks:** Building strong support networks among women can foster empowerment and provide encouragement to challenge traditional roles.

3. **Open Conversations:** Engaging in discussions about societal expectations and their impact can raise awareness and promote change within communities.

In conclusion, society expectations for females continue to shape the lives of women in various ways, from career choices to personal relationships. While significant strides have been made toward gender equality, the persistence of traditional norms poses challenges that require ongoing attention and action. By understanding these expectations and advocating for change, society can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals, regardless of gender.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are some common societal expectations placed on women regarding career choices?**

Society often expects women to prioritize family and caregiving roles over ambitious career paths, leading to pressure to choose jobs that are perceived as more flexible or supportive of family life.

### **How do societal expectations influence women's choices in education?**

Women may feel encouraged to pursue degrees in traditionally 'feminine' fields, such as education or nursing, while facing discouragement from entering STEM fields, which are often viewed as male-dominated.

## **In what ways do beauty standards affect women's self-esteem?**

Unrealistic beauty standards promoted by media and society can lead to body image issues, lower self-esteem, and mental health struggles for many women who feel pressured to conform to these ideals.

## **How do societal expectations impact women's roles in relationships?**

Women are often expected to take on nurturing roles in relationships, balancing emotional labor and domestic responsibilities, which can lead to imbalances in partnership dynamics.

## **What are the implications of traditional gender roles on women's independence?**

Traditional gender roles can restrict women's independence by promoting the idea that their primary value lies in relationships and caregiving, which may limit their personal and professional growth.

## **How do societal expectations affect women's participation in politics?**

Women often face societal skepticism regarding their leadership abilities in politics, which can discourage them from running for office or participating in political discourse, despite increasing advocacy for gender equality.

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Explore the societal expectations for females and how they shape identities. Discover how these norms impact women today and challenge the status quo. Learn more!

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