



# Press Release

## Majority (59%) of Canadian Teen Girls Feel Pressure to Conform to Unrealistic Expectations of What It Means to “Be a Girl”

### Many Say Social Pressures and Expectations Take Toll on Self-Esteem

**Toronto, Ontario, October 2, 2017** — A new Ipsos survey for Girl Guides of Canada—Guides du Canada (GGC) has found that a majority (59%) of teenage girls in Canada are facing pressure to conform to unrealistic expectations, which can negatively affect their self-esteem. The survey polled girls on a number of topics related to pressures and stereotypes they’ve experienced through the media, social media, or society at large, and found that these social expectations are not only widespread, but harmful to many.

#### Unrealistic Standards and Self-Esteem

Six in ten girls surveyed (59%) agree they feel pressure from society (the media, social media, parents, or teachers) to conform to unrealistic expectations about what it means to “be a girl”, whether it’s how they should look, dress, speak or act, or the specific interests they should have (14% strongly / 44% somewhat). Just as many (60%) agree they feel pressure from the media or social media to conform to unrealistic beauty standards (17% strongly / 42% somewhat).

For many, these pressures have harmful consequences: more than half (55%) agree (14% strongly / 42% somewhat) that trying to meet social media expectations about how they should look or act has negatively impacted their self-esteem. This pressure is the strongest (71%) among those who are heavy social media users.

#### Mixed Messages and Conflicting Expectations

Besides social media, girls say they’ve experienced peer pressure, which often contains mixed or even contradictory messages. For instance, nearly two in ten (17%) of those surveyed say they’ve felt peer pressure to be thin and lose weight, on the one hand, and have a “curvy” body type, on the other.

Indeed, more than half of girls agree they get mixed messages about how they’re supposed to look and dress (56%; 13% strongly / 44% somewhat), or act and behave (56%; 16% strongly / 40% somewhat) – messages like “be smart, but not too smart,” “play sports, but not those sports,” or “pursue your dream career, but not in that field.”

For some girls, these mixed messages have a tangible impact on behaviour, such as opting out of a preferred activity because of their gender: three in ten (30%) agree (5% strongly / 25% somewhat) they’ve avoided or considered stopping an activity or sport they like because not many girls participate. This can also extend to classroom subjects: 16% agree (3% strongly / 13% somewhat) they hide the fact that they like science, technology, engineering or math because they don’t want to be rejected by their peers.

Others have concerns about how they will be valued in the workforce: one in four (24%) agree (5% strongly / 19% somewhat) they don’t feel motivated to pursue their dream career because they’re concerned they’ll be compensated less than their male counterparts.

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### About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between August 31 and September 14, 2017, on behalf of *Girl Guides of Canada—Guides du Canada (GGC)*. For this survey, a sample of 523 Canadian girls aged 15-17 from Ipsos' online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the population of girls aged 15-17 according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within  $\pm 4.9$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadian girls 15-17 been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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