

The power of a selfie: A place for appearance diversity

by Carly Findlay

Social media, especially selfies and outfit photos, get a bad rap: too vain, filtered, a highlight reel that's unattainable for many. If you have a facial difference, a skin condition or are disabled, it's rare that you see yourself in the mainstream media, and maybe even rarer that you'll bump into others like you in the street. But social media has become a place for us, and a place to be seen. It's a place for appearance diversity. For me, for us, selfies and being visible can be game changing. They can help us increase confidence, share information, foster communities, change other people's perceptions and show younger and older generations what's possible.

While diagnoses might differ, the collective social experience of living with facial differences, skin conditions and disability are very much the same. Finding your tribe is important, and social media helps us find our identity and community.

I share my photo so that new parents of babies with ichthyosis can see what's possible for their little ones and to allay their fears. Googling ichthyosis can be scary, but I've helped to change that. I share my photo to give others with ichthyosis, facial differences and disability permission to share theirs and love themselves. I share my photo to show brands, and yes, I wear their clothes too. I share my photo to document the good times and the difficult times. I share my photo to demand improved access, inclusion and representation. I share my photo because I refuse to hide.

This keynote will show that social media is a space for us and a space to be seen, on our own terms.