



Outside the Mirror

Beauty standards are ideas about what features make people “beautiful.” They aren’t usually spoken out loud. They come in the form of images, personalities, and characters on social media and TV, in ads and catalogs, in the movies and on stage—and you’re bombarded with these messages every day. It’s easy to get the idea that you’re supposed to look a certain way or that you should somehow “fix” yourself to match an ideal. Well, don’t fall for it! In this badge, you’ll take a look outside the mirror—yes, the real one in your bathroom, but also the virtual one that the media holds up to you. You’ll learn to see through the hype and find your authenticity. You’re just right, however you are—and it’s time to own your glow.

Steps

1. Look to the past to understand the present
2. Embrace authenticity
3. Question beauty standards
4. Think about how images and looks can be altered
5. Be on the lookout for hidden messages

Purpose

When I’ve earned this badge, I’ll know how to push back against hidden beauty standard messaging and appreciate my authentic self.



Step 1: Look to the past to understand the present

It can seem like beauty standards are set in stone—but they’re not. Every culture throughout history has had its own ideas about the way people should look. Try a little time-traveling to see how beauty standards have changed over the years.

Sample activities:

Explore body messages in art. Find three examples of historic artwork (online, in books, or as part of a museum field trip) that depict people. Make a list of beauty standards you see in the images (what the bodies look like, how the people are dressed, and so on). How do they compare to today’s beauty standards, in terms of both similarities and differences? If things have changed, why do you think this might be? Discuss your findings with a friend.

Learn about a beauty icon of the past. Read about a famous beauty icon of any gender from a previous time (anywhere from ancient days to a few decades ago). What features made this person beautiful, in society’s eyes? What impact did the person have on the ways we think now? Present your findings, then discuss the ever-changing nature of beauty standards.

► **For more fun:** Visit a museum that displays wigs, corsets, hoop skirts, and other “beauty wear” from the past to see examples of how fashion trends change over time.

Step 2: Embrace authenticity

Authenticity is a big word that just means being true to yourself. It’s showing the world who you really are and not hiding behind expectations of what you should be. In this step, you’ll learn how to present yourself authentically and help others do the same.

Sample activities:

Show your authentic self with style. Gather a bunch of magazines or catalogs. Cut out images of looks that you think reflect the “real you”—hairstyles, accessories, clothing, makeup, and so on—and use them to create a vision board. Use the board as inspiration for your own unique look! Bring the look to life on your own or with a friend’s help, then model it with pride. Focus on how you feel—confident? Sassy? *Yourself*? Authentic and comfortable are the goals! (Oh, and P.S.—it’s great if you already love the way you dress, your makeup, your hair, and other aspects of your style just the way they are. Don’t change a thing!)



Promote body appreciation. Imagine you’re an entrepreneur (someone who starts their own business) running a body- or beauty-focused company. Come up with a marketing campaign that promotes body appreciation, not the need to change anything about yourself. Interview a real entrepreneur (preferably one who works with body or beauty products) to get ideas and advice.

Step 3: Question beauty standards

Beauty standards differ from place to place, culture to culture, and moment to moment. And society’s standards don’t account for inner beauty—that special glow we can get from being our true selves. Explore the many faces of beauty and learn to appreciate what’s real.

Sample activities:

Explore beauty standards in cultures around the world. Work with a group of friends to identify personal connections with people from several cultures. The people could be family, friends, neighbors, local experts, teachers, or anyone else in your day-to-day life. Invite them to speak to your group about beauty standards in their culture—what is considered beautiful and why? After the presentations, discuss what you learned. Talk about the idea that when it comes to beauty, “standard” is anything but.

Recognize and celebrate what’s real. Attend a women’s sporting event or watch one on TV to see women in their authentic glory. Watch for moments of strength, focus, flexibility, and skill. The outcomes are based on the athletes’ ability and performance, not their looks, and there’s real beauty in every move.

The Male Gaze

Much of the historical artwork in museums was created by men. These works often present female subjects in stereotyped ways that focus on their looks and bodies. This perspective is called the “male gaze” because it forces viewers to observe women from a man’s point of view. It can also reinforce society’s standards for the way women should look. The male gaze still shows up in today’s movies and other media, but it is becoming less of an issue as more content creators work to avoid this trap. And strong female creators are stepping up more and more to add their voices and points of view to the conversation. Maybe YOU could be one of them!

Be You

Hair texture varies not only from person to person, but in some cases among ethnicities. Women sometimes feel pressure to conform to societal hair standards (for instance, by relaxing their curly hair) that don’t match their genetics. That doesn’t mean you *can’t* do it. Here’s the rule of thumb: If a certain look feels comfortable, go for it. If it doesn’t, don’t. Be you!

When Strength Meets Style

Athletes need to be good at their sport. That’s job number one. But there’s nothing wrong with showing a little flair while they’re at it! Lots of female athletes rock eye-catching hairstyles or hair color, bold makeup, designer nails, and other fun touches. By combining style and skill, they’re putting personality into their play—and that’s as real as it gets.

Body appreciation:

A positive, accepting attitude toward one’s body, valuing it and being grateful for what it can do rather than how it looks.

Stereotype:

An idea or trait that is thought to apply to everyone in a group, without considering individual differences.


Step 4: Think about how images and looks can be altered

Media images are designed to send a message or get a reaction. Content creators may use camera angles, lighting, makeup, and other aids to produce a desired effect. Sometimes images are further altered by software that smooths people’s skin, changes body shape, or makes other “improvements” (not). Learn to see past these tricks and understand that media is often about presentation, not reality.

Sample activities:

Learn about image manipulation. Find someone who knows how to use image manipulation software. It could be anyone, even a friend or family member—it doesn’t have to be a graphics professional. Have them show you a few editing tricks. Then evaluate some “before” and “after” images. Can you spot the changes? Try altering some images yourself, if you have access to the needed equipment and software.

Do an outrageous makeover. Take “before” pictures of yourself and a friend in your natural state—no makeup, fancy hairdo, jewelry, and so on. Then help each other with outrageous makeovers. The goal isn’t beauty—it’s to come up with an extreme and totally different look. When you’re done, take “after” pictures and compare them to the “before” shots. Discuss how media uses a similar process, but beauty stereotype-focused, to transform people’s looks.



Real or Not Real?

Today, artificial intelligence (AI) can create false images. Sometimes these images are so realistic, it’s hard to tell they’re fake. But usually there are clues that a picture is AI-generated. Pay close attention to detect AI fakes. Remember that when it comes to digital art, you can’t believe everything you see.

To the Extreme

Special effects makeup can change people into monsters, add decades to their age, or make other extreme changes to their looks. Artists combine specially crafted prosthetics (false body or skin pieces) and makeup to get the desired effects. Beauty makeovers have less exotic goals, but they can deliver similarly dramatic results.

You Do You

The media often presents cultural variations in stereotyped ways. It sends hidden messages about how people of various origins should look and act. Whatever your background is, make sure to seek out media that represents you positively and authentically. Remember, content creators don’t know you. Don’t let them tell you what you should be.



Step 5: Be on the lookout for hidden messages

Ads, social media, TV, and movies can send hidden messages about appearance. Even without words, they may hint that people must look a certain way to be happy or healthy, find love, or do all sorts of other things. Learn to spot harmful hidden messages—then look past them to appreciate your own unique self.

Sample activities:

Decode an ad. Read about hidden messages in advertising. Then find a printed ad that features people. Paste it to posterboard or whiteboard and add callouts explaining any hidden messages about looks, body shape, fitness level, and other beauty-related topics. (Try to find at least five.) Add a sentence at the bottom that summarizes the ad’s overall attitude toward beauty. Share your work with a friend.

Be a positive influencer for a day. If you were an influencer, how would you promote body appreciation to your followers or subscribers? Design a campaign (virtual or otherwise) to get your message out to the world. Write text and create images that support your ideas. When you’re done, reflect on any hidden messages you used or considered using. Yep—EVERYONE does it, even you! Remember, hidden messages can be positive, too.

It’s a Paycheck

Social media influencers are often paid to feature certain products or services. Obviously, they aren’t going to say anything bad about these things—their income depends on it! Make sure to do your research and get the full story before believing things you see or hear online.



Volunteer’s Guide

Tips and ideas to help guide your troop through the Outside the Mirror badge

This badge line addresses body issues and related topics. Some Girl Scouts may find these topics sensitive. As the facilitator, your delivery is critical in providing a positive experience. Visit the Volunteer Toolkit on mygs.girlscouts.org for information and resources that will help you to make the most of this experience, along with detailed activity instructions and meeting aids. **The Cadette level covers a wide developmental spread. Carefully consider how to choose/present activities for younger versus older Cadettes.**

Step 1: Look to the past to understand the present

Time: 30–40 minutes

Ask: What are some modern beauty standards? Are beauty standards different today than they were in the past? Can you identify any changes?

Share: Beauty standards are ideas about what features make people “beautiful.” It can seem like they’re set in stone. Let’s do a little time traveling to see how beauty standards have changed over the years.

Sample activities:

Explore body messages in art. Have Cadettes find three examples of historic artwork online, in books, or as part of a museum visit (make prior plans and arrangements if taking a field trip). Ask each Cadette to list beauty standards they see implied in the images. Later, discuss how Cadettes’ lists compare to today’s beauty standards, in both similarities and differences.

Materials: *computers, smartphones, or tablets (if doing online research); books, if needed; paper; pens and pencils*

Learn about a beauty icon of the past. Have Cadettes read about a beauty icon (of any gender) from the past. Ask them to explain what made this person beautiful in society’s eyes and consider the person’s impact on the ways we now think about beauty. Have Cadettes share their findings with the group. Then guide a discussion about the ever-changing nature of beauty standards.

Materials: *computers, smartphones, or tablets (if doing online research); books, if needed; paper; pens and pencils*

Step 2: Embrace authenticity

Time: 30–40 minutes

Ask: Do you feel like you show your “real self” to the world? Why or why not?

Share: Authenticity means being true to yourself. It’s showing the world who you really are and not hiding behind stereotypes. Let’s talk about presenting ourselves authentically and supporting others in doing the same.

Sample activities:

Show your authentic self with style. Have Cadettes cut out pictures of looks they like from magazines and catalogs, then glue these pictures to cardstock to create a personal vision board. Cadettes could also use a favorite app to create a digital vision board, if they have the necessary equipment. Tell them to use their boards as inspiration to bring a look that feels authentically “them” to life and model it at the next meeting. Give Cadettes the chance to talk about how this look reflects who they are inside. Assure them that if they already love their current look, dress, makeup use, and so on, that’s great—they don’t need to change a thing!

Materials: *posterboard (one per Cadette); catalogs, magazines, and other printed materials; scissors; glue; computers, smartphones, or tablets (if creating digitally)*

Promote body appreciation. Either arrange for Cadettes to interview an entrepreneur about how to start and run a business or have them watch or read an interview with an entrepreneur they admire. Then have Cadettes imagine they’re starting their own body- or beauty-focused company. What would the company sell or do? Have Cadettes create a marketing campaign for their product or service that promotes body appreciation, not looks.

Materials: *computers, smartphones, or tablets (if doing online research or interviews); paper; pens and pencils*

Step 3: Question beauty standards

Time: 20–30 minutes

Ask: What do you think makes someone beautiful?

Share: Beauty standards differ from place to place, culture

to culture, and moment to moment. And society’s standards don’t account for inner beauty—that special glow we can get from being ourselves. Let’s explore the many faces of beauty and learn to appreciate what’s real.

Sample activities:

Explore beauty standards in cultures around the world. Guide Cadettes in identifying personal connections with people from several cultures. The people could be family, friends, neighbors, local experts, teachers, or anyone else in Cadettes’ day-to-day lives. Invite these people to visit your troop and speak about beauty standards in their cultures. After the presentations, talk as a group about the idea that when it comes to beauty, “standard” is anything but.

Materials: *none*

Recognize and celebrate what’s real. Make arrangements to attend a women’s sporting event of any type your troop enjoys, at any competition level (within your budget, of course). If attending an in-person event is not possible or practical, arrange a TV or livestream watch party. After the game, discuss what personal qualities Cadettes noticed the athletes displaying on the field (skill, flexibility, strength, perseverance, teamwork, etc.). How do these qualities represent authenticity and/or beauty?

Materials: *technology to screen a sporting event (if hosting a watch party)*

Step 4: Think about how images and looks can be altered

Time: 20–30 minutes

Ask: Do you think you can trust the images you see in media? Do they accurately represent the way things look?

Share: Content creators may use camera angles, lighting, makeup, and other aids to produce certain effects in media images. Sometimes these images are also altered by software that smooths skin, changes body shape, or makes other adjustments, often to make the images conform to society’s beauty standards. Today we’ll learn that when it comes to media, you can’t believe everything you see.

Sample activities:

Learn about image manipulation. Invite someone who knows how to use image manipulation software to visit a meeting and demonstrate some techniques. After the demonstration, have Cadettes evaluate a few images before and after manipulation (you can search for these image pairs online). Have Cadettes try altering some images themselves, if you have access to the needed equipment and software. Discuss why it’s important not to believe everything you see in media.

Materials: *computers, smartphones, or tablets with image manipulation software (if desired)*

Do an outrageous makeover. Have Cadettes take all-natural “before” pictures of themselves—no makeup, fancy hairdo, jewelry, and so on. Then have them help each other with outrageous makeovers. The goal isn’t beauty—it’s to come up with an extreme and totally different look. When Cadettes are done, have them take “after” pictures and compare them to the “before” shots. Discuss how media uses a similar process, but beauty stereotype-focused, to transform people’s looks.

Materials: *phones or camera for pictures; makeup, hair accessories, jewelry, and other makeover supplies*

Step 5: Be on the lookout for hidden messages

Time: 20–30 minutes

Ask: What is a “hidden message” in media?

Share: Even without words, social media, TV, and movies can hint that people must look a certain way to be happy or healthy, find love, or do all sorts of other things. Learn to spot these harmful hidden messages, then look past them to appreciate your unique self.

Sample activities:

Decode an ad. Have Cadettes read about hidden messages in advertising, then find a printed ad that features people. Have them paste the ad on posterboard and add callouts explaining at least five implied messages about looks, body shape, fitness level, and other beauty-related topics. Have them add a sentence summarizing the ad’s overall attitude toward beauty, then encourage (but do not require) them to share their work with the group.

Materials: *computers, smartphones, or tablets (for online research); posterboard (one per Cadette); catalogs, magazines, and other printed materials; scissors; glue; pens and pencils*

Be a positive influencer for a day. Have Cadettes design a campaign (virtual or otherwise) to promote body appreciation, writing text and creating images that support their idea. How would they get their message across? When they’re done, have them reflect on what hidden messages they used or considered using. Remind them that hidden messages can be positive, too! Encourage (but do not require) Cadettes to present their work to the group.

Materials: *computers, smartphones, or tablets (for virtual campaigns, photo sourcing, or taking pictures); paper; pens and pencils*



Made possible by Flamingo.

All trademarks, trade names, or logos mentioned or used are the property of their respective owners.

TM ® & © 2025 Girl Scouts of the United States of America. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical methods, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, now known or hereinafter invented, without the prior written permission of Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA), except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permissions requests, write to GSUSA at the address below or visit the www.girlscouts.org website to access permission request forms.

First published in 2025 by Girl Scouts of the United States of America,
420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018-2798
www.girlscouts.org

Item 64486

