



# Unattainable Standards:

## How Fashion and Body Type Trends Create an Unrealistic Idea of Beauty



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### INTRODUCTION

What is beautiful? Who is attractive? Answers to these questions vary depending on age, country, race — practically every defining characteristic of a person. That's the peculiar, chameleon-like nature of beauty standards; they are relative to the societal atmosphere in which they are formed. In other words, the idea of beauty is constantly changing. Two of the dominant elements of appearance are the way people dress and the way they are shaped, otherwise known as fashion trends and body types. Although there is constant change in Western society's idea of beauty, there seems to be no reason why we, as a society, continue to judge people based on these standards. Through research conducted, evidence shows that the fashion trends and desirable body types consistently change and evolve with time, proving that there is an unattainable standard women are still trying to reach.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The research for this project can be split into two perspectives: historical and modern.

#### HISTORICAL:

In order to analyze the fashion and body type trends across the decades, I turned to primary sources: old magazines, fashion shows, old ads, photoshoots, and photographs. This was able to provide me with data on the changes, laid out in the data and analysis to the right.

#### MODERN:

I surveyed Henry M. Gunn High School female-identifying students of all grades. The survey was meant to gather a modern youth perspective. Primarily, my questions inquired about how the individual felt about popular trends and how they viewed themselves compared to the people they see in the media. The goal was to see how much the subjects were influenced by the media and how it made them feel.

### DATA

Trends have been separated into twenty year increments. Although trends do not begin and end neatly with the decades, there are notable changes in ideals and popularity for certain articles of clothing in each grouping that I have highlighted.



### CONCLUSION & ANALYSIS

Looking at the graphical displays, we can see the similarities and differences over time.

#### SIMILARITIES:

Ideals for the decades always seem to be centered or based around the waist. The waist is a center point for the body. It tends to be a defining aspect in an outfit. Also interestingly is how much social movements impact fashion trends, such as the influence of the women's suffrage movement on the 1920s and the impact of the world wars on lack of materials.

#### DIFFERENCES:

There is a gradual trend of the loss of modesty. The length of bottoms gets shorter and the tops go lower. Alongside that, there always seems to be a pendulum swing of curves and skinny. Decades switch between, with no obvious or confirmed pattern.

### IMPLICATIONS & NEXT STEPS

I also sent a survey out to female-identifying students at my high school. In it, so many people expressed how much their mindset of what is beautiful is shaped by the ideal that is showcased here. The point of this project, however, was to bring awareness of the fact that these trends are constantly changing, so no body type can ever be truly valued. Therefore, the next part of this project is to share how many young girls are dealing with the issue of body image due to beauty standards. I hope that if I can share that all body types feel inadequate, people will feel more inclined to love and acceptance their bodies. Hopefully, people will begin to understand how damaging these standards that we set are and we can begin to change the way we look at female body types for the next generation.

1900s-1910s	Soft curves through corsets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corsets semi-emphasized curves</li> <li>Chest and bust were highlighted to a modest degree</li> <li>Modesty was an essential</li> </ul>
1920s-1930s	Boyish figure, straighter figure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flapper dresses</li> <li>All features downplayed, even hair with short bobs</li> <li>Women's Suffrage Movement at peak</li> </ul>
1940s-1950s	Slight hourglass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two piece bikinis, Poodle Skirt, Bullet bras</li> <li>Marilyn Monroe at peak career, Audrey Hepburn on rise</li> <li>World War II lack of materials forced a less conservative mindset</li> </ul>
1960s-1970s	Thin and toned, long legs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mini Skirts, Bell-bottoms, Crop Tops</li> <li>Jackie Kennedy, "Twiggy," Catherine Bach</li> <li>Social rebellion after War and during Vietnam War introduced birth control and rebellious teens</li> </ul>
1980s-1990s	Supermodel ideal (athletic but slender, some curves)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High-Waisted Jeans and spandex</li> <li>Cindy Crawford and Jennifer Aniston</li> <li>Rise of prominence of women in the workforce pushed ideals of professionalism and attractiveness</li> </ul>
2000s-2010s	Extreme curves with a thigh gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comfort is emphasized in tracksuits and the rise of athleisure</li> <li>Clothes show and reveal more skin than ever before</li> <li>Emphasis on curvy nature of clothes and bodies</li> </ul>

Images have been collected from Harper's Bazaar and a variety of websites. For a full list, check out <https://tinyurl.com/USReferences>

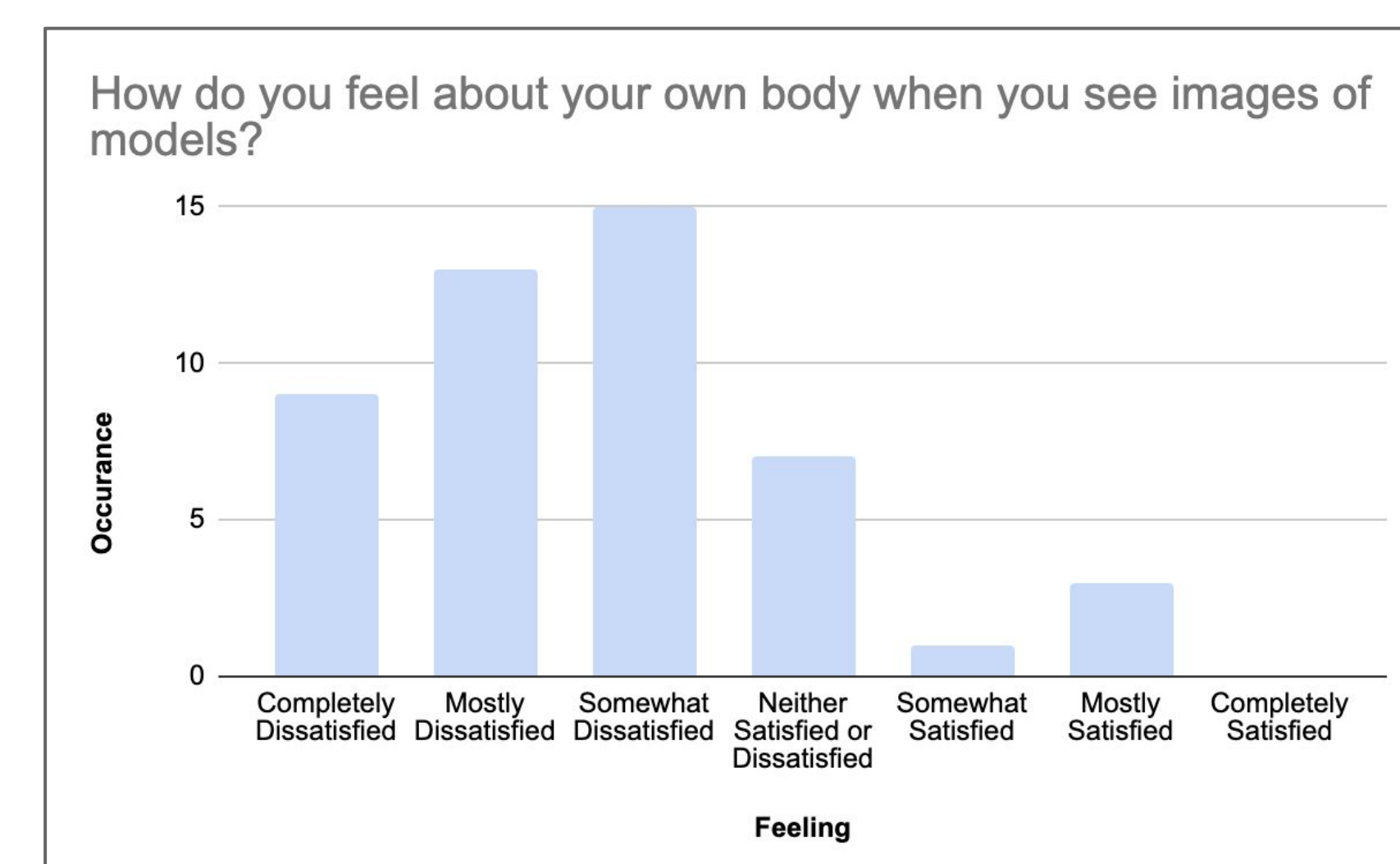


Figure 1.

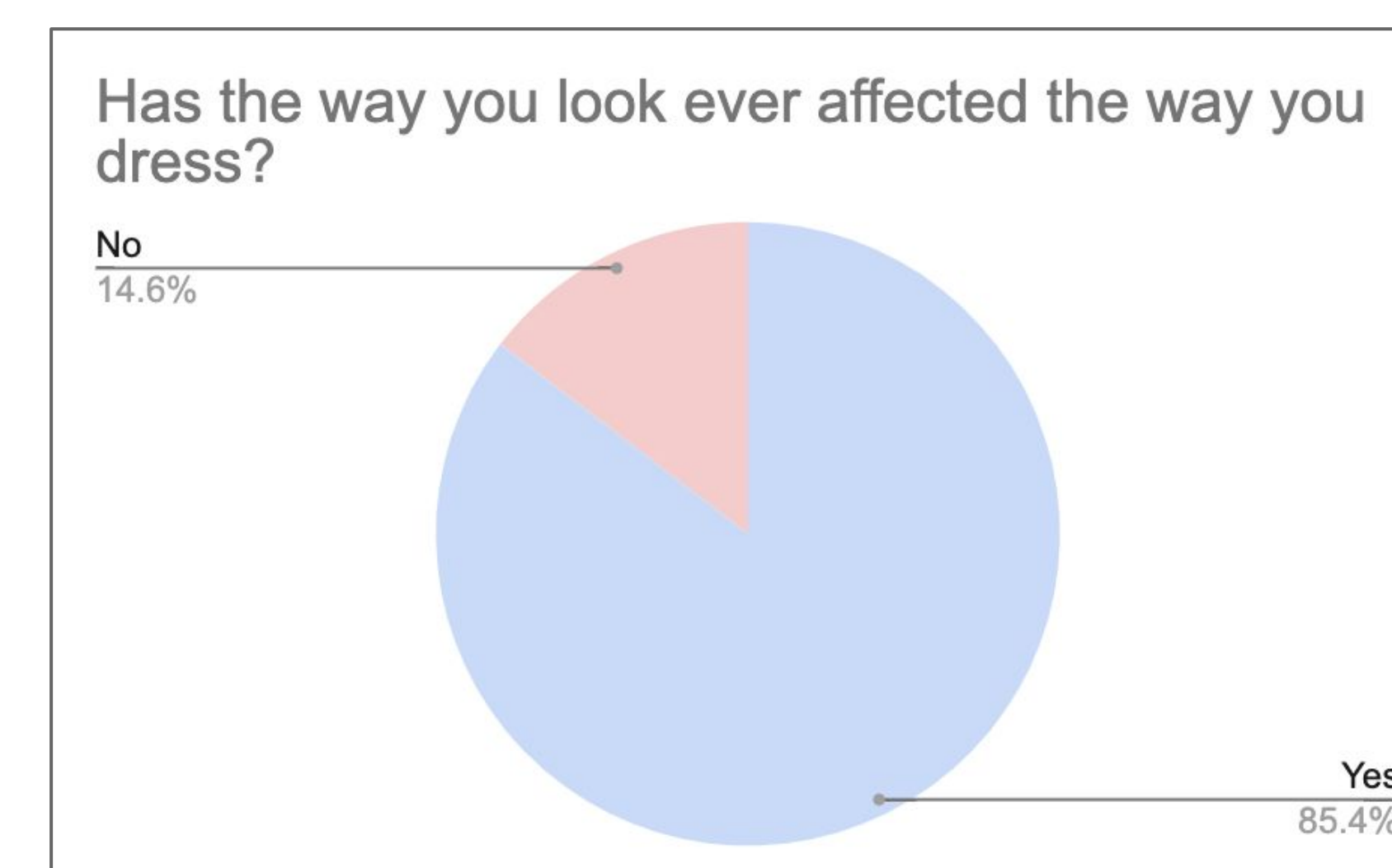


Figure 2.

Survey responses for female-identifying Gunn High School students.