

## smile pretty run like a girl

What happens to carefree, confident little girls as they approach womanhood? Statistics show that in too many cases, their concept of self becomes warped. Girls are surrounded by forces that persuade them to go against their own best judgment, to keep quiet when they want to object, to detest their bodies for being less than perfect, and to devalue their own voices in favor of the louder and more persistent voices of commercials, fashion magazines, and MTV. The result is an increase in the number of teenage girls who experience eating disorders, drug problems, suicide attempts, early sexual relations, and other self-destructive behaviors. *RUN LIKE A GIRL* and *SMILE PRETTY* go inside the experience of American teenage girls as they grapple with growing up in a world that tells them they are fat, ugly, loud-mouthed, or frigid if they are anything but conventionally pretty, thin, unassuming and sweet.

*RUN LIKE A GIRL* and *SMILE PRETTY* were shot by an all-woman crew so that interview subjects would feel comfortable relating personal anecdotes and shooting could occur behind-the-scenes, in female-only environments such as locker and dressing rooms. Editing without narration, the girls tell their stories in their own words. The result: two very intimate, honest documentaries which peel away pretense and reveal the essence of teenage girls' experience.

Says producer/director Carol Cassidy, "Part of being a girl in our culture is learning to keep secrets. Girls tend to keep quiet about sex, pain, rage, intelligence, desires, ideas, and dreams. They learn to protect their parents from the details of girls' experience. They keep their wisdom, friendship, love, power, and hope to themselves. I've discovered that girls will talk if you listen with respect and without judging. These programs are designed to spark all night heart-to-heart talks. They are for anyone who has ever been, or cared about, a young American girl."

### this guide

By examining girls' participation in sports and beauty pageants, both *RUN LIKE A GIRL* and *SMILE PRETTY* provide an excellent way to involve young people in discussions about gender roles, self-esteem, body image, peer pressure, societal expectations, definitions of beauty, media images and role models, participation in sports, and more.

This guide offers four tools:

- Opening Questions - suggestions for what to ask to get the conversation going;
- Quotes from the Film - Sometimes it is easier to react to something a stranger says on screen than to something said by the person sitting across from you. You can use quotes as a reminder of the film's content or to ask for response.
- Background Facts can provide a context for your discussion; and
- Resources that both girls and adults can use to get more detailed information on the issues raised in the films and to connect with other people who are thinking about those issues.

Note:

Quotes in normal text are from *RUN LIKE A GIRL*.  
Quotes in italics are from *SMILE PRETTY*.

### discussion tips

When we talk with young people it is natural to want to convey our own values to them, but beginning a discussion by establishing our opinions or seeming to look for specific answers sends the message that we don't respect what others think enough to genuinely listen to them. Not surprisingly, people who get that message aren't likely to want to engage in a conversation with us.

The goal of discussing *SMILE PRETTY* and *RUN LIKE A GIRL* is not to convince participants to accept a particular point of view, but to provide an opportunity for people to think through their own feelings, examine where their opinions come from, and to better understand others in the group by learning more about what they think and why. A skilled discussion leader walks a fine line between listening to what participants have to say, respecting all opinions (even when you disagree) and encouraging people to go deeper by guiding them to consider the source(s) of their opinions, evaluate the logic of their arguments, and support their beliefs with facts.

Help your group set ground rules that allow for everyone to have a turn and to speak without being interrupted. You might also suggest that participants speak in the first person (using "I" statements) rather than generalizing (e.g. "Girls are..." or "jocks act like...").

The most obvious way to open a discussion is simply to ask people what they thought of the film. Often this will be enough to launch a group into a lively discussion. General opening questions like, “If you were going to tell a friend about the film(s) you just saw, what would you tell them?” or “If tomorrow someone asked you about what you saw, what scene(s) would you remember the most and why?” can be useful starters.

For groups who are ready to delve a little deeper, you might want to use the questions below. They can be used to prepare people to watch the films or as a closing activity to help participants pull things together.

**If you were the ideal version of yourself...**

- What skills would you have?
- What would your accomplishments be?
- What would you look like?
- What kind of values would you uphold?
- What would you care about?
- Who would be the important people in your life?
- What kind of support would help you become that person?
- What kind of things stand in the way of your becoming that person?
- What kinds of messages, experiences, and relationships have influenced your vision of yourself?

How do the girls in the film(s) answer these questions? Pick one opinion expressed in the film(s) that you agree with and explain why what was said made sense to you. Pick one opinion expressed in the film(s) that you disagree with and explain why you disagree.

**What kinds of things have you done because you thought “that’s what girls are supposed to do”?**

- Have you ever given up doing something you really liked because people said “girls don’t do that”? How old were you?
- Have you ever avoided doing something because you were afraid of what people might think?
- Have you ever avoided doing something because you were afraid that people might think you were a lesbian?
- Where do ideas about what girls are supposed to do come from? Who benefits from these ideas? Who suffers because of these ideas?

Girls in general...they’re not allowed in society to be more aggressive and to use their strength and their power.”

“In junior high I started growing my hair out because I was just kind of tired of everybody thinking that I was a boy....I might as well just grow my hair out, so that’ll be one less thing I have to worry about. A lot of people they’re just like, ‘Are you gay or something?’”

“I ask other girls sometimes why they stopped [jumping double dutch] and they be like, ‘Girl, please. I’m grown now. I’m older, that’s kiddie stuff.’ I must still be a kid then.”

“I don’t know why people expect teenage girls to [act happy all the time] ‘cause so many of us aren’t....It’s just one of those insane expectations that people have of girls. You’re supposed to sit there and smile and not talk and be stupid.”

“I don’t think in Trinidad there’s high [teen] pregnancy. ‘Cause everybody there knows if you do this, your mother’s there to say, ‘Oh why did you do that.’...Up here, it’s totally different. Everybody here is like, ‘I can get pregnant at any age,’ because they don’t know how they’re feeling about themselves, they’re not sure, they don’t have high self-esteem.”

*“Everybody starts changing through middle school. It’s just a peer pressure thing, to change from what you are to a girl....I guess that’s when you really decide, ‘Hey, I’m finding myself.’”*

*“I can’t stand wearing a lot of make up. I hate it. But, I mean, you’ve got to....You probably could never have gotten me in one of these [pageant dresses] when I was little....I was a big tomboy....I mean, I loved my Barbies but I used to rip their heads off. And pretty much twelve or thirteen is when I grew out of that stage and decided I need to grow up and be a girl like I was supposed to be when I was born....I reckon right when puberty hit in...it was almost waking up one morning and I was totally different.”*

**What does each girl get from the activity in which she participates?**

- What do girls get out of participating in sports? Is there a difference between participating in a competition that places a great deal of importance on how you look (e.g., a beauty pageant or synchronized swimming) and a sport that doesn't (e.g., rugby)? Can you think of any sports where boys get points taken off if they don't smile? Is there a difference between team sports and individual competition?
- In this film, who is having fun? Who seems to feel good after the game or competition?
- How do each of the girls release tension? Which of them use their sport to release tension? Which activities seem to create tension?
- What kinds of things are each of these girls proud of? Have you ever felt proud of yourself? What were you doing?
- Consider some of these things that girls say they get from competition (e.g., attention; safe place to play; scholarship money; an outlet for energy; a sense of belonging; etc.). Which activities actually provide the girls with what they say they want? Is the activity that each girl has chosen the best way for her to get the things she wants? Are there other ways these girls might have gotten the same things?
- Have you ever heard the phrase "you run like a girl" (or "you throw like a girl") used as a put down? What does the phrase mean? How does it make you feel?

"Number 3, she was the biggest chick on the [rugby] team and last season everybody tried to tackle her and was just bouncing off of her. She's that one really big girl and I took her down. I'm so proud of myself."

"On double dutch it's like you can be real with yourself. You can be free. You don't have to be so uptight."

"I came to synchronized swimming because I liked the glamour, I liked the make-up, the idea of wearing sequin suits. I wanted to be the Miss America ideal. Little girls always want to be like Barbie."

"A lot of us [in synchronized swimming] have blacked out [underwater]...and it's very scary. Yet at the same time it creates a nice challenge. Because when you come up you know that you've won."

"When I got angry with myself [for having a 'bad swim'], I would scratch...my legs and my arms...just to inflict pain on my body. It was easier for me to deal with that than the emotional pain. That was punishment for myself....But coaches would come in and say...'Put your pants on, we don't want anyone seeing that.'"

*"When you finally get that [pageant] title you feel really good, because you're like, 'Wow, she's really hard to compete against and I finally...beat her.' It's not competition. We want to be all as one, but we want to be competitive more, 'cause that's basically the fun of it also."*

*"[Pageants are] just like anybody going to play football on the weekends, or basketball....It's just something for girls to do, 'cause there's not a whole lot of hobbies that girls like to do....It does a lot for you....It gives you confidence that you're yourself and you can go out there and you can present yourself for who you are."*

*"I think pageants can open a lot of doors for you...it can speed up your future....I definitely want to be...a news anchorwoman. So, I think that that would help me a lot if I was Miss USA."*

## How do you feel about the way you look? Where do our ideas about what we're supposed to look like come from?

- Do you think the girls in the film look better in make-up? Who benefits when girls use cosmetics?
- What does it mean to “dress like a girl”?
- What does it cost to “look like a girl”? How much do you spend on clothes and make-up?
- How did it feel to find out that pageant contestants spent between \$10,000 and \$30,000 on clothing for competitions?
- Why do some people assume that pretty girls are air-heads?
- List the things that girls in the film say they do to look pretty that are uncomfortable or painful. (Some examples: hot waxing bikini line, holding up breasts with duct tape, having plastic surgery, straightening hair, adding hair, walking like a model, etc.). Why do women and girls do things that are painful, uncomfortable, or even unhealthy in order to look a certain way?
- Is it possible for girls of all races to meet your community's ideal standard of beauty? How about girls with different kinds of body types? Hair types? Eye color? If not, what are the effects on girls who can't look like the ideal?

“Sometimes I'll let [my sisters dress me up or curl my hair], like if I go to a dance or something....But otherwise...it's just too much to maintain. It's so annoying. You have to worry about so much more. I don't need the added stress.”

“I hated junior high. If you're out of the norm then you're ostracized by everyone....I was a size C [bra cup] in eighth grade so I was just bizarre....Everybody was, 'Oh, she's fat, she's fat.' Actually, I wasn't fat, I just developed before everyone else did. But I didn't see it that way and neither did they.”

“It's the sequins, it's the makeup, we train to make [synchronized swimming] look easy so people misinterpret what we do, don't think it's so hard, think we're standing on the bottom of the pool. They say, 'Oh, it's just glamour, it looks so easy.' And they don't see the other side of the sport.”

*“It hurts to be beautiful.”*

*“It's a pageant. What else do I have to do but walk across a stage?...It was the hardest thing. My stomach hurt. My rear end hurt. My shoulders were tight, and it was uncomfortable.”*

*“You can't stand up there and compete against girls who have ten tons of hair. That's like standing up there with girls who have ten tons of boobs, and you don't have any, you're flat-chested.”*

*“This nose should have been on somebody else....I think I'm gonna give my nose some liposuction, just to make it a little bit thinner.”*

*“[My mother] grew up in China, so it's much different from America....She'd never seen lipstick before, but she learned when she came here....Eye-shadow, eye-liner, moisturizer, the whole beauty regimen.”*

**Is what boys think of you important to you?**

- At the beginning of the film the girls complain about boys walking through their rugby practice. Have you experienced anything similar? How did that experience make you feel? What did you do?
- The films show several examples of girls interacting with boys and men (e.g., the “date” at the basketball game; shoving each other in a store; Miss Chitlin posing for pictures; etc.). How did the boys/men treat the girls? Is the attention positive or negative? How did each of these images make you feel?
- Is it easy to be friends with both girls and boys? What are the differences in these friendships? What is hard about each kind of friendship? What is rewarding?

“I hope he likes me, at least enough to stand me for one night....I’ve never had a boyfriend before....[My friend] says to be charming. I said, ‘And I do that by doing what?’”

“You say that [you’ll get married when you’re ‘50, 60’] now, and then the future comes and you’ll all be like, ‘Do, do, de do.’ You’ll hear the bells ringing.”

“I want a boyfriend. I don’t know if I want one that badly. I don’t want one bad enough to wear dresses every day and wear a whole lot of makeup.”

*“I only have one girlfriend, the rest of ‘em are boys. Girls, I don’t know. They’re just not attracted to me.”*

*“The girls start growing up and the guys start noticing the girls. And eventually you want to say, ‘Hey, I’m not one of the guys anymore, I’m a girl. Hey, look at me.’”*

**Who are your role models and what do you learn from them? Who do you trust and why?**

- Listen closely for comments that coaches and parents make. Which of the comments seems to be supportive? Is it possible to give critical comments and still be supportive?
- One of the girls observes that it is “so nice to hear someone say how good you are doing.” Which people in your life support you that way?
- How did it feel to see girls and their coaches or parents disagree? (e.g., the synchronized swimmer who reacts to her coach’s command to smile by saying “it doesn’t seem like happy music”; or the pageant competitor who would be happy to compete with “her own boobs” only to be told by coaches that if she wants to win she needs the “extra push up”; or the girl who wants to compete with her own hair whose mother reminds her that when she didn’t add extensions, she lost; etc.). How were these disagreements resolved? Whose interests were served?
- Several mothers say that their daughter’s participation in competition has strengthened their bond. Are you convinced? Do you think that someone can be a good mother and a good coach at the same time? What are the differences in those roles?

“My little sister, I’m going to teach her [to double dutch]. She’s like me, like how I used to be. She’s just like me so I’m gonna teach her how to jump.”

*“I’ve done everything but walk across that stage with her. I take every step she takes....If she falls, I fall. If she wins, I win. If she loses, I lose.”*

*“It wasn’t up to my standard, but I guess it will be alright. It wasn’t as good as I could have done it myself....It*

# Resources

## organizations

### About-face

[www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org) 415/436-0212

A media literacy organization dedicated to combating distorted images of women. Website includes great statistics, action suggestions, and artwork that challenges negative images.

### American Association of University Women

[www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org) 202/785-7700

Conducts research and does advocacy work on gender equity, especially in schools.

### Dads and Daughters

[www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org) 888/824-3237

Provides tools to strengthen fathers' relationships with their daughters and to transform pervasive messages that value daughters more for how they look than who they are.

### Girls Inc.

[www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org) 212/509-2000

Provides lots of programs and information encouraging girls to be strong, skilled, and confident. Website includes a "Girls Bill of Rights" that is a great discussion starter.

### Girl Scouts of the USA

[www.gscusa.org](http://www.gscusa.org) 212/852-8000

The world's largest organization for girls, with programs developing character, conduct, patriotism and service.

### National Coalition of Girls' Schools

[www.ncgs.org](http://www.ncgs.org) 978/287-4485

Conducts research on gender issues and has published a series of publications for girls, parents and educators.

### Women's Sports Foundation

[www.lifetime.com/WoSport](http://www.lifetime.com/WoSport) 800/227-3988

In addition to supporting female athletes, WSF provides information on sports and women's health. Note: their website is housed on the Lifetime cable tv site, so you'll have to wade through some commercial postings to get to the "good" stuff.

## books

Boston Women's Health Collective. *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Simon & Schuster, updated regularly)

Still the best single source for girls and women who have questions about their bodies or health

Joan Jacobs Brumberg. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (Random House, 1997)

A comprehensive academic study by a leading researcher on anorexia

Carol Cassidy. *Girls in America: Their Stories, Their Words* (TV Books, 1999)

By the filmmaker, based on the films RUN LIKE A GIRL, SMILE PRETTY and BABY LOVE

Peggy Orenstein. *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap* (Doubleday, 1994)

Examines the societal and cultural forces that erode girls' confidence

Mary Pipher. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Ballentine, 1994)

Lots of good information on self-esteem, psychology, and body image

Myra Sadker and David Sadker. *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* (1994)

Report of research revealing inequitable treatment of girls in U.S. schools

Naomi Wolf. *The Beauty Myth* (1991)

A journalist's critical examination of American notions of beauty and womanhood, linking unrealistic standards to self-destructive behavior

## resources especially for girls

### New Moon Magazine

218/728-5507 [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org)

Targeted for girls ages 11-15, New Moon "is where girls tell the world who they are without adults or advertisers as interpreters."

### Teen Voices

888-882-TEEN [www.teenvoices.com](http://www.teenvoices.com)

A magazine by and for teenagers that knows girls are "more than just a pretty face."

### [www.cybergrrl.com](http://www.cybergrrl.com)

Links to lots of good sites and chats, including a link to femina.com, a great search engine for women-focused web sites that includes a special category for websites of interest to girls.

Note on using websites: Anytime you are going to a website for girls, be careful to type the address very carefully. Misspelled URLs may land you at a pornography site.

## background facts

These statistics have been gathered from a variety of national studies over the last twenty years. Check to see if things have changed over time or if your community mirrors national trends by surveying the people in your school, group, or neighborhood.

- 5-10% of all American girls and women are or have been anorexics.1
- The average model today weighs 23% less than the average American woman.2
- If the measurements of a Barbie doll were translated into human terms, a 5'9" tall Barbie would be 33-18-28 (bust-waist-hips). The average 5'6" beauty contest winner measures 36-25-35.3
- More than 80% of grade school girls (6th grade and below) report having been on a diet at least once. 40% of nine- and ten-year-old girls report having been on a diet. Most of them were not overweight.4
- 50% of white girls ages 12-16 consider themselves overweight and only 15% consider their bodies normal. This is 6 times the rate for boys.5
- Over a five-year period, 98-99% of women who diet regain the weight they lost. 90% regain more than what they lost.6
- Prior to entering college, 23% of male valedictorians and 21% of female valedictorians felt intellectually "far above average." After four years of college, 25% of the males felt intellectually "far above" their peers; none of the women believed that about herself.7
- When asked "What is the best thing about being a boy?" the most common response among middle school aged boys was "not being a girl." When asked "What is the best thing about being a girl?" the top answer was "I don't know" or "Nothing" followed by responses focusing on hair and shopping.8
- Before passage of Title IX, 300,000 girls participated in high school sports. After Title IX, 2.37 million girls participated in high school sports.9
- Girls who participate in sports report lower pregnancy rates and beginning sexual activity later than girls who do not participate in sports.10
- 85% of girls in grades 8-11 report experiencing sexual harassment.11

**Title IX:** "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." (1972)

- 1 Joan Jacobs Blumberg. *Fasting Girls*, 1999
- 2 Naomi Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 1991
- 3 Marilyn Ferris Motz, "I Want to Be a Barbie Doll When I Grow Up" in *The Popular Culture Reader*, 1985
- 4 *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 1992; Nanci Hellmich, 1996
- 5 Dr. Richard S. Strauss, July 1999
- 6 *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 1992
- 7 *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9 October 1985
- 8 Dr. Cynthia S. Mee, 1985 - *Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center*; replicated previous study by AAUW, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, 1991-1992
- 9 *Women's Sports Equity Foundation Gender Equity Report*, 1998
- 10 *Women's Sports Foundation*, 1998
- 11 AAUW, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, 1991-1992

## about itvs & this guide

*RUN LIKE A GIRL* and *SMILE PRETTY* were produced and directed by Carol Cassidy for the Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funds provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. ITVS was created by Congress to "increase the diversity of programs available to public television, and to serve underserved audiences, in particular minorities and children."

To obtain additional copies of this guide, contact us at tel (415) 356-8383; fax (415) 356-8391; itvs@itvs.org.

To purchase *RUN LIKE A GIRL* and *SMILE PRETTY*, contact Films for the Humanities, 800/257-5126.

**Look for the companion book by Carol Cassidy, *GIRLS IN AMERICA: THEIR STORIES, THEIR WORDS*, arriving in bookstores in November from TV Books.**

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