

GENDER EQUITY FOR ALL
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KNOWING YOUR WORTH

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KNOWING YOUR WORTH:

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From a young age, girls face an onslaught of negative messages from the media about their bodies, intelligence, roles in society and their families, and their worth. In response to these stifling and overbearing ideas, some young women begin to cultivate identities or a sense of worthiness based on superficial matters such as assumed attractiveness, academic validation, or sports performance.

Any source of worthiness that is subject to change can be a slippery slope. If your claim to worthiness is your academic prowess, what happens to your self-esteem when you receive a C? The goal is to develop a sense of self-esteem that transcends external markings such as performance of any kind and instead focuses on your inherent worth as a human being.

ACADEMIC VALIDATION

Despite what your parents or teachers say, academic validation is just as toxic as any when it comes to sourcing your self-esteem from a single factor. Students who strive for academic validation may lose motivation for learning, instead focusing on their GPAs and scores. And because academic validation is not reliable—no matter how hard you work or how smart you are—one poor performance can lead someone to spiral.

(Ever introduced yourself, “Hey, I’m 3.8?” or “Nice to meet you, I’m 1490?” That’s because you’re more than just a number). Someone I spoke to told me that she experienced suicidal thoughts after getting one bad grade. “It was terrifying,” she told me. “I realized something needed to change.”

What to try instead: Your self-concept may consist entirely of your academic ability, but what would it look like if you began putting more focus on the effort you've already been putting in to achieve such success? Instead of thinking, “I am smart and therefore worthy,” (which can be more or less subconscious), try, “I put in every effort I can, which makes me feel proud of myself.”

NOT DRAWN TO SCALE: ON WEIGHT AND WORTHINESS

Step one: throw. your. scale. out.

Whether you want to have a smashing ceremony or simply refuse to replace the batteries the next time they run out, realize that as long as you continue to weigh yourself, some part of you will associate your self-worth with your weight. It’s inevitable, given the full-court press of diet culture pretty much everywhere. Think about how scales are marketed in stores: the box itself usually bears an image of the product inside, and the number on the scale is usually in the low 120s. We are taught that in order to be desirable and healthy, we must be as small as possible. Inherent in that message is the societal pressure to avoid taking up space at all costs.

- The best way to cultivate a positive body image is to act like you have it. Wear whatever you want and treat yourself as if you love yourself: wake up earlier to get a moment to yourself, try on some new lip gloss just for fun, or add some joyful movement into your day by walking your dog.
- Whenever you're having an insecure day, have a mantra you repeat to yourself, such as, "my body does not define me."
- Practice body neutrality or tolerance - you don't need to call yourself stunning all day, but it is important to respect your body just as you would respect anyone else's body. If you catch yourself thinking cruel thoughts about your body, gently redirect your process. (You'll eventually get there!).
- Stay curious! If you have a negative thought about your body, notice it. For example, if you think, "I look so ugly, I may as well stay home," take a moment to wonder what spurred that thought. Is it that your dress is tighter than usual? Is it perhaps not your style? Are you bloated from a big meal? None of these thoughts necessitate action, but they can help increase your empathy for yourself.

THERE IS NO JUXTAPOSITION: STRENGTH AND FEMININITY

How many times have you tried to play down your femininity when attempting to appear professional or knowledgeable?

“Plain makeup. Dark suits. No jewelry,” was how Hailey, of Project Empowerment, described how used to dress to speak at important school board meetings, “regardless of if the topic was dress code or recognising June as Pride month. I felt like I had to dress that way to be heard.

However, now I happily attend those same meetings in heels and makeup- all of which make me happy.”

Your femininity does not undermine your proficiency or ability. If you enjoy dressing femininely, don't feel forced into androgyny because you think it's what other people want.

ASSERTING YOUR NEEDS

Many girls struggle to assert their needs in fear of being seen as aggressive or mean. Remember that as long as you are being respectful, it is not your job to control how others perceive you. Women who stand up for themselves are more likely to be labeled as needy or annoying, but we cannot let stigma prevent us from living optimally.

Suggested reading:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2018/08/28/when-women-are-called-aggressive-at-work/?sh=323fc3517bc8>)

If you have needs that aren't being met, keep on pushing. People may not be on your side yet, but the law is.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND UNFAIR COMPARISONS

It's not up for discussion: social media consumption and self-esteem issues are positively correlated. Despite this, girls may feel an enormous social pressure to stay on these apps.

Here are some tips for damage control:

- Unfollow people who give you the ick. If someone appears to edit his/her/their photos very often, spreads messages that do not align with your values, or otherwise makes you feel uncomfortable, simply unfollow.
- Follow women who inspire you. Social media can be a great space for creativity and inspiration if you let it be.

Some recommendations:

@ruthproject_ (the only account of our global gender equity organization)

@almondmilkisnuts (anti-diet dietitian)

@sierraschultzzie (body-positive influencer)

@_peacefromwithin (help with anxiety and anti-diet culture content) @rupikaur (Punjabi-Canadian poet)

@kinsalehueston (Indigenous poet)

@mamadoctorjones (female physician)

@ashparaskevas (Black creator, self-acceptance content)

These are just examples! There are thousands of women surgeons, lawyers, engineers, psychologists, politicians, and other professionals you can follow.

- Remember that it's most likely contrived. Have you ever been shocked when the happiest couple on your For You Page broke up the day after posting their photoshoot in a Napa vineyard? You're not the only one. If you feel really strongly about continuing to consume influencer content, try to bear its lack of authenticity in mind.

BEING YOURSELF: THE JOB NOBODY CAN DO FOR YOU

This is the one job you cannot delegate –being yourself. Think: what makes me me? How have I tried to conform to an ideal before? How can I prevent that from happening again?

- Jess used to think that her interest in the environment would make other people think she's uptight and too liberal. She now realizes that her ability to effectively convince people about environmental policy is one of her most special traits.
- Tarryn always wanted to thrift her clothing but was scared people at school would judge her for not wearing trendy fast fashion. One day, she decided to just buy the plaid dress from the local consignment store and wear it to school. She didn't get many compliments, but she felt the most authentically herself she'd felt in ages.

What's something you've been scared of trying or showing others about yourself?

ACCEPTABLE SOURCES OF WORTHINESS

While we've discussed what you shouldn't base your self-esteem off, what can you try instead? Think: what have you noticed about yourself that you really love?

- How hard you work
- How much you care about others
- How passionate you are
- How much you love your family
- What a great friend you are
- What an independent thinker you are
- How committed you are to your community

The ideal self-esteem is culled from a variety of innate characteristics (not just one) and also includes your inherent worth as a human being. That way, not even one bad day can send your self-worth tumbling into the gutter.

AFFIRMATIONS FOR SELF WORTH

Here are some great affirmations the Project Empowerment team wished they knew when they were younger:

- > I'm enough exactly as I am at this moment.
- > I have everything I need inside of me.
- >The power is inherent to me; I just need to tap into it.
- >I'm striving for improvement but I'm loving myself through it.

These are great to tack up on a Post-It in your locker, next to a mirror, or on a car dashboard. Saying them out loud can also be very helpful.

SEEKING HELP

If you're plagued by consistent thoughts of unworthiness or feelings of shame, it may be time to reach out for help. Left untreated, low-self esteem can lead to bigger problems like eating disorders, depression, and anxiety. Talk to someone you trust about seeing a licensed professional.