



## Women and Body Image

**“Beauty shouldn’t be about changing yourself to achieve an ideal or be more socially acceptable. Real beauty, the interesting, truly pleasing kind, is about honouring the beauty within you and without you. It’s about knowing that someone else’s definition of pretty has no hold over you.”**

**Golda Poretsky**

Throughout the centuries expectations and demands on women about what their body should look like and be capable of has not only impacted on their confidence and self-esteem but also their health and wellbeing. The cultural expectations of women, so often linked with other forms of oppression such as class, race and disability, not only influences the clothes we wear, but also our physical wellbeing. From corsets in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to high heels in the present day through to ever changing diets to manipulate body size and shape. These trends not only have negative physical impacts, but can reduce women’s confidence, as often the demands are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve and maintain.

In a society where, “81% of women reported some body dissatisfaction, 26% of whom reported feeling “disgusted” because of their body image”, (Body-image – a rapid evidence assessment of the literature, Nina Burrowes (2013) Government Equalities Office), it is not difficult to imagine how this impacts on girls and women relationships and life opportunities.

Addressing the issue of body image is complex and challenging. Recent concerns about an “obesity crisis” in the UK has seen an increase in public information in relation to health and wellbeing, but often these focus on the individual rather than societal pressure. Pererson and Luedicke (2013) highlighted that, “By stigmatizing the obesity or overweight person, campaigns could potentially alienate the audience they intend to motivate and hinder the behaviours they intend to encourage”. This further encourages framing any intervention, “in ways that foster confidence and self-efficacy”, (Fighting obesity or obese persons? Public perceptions of obesity-related health messages). This is particularly vital when supporting oppressed groups, such as women. Increasing control and confidence is essential to support women to make the decisions that are right for them and to ensure long-term and lifecycle wellbeing.

Linked to women’s oppression in general, negative body image has been shown to extend, in different forms across the lifecycle, with The Government Equalities Office (2015) recognising that “... a 45 year old woman is as likely to be dissatisfied with her appearance as her 19 year old daughter”, (Body Confidence Campaign, progress report).

Recognising the impact of body image across women’s lifecycle is essential as, like life changing injury or illness, body changes, such as pregnancy and menopause, this can be negatively impacted by societal expectations and stereotypes.

“41% of women who had been pregnant said they felt more negatively about their body image after pregnancy than before.”

(Burrowes, 2013)



## EVENT RESULTS

**THEME:** Since time began, women have been judged based purely on how they look. Whether you are fat, thin, short, tall, disabled, living with a disfigurement or anything in between, you will probably have experienced some sort of assumption, discrimination or faced barriers based on your appearance. The impact on women is huge and wide ranging from low self-esteem to obsessive dieting.

**PARTICIPANTS:** Total of 70 women from local communities, representing a wide range of backgrounds, convened 18 break-out groups on issues with 57 proposed actions. **(Apr 2017 / Oct 2018)**

### TOP FIVE PRIORITIES VOTED BY PARTICIPANTS (NUMBER OF VOTES)

| April 2017  | October 2018  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love your scars, they show what you have survived. <b>24 votes</b></li> <li>• Acceptance of situation and determination to keep trying new skills. <b>21 votes</b></li> <li>• Take control of your own life. Own it – Good or Bad! <b>20 votes</b></li> <li>• Allow yourself to feel what you feel – there is no such thing as ‘should feel’. <b>19 votes</b></li> <li>• Self-acceptance, at any age. <b>16 votes</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful of messages we give children. <b>30 votes</b></li> <li>• Love yourself – there’s only one you! <b>21 votes</b></li> <li>• Healthy food needs to be cheaper and more accessible. <b>16 votes</b></li> <li>• Education (health and home economics) adults, children. Less fast foods, healthy cooking, gardening and allotments for vegetables. <b>16 votes</b></li> <li>• Encourage women to believe in themselves. <b>15 votes</b></li> <li>• Self-help – go out; join groups; make friends. <b>15 votes</b></li> </ul> |

- Allow yourself to feel what you feel – there is no such thing as ‘should feel’. **19 votes**
- Self-acceptance, at any age. **16 votes**
- Acceptance of self. **13 votes**
- Encourage people not to judge on image - ‘Don’t judge by it’s cover’. **11 votes**
- Surround yourself with positive people. **11 votes**
- Turn your life around, make changes. Join groups, share information, stand up for your rights. **11 votes**
- Self-belief and self-confidence and staying positive with a good sense of humour. **10 votes**
- Not let age be a barrier to enjoying life’s experiences. **10 votes**
- Network more to encourage campaigns on important issues, such as this. **10 votes**

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- Encourage women to believe in themselves. **15 votes**
- Self-help – go out; join groups; make friends. **15 votes**
- ‘Perfect’ bodies do not exist. What’s inside you as a person is what matters. **14 votes**
- Be positive – set your own agenda. **11 votes**
- Women should lift each other up instead of seeing ourselves as competitors. **11 votes**
- Don’t give a damn what other people think of you. **11 votes**
- Do not seek for external validations (including what you see on social media – those perfect bodies, people). **11 votes**
- More acceptance for women no matter what size they are. **10 votes**
- Love and nurture what your body has done for you (childbirth, puberty, surgeries etc.) Practice self-love, self-healing. Make time for yourself. **10 votes**

### GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

| April 2017  | October 2018   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual action/mind-set change. <b>259 votes</b></li> <li>• Organised action/Support groups. <b>18 votes</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual action/mind-set change. <b>203 votes</b></li> <li>• Education/Training. <b>44 votes</b></li> <li>• Government/Structural changes. <b>22 votes</b></li> <li>• Organised action/Support groups. <b>8 votes</b></li> <li>•</li> </ul> |

### DETAILED RESULTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS

| April 2017   | October 2018   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love your scars, they show what you have survived. <b>24 votes</b></li> <li>• Acceptance of situation and determination to keep trying new skills. <b>21 votes</b></li> <li>• Take control of your own life. Own it – Good or Bad! <b>20 votes</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful of messages we give children. <b>30 votes</b></li> <li>• Love yourself – there’s only one you! <b>21 votes</b></li> <li>• Healthy food needs to be cheaper and more accessible. <b>16 votes</b></li> </ul> |