

Quick fixes and appearance concerns among women and men in Britain

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University of the
West of England

Prepared by:

Dr Phillippa Diedrichs, Miss Nicole Paraskeva & Miss Alice New

Centre for Appearance Research

University of the West of England

PARTICIPANTS:

759 British women and men took part in an online questionnaire study from November 2010 – April 2011. Participants were recruited to take part through YMCA (UK) email distribution lists and social networking websites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). As an incentive to participate, participants were offered the chance to enter into a prize draw to win an iPad.

		Women (n=376)		Men (n=383)	
		%	N	%	N
Age					
	Range	19-68 years		18-78 years	
	Average	34.90 years		35.82 years	
Body Mass Index					
	Range	15.25-41.37		14.13-49.54	
	Average	24.50		25.64	
	Underweight (<18.5)	4.48	16	2.4	9
	Normal (18.5-24.9)	58.26	208	49.06	183
	Overweight (25-29.9)	25.49	91	33.51	125
	Obese (≥30)	8.5	42	15.03	56
Ethnicity					
	White: British	76.8	281	81.5	304
	White: Irish	1.4	5	1.1	4
	White: Other	9.6	35	4.6	17
	Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	0.8	3	0.3	1
	Mixed White and Black African	0.3	1	0.3	1
	Mixed White and Asian	0.8	3	0.8	3
	Mixed Other Mixed	1.1	4	0.5	2
	Asian or Asian British: Indian	1.3	5	2.9	11
	Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	0.3	1	0.5	2
	Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	0.5	2	0.8	3
	Asian or Asian British: Other	0.5	2	1.3	5
	Black or Black British: Black Caribbean	1.4	5	0.8	3
	Black or Black British: Black African	1.6	6	0.8	3
	Black or Black British: Other Black	0.5	2	0.3	1
	Chinese or Other Ethnic Group: Chinese	0.5	2	1.8	7
	Other	2.2	8	1.6	6
Sexual Orientation					
	Homosexual	4.6	17	31.3	117
	Heterosexual	89.1	335	63.6	238
	Bisexual	2.7	10	4.3	16
	Other	5	13	0.8	3

		Women (n=376)		Men (n=383)	
		%	N	%	N
Education					
	GCSE/ O Level or equivalent	6.6	24	7.5	28
	A Level or equivalent	9.3	34	10.8	40
	Higher education certificate or diploma	16.7	61	16.9	63
	Undergraduate degree	44.8	164	39.8	148
	Masters Degree	19.7	72	21.8	81
	PhD or equivalent	3.0	11	3.2	12
YMCA Status					
	YMCA Member	54.5	199	71.4	265
	YMCA Staff	18.9	69	10.5	39
	None of the above	26.6	97	18.1	67

KEY FINDINGS:

QUICK FIXES

DIETING

- 44.5% of men and 70.9% of women have been on a diet to change their body shape
- 59.2% of men and 53.4% of women believe that dieting is an effective way to change their body shape

STEROIDS

- 8.5% of men and 0.8% of women would consider taking steroids to change their body shape

EXERCISE

- In rank order, **men** said the following reasons best describe why they exercise
 1. To maintain good health (53.3%)
 2. For a sense of personal accomplishment (13.9%)
 3. To manage their weight (12.3%)
 4. Other reason (8.8%)
 5. To change a specific body part (4.8%)
 6. Because it is fun (4%)
 7. They don't exercise (2.7%)
 8. To socialise (0.3%)
- In rank order, **women** said the following reasons best describe why they exercise
 1. To maintain good health (47.7%)
 2. To manage their weight (32.4%)
 3. For a sense of personal accomplishment (6.8%)
 4. Because it is fun (3.5%) and to change a specific body part (3.5%)
 5. They don't exercise (3.0%)

6. Other reason (2.7%)

7. To socialise (0.3%)

COSMETIC SURGERY

- 20.1% of men and 28.1% of women would consider having cosmetic surgery to change a part of their body that they were unhappy with.
- 51.7% of men and 40.4% of women believe that there is nothing wrong with having cosmetic surgery, although they personally wouldn't have it.
- 28.2% of men and 31.4% of women believe that cosmetic surgery is too readily available and should be restricted to those with underlying physical and health issues.
- If money wasn't an issue, 24% of men and 29.5% of women would have cosmetic surgery to change their body shape.

AIRBRUSHING

AWARENESS OF AIRBRUSHING

- 70.6% of men and 80.9% of women think that consumers are not aware of the extent to which images of models and people in the media are airbrushed.
- When shown an image of a male model before and after airbrushing, 63.7% of men said that they were surprised by the extent of the airbrushing, with 16.4% saying they were extremely surprised.
- When shown an image of a female model before and after airbrushing, 11.1% of women said that they were surprised by the extent of the airbrushing, while none of the women saying they were extremely surprised.

IMPACT ON BODY IMAGE

- 75.6% of men and 86.2% of women think that airbrushing has a negative effect on people's body image

LABELLING

- 62.6% of men and 52.1% of women think that labelling airbrushed images with a warning or notification would not prevent any negative effects of airbrushing on people's body image.

MEDIA AND BODY IMAGE

- 36.8% of men and 50.4% of women report that they compare their bodies to people on TV
- 42.4% of men and 30% of women said they would like their bodies to look like the models who appear in magazines
- 51% of men and 34.9% of women said that they wish they looked as athletic as sports stars.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE BODY IMAGE

In rank order, women and men said the following strategies would be helpful to promote positive body image:

1. More diversity in the appearances of people shown in advertising, magazines, fashion and on TV (including body shapes and sizes, ages and ethnicities) (48.9%)
2. Targeting industries (e.g., diet, fitness, modelling, and food industries) and making policy changes to promote positive change (35.9%)
3. Shifting society's focus from appearance to health (22.7%)

1. DIVERSITY IN APPEARANCE

48.9% of women and men said that they want to see different body shapes & sizes, variety of ages, ethnicities and a wider range of physical appearances in the media, advertising and fashion industries and on TV.

Their reasons for this were:

- To reflect society
- To avoid setting a narrow definition of what attractive means
- Dispel the notion of what is right or wrong in terms of body shape and size
- Limit false expectations of socially acceptable body shape and appearance and promote a healthy body image

"Simply to have more variety in body shapes so that people see themselves as falling within an "acceptable" range, rather than always falling short of the ideal (whether "perfected by airbrushing or just near-perfect)." (Male, 46 years)

"Even though a lot of marketing ticks all the boxes when it comes to disabilities, gender, ethnicity etc, too many of the women/models are all the same size" (Female, 26 years)

2. TARGETING INDUSTRIES AND POLICY CHANGE

35.9% of women and men said that we need to targeting industries (e.g., diet, fitness, modelling and food industries) to promote positive body image.

i) Food/weight loss industry

“exact calorie indication on packaging” (Female, 23 years)

“more low-cost healthy eating” (Female, 35 years)

ii) Fashion and Modeling industry

“any model who is under weight should not be allowed to promote a product” (Female, 28 years)

“ensuring that all high street shops carry equal amount of stock for all sizes” (Female, 36 years)

iii) The media

“reduce conflicting messages in magazines” (Female, age unknown)

“Limit the amount of airbrushing that can be done” (Male, 28 years)

“Get rid of airbrushing altogether” (Male, 39 years)

“Without such a media influence on appearance, diet pages in magazines, pictures of celebrities with cellulite etc, we may be a little less obsessed with appearance” (Female, 25 years)

“TV shows should stop telling us that looking good is the key to happiness...surely there is more to being happy than being beautiful” (Female, 23 years)

“stop the promotion of plastic surgery” (Female, age unknown)

“the media needs to stop promoting sex within their images and content” (Male, 25 years)

iv) Fitness industry

“cheaper gym membership” (Female, 35)

“discount at gyms” (Male, 33 years)

“Gyms have a role in promoting exercise for health/fitness and not for external appearance. Gyms too often promote body image ideals rather than talking about health” (Male, 24 years)

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

22.7% of women and men said that there needs to be a shift in society’s focus on appearance to a focus on health.

In particular, they felt the following points were important:

i) We need to educate adults and children about exercise and healthy eating

“Education is still key in promoting a healthy lifestyle and positive body image” (Male, 39 years)

“Educating people in the importance of a healthy balanced diet and regular exercise as a legacy for life” (Female, 50 years)

“A larger educational campaign about nutrition, self esteem, and the health benefits of exercise” (Female, age unknown)

“The education system needs to change, our health is as an important subject as maths or English, unless we are educated about our bodies and how we should take care of them, the negative impact the media can have and learn how to love our own bodies without comparison to others, things will not get better. I think that’s the place to start” (Male, 29 years)

ii) We need to focus our attention away from “looks” and “appearance” and onto “health”

“I think more emphasis on health as opposed to “looking good” would help” (Male, 28 years)

“Promotion of physical health rather than physical perfection” (Female, 28 years)

“Greater emphasis on health rather than weight (and being thin)” (Female, 35 years)

iii) We need to focus on what our bodies can do, rather than what they look like.

“Teaching and promoting healthy lifestyles, beliefs, stronger community and family networks, where appreciation comes from a person’s actions and not their looks” (Male, 32 years)

“Increase body awareness so people understand what their body is capable of doing-they will then see their body as a living part of them and not simply a “shell” they exist within. (Female, age unknown)