

THE STATUS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN SCOTLAND

2019

The Young
WOMENS
Movement



Status of Young Women in Scotland 2019 Fourth Edition

Produced by YWCA Scotland –
The Young Women’s Movement.

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About Us

YWCA Scotland-The Young Women’s Movement is a feminist organisation and part of a worldwide movement of women leading change. Our vision is a world where every woman can shape her own life journey and fulfil her potential, where the voices of women are heard, respected and celebrated.

Ypeople Group In 2017, Ypeople and YWCA Scotland – The Young Women’s Movement merged under the same banner of Ypeople Group. Ypeople’s aim is to support positive change in people’s lives across Scotland. We provide support in many forms including: mentoring, housing advice, supported accommodation, counselling, and after school care.



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F FOREWORD

The Status of Young Women 2019 report focuses on body image and the associated pressures to look a certain way, something that many girls and young women are only too familiar with. It resonated with me too, though when I was growing up, going to High School, University and entering the workplace, social media did not exist. For all the good aspects and connectedness that social media has offered, I feel lucky not to have had to deal with the pressures that social media has put on girls and young women and the unrealistic ideals and expectations about how we look and what is desirable that it perpetuates. Of course, that pressure does not only come from social media, but in my conversations with young women and girls it is often highlighted and it is perhaps difficult for those of us who grew up without it to fully comprehend just how influential it is in the lives of young women, and indeed young men and boys today.



Nicola Sturgeon
First Minister of Scotland

According to the report, 1 in 10 girls who responded to the survey said that she hated her body. This is one girl too many. It is crucial that we recognise and address the impact body image has on the mental health and wellbeing of girls. And it is perhaps even more urgent to do so at a time where social media is putting immense pressures on young women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by online abuse, harassment and bullying.

It is time we move beyond the scrutinisation of women's bodies, and create a culture that is more inclusive and truly represents the diversity of women in Scotland today. My message to all the young women and girls of this country is to never let anyone tell you that you are not good enough, or that your body is not right the way it is. Part of my role as First Minister is to pave the way for the next generations of young women and girls to flourish and be accepted for who they are, and not for who they should be.

This enlightening report lays the grounds for conversations to happen amongst young people; for conversations trigger actions, and with actions come change. It also reminds us that we all have a role to play in ensuring that young women and girls in Scotland feel empowered, because gender equality is everyone's responsibility.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Young Women's Movement for their truly incredible work which allows us to move a step forward every year.

Finally, I would also like to thank all the girls and young women who took part in this study, for opening up about your personal experiences.

INTRO

Our fourth **Status of Young Women in Scotland (SYWS)** report focuses on **body image**. We wanted to explore what contributes to negative body image and what needs to change to encourage and ensure young women feel happy, confident and accepting of their bodies and appearance.

We are positive about the contribution young women can make to shaping Scotland's progressive future. That starts with understanding how we view ourselves. This research is a response to the changing context in which we present, share and discuss our lives in person and on digital platforms. It's not a vanity project. Poor body image affects our health and wealth, distorts our relationships and limits our confidence. Unattainable ideals perpetuate inequality, absorb our time, energy and money, suck the joy from experiences with friends and set the tone for our engagement with the wider world.

We were heartbroken that 80% of young women who responded to the survey felt that their body image had stopped them from doing something or negatively impacted their confidence and limited their life choices. But these stats deeply resonated with us too, and our experiences are similar. The week that I read the first draft of this report, a thought of cancelling a TV appearance popped into my head. Sleep deprived as a mother of a toddler and working full time, my body became almost unrecognisable to me, my skin was pale and breaking out, my hair was flat and messy at the same time, and no amount of concealer could hide



Patrycja Kupiec

Director YWCA Scotland -
The Young Women's Movement

the bags under my eyes. My confidence was low. Of course, I ended up doing the interview, but despite feeling accomplished in my career and proud of my achievements, I have experienced these unwanted intrusive thoughts that equate my worth to my appearance for as long as I can remember. We need to break this cycle for ourselves and for future generations. I want my daughter to grow up loving all her qualities and quirks.

The young women who participated in this research shared with us what they are doing to encourage positive feelings about their bodies, and what needs to change in our society for them to accept their bodies the way they are. We finish this report with recommendations and actions we are committed to take as the national organisation representing the voices of young women in Scotland. We want this report to start conversations in safe spaces to create a positive culture around body image.

Around 380 young women from across Scotland shared their views with us in focus groups, interviews, and an online survey. We are grateful for their honesty discussing challenging topics, and we owe it to them, and all young women and girls in Scotland, to create a more equal society. The research was managed by our research partner, The Lines Between Ltd. This report presents the findings; including quotes and stories from the young women we spoke to. As always, we strived to ensure that we reached diverse young women from all over Scotland, and the findings, while not representative of the experiences of all young women in Scotland, shine a new light on the experiences of those who participated in this research.

1



THE FAR-REACHING IMPACT OF BODY IMAGE

Our fourth Status of Young Women in Scotland (SYWS) report focuses on body image. This work by YWCA Scotland - The Young Women's Movement (YWM) has given young women across Scotland an opportunity to voice their thoughts and feelings about their bodies through an online survey and focus groups. Themes included the impact of negative body image on health, relationships, types of activities young women engage in, opportunities they can access, their lifestyle choices; the role of social media in shaping negative and positive body image; the role of influencers, families, friends, partners; the beauty ideal and chasing it through weight loss, cosmetic treatments, enhancements and body modifications. The research carried out for this report offered us a chance to explore what can be taken to change the conversation around body image from negative to positive¹.

HOW YOUNG WOMEN FEEL ABOUT THEIR BODIES

The survey asked young women how they felt about their bodies. Only 4% said they loved their bodies, half had negative feelings about their bodies, and 1 in 10 went as far to say they hated their bodies.

RESPONSES TO 'HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR BODY?'

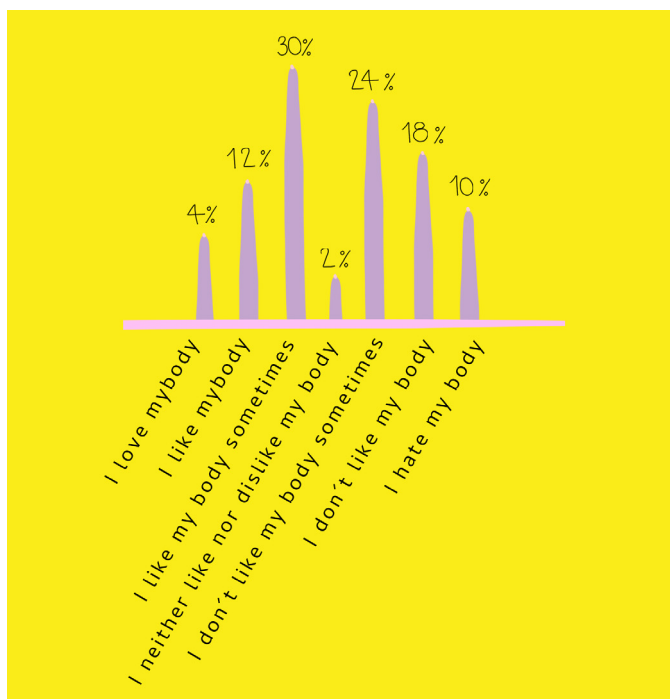


Figure 1 How young women feel about their bodies

¹Engender (2016): Equal Voice Equal Power: the case for gender quotas in Scotland

THE IMPACT OF BODY IMAGE

80% of young women who responded to the survey said their body image had stopped them from doing something or negatively impacted their confidence and limited their life choices.

BODY IMAGE IMPACTS...

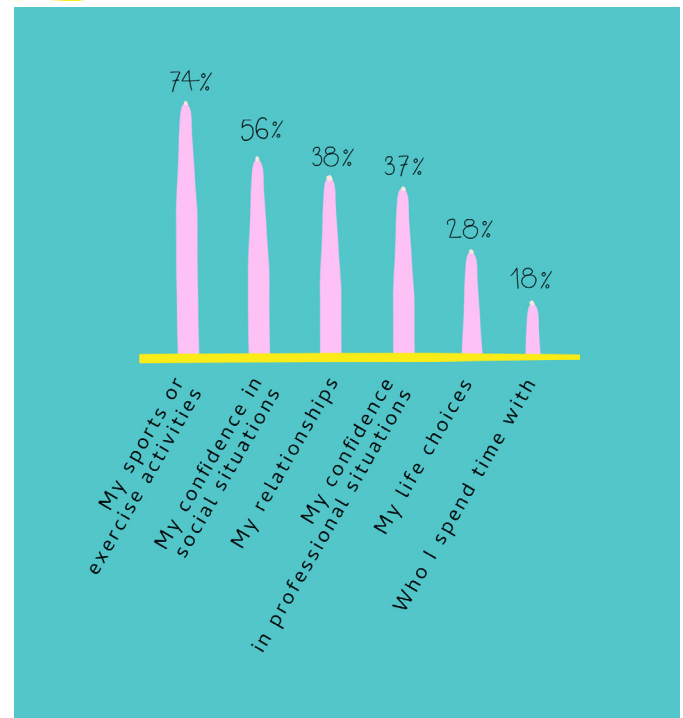


Figure 2 Body image impacts

SPORTS OR EXERCISE

Over half (56%) of young women said their body image affected their participation in sports or exercise activities. In comments they described feeling vulnerable, exposed and scrutinised².

“ I didn't attend the gym for years because of it. I still struggle with public exercises where my weight will be showcased (rock climbing, wet-suit rafting for example).
It's put me off going to the gym, there are so many slim beautiful gym bunnies in there, I just feel so terrible at the gym.

There were 71 comments about swimming. For example, several young women said they “used to love swimming”, but do not do it anymore because they feel self-conscious .

“ I've not been swimming in over 5 years due to body confidence issues. The thought of a beach holiday doesn't excite me, instead I fill with dread.

I haven't worn a bikini since I was about 15 because I think my body is too unattractive; even though I've seen bigger women rocking bikinis and genuinely think they look great!

SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Nearly half (47%) of the survey respondents said their body image had negative social implication. Social pressure to wear certain clothes or to be a specific body shape, even among friends, affects the way some young women feel about going out.

“ I cancelled going to a very close friend's birthday party when I found out they were getting ‘dressed up’ because I didn't have anything dressy enough to wear that I felt comfortable in. I don't own any typically dressy stuff because I don't like parts of my body and dressing differently to others would attract more attention than I'd want.

“ *Being overweight for most of my life has held me back a fair bit in social situations. My weight has fluctuated quite a bit in the last five years, and I notice a direct correlation between how big I am and how outgoing and open I am/how often I go out.*

I hate going clubbing, I hate being around a lot of people. I think because I'm plus size, people are staring at me and I totally stick out.

Comparisons within peer groups was a source of anxiety in social events. Fears about the way they might look in pictures affected how much they could enjoy the event itself³. Some said that concern about photos can be a key reason for choosing not to do something social. For example, being photographed with friends who they perceive to be more beautiful can feel very difficult.

“ *Going to social events, I never ever get my photo taken because looking at pictures of me makes me feel sick.*

You'll be like, I don't want to get a picture with them because they are so much prettier than me.

Outwith peer groups young women also described how their body image impacted their day to day interactions and activities, like not feeling able to leave the house to go to a local shop or to walk the dog.

RELATIONSHIPS

Body image had negatively impacted the relationships of just over one third (38%) of young women. This was mostly linked to their feelings about their bodies in romantic or sexual situations. Some described turning the lights off during sex, wanting to keep their clothes on, or finding it difficult to wear lingerie in front of their partners. It also prevented some women from pursuing relationships.

“ *It has stopped me from asking someone out because I thought they could never fancy someone with a body like mine.*

I didn't have sex or date for years in fear of being too ugly.

I have turned down social opportunities like dates, or meeting new people on multiple occasions.

Young women reflected that feelings and thoughts about body image are complex, have powerful consequences, can change and are influenced by many factors. The themes discussed above demonstrate the link between body image and self-esteem, how young women feel about their bodies can impact their confidence in many situations.

“ *Even if no one else is looking, and no one cares, you can feel like you are under a microscope. You are just trying to fix or hide something all the time.*

Maybe you are really happy for a week then unhappy the next, it's so intangible and is dependent on so many things.

I'm slowly starting to love myself but there are days when it's too much and I just can't.

Some described strong negative feelings about their bodies.

“ *No matter how many times someone tells me that, my mum tells me I'm beautiful all the time, but I look at myself and I'm just like, you are barkin', you are disgusting.*

My body image is what gives me anxiety, that's the only reason I've got anxiety. I don't like myself so I don't want anyone else to look at me.

EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Just over one third (37%) of young women said that their body image had negatively impacted their confidence in professional situations. Examples included not attending work or school due to feeling insecure about their bodies. Some participants said it prevented them from applying for jobs, or that they have been late for work or school because of body image issues⁴.

“ *It has affected my ability to network as much as I would like to in my career.*

I was bullied really badly in school for having smaller boobs than everyone else my age. I would get hit and called names, mostly by boys, and it got to a point where I would pretend I was sick and not go to school.

BODY IMAGE AT A YOUNG AGE

Many young women described the moment that they first became aware of their body image. This was often linked to puberty, for example when their period started, or body started to change. In some cases, this was closely followed by name calling or bullying at school. Some felt their parents had, unknowingly, contributed to negative experiences at this difficult time.

“ *I hit puberty way earlier than most other girls, so I just had wider hips and boobs and hairy legs, I remember my Mum being like ‘you can’t shave your legs, you’re like 12, you’re too young’ and just being in P.E. and just so self-conscious.* ”

I think my dad didn’t realise I was there and he was talking to my granny, and he was like ‘aw the wee one thinks she’s fat but we just tell her its puppy fat’. It just sticks in my head so much and at that moment me being like ‘I am fat!’ cause I’ve just heard my Dad say it, he thinks I’m fat, like... yeah just like a memory that lives with you for all of time.

When I was 10 I went on my first diet.

There were also conversations about redefining body image. Some young women described making conscious efforts to quash negative feelings as they got older.

ANXIETY

Self-consciousness about standing out was a significant issue for younger women. They talked about the social pressure to look the same as everyone else at school.

“ *Even going to school, me and my friend text each and ask what we are wearing or if we’re wearing make-up that day, if she’s wearing make-up, I’ll wear it too.* ”

Not being able to look like everyone else was described as a cause of anxiety; some described strategies of trying to look completely different, to avoid unfavourable comparison. Some of the younger participants said school uniforms make it harder to not compare themselves and their bodies to their peers.

“ *I have a smaller upper half, but if someone else was to wear the same thing as me I would get dead self-conscious about how they wore it compared to how I wore it. That’s why I wear different clothes.* ”

In a group discussion with 16-18 year olds, they described constant self-consciousness about the way they look.

“ *Sometimes I spend the whole day thinking about how I look, it’s so bad.* ”

It happens when I go out or do anything, like I can be fine one minute then getting a drink and then it’ll just hit you. You never go out thinking oh I look good, there’s always something like my hair is a bit flat or I’ve got a spot.

FOOD AND EATING

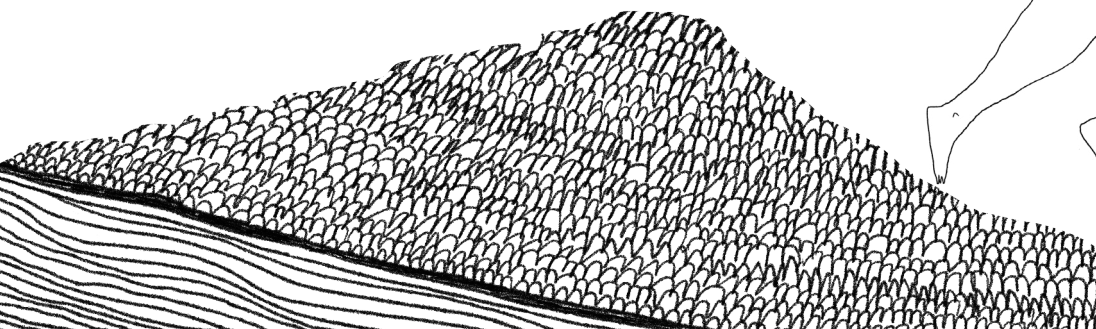
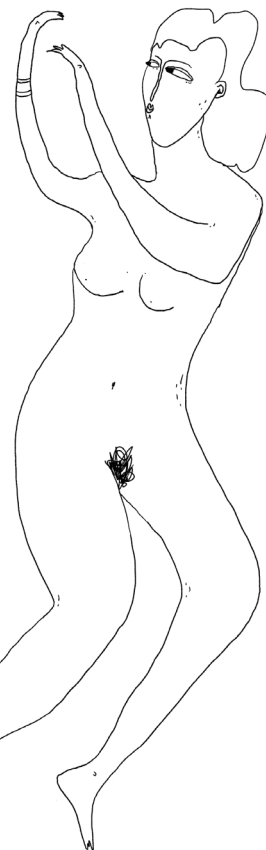
Young women told us that body image influences their food and eating choices. For example, some change their eating habits before events; others described difficulties with eating or disordered eating⁵.

“ *Having disordered eating and poor self-confidence has stopped me from being able to partake in activities that others could do fine.*

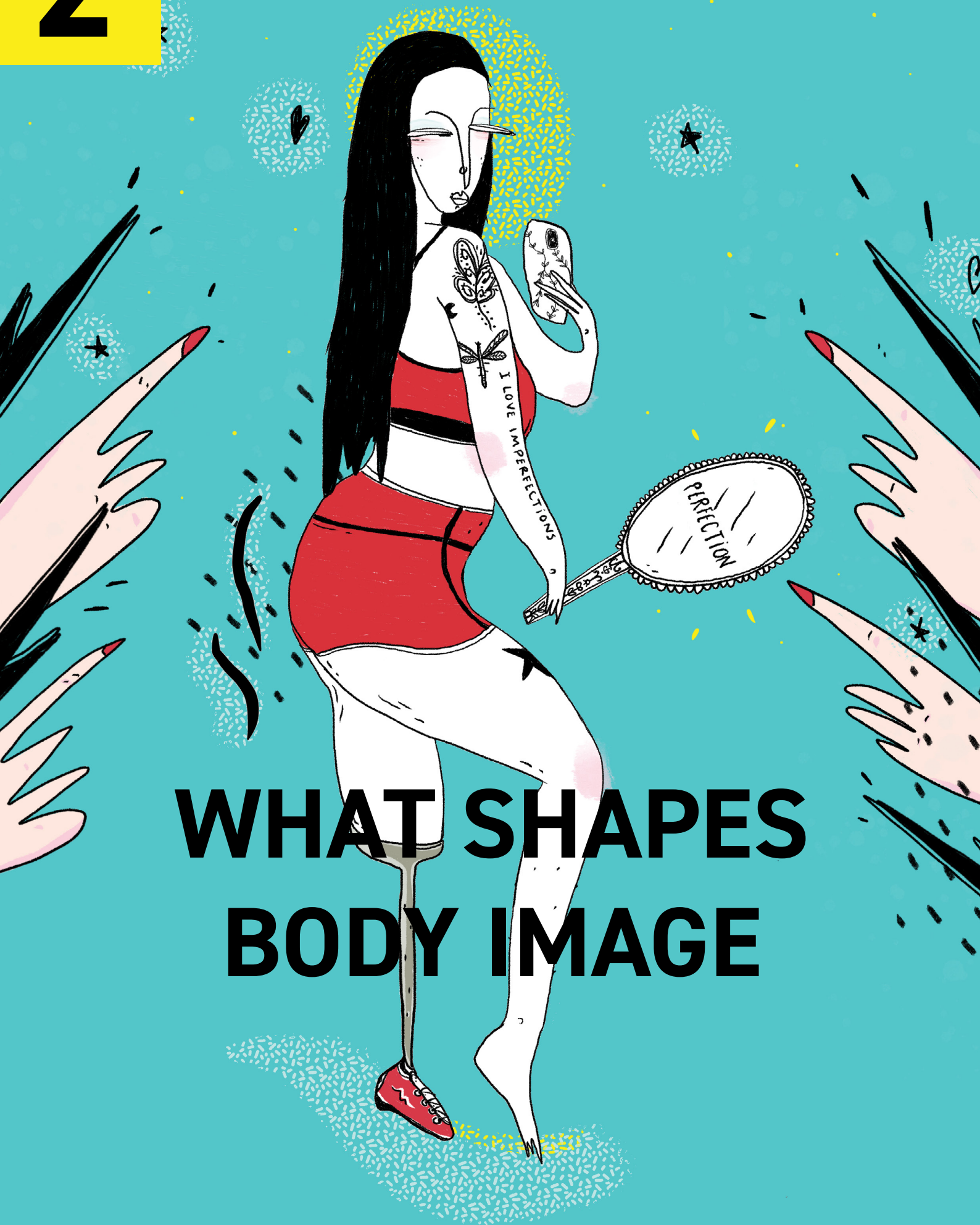
I had anorexia so that impacted most aspects of my life.

I remember having a fundraiser and I was wearing a crop top, so I didn't eat the full day cos I knew I was wearing a crop top, so yeah I won't eat anything and then I'll contour my stomach before I go.

Having a negative body image can impact young women's lives in many different ways, from carrying out day to day activities, to impacting mental health, confidence and self-esteem.

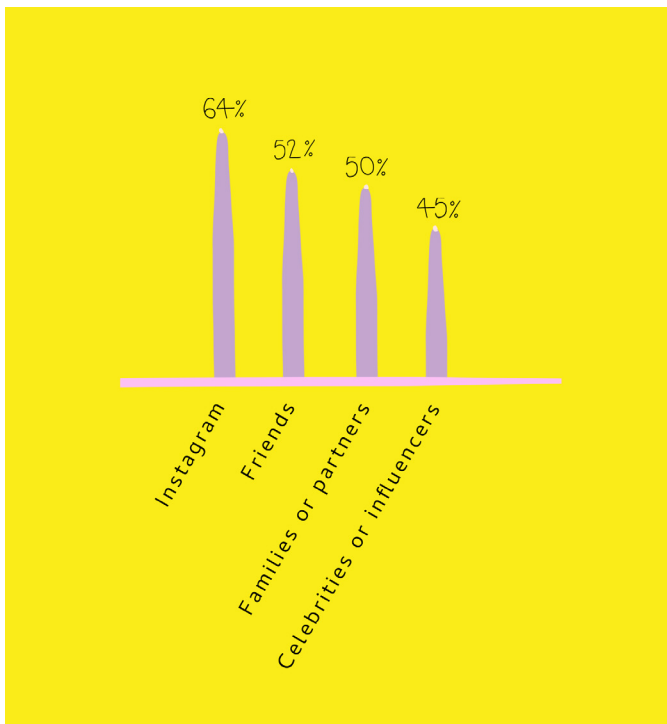


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WHAT SHAPES BODY IMAGE

A complex array of factors shape and influence the way young women feel about their bodies. Our survey showed that Instagram has the strongest influence on body image, followed by friends, then family and partners. This powerful combination of external forces - what young women see - and personal factors - like experiences with the people closest to them - play significant parts in shaping how young women feel about their bodies.



INSTAGRAM

Our survey identified Instagram as the top factor influencing body image, with 64% of young women saying Instagram influenced the way they felt about their body. In group discussions young women reflected on why Instagram specifically was so influential.

Some had been on Instagram since aged 10 or 11, and described their attachment to the platform as a means to communicate, validate and represent themselves. They described behaviours and culture related to Instagram use that generate negative feelings about their bodies.

EDITING PICTURES

Young women told us that Instagram perpetuates perfection. They said the common practice of editing pictures, particularly by celebrities and influencers, promotes a body ideal.

Almost all (86%) of survey respondents said they posted photos of themselves online, with almost two thirds (63%) editing their pictures before posting them; some because they don't want people to see the way they looked without editing.

“ Young woman 1: Instagram is the worst.

Young woman 2: Yeah, people photo-shopping and stuff, because it makes them look perfect even if they're not. Like I'm sure Kylie Jenner has got stuff she doesn't like about herself, but she photo-shops all the time.

CATFISHING

Participants described 'catfishing', which is when someone looks different in person than their social media profiles.

“ Young woman 1: It's like when you don't look anything like your pictures, you look really nice in your pictures but when someone sees you in person they're like 'she's rotten'. So that's like the worst thing you can be.

“ *Young woman 2: I will hold my hands up and say that when I've done my make-up and hair, I do not look like the same person.*

Young woman 1: One of the awards at prom last year was 'biggest catfish'.

Young woman 2: Yeah we have like 'biggest catfish' and 'rear of the year' and all that.

These discussions highlight the pressure for young women to conform to a body or beauty standard. Ideals are attained by picture editing, however, when they look different, they may be stigmatised.

INSTAGRAM BEHAVIOURS

Some of the younger participants reflected on the social culture around Instagram, such as the pressure to get 'likes' on photos, or have a large volume of followers. For example, they mentioned deleting pictures that do not receive a certain number of likes.

“ *Young woman 2: Oh my god I do that so much, I am the worst for it. If it doesn't get above 100-200 likes, I just delete it.*

Young woman 3: See if I post a picture at the same time that somebody else posts a picture, I know for a fact that they have more followers than me, they'll have a nicer picture... so I'll just delete it and post the same picture later on.

Young woman 1: I'll post at 6pm tonight, because I know that more people will be on Instagram. So I'll keep it in my archive and post it later.

Some described having two Instagram accounts. A primary, public account for posting edited pictures that presented them as the best version of themselves, and a second private account, or 'Finsta' primarily used to share pictures with close friends.

The time-consuming nature of taking pictures for Instagram was highlighted. For example, in social situations, young women might take tens of pictures of themselves alone or with a group before they pick the 'perfect' picture for Instagram.

DELETING INSTAGRAM

Some participants have deleted Instagram because of its negative influence on their body image.

“ *I leave Instagram, I sometimes just delete the app from my phone and I feel like, I actually feel relief, but then it's very addictive so...*

Others curate their feed, unfollowing accounts having a negative influence on their body images.

“ *I used to follow things like that, but I was like this isn't doing me any good, I'm not enjoying it, so why am I still having this pop up on my feed every day and instead I've gone to following things that make me smile or laugh or accept things rather than feel critical about them.*

OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Aside from Instagram, we asked young women about how other social media platforms influenced their body image. One fifth of young women said Facebook (20%) and YouTube (19%) influenced them and, with smaller influences attributed to Twitter (11%)

and Snapchat (9%). Young women are likely to use a range of different social media platforms, so these results are not surprising ⁸.

FRIENDS, PARTNERS AND FAMILY

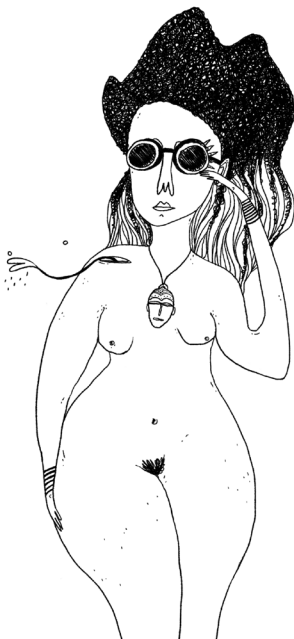
Around half (52%) of young women who took part in the survey said their friends influenced the way they felt about their bodies. In conversations, young women told us why and how they are influenced by those closest to them.

FRIENDS

Nearly a quarter of young women said friends influenced the way they felt about their bodies 'a lot'. In the group discussions, young women in high school talked of their close or best friends influencing them in good ways.

“*My friends are all really nice about it, they tell me I can wear what I want and not to worry about what anyone says.*”

However, peer groups and other elements of school settings also contribute to young women's negative feelings about their bodies. Examples included bullying, negative comments, and online harassment. One group of young women in high school reflected on online bullying via group chats.



“*Young woman 1: We have these group chats at school, I'm in one that has like hundreds of people in it, and every year people's prom pictures get posted on it. Every single group chat I was in was talking about who looked good, who looked bad, who had a terrible dress on, who's make-up was a state. We all do it, it's just the norm.*”

Young woman 2: I have my prom dress already, I love it and think it's pure beautiful, but I know on prom night it will get criticised on a group chat.

Young woman 3: Yeah and they might comment on the picture you post on Instagram saying you look stunning, then talk badly about you on a group chat.

Young woman 1: I'm not even excited about prom anymore, it makes me anxious, I don't want to go dress shopping, I don't want to get my make-up done because what if they don't like it.

They observed it wasn't socially acceptable to outwardly love or accept your body.

“*If you say that you're happy in your own body, then that's more shocking, imagine being that full of yourself.*”

Some young women no longer in high school, also reflected on how their school experiences had shaped them.

“When I think about any conversation I’ve had with my girlfriends, not just about body image but any kind of mental health issues... high school always comes up, it’s just the foundation of when you learn to be who you are. It’s so damaging, anything that happens in high school, everyone has their memories of what happened in high school, it can be really traumatic.

I remember the toxic culture in high school, we were all on diets... now I’m a bit older, everyone’s bodies are different, you think your friends are beautiful even if they are all different, you think they are all beautiful, that makes sense to me now.

FAMILIES (ESPECIALLY MUMS)

Over a quarter of young women said their families influenced the way they felt about their bodies ‘a lot’. In the group discussions, mums or other female family members were often described as the most influential. Many conversations about family influences related to body size and dieting.

“It’s my mum that makes me feel so bad about my body. She doesn’t realise she’s doing it but... you know she’s meant to be the one that says that I look beautiful no matter what I wear... but she isn’t.

I was 15 when I did my first diet, and I was eating those powder soups and I think about how my Mum let me do that and I’m like “wow.” If I had a daughter

I would not let her go on a diet when she’s 15.

My packed lunch in primary school, y’know how your packed lunch would be like a little sandwich and then like a packet of crisps or whatever, mines were carrot sticks and cucumber sticks. Cause my mum wanted me to lose weight. She was always dieting, she always wanted to be a size 6. Now she’s like an 8 or a 10 and she’s like “I used to be a 6” all the time now.

Some young women said their families’ culture perpetuated negative body images.

“My grandma got my mum “jaw reconstruction” when she was 6 years old purely because she didn’t want her to have an Asian bone structure. I do think there is such an internal cultural thing from families to look a certain way.

Every African mum, the first thing they see when they look at you is the nose and that’s the first thing they have to comment on... is the nose. Like I walk in somewhere and there is a room full of aunties, my nose is the first thing that’s talked about.

For me it is my weight. They are like ‘you’ve lost weight’, ‘you’ve gained weight’ I’m like, I weigh the same...

To a lesser extent, young women also said support from their families helped them to feel more positive about their bodies. This is discussed in more depth in chapter 6.

“ *My mum has been the one person my entire life that says that no matter what I wear I look good.* ”

PARTNERS

Romantic relationships can have a significant impact on the way young women feel about their bodies. Some young women described partners who helped them to accept their bodies, which encouraged them to feel more positively about their body image.

“ *I think at the moment I'm slowly starting to love myself because my boyfriend preaches the whole 'if you don't love yourself how the hell are you supposed to love somebody else'. I'm slowly starting to love myself.* ”

However, some told us about partners who had contributed to negative body images. One young woman described a verbally abusive partner who had affected her self-esteem and therefore how she felt about her body.

CELEBRITIES AND INFLUENCERS

Young women talked about celebrities and Influencers, separate to media and social media ⁹.

Just under half (45%) of the young women who took part in the survey felt their body image was influenced by celebrities and influencers, with a fifth saying they were

influenced 'a lot'.

Just over one third of young women (38%) had bought make-up or cosmetics because of an endorsement from a celebrity or influencer¹⁰.

One sixth (16%) of young women bought clothing to alter their body shape, for example, sculpting leggings or tights.

One in ten young women had bought weight loss products¹¹.

“ *Young woman 1: I bought SlimFast last week because I was feeling really fat and it was a tenner in B&M, and Alexandra Burke was on the front. But like I could just spend hours on Instagram just looking at stuff on how to lose weight.* ”

Young woman 2: Yeah like if you're going to the gym you'll google 'what to do to get a nice bum', 'how to get thicker thighs', 'how to get a smaller waist'.

Young women reflected that while the celebrities and influencers affect them, they are aware that the images they see on social media aren't always a true representation of the person they follow. Many young women talked about curating their Instagram feeds so as not to follow accounts that influenced them negatively.

“ *I mean I don't follow any of the influencers or any of the fitness ones as they just make me feel bad about myself.* ”

REPRESENTATION IN SOCIETY AND THE MEDIA

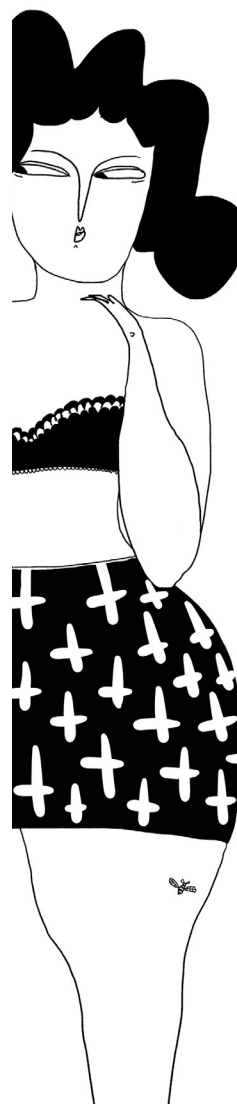
Nearly half (48%) of young women who responded to the survey said they felt their body wasn't represented in society (e.g. positions of power or the media). In conversations, many young women said they do not feel represented in media or social media, and this negatively impacts the way they felt about their bodies.

Young women reflected on what would need to change for all women to be able to love their body in Scotland. Often mentioned was a need for better media representation of all body types and abilities e.g. "skin colours, hair types, disabilities, body shapes and sizes".

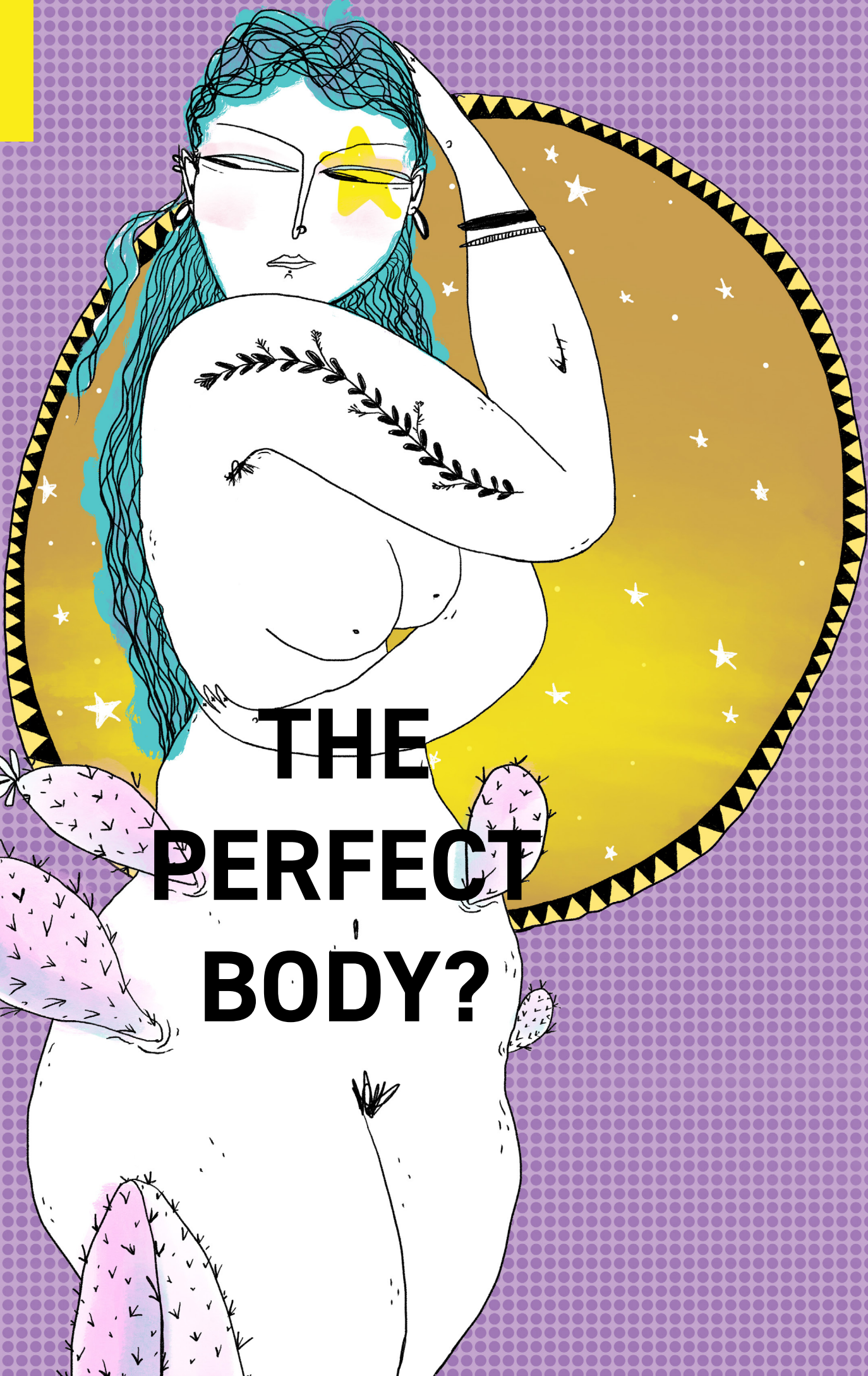
“Everything is so fake and unattainable to the point we can't even separate that from reality.”

Nearly two thirds (57%) of respondents agreed that the media in general influenced their body images.

Just under half (44%) of young women who took part in the survey feel their body is represented. In conversations, young women reflected this could be due to recent changes in marketing and advertising towards inclusivity, showing women of a range of ages, ethnicities and sizes. One suggested there is increasing demand for this kind of advertising, linked to the body positivity movement.



3



**THE
PERFECT
BODY?**

Discussion of beauty standards and the 'perfect' body were common themes in our conversations with young women. They described fluctuations in ideals, how body ideals are created and fatphobia. Young women from ethnic minority communities reflected on the racism and appropriation woven through beauty and body ideals.

THE KARDASHIANS

The Kardashian family were mentioned in almost every conversation about beauty standards and body ideals¹³. Of the five sisters, Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner were most frequently discussed.

Young women described why the Kardashians are perceived as desirable; long toned legs, with 'thick' thighs, a big bum, small waist, big breasts, strong facial features including thick and dark eyebrows, and long hair.

They also discussed skin tone and make up. The Kardashians introduced the 'contouring' trend - using darker shades of concealer or foundation to create dimension and a more defined facial structure¹⁴- into the mainstream.

“ *When I think about body image, the first thing that comes to my mind is Kim Kardashian.*

It's a norm to idolise her, to want to look like her. I feel Kylie Jenner is a bigger one for our generation.

Many young women suggested the Kardashians represent the body ideal and beauty standard of this generation. A few discussed this difference from the standards and ideals of previous generations; mentioning public figures like Kate Moss, who represented the 'size zero' ideal, with defined cheekbones and usually light skin and hair.

“ *It was size zero back in the 90s and 2000s but now it's the Kardashians, they are the ideal now, being curvier is the attractive thing.*

It used to be a size zero when I was in high school and there was like a big movement away from that to now it's, tiny waist, big hips, big bum, big boobs and like, what do you have to eat to get that?

YOUNG WOMEN FEEL THEY CAN'T WIN

“ *If you're any bigger than them (the Kardashians) then you're fat, and if you're skinnier then you're just like lanky.*

In relation to the body ideal, young women expressed a feeling of never being able to get it right. They described the evolution of body ideals, and their unattainability.

“ *I think it's amazing that thick body types are being celebrated but it's gotten to the point where it's the ideal... you are never going to win as its this constant changing of what you need, like that's what is ideal now but back in the day that's not what was ideal and I just think that's so damaging for young women because it's like well, you are being told to be different sizes that you will never fit in especially with the Kardashians whose bodies just don't make sense! Their waists, their butts and everything, they can't have all the organs we have!*

Beauty standards in relation to facial features were also discussed.

“ Being someone who is south Asian I actually have a unibrow and I would get bullied for it like crazy growing up. I don't have one anymore but I have very thick eyebrows, now I work in sales and sometimes my customers will come up to me and go 'I love your eyebrows', ideals keep changing.

FATPHOBIA

Young women described their first thoughts about the term 'body image'. Mostly, they talked about negative feelings, like low self-esteem, feeling judged and being bullied.

“ When I hear 'body image' my immediate perception is negative. I feel like when we hear about body image it's usually followed by a conversation that isn't positive.

Some of the first words that young women used about body image related to weight and size, indicating that body image and body size can be one and the same for some.

“ I think about weight immediately, when I started feeling negatively about my body it was about my weight.

Negative feelings about their bodies stop young women from wearing certain outfits. Some described fear of changing in public places; wearing kaftans or robes beside pools, changing in cubicles rather than shared areas, or not going clothes shopping with friends in case they have to try on an outfit in front of them.

Young women discussed how the body ideal can exacerbate fatphobia. Some, who identified as 'plus sized', reflected that not conforming to the current body ideal, or appearing not to care about conforming to it, can lead to abuse.

“ I live opposite a high school and any day I'm walking for the bus when it's lunchtime, I'll get abuse shouted at me. I put headphones in and try and walk as fast as I can. It is really disheartening that people who don't know you at all are just judging you on one thing.

Some participants feel they are not accepted within society and excluded from activities, like being able to buy clothes or access facilities.

“ I'd love to wear the pretty leggings and sports bras that everyone else is wearing but they only make up to a size 14 so that's not happening.

One young woman said she was moving towards feeling more confident and accepting of her body, but finds this extremely difficult when the world isn't designed to accommodate her. See Chapter 10 'Additional Quotes' for more about this young woman's experience.

Some young women who lost weight described reactions from others.

“ I lost five and half stone. It didn't change me as a person and it didn't change how I felt about myself cause I still didn't like myself but the outside had changed so other people liked me more and were giving me more attention that wouldn't have given me attention before.

People really treat fat people horribly.

People saying 'wow you look amazing' after you've lost weight feels good for a second, but then it makes you think, what did they think about me before?"

THE BODY AND BEAUTY IDEAL IS EITHER WHITE OR 'EXOTIC'

Conversations about body and beauty ideals touched upon ethnicity. Young women from minority ethnic communities described that while the body ideal in Western societies remains white, they are aware of the social media phenomenon which idealises typically "ethnic" features on white and lighter skinned women. For example, certain body shapes and darker skin tones being celebrated on white women while generally, these have been ignored on the women from those ethnic minorities.

"I think it is important to emphasise that what we see in media really tells us quite clearly that our features are only 'beautiful' or even 'acceptable' on white, lighter, racially ambiguous women.

It's the classic argument of it's the black community versus the Kardashians. How they are the ideal but essentially, and I'm not saying all black bodies look like that [like the Kardashians] but just black women have had that body type forever. But because they have significantly lighter skin and their hair grows that length, they are gorgeous. it's like... um Halle Berry has looked like this for ever, but she was not beautiful for you.

It was suggested that the Kardashian body and beauty ideal has created a preference for people who do not look white, but 'you can't quite make out where they are from'.

"I think it is white [the ideal] but also the right kind of exotic, like racially ambiguous, this is not just like Scotland or as the UK, its everywhere, it's Pakistan, Nigeria, this is everywhere.

This theme included a discussion around colourism, the idea that lighter skin is more desirable. Eleven young women had used lightening or bleaching creams for their skin, and three would do in the future. These numbers are small, but suggest the ideal of celebrating lighter skin is enduring.

"If you've got a light skin black person and a dark skin black person, they are treated completely different and having those features like the big lips and then the big bum and boobs, that's celebrated more in a light skin person than it is on someone dark.



4



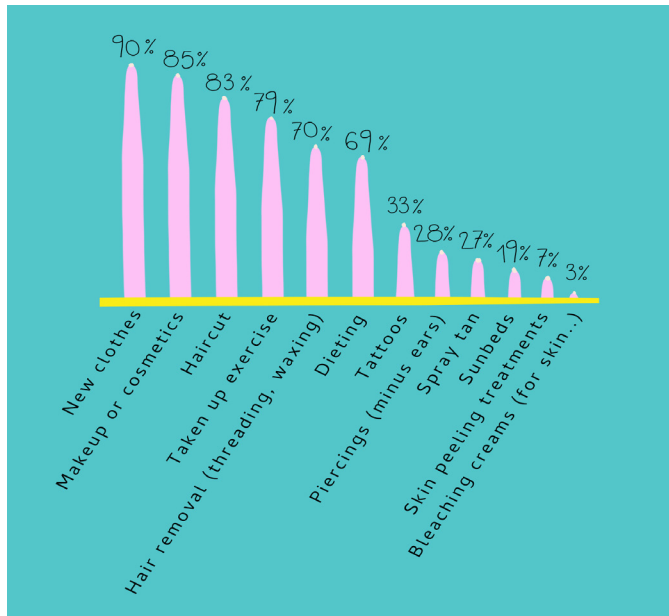
CHASING BEAUTY



50% AUTHENTIC

This chapter explores young women's efforts to change how they look and the impacts of these changes.

CHANGES YOUNG WOMEN ARE MAKING TO THEIR BODIES



'REGULAR' CHANGES

Unsurprisingly, most young women had experience of buying new clothes, wearing makeup and getting a haircut. They said they made regular changes to feel better about themselves or because it made them feel good; most anticipated continuing to make these changes in the future. Some mentioned external pressure in relation to make-up in particular; for the younger women this pressure came from peers in school.

“If you put make-up on, people will come up in school and say ‘oh you look so nice today’, and then if you don’t they ask if you’re not well.

I know for myself that me without make-up is a no-go. I would never leave the house without make-up.

DIETING AND EXERCISING

Most young women had taken up exercise (79%) or dieted (69%) to change their bodies. The younger women described dieting for specific events, like a holiday, Christmas and prom. At the time of a group discussion with 12 participants, all were on a diet.

“If you’re going out at the weekend you’re like ‘patch eating food for a bit’. Cos I know if I don’t eat properly for a week my chin gets smaller.

If you diet before Christmas, you won’t feel as bad for eating loads over the holiday.

Those who responded to the survey discussed how focusing on changing their body image, particularly in relation to dieting, could leave them feeling obsessed with reaching a goal; a certain weight, or body type. A failure to reach this could leave them feeling worse.

“Any attempt at dieting is always disastrous for my health - mental and physical. It always ends in thinking I am not good enough, that I am lazy and a failure.

Other young women observed changing attitudes towards dieting in recent years

“When I was in high-school and on a diet, I would have a powder soup, and almost eat nothing all day and calorie count. Now I feel like people are cutting out specific things, like there’s a girl in my office doing ‘Keto’, and there’s just more of a fitness culture, with Instagram... it’s cool to be fit.

We need to stop it being ok to talk about diets openly. We need to stop referring to food as naughty.

Although attitudes towards dieting and exercising are changing, they still promote unhealthy ideas about body image. Young women also highlighted that many of the trends within the industry, like the move towards wellness, are expensive and elitist¹⁹.

Some young women described the positive impacts of dieting and exercising, not specifically in relation to a wellness approach, but how shifting their attitudes towards diet and exercise had a positive long-term impact. The distinction for some women was that they exercised to feel stronger or healthier; rather than just to lose weight.

“*The biggest thing that changed me for me is rather than looking at my slimmer body and admiring that, it's looking at my muscles and being like 'look what my body is capable of doing now!'...I know for a lot of people exercise isn't always this positive and can become quite obsessive but this reframing of the way I looked at my body has really helped me.*

TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS

Around a third of young women had tattoos or piercings. Some said tattoos had positively impacted their body image, as it helped them feel like their body was a representation of their true self, which made them more accepting of their bodies.

“*Tattoos and piercings gave me more ownership over my body and body image. So that was positive. It was personal and not dependent on societal norms.*

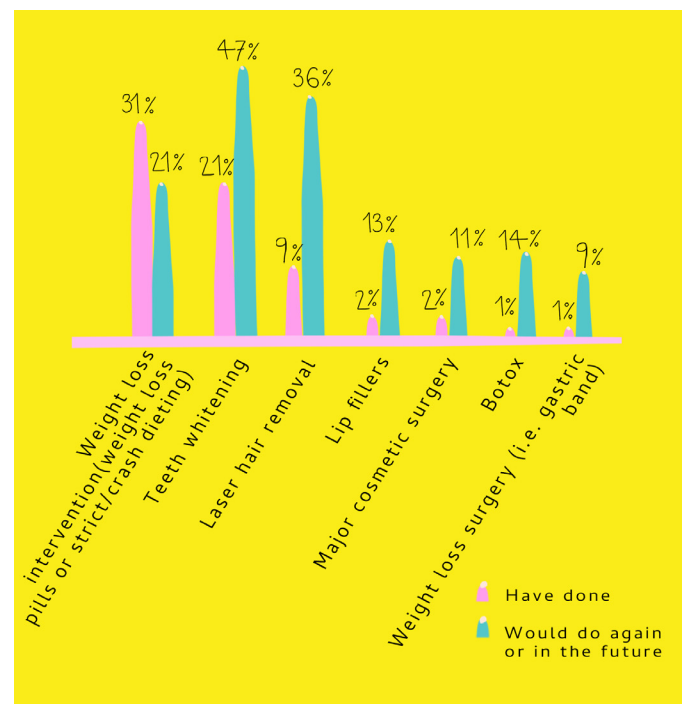
SPRAY TANS AND SUNBEDS

A fifth of our survey respondents had used sunbeds, and over a quarter had used spray tans. In the group discussions, young women described how they felt about sunbeds. All suggested they understood the risks of using them, but for those who use them, the results outweighed the risk.

“*I love a sun-bed cos a sun-bed gets you all tanned and gets rid of spots. Like you risk getting skin cancer so you can look tanned with no spots, if I'm being totally honest.*

I hate how white I am but I've got really bad skin so if I put fake tan on it clings to it and then everyone is like 'oh look at you, pure tiger bread'. That's why I would use sunbeds over fake tan.

WHAT YOUNG WOMEN WOULD CONSIDER CHANGING IN THE FUTURE



Young women told us about changes they would like to repeat or try in the future to alter their bodies or appearance. The chart above shows interesting differences between changes made or desired. These types of interventions are more extreme than those shown on the previous chart. They point to an appetite for more extreme efforts to change appearances. The only intervention that young women feel less likely to repeat or try in the future was weight loss like pills or crash dieting, which 31% of young women had done, but 21% said they would do again.

COSMETIC TREATMENTS

Just over 1 in 10 said they would have minor surgery or cosmetic treatments like lip fillers or Botox. Around 1 in 10 participants said they would consider major cosmetic surgery²².

Discussion about cosmetic treatments arose among the young women in our group sessions. Attitudes were varied, but it was evident that younger women (16-18 year olds) would like to alter their bodies through some form of cosmetic treatment. Among the twelve young women in the high school group that we spoke to, all but one wanted some form of cosmetic treatment. They gave examples of the things they were considering; nose surgery, lip fillers, breast enlargements and liposuction.

“ *I'm so excited [to get cosmetic treatments], I want a nose filler, I want my chin shaved, I was looking at photos on my Instagram last night and was like 'my chin actually used to look like that, what's happened?' I want like that bit taken away, cos that runs in the family and it's not a good look... I want a bit of liposuction on my legs.* ”

WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY AND INTERVENTIONS

Almost a quarter of young women said they would consider an intervention to lose weight like diet pills or crash dieting in order to change their bodies, while 1 in 10 said they would consider weight loss surgery²³.

“ *I would consider weight loss surgery of some description, I've been trying [to lose weight] properly for a while and it is happening but it is slow, what if it stops, is it an option further down the line. Because I do feel like my weight is having an effect on my health as well as my mental health. But as much as I don't really want to go down that line, it is something I've considered because while my health is taking a risk is it better to go for one procedure and potentially cancel out a load of other risks further down the line.* ”

THE NORMALISATION OF COSMETIC TREATMENTS AND WEIGHT LOSS INTERVENTIONS

The sentiment that weight loss intervention and other cosmetic treatments have become normalised was echoed in the group discussions. One young woman reflected that treatment use by influencers and celebrities has normalised cosmetic treatments, but that this transparency is necessary so young women know that the treatments are happening²⁴.

“ *I think it's good though that people are now saying they have had plastic surgery cause then, even though it normalises plastic surgery which is problematic but it does tell people that this is not natural... it's conflicted.* ”

HOW DO THESE INTERVENTIONS MAKE YOUNG WOMEN FEEL?

Some young women felt making changes would alter how they felt about their bodies. They hoped it would make them happier, more confident and comfortable with how they looked. Some acknowledged that it might not change the way they felt about their bodies.

“ *Someone said to me that you need to love yourself as you are before you go changing yourself, because that's not going to make you love yourself anymore. And like I want to see that happen, but at the same time I'm thinking that maybe I would love myself more if I changed the things I don't like.* ”

Of the young women who responded to the survey who had made changes, there was a strong sense that changes only positively impacted on their body image for a short time and that these feelings would eventually wear off.

“ *I usually felt good for a few days after but then I would want to focus on something else I didn't like.* ”

It was a short-term distraction- it didn't really help the fundamental issue that I am really unhappy with how I look.

These aesthetic changes did little to address how these young women really view their bodies. They highlight the cyclical nature of trying to deal with poor body image; there is always something else to improve. Others believe happiness comes from within and therefore requires more work than just changing your physical appearance²⁵.

“ *Main positive change has come from feeling healthy and happy much less to do with aesthetic changes.* ”

I feel happier when I look better.



5



**ACCEPTING
YOUR BODY**

100%
ME

Body

Some young women are actively trying to encourage positive attitudes and feelings about body image.

BODY POSITIVITY

The Body Positive Movement aims to encourage everyone to fully respect and accept all body types regardless of age, race, gender, ability, size, shape or health status²⁶.

Most (84%) of young women who responded to the survey said they were aware of the movement around body positivity. In the group discussions, some participants mentioned following social media accounts that have a body positive message, or unfollowing accounts that made them feel negative about their bodies.

“ I’m trying to view myself in a more positive light so even on social media, the accounts I follow are more to do with positive body image and even artists that draw women with like all different shapes of boobs and bodies...

I unfollowed the bloggers and the fitness ones as they just make me feel bad about myself.

Over half (52%) of respondents said the movement had impacted the way they felt about their body image.

ACCEPTANCE

Young women described how the movement had encouraged them to think about how a normal body is difficult to define. Some talked of celebrating differences, and feeling accepting of their own bodies. Some found that the movement changed their outlook on their own appearance and on how they view others too.

“ Made me feel as though my body is fine the way it is, my body shape is natural and human, my body is feminine.

Given me permission to accept my body. Given me access to wonderfully diverse people to follow.

Not so much about my own body but it has encouraged me to dismantle some incredibly unhealthy attitudes towards people's appearance that I hadn't even realised I'd internalised. Embracing body positivity has made me a more open person.

Some acknowledged that acceptance of their bodies is easier for them, as they conform to beauty ideals.

“ Accepting it properly and how wonderful it is, also with how privileged I am as a white size 10 woman. Realising how much harder it is for women who are different sizes and shapes and don't fit with the hegemonic ideals of body size. Although I don't feel fully represented, models are still size 6, but I am not stigmatised on a day to day basis due to my body size.

REPRESENTATION

Young women said seeing people that look like them gives them confidence to be themselves.

“ *The body positivity movement was started by fat women of colour and it's made me appreciate how much my body shape is now seen in traditional advertising compared to them.*

Seeing more representation of my body type and seeing that people with my body type can feel good about themselves, less happy successful lives and find love.

CONFIDENCE AND HAPPINESS

Young women talked about increased confidence as a result of the movement. For one respondent, the impact was simply that she was able to go to the beach now. They described how it let them explore and focus on other things that are important. For example, one respondent said they felt less stressed, because they weren't thinking about their body all the time. Others described learning to celebrate their bodies.

“ *It does make me feel empowered, I used to hate my curves but now I appreciate them.*

AWARENESS

The movement encouraged young women to reflect on the way they had viewed themselves.

“ *I am more aware of my body, I feel it is indeed mine and it is in my power to change the perception I have of it.*

For others, awareness meant that they were more knowledgeable about their bodies.

“ *I'm proud of how I look and have started feeling more confident and caring less about when I feel bloated or put on bit of extra weight because I know I'm healthy and I can manage myself.*

“ *I follow @Bodyposipanda - a body positive activist who has recovered from an eating disorder - and she posted a picture about her realisation that if you have to work that hard and monitor every calorie then it's just not how your body is meant to look and that's okay. I used to feel quite blue about the fact I did loads of exercise, was physically fit and ate healthily but didn't have a flat tummy and now I try and look at my body more in how strong it is and all the amazing things it can physically do, even if I don't have washboard abs!*

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE BODY POSITIVITY MOVEMENT

Almost three quarters (72%) of survey respondents liked the term 'body positivity'. There is some debate about the movement in the media, among those that feel it excludes women who don't love their bodies, or is used as a marketing tool for brands.

“ *It is good to emphasise that different bodies are worthy and beautiful but I think individualising the issue can depoliticise it and make people feel guilty that they're just not thinking positively enough.*

“Weirdly, it has made me feel even worse. It’s thrown guilt into the mix - if I ever have a bad day and feel fat, or like my skin is bad or I just feel unattractive, I now feel guilty for thinking those things.”

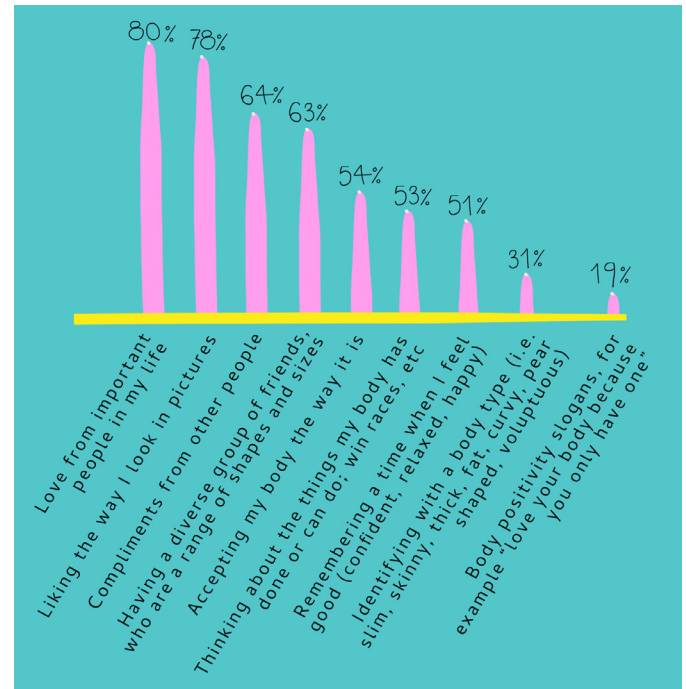
I think the term ‘body positivity’ usually focuses too much on being happy with how you are when actually if you’re not happy it should be ok to want to change that in a healthy way.

A few participants suggested the foundations of the movement were taken from the work of the fat liberation movement. They believe the focus of the body positivity movement on accepting and loving all bodies has instead made them feel less welcome within the movement.

“I feel like body positivity has been co-opted by slim, white women, away from the fat, black women who originally coined the term. I think I find the body neutrality movement is more radical in some ways.”



WHAT HELPS YOUNG WOMEN FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEIR BODIES



Young women develop body confidence and positivity in a range of ways. External validation like love, encouragement, compliments from other people and liking the way they look in pictures play an important role.

Love from the important people in young women’s lives make them feel the best about their body image, with 80% choosing this statement. In the group discussions, participants described supportive family and friends, and how their love and encouragement can help to boost confidence and self-esteem.

“The people I value in my life are the ones who help me through.”

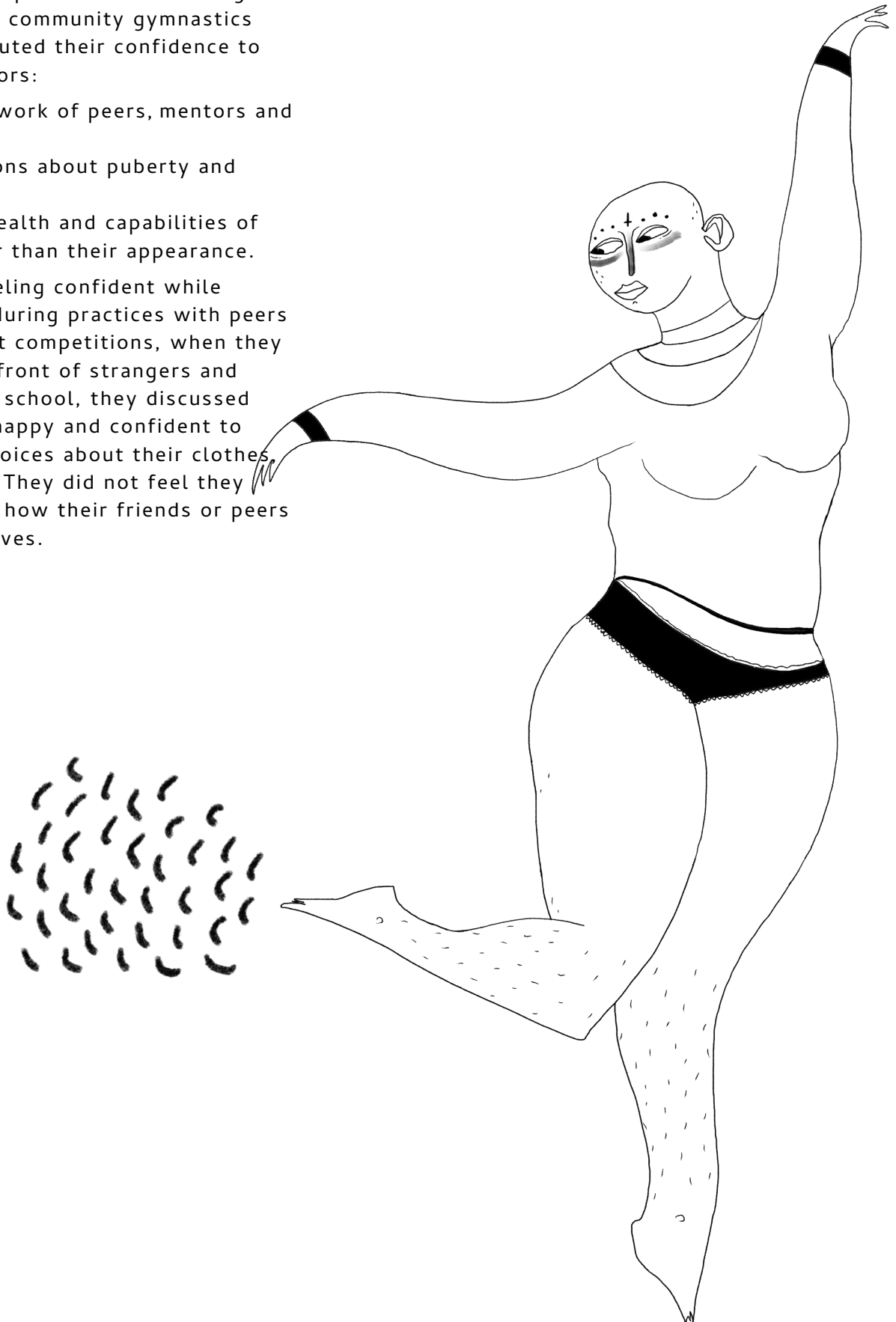
Interestingly, almost the same proportion of young women (78%) said that they felt good about their body images when they liked the way they looked in pictures. This was echoed in our conversations with younger women, some of whom said that how they looked in pictures had a greater impact on how they feel about their body than the way they look in real life.

A FOCUS ON YOUNG WOMEN WHO FEEL CONFIDENT AND HAPPY

A group of happy young women, who do not feel negatively about their body images, reflected on their experience of body positivity. The group of thirteen were aged 12-16 and part of a community gymnastics group. They attributed their confidence to the following factors:

- 1 a supportive network of peers, mentors and family,
- 2 open conversations about puberty and menstruation,
- 3 a focus on the health and capabilities of their bodies rather than their appearance.

They described feeling confident while wearing leotards during practices with peers and coaches and at competitions, when they are performing in front of strangers and judging panels. At school, they discussed feeling generally happy and confident to make individual choices about their clothes, make-up and hair. They did not feel they had to conform to how their friends or peers presented themselves.



6

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION AROUND BODY IMAGE



Young women discussed what needs to change to encourage more body image positivity in Scotland. In conversations and survey responses, they suggest this culture change is a big task and described ways to achieve it.

CHALLENGING THE PATRIARCHY

Common themes included a need to tackle street sexism and harassment and breaking down the idea that women's success and value is reliant on their appearance.

“ *Allowing women to see their bodies as instruments which are capable of different things and not just objects which look pretty.* ”

There needs to be less of an association with how women look and the perception of how capable they are. It should not be viewed as unprofessional to not wear make-up or high heels. There should be more celebration of the wonderful things women's bodies can do other than "look nice".

There was also a focus on challenging preconceptions of how women are meant to behave and appear.

“ *Easing the pressures to look a certain way at stages of our lives e.g. how a new mum should look, how a retired woman should look.* ”

“ *I think there is still a subconscious misogyny that really permeates a lot of our social interactions, in relation*

to body image or not. I think this goes hand in hand with issues such as race and ability too but more should be done to challenge preconceptions about women; that we're strong, that we're capable and that what you look like on the outside doesn't determine your level of intelligence.

REPRESENTATION

93% of young women who responded to the survey said they would like to see more diverse bodies represented in society.

Participants discussed the need for better representation of all body types and abilities and spoke of the harm associated with the idea that beauty is tied to a body type. Many respondents spoke about the difference seeing more “real women” in advertising, and not just in relation to body types.

In conversations about representation they called for diversity:

“ *Skin colours, hair types, disabilities, body shapes and sizes.* ”

To see all body types being praised as beautiful.

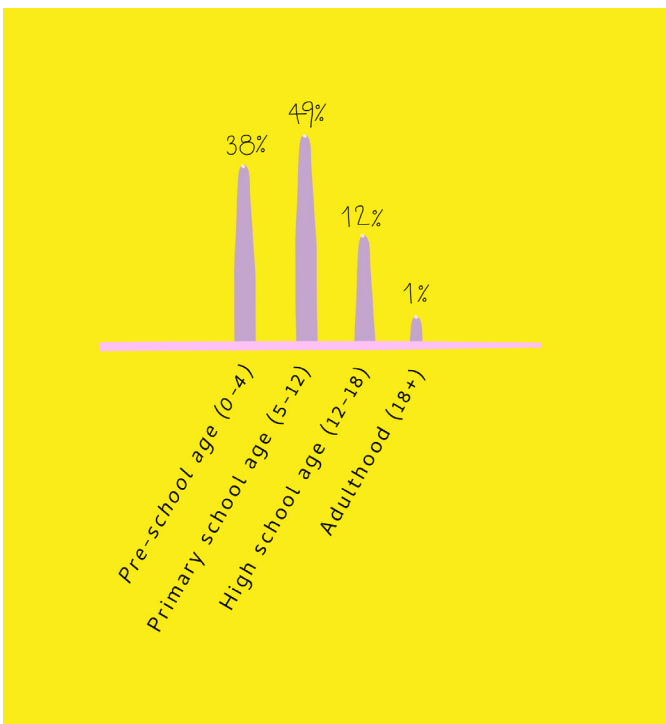
I have acne and the only representation I see for people who have skin similar to mine is in adverts where people talk about how acne affected their lives and then promote a product that is marketed as being a saving grace.

REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND EDUCATION

Young women reflected on the link between social media and body images. They discussed a need for monitoring and regulating how the platforms operate, particularly Instagram, for example removing face altering filters²⁸. There were calls for education about social media's impact on mental health, self-esteem and wellbeing.

“*Social media needs to change. There needs to be greater awareness of following people who make you feel good, rather than people who make you feel envy and trigger you to try to change yourself.*”

Young women were asked at what age we should start talking to young people to try and encourage more positive body images.



The vast majority of young women thought it should start before the age of 12 (87%), with around half agreeing that this should be in primary school, and 38% thinking that pre-school age would be the best time to start having these conversations.

“*Education is key and needs to be implemented from a young age. The focus should not be on the way our bodies look, but what they can do and feel like, i.e. Move your body because it feels good and it's good for your mental health and well-being, NOT because you have to otherwise you'll put on weight.*”

Teach about critical thinking at an early age, give young women the tools to put into perspective what they are exposed to so they can develop informed opinions. Teach them to be self-aware and that they don't have to play by any rules book than the one they are creating for themselves.

Additionally, they called for opening up discussions and conversations around body image in high school and creating a positive culture in schools.

“*Honest communication & open discussions about body positivity whether that is done formally or informally in different environments. Beginning this conversation in high school would have benefited me because high school is when insecurities and comparisons about body image starts.*”

ADDRESSING DIET CULTURE

Less emphasis on diet culture and addressing 'fatphobia' were prominent themes in survey responses.

“*Fat people need to stop being the butt of the joke. We need to stop thinking of fat people as lazy. We need to stop perpetuating dangerous narratives of “just be healthy” which is thinly veiled fatphobia and ableism. We need to stop it being ok to talk about diets openly. We need to stop referring to food as “naughty”.*

Diet culture is so normalised that sometimes it's the only thing we discuss. Erasing diet culture would be the ultimate goal.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles was a consistent theme including a need to educate individuals on harmful diets. Some young women called for changes to the public health narrative around obesity and dieting.

“*We need to be so careful with obesity messaging from healthcare professionals and campaigns from the NHS. Dealing with the genuine public health crisis by treating fat people as idiots and slobs and continually challenging their access to healthcare makes it harder for them to love their body and can contribute to poor mental health.*

INCLUSIVE SPACES

Young women were asked if they talked about how they felt about their bodies. Almost half (44%) said yes, but only when they felt bad about their bodies and just over a quarter (26%) said that they did not discuss how they feel, because it is too uncomfortable.

Participants talked about the issues surrounding body image, like mental health, self-esteem and changing bodies in a safe space. The young women in high school, told us the body image conversation with our researchers was the first time they had addressed the issues around body image in an open and safe environment.

“*I like this, talking about it is nice. Hearing that other people feel the same way. I feel like it needs to get brought up more, and like you need to have an opportunity to have a wee rant about it. But no-one listens like this. It's one of those things, I knew that people felt like that, but I didn't realise that all you guys' felt like that.*

Although you may suffer from negative body image, you might be a trans woman, plus size, black, Asian, having open and honest conversations I think would help to smash stereotypes and we'd be able to support and get advice from each other.

During 'Girls week' we did mood-boards on body image and it was the first time I'd sat down and spoke to somebody about it and thought about it properly and I'm 28 and that was the first time I'd properly spoken about it. It's a bit

scary that we've got to this point in life and not had that conversation with somebody.

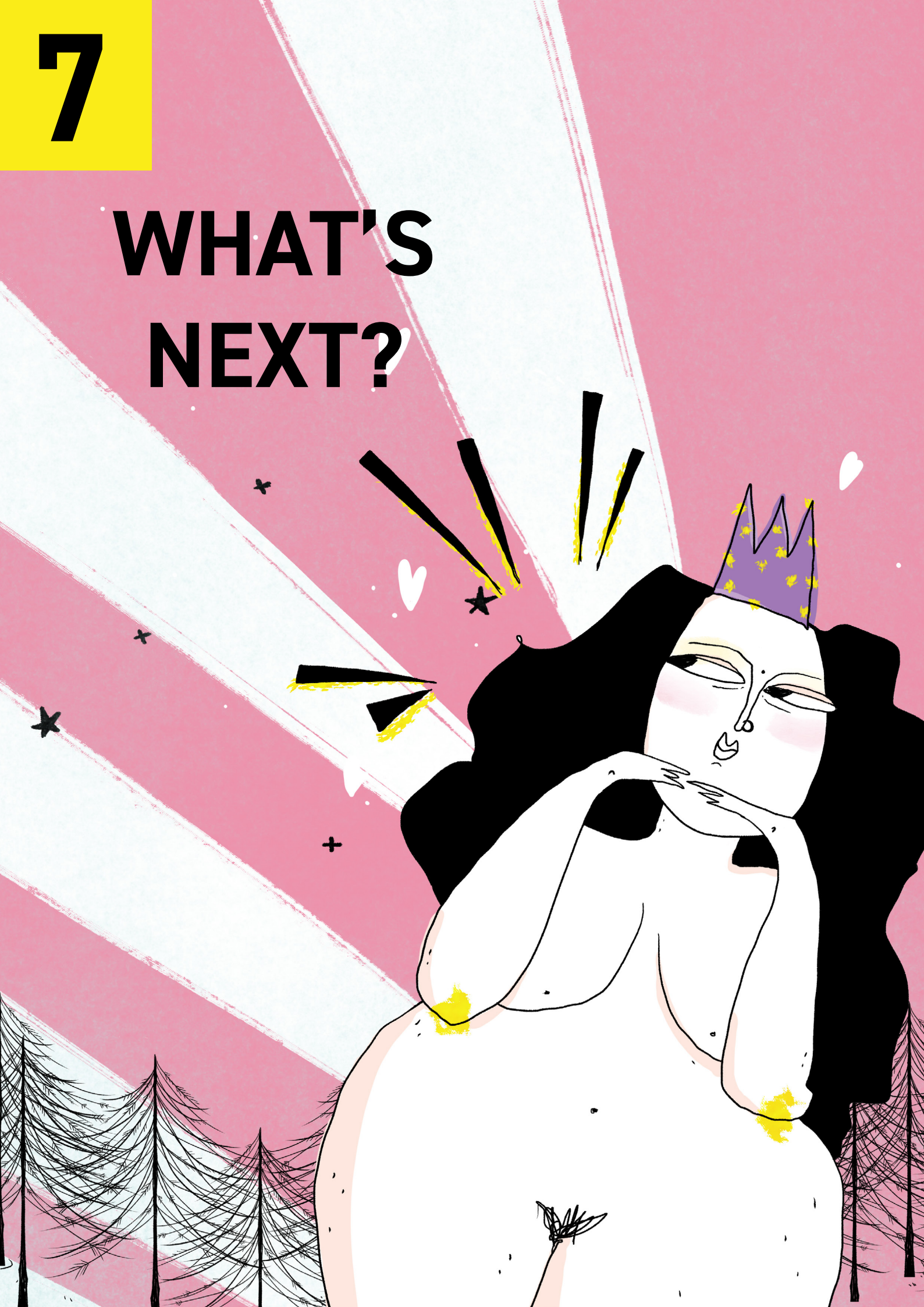
It is clear that open discussion about issues can foster a sense of community and shared experience and that young women value safe spaces to have these conversations.

Young women have ideas about how to create a positive culture around body image. The following pages set out our response to the findings and a commitment to creating more body image positivity in Scotland.



7

WHAT'S NEXT?



This year's discussions have highlighted the variety of ways young women feel affected by their body image and how it influences their confidence to achieve their full potential. While the picture that emerged seems bleak, and we heard some heart-breaking stories and discussions, the openness with which young women shared these with us and their ideas for what needs to change, left us feeling hopeful for the future.

We uncovered some common themes regarding the social pressures facing young women with regards to their appearance. The pressure to conform to the perceived body ideal came from a range of sources: social media platforms, celebrities/influencers, advertising, medical professionals, peers, and family. Feeling of being constantly judged for one's appearance was described as exhausting and disheartening and was seen by many young women as another expression of patriarchy and a form of misogyny. Young women also highlighted the lack of representation they see in media as a significant barrier to feeling confident. Having a negative body image can impact on all aspects of young women's lives, from day to day activities, to education, relationships, mental health, and self-esteem, and if we want to live in an equal society we need to provide solutions to improve girls' and young women's relationship with their bodies. Below are our commitments to action, and we encourage you all to make your own, whether in a personal or professional capacity.

1 YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement will use our platform to galvanise the **#BodyPositivity** movement in Scotland and continue to feature a diverse range of women and girls. We will work to end body stigma through our digital platforms, working with other organisations and leaders in the BoPo movement in Scotland to ensure our networks feel confident in themselves and are seeing a range of content and takeovers from our accounts.

2 We need quality education about social media's impact on mental health, self-esteem and wellbeing. 87% participants thought this should start before the age of 12. Our YGirls school programme focuses on positive messages around body image, safe use of social media and improving self-esteem. We currently deliver it in Glasgow to P7 girls, but we are committed to expanding it to include boys and families. The next step in our ambitious plan is creating a campaign for educators in Scotland to train teachers in how to have these conversations with primary kids.

3 YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement will continue and expand our work to open conversations around puberty and menstruation. We are committing to a monthly health blog to help to tackle stigma around these topics.

4 We are calling for changes to the public health narrative around obesity and dieting. We are committed to running two digital campaigns, **#WaitingForChangeScot** and **#EatYourWords**, to highlight and address body shaming young women can experience when accessing health services.

5 YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement has significant experience in running safe spaces for young women to share experiences, have challenging conversations, get peer support, and foster a sense of community. We are committed to supporting other organisations in the public sector and the third sector to set up their own safe spaces to have conversations to create a positive culture around body image.

RESEARCH APPROACH



METHODOLOGY

The key features of our methodology are described below:

1 THE RESEARCH TEAM

The Lines Between were commissioned to undertake the fieldwork, analysis and reporting for SYWS2019 on behalf of The Young Women's Movement. The Lines Between were supported by a small team of five volunteers from The Young Women's Movement who assisted with transcribing focus groups and analysing the qualitative data from the survey. A programme participant from the Young Women Lead Programme assisted with the development of the paragraphs around ethnicity and body image in chapter 4.

2 ONLINE SURVEY

The survey was open from October until the end of November 2019 and received 347 complete responses from self-identifying young women in Scotland between the ages of 16 and 30.

The survey was used to generate both quantitative and qualitative data about young women's experiences of body image. This online approach allowed us to reach a much wider range of young women who might not have had the opportunity to have their voices heard through this research. Survey participants were also asked if they wanted to contribute more to the research.

3 FOCUS GROUPS

Face to face methods helped us to capture and explore varied experiences. For example, we engaged with a range of organisations that work with young women from across Scotland, including a sports club in the Highlands, and a high school in Glasgow. During the focus groups we used a range of aids to stimulate discussion, such as emerging findings from the survey results and visual prompts. A large degree of flexibility was needed when using our discussion guide to ensure accessibility. Focus groups typically lasted an hour, with all dialogue recorded and transcribed

for analysis. The focus groups took place between October and December 2019 and we spoke to a total of 33 young women.

4 VIDEO ENTRIES

We gave young women the opportunity to record a short (3 minute) video interview, which they could submit online via the video conferencing software, Odoo. This allowed women who could not take part in a face to face group discussion, the opportunity to take part.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

1 THE SURVEY

Potential participants were reached through a social media campaign, using the twitter handle #SYWS2019.

2 INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

We contacted organisations and agencies working with young women to gain their buy-in to the research and raise awareness among potential participants. Our contact with a range of schools in urban and rural Scotland helped us to reach young women who may not have participated in the research otherwise. This approach allowed us to gain a range of perspectives from young women.

3 TRAVEL

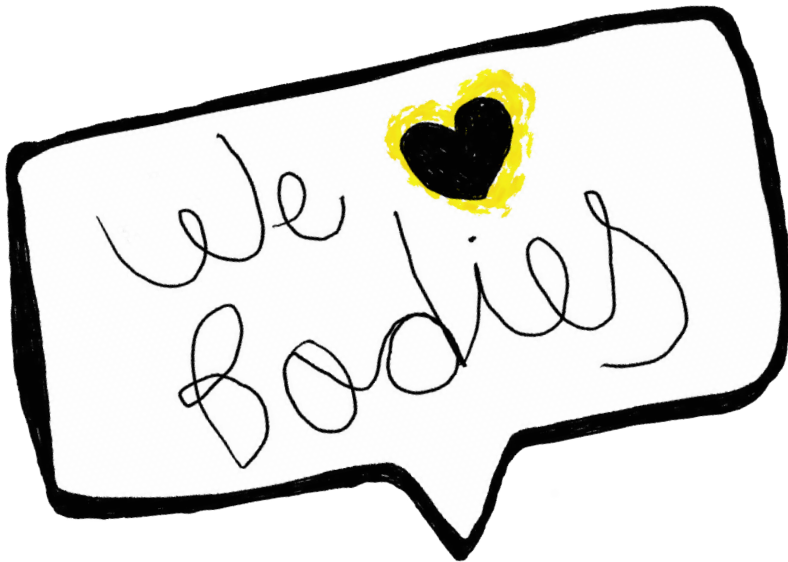
Our efforts to reach rural communities involved travelling around Scotland by train around the peripheries of the central belt and across the Highlands.

4 LIMITATIONS

Although the activity described above has many strengths, we acknowledge the limitations of the methodologies employed. The findings should not be considered representative of the experiences of all young women in Scotland; they shine a light on the lives and views of those who participated in this research.

5 DEMOGRAPHICS

This research included a total of 380 participants (347 survey respondents and 33 fieldwork participants). From the outset, we endeavoured to reach people with diverse perspectives and voices. The table below shows the range of young women who took part in this research.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AGE GROUPS DO YOU FALL INTO?	NUMBER	%
12 - 15 years	8	2%
16 - 18 years	41	11%
19 - 24 years	138	37%
25 - 30 years	188	50%
WHICH OF THESE BEST DESCRIBES WHERE YOU LIVE IN SCOTLAND?		
Central Scotland (Glasgow, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Argyll, Edinburgh & Lothians, Fife, Central)	302	80%
Northern Scotland (Grampian, Highland, Perth/Tayside, Western Isles, Orkney, Shetland)	69	18%
Southern Scotland (Borders/Dumfries & Galloway)	5	1%
ETHNICITY		
White Scottish	260	69%
White: Other British	32	9%
White: Irish	5	1%
White: Polish	3	1%
Any other White ethnic group	28	7%
Pakistani, Pakistani White Scottish or Pakistani British	5	1%
Indian, Indian White Scottish or Indian British	2	1%
Chinese, Chinese White Scottish or Chinese British	2	1%
Any other Asian	2	1%
Any Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	16	4%
African, African White Scottish or African British	7	2%
Black, Black White Scottish or Black British	3	1%
Arab, Arab White Scottish or Arab British	2	1%
Any other ethnic group	3	1%
Prefer not to say	10	3%
YOUNG WOMEN WITH A LONG-TERM CONDITION	71	19%

10

ADDITIONAL QUOTES



FATPHOBIA

“ Once, I got stuck between two rows of seats on a train. Now, when I sit on the train, I sit as close to the door as I can, I hated that it destroyed my confidence because I find myself quite a confident person, I'm always probably the loudest person in the room, I'm always the first person to talk or say hi but that destroyed me. I went into a big hole at that point in my life, I just stayed in my house for like 2 weeks at least, it was really bad.

“ I spent a couple years of my life in Pakistan. Everyone wants to be white, everyone wants to be hairless. They advertise like creams that like bleach your skin to turn you white and they, the beauty salons, everyone is there every week for a waxing appointment. Every single person.

I do think there is in south Asian cultures such a big emphasis on whitening your skin. Really big Bollywood actresses they are lighter skinned, there is this big emphasis on just trying to be whiter.

THE BODY AND BEAUTY IDEAL IS EITHER WHITE OR 'EXOTIC'

“ My body is not a white body and all of the ways that I think my body needs to look is because... like I'll just say it straight; the beauty expectations are racist.

Many black people see the Kardashians as performing a conception of “blackness” while being completely protected by their whiteness

If you've got a light skin black person and a dark skin black person, they are treated completely different [group agreement] and having those features like the big lips and then the big bum and boobs, that's celebrated more in a light skin person than it is on someone dark.

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE BODY POSITIVITY MOVEMENT

“ I think some of the messaging around body positivity is dangerous and sexist, it seems to be saying 'I'm fat and gorgeous please objectify me'. Progress is for women not to be judged on looks or judge other women, to have healthy bodies they look after, to reject beauty standards and not exist for the male gaze.

END NOTES



¹This aligns with national studies into sports participation for young women; it is estimated that 40% of girls have dropped out of all sporting activity by the time they reach 18, and that this increases to 43% of women by adulthood.

Sportscotland.org.uk. (2020). [online] Available at: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/documents/resources/makingwomenandgirlsmoreactive.pdf>

²It is estimated that more than three times as many women as men stopped swimming between 2005 and 2014, and it believed that almost half a million women in England have given up swimming in the past decade due to a lack of body confidence

Rumsby, B. (2020). Body image worries make half a million women give up swimming. [online] Telegraph.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11378695/Body-image-worries-make-half-a-million-women-give-up-swimming.html>

³This link to social media is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

⁴This reinforces findings in other research; one in six of the women who took part in a study by Plan International had not attended school or work because they felt anxious about their appearance.

The Independent. (2020). One in six girls has not gone to school or work because they 'felt anxious about the way they look'. [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/women-body-image-anxiety-teenagers-international-day-of-the-girl-a9150956.html>

⁵Beat Eating Disorders UK estimates that 1.25 million people in the UK have an eating disorder and that around 75% of these cases are within women.

Beat. (2020). How Many People Have an Eating Disorder in the UK?. [online] Available at: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/how-many-people-eating-disorder-uk>

⁶In the survey we asked participants to rate how much the following impacted the way they felt about their bodies on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being 'not at all' to 5 being 'a lot': the media, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, celebrities and influencers, friends, partners and family, dress codes.

⁷'Fake Instagram'

⁸Studies carried out by various institutes gathered the same results; the study involved 14-24 year old young people in the UK, and found that all five of the main social media platforms (YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) had a negative net result on body image, with Instagram ranking the worst.

Scottish Government (2017). Exploring the reported worsening of mental wellbeing among adolescent girls in Scotland.

⁹Social media influencing is the use of public figures on social media accounts to promote products or services. Someone is considered an influencer if they have 5,000+ followers, but to have the most influence, bigger brands or companies seek out profiles that have over 100,000 followers. Brands and companies' market through influencers as influencers know how to engage with their audience, and audiences are more likely to trust a product or a service that is endorsed by a public figure that they trust.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etQ36X37dXo> (What is a social media influencer? Forbes 2017)

Kayla Itsines was ranked one of the top health and wellness influencers in 2019 with more than 11 million followers on Instagram and 26 million likes on Facebook. She has her own product range, the most well-known of which is a work-out programme called Bikini Body Guides (BBG), where users pay a monthly fee to access her workout plans via an app.

Kayla Itsines. (2020). Kayla Itsines - Sweat With Kayla. [online] Available at: <https://www.kaylaitsines.com/>

¹⁰Instagram allows followers to buy products via Instagram posts. As an example, Kylie Jenner has 162 million followers on Instagram. She launched her cosmetics company in 2015, and in 2019 was hailed the world's youngest self-made billionaire by Forbes due to the success of the company. She markets the products via her Instagram, posting herself using them, and with Instagram's built in 'shop' feature, customers can buy products directly via the posts.

Theinfluencemarketer.com. (2020). [online] Available at: <https://theinfluencemarketer.com/blog/top-health-influencers/#ixzz6EDzMTW9e>

¹¹Weight loss products range from teas, to diet pills to sweets, and posts are targeted primarily at women. Recently, after a social media campaign to restrict the marketing of these products, Instagram has introduced a policy that if a post promotes a weight loss product or cosmetic procedure and has a price tag fixed to it, users who are younger than 18-years-old will be prohibited from viewing the post. It is argued that often, products sold by influencers and celebrities are based on false advertising, as pictures and posts on Instagram are highly edited.

Hillier, L. (2020). Behind Kylie Jenner's success in a saturated cosmetics industry – Econsultancy. [online] Econsultancy. Available at: <https://econsultancy.com/behind-kylie-jenner-s-success-in-a-saturated-cosmetics-industry>

¹²Responses to this question will be discussed in detail in chapter 7

¹³The family of celebrities have prolific social media presences, and are most well-known due to their TV series 'Keeping up with the Kardashians' which first aired in 2007.

¹⁴Nytimes.com. (2020). We're Living in the Golden Age of Contouring. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/t-magazine/contouring-trend-makeup.html>

¹⁵This is the treatment of plus sized people that shames and excludes them within society.

¹⁶While dieting can be a safe way to approach weight loss, dieting as a result of external pressures from others to look a certain way is likely to be damaging to a young person.

YWCA (2018). Be Real Campaign. [online] Available at: https://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Somebody_like_me-v1.0.pdf

¹⁷This aligns with the rise of the wellness industry, which was valued at more than \$4 trillion in 2018, roughly the combined GDP of the UK and Canada. This surge in interest in wellness is driven by access to new technologies and a willingness to spend on them, according to Forbes. Younger generations are more likely to use fitness trackers, apps, and spend on athleisure brands and organic foods.

Forbes.com. (2020). Why The Wellness Business Is Booming (And How To Succeed In The Industry).

[online] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2RrEVjr>

¹⁸The ketogenic diet is a high-fat, adequate-protein, low-carbohydrate diet, similar to Atkins and other 'low-carb' diets.

¹⁹Wiseman, E. (2020). Is this the end of wellness?. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jul/14/eva-wiseman-is-this-the-end-of-wellness>

²⁰A study reviewed by the NHS found that sunbed users had a 20% higher risk of melanoma (the most dangerous form of skin cancer) compared to those who had never used one. The cancer risk increased with additional sunbed sessions and almost doubled when sunbed use began before the age of 35 (87% higher risk) .

NHS (2017) Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/news/cancer/sunbeds-killing-hundreds-each-year/>

²¹For example, 83% of young women said they had had a haircut, and 80% said they would get a haircut again.

²²According to a study carried by the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) women underwent 92% of all cosmetic procedures recorded and the three most popular procedures for women were breast augmentation, breast reduction and blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery). The biggest increases for women were for liposuction which rose 12%, and facelifts which rose 9%.

BAAPS.com (2019) Available at: https://baaps.org.uk/about/news/1708/cosmetic_surgery_stats_number_of_surgeries_remains_stable_amid_calls_for_greater_regulation_of_quick_fix_solutions.

²³Former BAAPS President Rajiv Grover, who compiles the annual report with the statistics outlined above, commented on the rise of liposuction: "The rise comes at a time where the popularity of TV shows such as Love Island has driven the desire for a toned torso, as did the fashion for women's athleisure clothing. The danger of cosmetic surgery becoming too closely linked to reality TV or celebrity endorsement is that it can make surgery seem like a commodity, which should never be the case. An operation is not something that can simply be returned to the shop if you have second thoughts."

²⁴Cosmetic treatments are accessible to younger generations. Kylie Jenner, who was born in 1997, spoke on her reality-TV show “Life of Kylie” about wanting to get lip fillers after a boy commented on her small lips when she was fifteen.

The New Yorker (2019). [online] Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/decade-in-review/the-age-of-instagram-face>

A recent investigation by the BBC looked into young people under the age of 18 accessing cosmetic treatments, it highlighted that there is little regulation for clinics that offer treatments that are non-surgical, for example; non-surgical nose fillers, bum lifts, laser treatments, chemical peels and Botox. It discussed that clinics are only regulated if they offer surgical procedures, but that non-surgical treatments make up 70-80% of all cosmetic treatments undertaken in the UK, and that the market for non-surgical treatments could reach £3 billion by 2022 (the UK cosmetic surgery market was estimated to be worth £273 million in 2017). The investigation highlighted that often no formal ID card is required for proof of age when accessing these treatments, which enables young people to access them before they are 18.

Currently, the BAAPS is working with the government to develop a certification of accreditation for cosmetic clinics, to avoid young people under the age of eighteen accessing treatments.

IMTJ (2020). [online] Available at: <https://www.imtj.com/news/uk-non-surgical-cosmetic-treatments-could-grow-3bn/>

²⁵This aligns with research carried out by the BAAPS and the BBC, which report that cosmetic treatments are on the rise for women in the UK. Young women hope that making these changes will help them to feel happier and more confident, but for those that had made changes, it was often the case that they realised there was more contributing to their negative body images than the area they were trying to change.

²⁶The movement which originally started in the 60’s to tackle fatphobia, has recently flourished through social media, specifically Instagram, as a result influencers and bloggers, such as Gabi Gregg, who has contributed to the movement by encouraging people to reclaim the word ‘fat’ as a positive description, she also has her own lingerie and

swimwear collections and encourages representation of plus sized people.

²⁷Young women were asked to rate the what made them feel good about their body images on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being a lot.

²⁸In October, Instagram announced that it would be removing “all effects associated with plastic surgery” from its filters, but this appears to mean all effects explicitly associated with plastic surgery, such as the ones called “Plastica” and “Fix Me.” Face altering filters will stay present on the platform.

The New Yorker (2019). [online] Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/decade-in-review/the-age-of-instagram-face>

²⁹The Lines Between also undertook the SYWS2015, SYWS2016 and SYWS2018 studies.

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WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We would love to hear your thoughts on the themes and topics discussed in SYWS 2019. Reach out on social media using the **#SYWS19** or email us at **hello@ywcascotland.org**

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