

BE REAL

BODY CONFIDENCE FOR EVERYONE



Great Expectations

A report investigating the origins of the body image expectations and pressures experienced by young people

July 2018

In partnership with

YMCA

Dove
self-esteem
project



BE REAL

BODY CONFIDENCE FOR EVERYONE

The *Be Real Campaign* is a national movement made up of individuals, businesses, charities and public bodies.

The *Be Real Campaign* was formed in response to the Reflections on Body Image report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Body Image. Chaired by Mary Glendon MP, and co-ordinated by YMCA, the campaign was founded in partnership with Dove.

The Be Real Campaign focuses on three areas in which it strives to bring about real change:

- ▶ **Real Education:** We want to give children and young people a body confident start to life.
- ▶ **Real Health:** We want healthy living and general wellbeing to be prioritised over just appearance and weight.
- ▶ **Real Diversity:** We want the advertising, fashion, music and media industries to positively reflect what we really look like.

Introduction

During the past two years, as part of our work to promote body confidence, YMCA has interviewed more than 3,000 young people on the issue of body image.

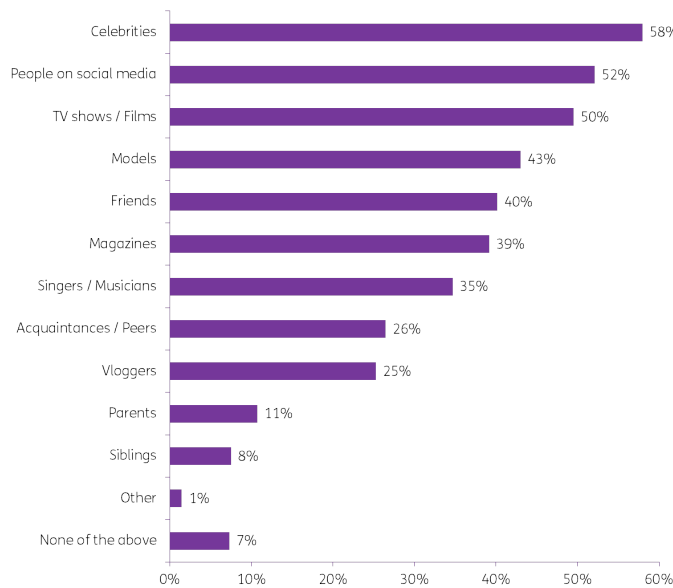
This research has sought to bring to the fore the extent of the daily pressures young people face to look a certain way, as well as the negative impact these can have on their emotional wellbeing, relationships, and their education and employment.

Building on these findings, this research seeks to understand the origin of the expectations and pressures young people face to help create practical solutions to how this problem can be addressed.

Great Power

Celebrities top the list of those that individuals and groups young people felt created the expectations they feel pressured to live up to. Almost three fifths of young people (58%) identified celebrities as where the expectations and pressures to look a certain way came from.

*Where do you think the expectations and pressures to look a certain way come from?
(n=1,006)*



In speaking to young people, the term ‘celebrity’ encompasses a diverse range of individuals from across different genres, including film, TV and music.

Given the broad way in which young people define celebrities and the polymathic nature of modern celebrities, it comes as no surprise that those exerting expectations and pressures on the way young people look also extend to individuals on social media.

Accordingly, more than half of young people (52%) identified people on social media as setting the expectations and pressures on how they were supposed to look.

“Literally you find them everywhere. Like, you could be on Facebook or something or Instagram and there’ll be like, an advert for clothes. You’re just constantly flooded with images.”

After those on celebrities and individuals on social media, models are the group young people identified, with 43% indicating models set the expectations and pressures to look a certain way.

The fashion industry is often identified by young people as creating unrealistic and unattainable ‘ideals’. This is despite effort by some in the industry to create greater diversity in the models it employs. Young people tend to see such efforts as ‘tokenistic’ or as simply not going far enough in their representation of diversity in society.

“It’s everywhere. Even the plus-sized adverts, like for women with curves. They’re not even really big. They’re just wider hips.”

“Apparently size 14-and-up is classed as a plus-sized model.”

It is important to note that within each of these groups, there are individuals who young people identify as having a positive influence on their body confidence. However, our research revealed these were far less common than those seen to have a negative influence and impact.

After celebrities and influencers encompassing the worlds of TV, films, music, fashion and social media, it is the peer group that were seen to dictate the expectations young people feel expected to meet.

Two in five young people (40%) of young people identified their friends and 35% identified their peers as setting the pressures and expectations on how they were supposed to look.

Speaking to young people reveals that friends and peers act not only as an influencer in their own right, but also as a channel through which expectations set by celebrities and influencers are exerted and reinforced.

In addition to friends and peers, the primary means through which this power and influence is exerted is through TV and film, social media and magazines.

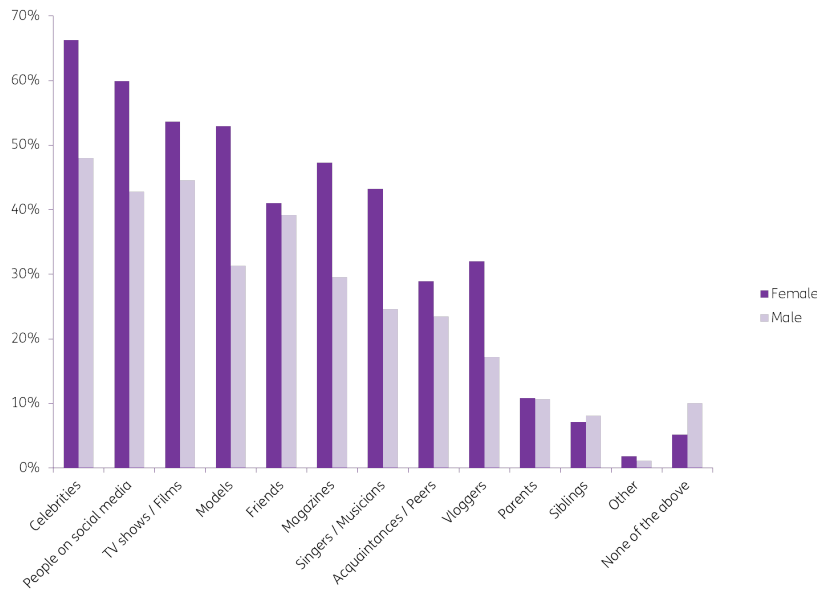
“You see it all the time in magazines. You have all these stick-thin women. Like and it’s all over social media.”

“The magazines and the media. Anything to do with fashion.”

Half of young people (50%) identified TV shows and films as setting the expectations and pressures on how they should look, with a further 39% identifying magazines.

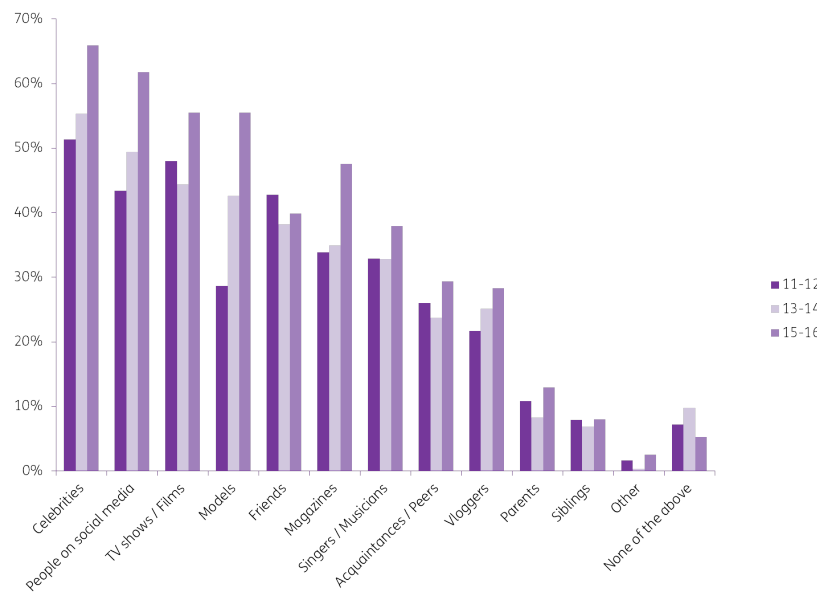
In line with the findings in our previous research, across almost all groups of individuals and mediums, the expectations and pressures young people feel increase with age.

Where do you think the expectations and pressures to look a certain way come from?
(n=1,006)



As young people enter high school and puberty, our research has found they become much more conscious of themselves, the way they look and the world around them.

Where do you think the expectations and pressures to look a certain way come from?
(n=1,006)



Also in keeping with our previous research, the findings also show gender plays an important role in the expectations and pressures felt by young people. Females consistently reported feeling greater expectations and pressures around how they look.

The all-encompassing nature of expectations and pressures on the way they look is demonstrated by less than one in ten young people (7%) of young people saying that none of the groups or methods already set out fuelled this.

Great responsibility

As this research demonstrates, it is clear that celebrities exert significant influence on how young people view themselves and their body confidence,

These expectations and pressures manifest themselves through mediums young people interact with daily, such as TV, film, music, fashion, social media and magazines, as well as their friends and peer groups.

Too often the influence they exert is a negative one, impacting on young people's emotional wellbeing, relationships, and their education and employment.

To change this reality, both celebrities and the businesses that operate the mediums through which they reach young people need to recognise and take seriously the responsibility they have.

Celebrities and influencers should...be responsible and promote body positivity on social media channels

Businesses should...sign up to the *Be Real Body Image Pledge* and commit to:

- ▶ Reflect diversity
- ▶ Reflect reality
- ▶ Promote health and wellbeing
- ▶ Promote the pledge

Data and methodology

This research was undertaken by YMCA on behalf of the *Be Real Campaign*.

The quantitative fieldwork for this research was conducted by YouthSights, a specialist youth research agency. The quantitative sample consisted of 1,006 young people aged between 11 and 16 years-old from across the UK.

To supplement this, YMCA also undertook qualitative research in the form of focus groups held in 12 different locations in the UK, with young people aged between 11 and 16 years-old.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out between August 2017 and February 2018.

Where do you think the expectations and pressures to look a certain way come from?
(n=1,006)

| | Total | Gender | | Age | | |
|------------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | 11-12 | 13-14 | 15-16 |
| Celebrities | 58% | 48% | 66% | 51% | 55% | 66% |
| People on social media | 52% | 43% | 60% | 43% | 49% | 62% |
| TV shows / Films | 50% | 45% | 54% | 48% | 44% | 55% |
| Models | 43% | 31% | 53% | 29% | 43% | 55% |
| Friends | 40% | 39% | 41% | 43% | 38% | 40% |
| Magazines | 39% | 30% | 47% | 34% | 35% | 48% |
| Singers / Musicians | 35% | 25% | 43% | 33% | 33% | 38% |
| Acquaintances / Peers | 26% | 23% | 29% | 26% | 24% | 29% |
| Vloggers | 25% | 17% | 32% | 22% | 25% | 28% |
| Parents | 11% | 11% | 11% | 11% | 8% | 13% |
| Siblings | 8% | 8% | 7% | 8% | 7% | 8% |
| Other | 1% | 1% | 2% | 2% | 0% | 2% |
| None of the above | 7% | 10% | 5% | 7% | 10% | 5% |

YMCA

YMCA England & Wales

10-11 Charterhouse Square
London
EC1M 6EH
020 7186 9500
www.ymca.org.uk
Charity number: 212810



YMCA Ireland

National Centre, Donard Park
Newcastle, Co Down
BT33 0GR
028 4372 3172
www.ymca-ireland.net
Charity number: XN45820

YMCA
S C O T L A N D

YMCA Scotland

3 Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh
EH8 8PJ
0131 228 1464
www.ymcascotland.org
Charity number: SC013792