

How ‘Good Girl’ Conditioning Evolves in Adulthood

Our 2024 research identified three behaviors at the heart of ‘good girl’ conditioning: performing perfectly, pleasing everyone, and protecting others. In 2026, we returned to these patterns with a new qualitative focus group of 15 women, and the data points clearly to where that pressure is coming from today. When we asked women to recall a recent ‘good girl’ memory and identify who expected them to behave that way, 92% selected themselves.

This does not mean the outside world has gone quiet. Family members and caregiving roles collectively represent a meaningful secondary source of pressure, with 31% naming a family member and 23% naming a parent or caregiver. Workplace relationships—bosses, colleagues—also featured.

This pattern makes sense when we consider how ‘good girl’ conditioning works over time. What begins in childhood as an external set of instructions—be quiet, be helpful, don’t make a fuss—gradually becomes absorbed into a woman’s own internal framework. By adulthood, the rules no longer need to come from outside — ‘good girl’ conditioning has been quietly reinforced for years through messages about what it means to be worthy, loveable, and safe.

This is an important distinction, and one that requires holding two truths at once. The expectations women hold for themselves — the stories we tell, the standards we hold ourselves to — is something we can begin to examine. That awareness is a starting point. And yet, because these patterns were absorbed slowly, over years, and often without conscious awareness, they do not shift quickly or easily.

What the data invites is not self-blame for the weight of an internal standard that was never freely chosen, but curiosity—about where those standards came from, whose voice they carry, and whether they still serve.

Love is earned by...



Performing Perfectly

Fearing people’s judgment of us, we expect perfection of ourselves.



Pleasing Everyone

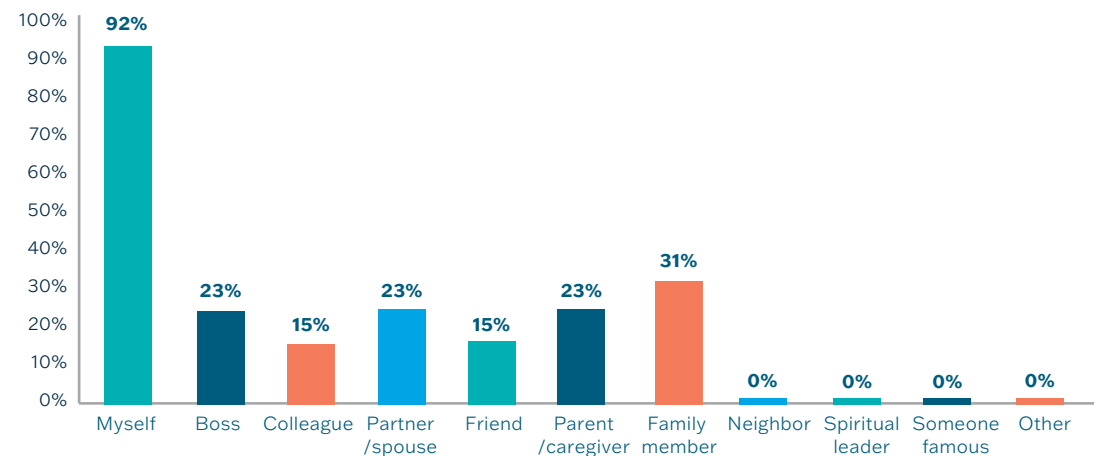
Fearing people think we’re unworthy, we put the needs of others first.



Protecting Others

Fearing others will abandon us, we silence ourselves.

Who did you feel expected you to be a ‘good girl’?



AH-HA MOMENT:

By adulthood, the pressure to be a “good girl” is coming primarily from within.