



MIRROR ON

Body Diversity

An exploration into body image, diet culture, eating disorders and more...

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At Channel 4, we've been running our award winning '**Mirror on the Industry**' project for 4 years. This is a study that audits TV advertising to see how diverse and representative it really is.

In 2022, we are building on the project and releasing the '**Mirror on...**' series. Individual reports that take a closer look at some of the topics we evaluate in the wider study and dig deeper into the feelings and perceptions our audiences.



The first topic we're exploring in this series is **Body Diversity**. We want to understand how represented different body types are in TV advertising, how people feel in their own skin and explore the impact of diet culture, the media and brands. We hope you find this report interesting, and for those of you who are time poor, you'll also find a teaser video and one pager on the 4Sales website.

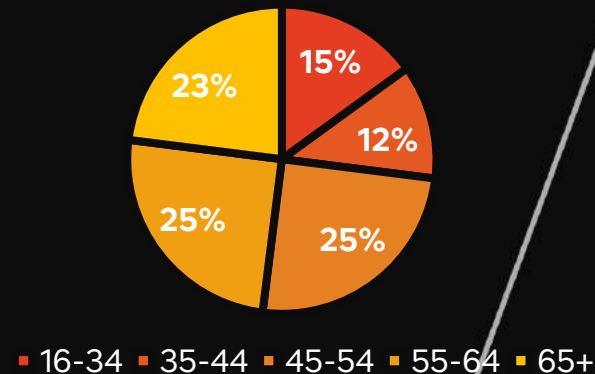
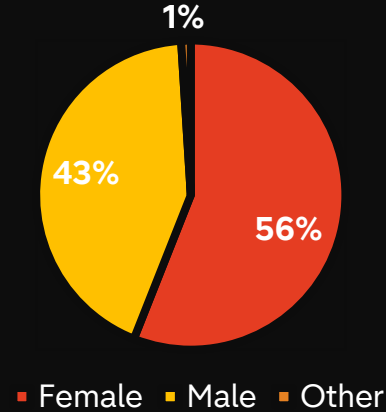


WHO WE SPOKE TO

1139 PARTICIPANTS

We used our Channel 4 **4Youth** (16-24s) & **Core4** (16+) communities to speak to people about their perceptions of **body representation** in media, how it makes them feel and the related issues surrounding **diet culture, body image, food & exercise**. As well as drawing out supporting evidence from **One Pulse** surveys and **Kantar's TGI Consumer Analysis**.

CORE  YOUTH 





Summary

- 01.** Representation in advertising is seen to be confined to slim, conventionally attractive, white, middle class, and cis-gendered bodies. There is a clear demand for more body inclusive TV advertising, with almost 8 in 10 agree it is **important that TV advertisers are inclusive of all body types**, irrespective of their own body size.
- 02.** Mainstream media, brands, celebrities, and social media are thought to be one of the foundations of diet culture, or at least are responsible for its **pervasiveness into mainstream culture**.
- 03.** Notions of health are wrapped up in aesthetics; while some perceive 'healthy' to mean physical and mental balance, there is moral currency associated with "health" which prioritises thinness. **The primary reason people diet is aesthetically focused, often to lose weight or to achieve a certain look.**
- 04.** Less than 1 in 5 women and 1 in 4 men feel positive about the way they look. Diet culture has weaved its way into the lives of many, leading to **consistent self-critique and unhealthy, unsustainable dieting practices**. For some it can also lead to disordered eating and eating disorders.
- 05.** Some are **taking control back over their body** – this is more prevalent in young people, and is done via:
 - **Shifting food habits** to make more informed choices rather than drastic/ crash diets
 - **Exercising** to improve overall wellbeing (both physically and mentally) and to feel stronger
 - **Working towards body acceptance** – accepting our bodies for what they are and do, and embracing body diversity



01

BODY DIVERSITY IN TV ADVERTISING



Representation in advertising is seen to be confined to slim, conventionally attractive, white, middle class, and cis-gendered bodies

There is a lack of diversity within depictions of bodies; stretch marks, cellulite, wrinkles, spots and saggy boobs feature very little in advertising

- This is improving somewhat with some brands displaying a larger range of bodies e.g. Dove and some fashion brands like Misguided, GymShark and Nike

“ Though it is getting better, most of the times, those you see on adverts are skinny, conventionally attractive, perfect skin, no stretch marks, perky boobs etc. And that’s a very marginal group of people and doesn’t represent the masses. **It is unhealthy and messes with people’s idea of perfection** ”

- female, 25-34

Advertisement diversity

Advertising only shows people that look a 'certain' way

17%

83%

Advertising represents a wide range of body types

67%

33%

■ Disagree (1-2)

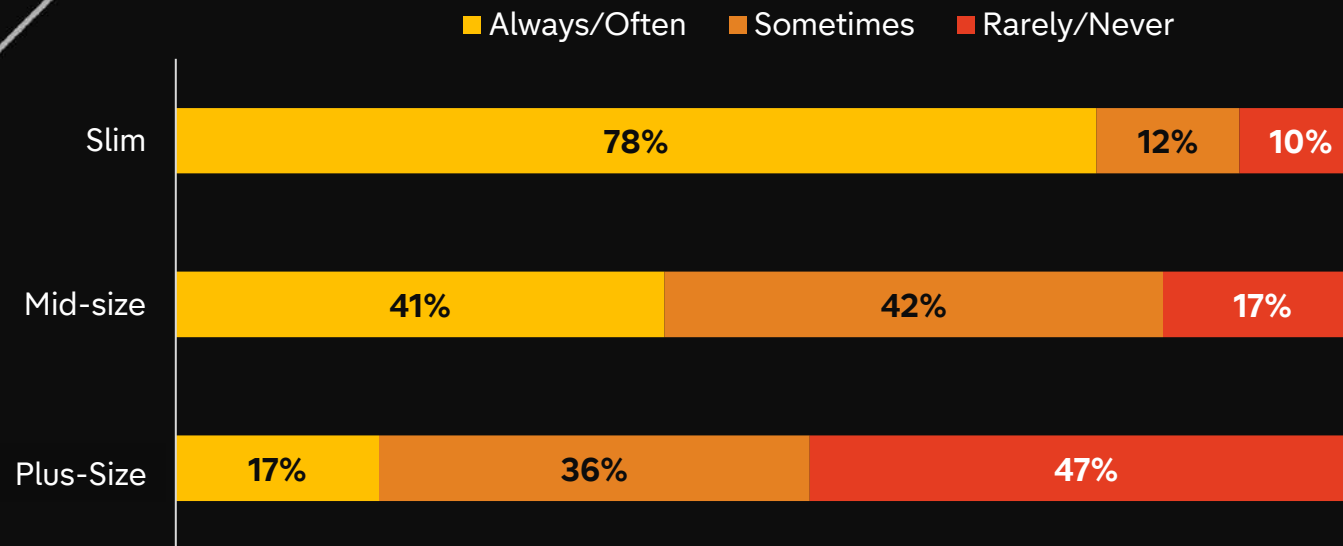
■ Agree (3-4)

Q. And thinking about brands' advertising please tell us how much you agree with the following... [base: 787]

As such, its unsurprising that people feel that plus-size representation is lacking in TV advertising

Almost half of those who see themselves as plus-size report rarely or never seeing their body type in TV advertising

Frequency of seeing one's own body type in TV advertising



Q. How often would you say you see your body type in TV advertising? [base: Slim n=116, Mid-size n=238, Plus-size n=146]

There is a clear demand for more body inclusive TV advertising...Almost 8 in 10 agree it is important that TV advertisers are inclusive of all body types, irrespective of their own body size

Audiences recognise the importance of embracing that **healthy bodies** don't all look the same and are aware that the lack of representation can lead to **negative mental-health outcomes** across the nation.

78%

agreed that its important for TV advertisers to be inclusive of all body types

"Image is important to many people and **healthy bodies come in many shapes and sizes.**" Female, 25-34, Plus-Size

82%

Of Plus-Size people agreed

"Because otherwise people with body types that are less commonly seen will have a **negative self-image** which can lead to **mental health** problems." Female, 21-24, Slim

76%

Of slim and Mid-Size people agreed

"**Especially in men.** It feels like bigger men aren't represented as much." Male, 25-34, Plus-Size

Q. Do you think it's important for TV advertisers to be inclusive of all body types; and why: [base: All n=486, Slim n=113, Mid-size n=233, Plus-size n=140]



The minority opposition to body inclusive advertising surfaces some interesting biases

Is TV advertising still catering to the male gaze?

Men

3x

more likely to **disagree** that TV advertisers should be inclusive of different body types **compared to women**

Why are there a minority that don't think body diversity is important?

*"No I don't think very obese people should be **glamourised** as its very unhealthy"*

For a minority, there is a perception that being inclusive of larger bodies will "glamorise" obesity. This perception speaks to a widespread **empathy gap**, fuelled by campaigns such as the 'war on obesity' which simplify and dehumanise, where plus-size people **simply being present** or shown as joyful is seen as **harmful**, when in fact **everyone** deserves to feel represented.

Why do some people think body diversity inclusivity is conditional?

Some of the responses suggested that the importance of being body inclusive '**depends**' on:

1) Whether the advertisement is relevant to the body type

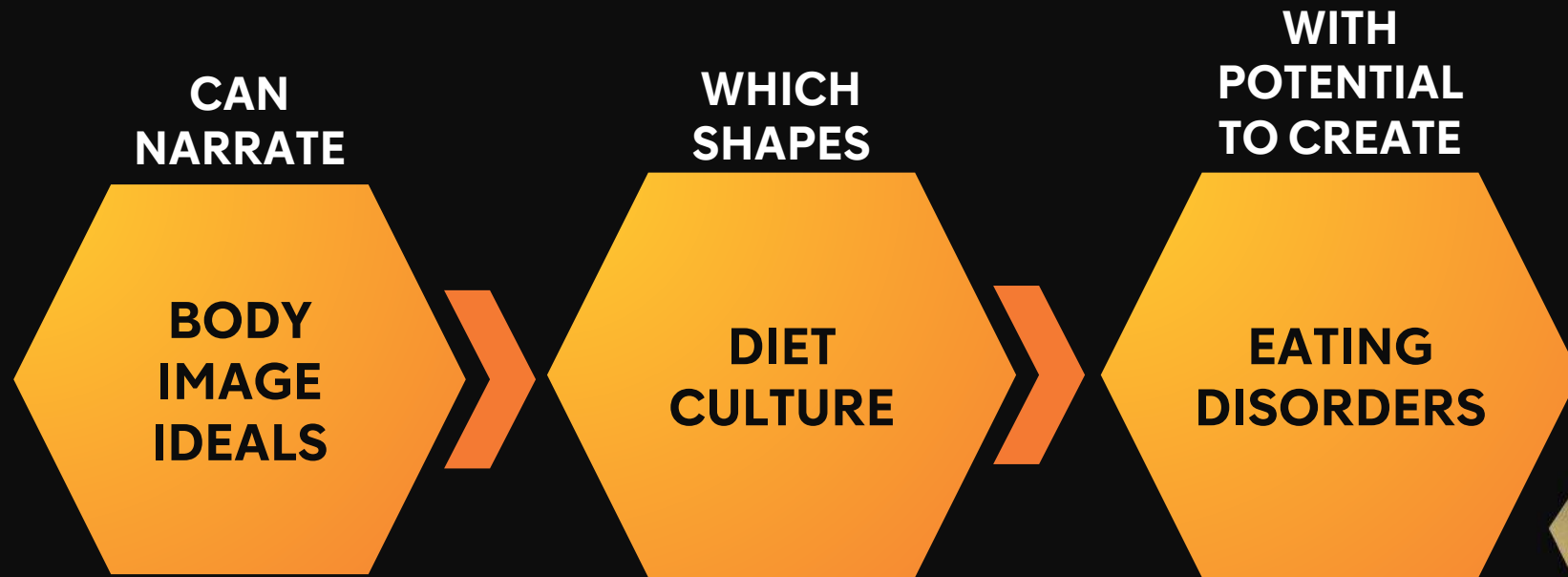
This resonates with the **unhelpful narrative** that certain body types should only be seen in certain spaces

2) Only if the body is "healthy"

This ignores the **fact** that **not all healthy bodies look the same**. It also insinuates that those who are struggling with health are **less worthy**, and should not be represented. This empathy gap is incredibly damaging and can fuel shame and drive eating disorders.

Q. Do you think it's important for TV advertisers to be inclusive of all body types; and why: [base: All n=486, Men n=192, Female n=294]

As an industry, we need to acknowledge the massive influence advertising and mainstream media have on society's image of itself





02

DIET CULTURE // BODY IMAGE:
AN EXPLORATION



Diet culture is a multifaceted concept.

For many it derives from media and brand outlets which perpetuate strict beauty standards by reinforcing dieting (and other forms of self-control) as the appropriate and desirable way of living, particularly for women.

Some see dieting as a functional way of regaining health whereas for many, dieting has negative connotations surrounding the moralisation of how one should and shouldn't eat...

“

Diet culture **equates one's wellbeing with image**, especially thinness. This means that being **thin is the priority** - even if this actually makes one ill. It can go as far as believing thinness means one is morally good etc

– female, 55-64

“

Diet culture means the counting of calories and reducing of food intake to a **toxic extent** which has been **reinforced by beauty standards** in the media

– female, 16-24

“

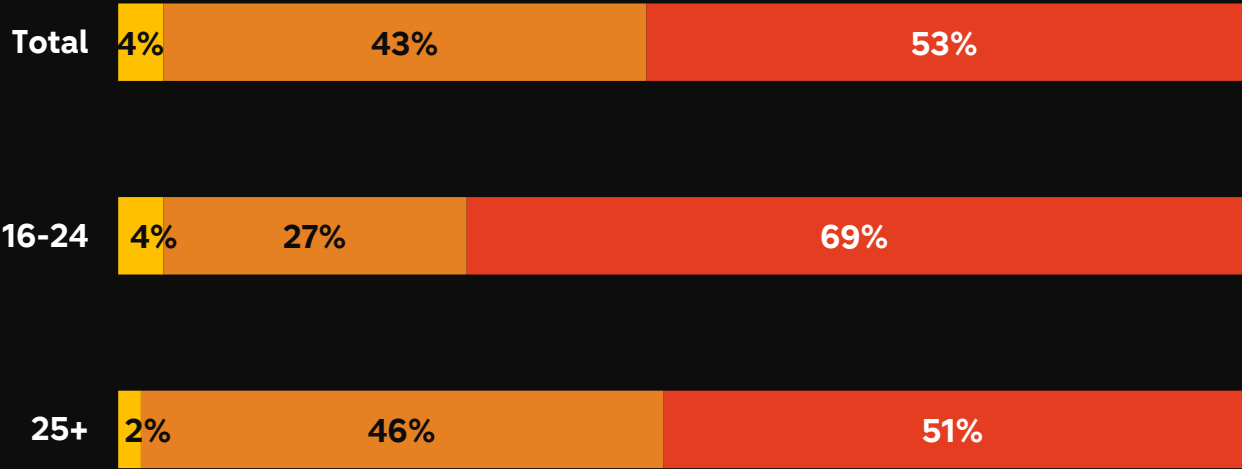
I absolutely hate the term diet. It implies a **short sharp burst** as opposed to a well-informed and accepted lifestyle change. Diets tend to be so harmful and unhealthy, and lead to a **worsened relationship with food**

– female, 16-24



Over half view diet culture as dangerous, this figure increases to 69% when looking at younger generations

Dangers of diet culture:



■ Not dangerous (1-3) ■ 4-7 ■ Very dangerous (8-10)



Diet culture is deeply engrained into society, informing biases and the way we think; it can therefore be difficult for people to perceive objectively

[base: 1139, 16-24: 113 25+: 1036, male: 492, female: 642]

The impact of diet culture can be grouped into 4 areas:

01. SITUATION

Diet culture perpetuates strict messages of how to look and live

02. REALISATION

People internalise these messages as relevant and essential to who they are or who they could be

03. ACTION

Consistent self-critique or being bullied by others resulting in dieting behaviours and disordered practices

04. EFFECT

Body dysmorphia, mental and physical illness and/ or perpetual self hatred

“When I was younger, I was **influenced by pictures and stories in the media** of thin bodied people either talking disparagingly about themselves, or from others commenting on them in a negative way. I **changed my eating habits** because of this as it led me to **believe someone of my weight was unworthy**. I still partially agree with my decision because I have **internalised those negative feelings** about myself.
– female, 16-24

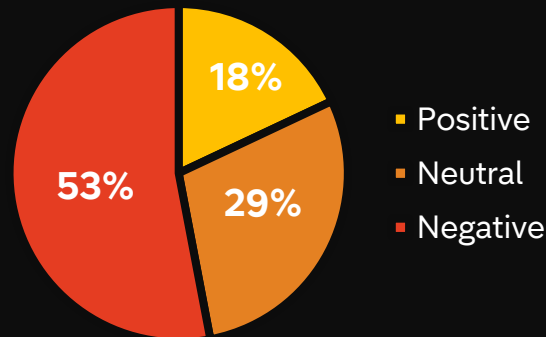
“It’s hard to not feel a way about your body. It’s **constantly pushed in our faces!** Adverts about gym and health, Instagram is all gym and health, same with most if not all social media. My reaction to the pressure depends, sometimes I work out and go on a health kick. Sometimes I just admit defeat and don’t care lol. **Makes me feel different depending on the day**. I hate the gym
– male, 16-24

Only 18% of women and 23% of men feel positively about their bodies

Women are 2x more likely to have negative perceptions of their body image than men

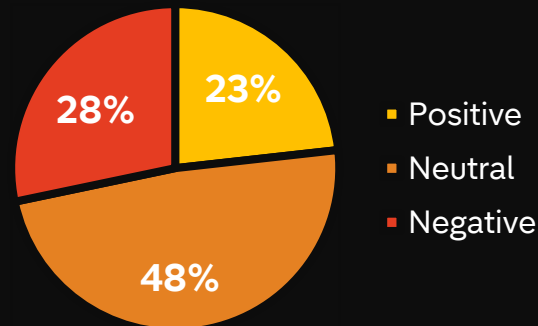
Feelings towards body:

Female:



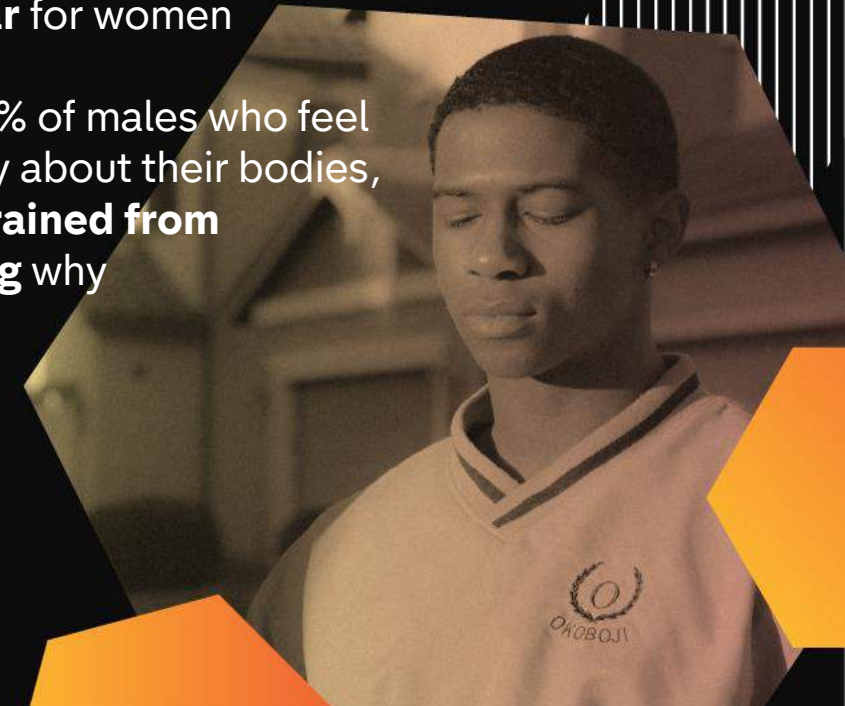
Feelings towards body:

Male:



Feelings of **shame and anxiety** surrounding one's body are widespread – this is particularly the case when in **swimwear** for women

Of the 28% of males who feel negatively about their bodies, many **refrained from disclosing** why



Q. How do you feel about the way you look (your body image) most of the time? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

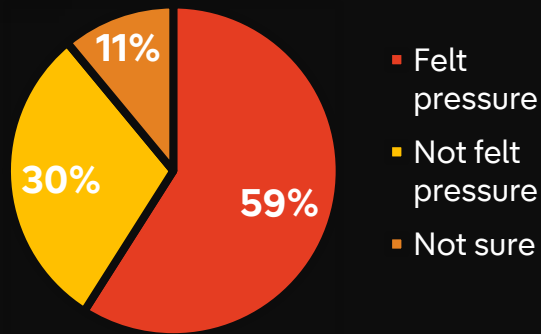
Women are 2x more likely to have felt pressure to look a certain way

This feeling stems for most from a **comparison to others** and a desire to *fit in* and to look *good enough*.

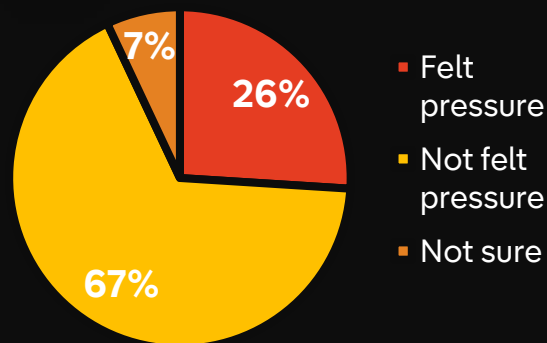
This pressure is often a product of multiple aspects (friends, family, work, tv and film etc), however **social media** has exacerbated it as it highlights and focuses on a thin beauty ideal – particularly for young people

Pressure felt to appear a certain way:

Female:



Male:



27% of women think there is an **ideal body type** vs only 13% of men



*I think my whole life genuinely since when I was in primary school, **I felt pressured to look a certain way**. Personally, all I ever feel is pressure that **I don't look good enough** or I don't look as good as my friends, and it makes me feel shit honestly.*

– female, 16-24



***Social fat shaming** drove me to crash diet and I destroyed my kidneys, and I still have **body image problems** because of it.*

– female, 35-44



Q. Do you ever feel pressure to look a certain way? Q. Do you think there's an ideal body type? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

For many, the pressure to strive for the body image 'ideal' of 'perfection' can seem **omnipresent** and **inescapable**

“

I feel quite neutral about my body, neither positive nor negative, but I still get **waves of self-hatred because of the way we pressure ourselves** and others to look a certain way. It makes me feel like I'm **fighting a losing battle because my body will never look like that**, and I don't want to spend my life struggling to be thin when there's infinitely more important things to be worrying about. It's disheartening to see that **diet culture is still so entrenched in our society** and I hope we can see change, though I doubt it.

– female, 16-24

I often **cave into the pressure because the ideal body type is so overly saturated** that it has become the new norm and **anything outside of this body shape has become abnormal**. On my more confident days this pressure makes me feel disgusted because I have younger siblings and I can't imagine how much more difficult it will be for them to accept that all humans have flaws and the bodies we see on social media are far from natural. Sometimes it makes me angry because I feel that **men also have unrealistic expectations of women**, and it makes us feel even more self-conscious.

– female, 16-24

”



Women are significantly more likely to say/think negative things about themselves in comparison to men

Phrases thought [I have said/ thought this]:



Female
Male

Q. We are now going to show you some phrases you/ people you know may or may not have said in the past, please select which best applies for each: [I have said/ thought this] [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

Almost 4 in 10 report feeling anxious and shameful about their appearance, however 4 in 10 also report feeling acceptance

Women are **more likely to feel negative emotions** such as **Anxiety, Shame & Depression**. While for positive emotions there is less differences between them.

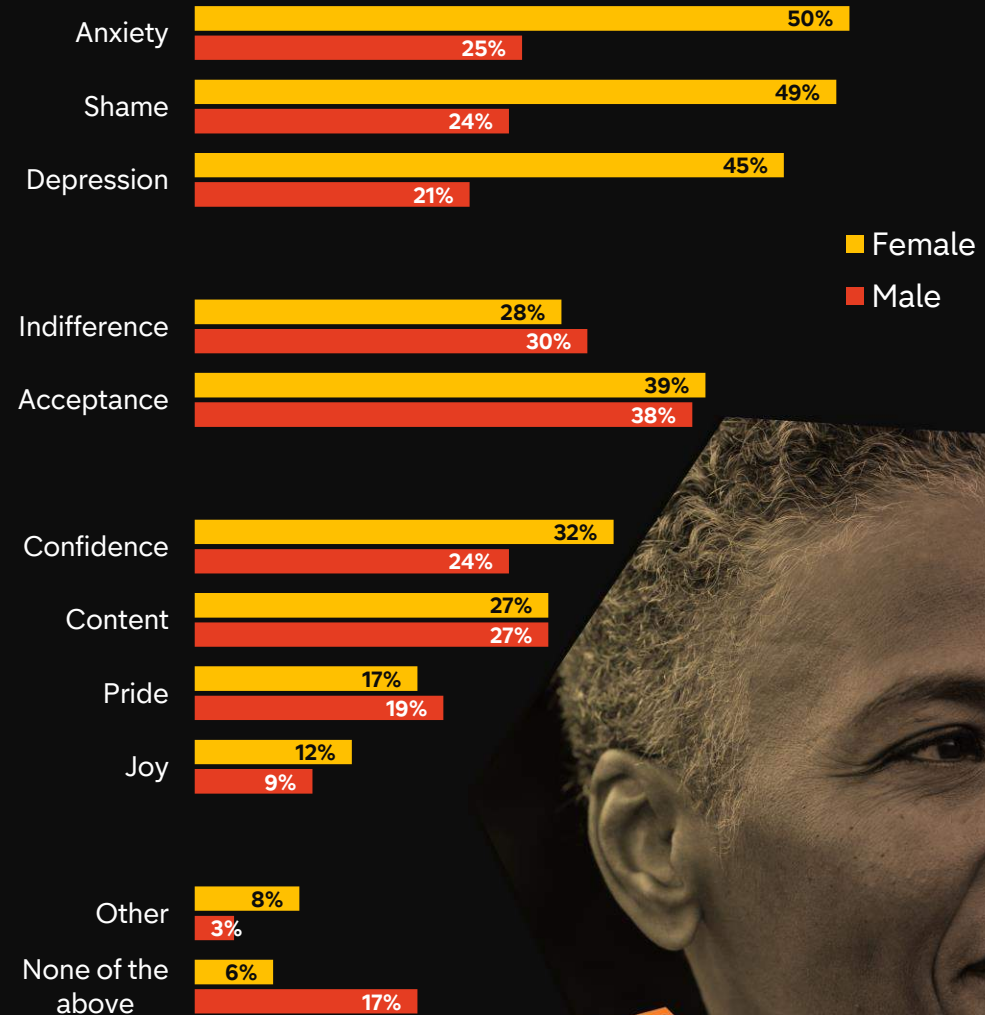
Men are **almost 3x as likely** to say they've felt none of these emotions.

Emotions felt due to appearance

NEGATIVE

NEUTRAL

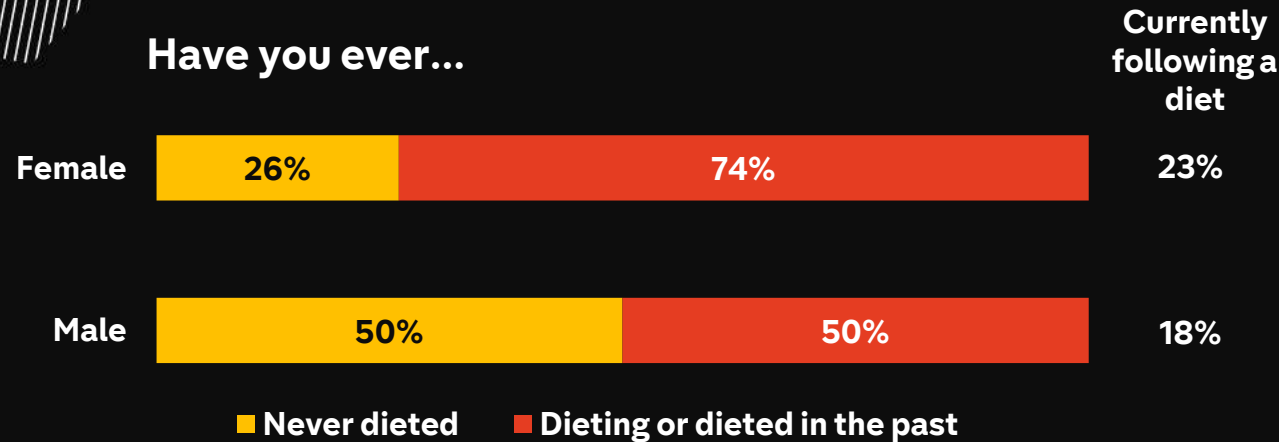
POSITIVE



Q. Have you ever felt any of the following emotions due to your appearance? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]



3/4 women and **1/2** men have dieted either now or in the past – and the primary motive is weight loss



Older age groups are more likely to use scales, as well as use them more regularly.

1 in 4 have never and would never diet due to watching the negative long term impacts diets have had on loved ones



*I have experienced other people dieting and their struggles, and personally from what I have seen I don't think it is a very healthy thing to do. **It causes a lot of mental struggles as well as physical struggles** when it doesn't work as fast as you want it to, or you aren't achieving the results you hoped. It is very much linked to body image in some cases.*

– female, 16-24



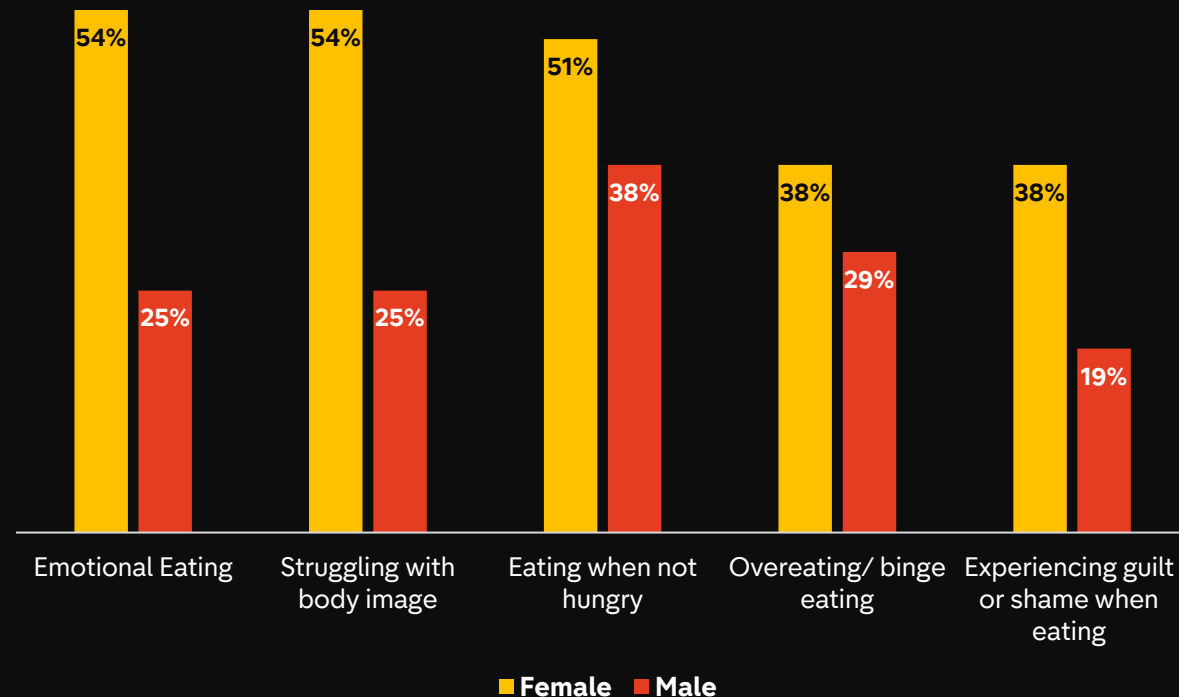
*Why did I diet? To lose weight, duh! **To be the size 6 girl that all the boys wanted** in school, to fit into those jeans I refused to sell, to make myself feel 'healthy'.*

– female, 25-34

Q. Have you ever followed a specific diet? [base: 1139, 16-24: 113 25+: 1036, male: 492, female: 642]

Women are significantly more likely to face challenges when looking at their relationship with food

Struggles associated with eating



2x more women than men struggle with emotional eating and body image.

The biggest challenge men face is eating when not hungry, whereas women are also more likely to struggle with emotional eating and body image.



Q. We now have a list of challenges people can face when looking at their relationship with food and diet. Please select which ones, if any, apply to you [base: 1139, 16-24: 113 25+: 1036, male: 492, female: 642]

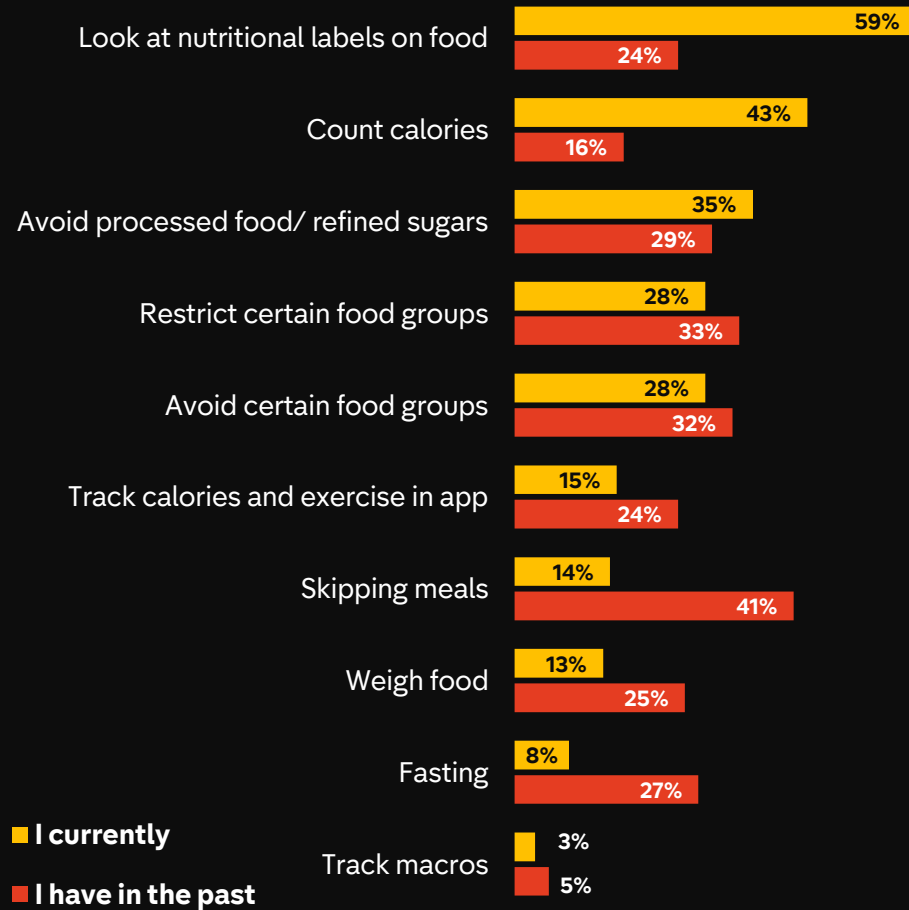


Diet culture blurs the lines between what is healthy and what *looks* 'good' – for many therefore, it is hard to define where a focus on health ends and diet culture begins...

“Healthy” means looking after and prioritising your physical and mental health

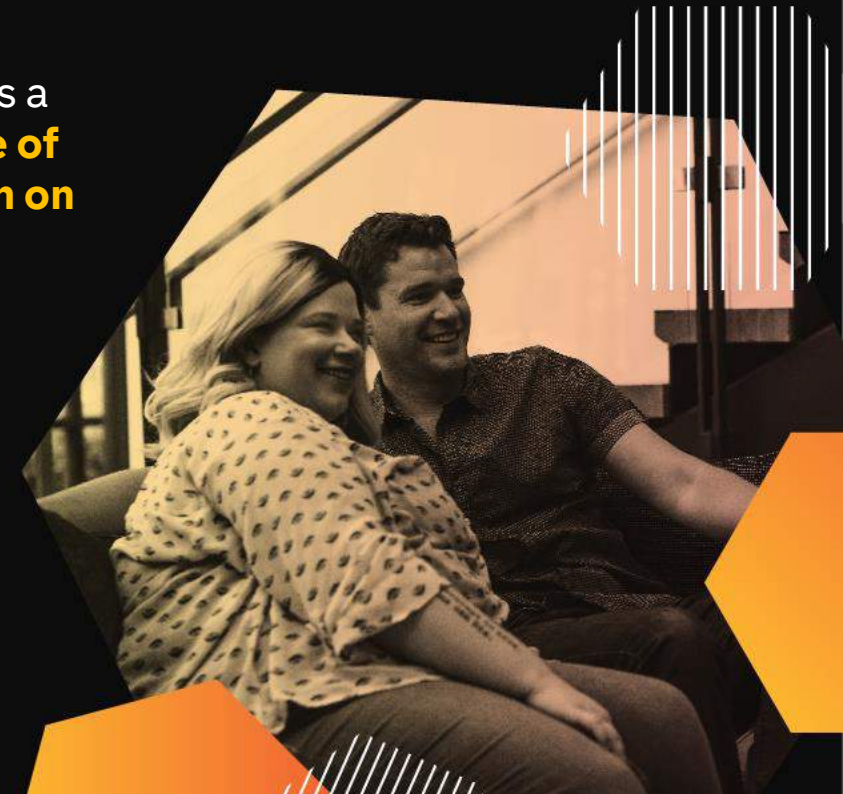
While being 'healthy' is not directly associated with physical appearance, many suggest that maintaining a certain a lower weight and thinner body does fit into the category of 'healthy' for them. For some, particularly women, terms such as 'healthy' and 'slim' can be interchangeable, suggesting a perception that only one specific body type can be healthy.

Dieting behaviors:



The prevalence of **skipping meals, fasting and weighing food** has declined

For many, dieting now takes a different form, being **aware of nutrition** and **cutting down on certain foods** are more prevalent behaviours.

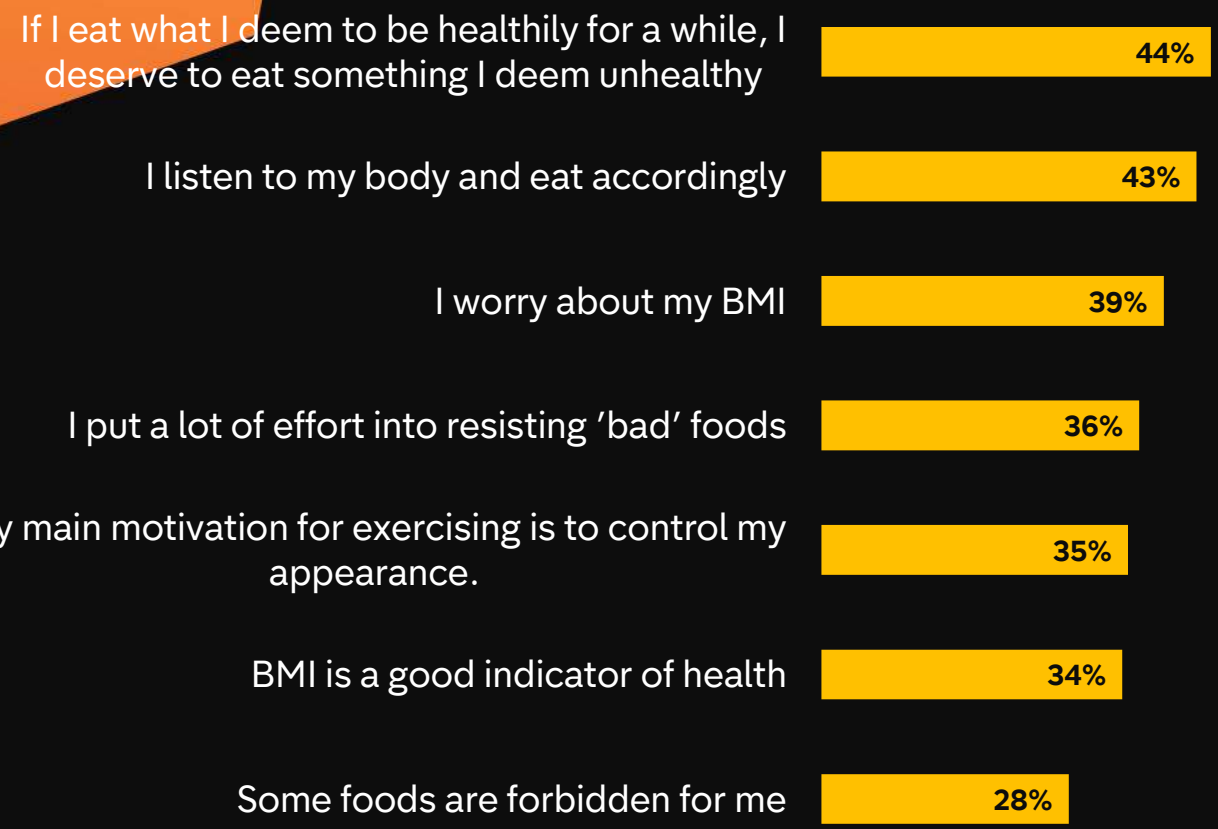


Q. Please select which of the following you do or have done in the past [base: 1139, 16-24: 113 25+: 1036, male: 492, female: 642]



2 in 5 'reward themselves' for eating 'healthily' with something 'unhealthy', 2 in 5 also listen to their body and eat accordingly

Agreement with views [top 2 box – agree]



are going to show you some views people may or may not align with. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with them [base: 1139, 16-24: 113 25+: 1036, male: 492, female: 642].

Those who feel positive/neutral towards their body report feelings of acceptance

Body neutrality means accepting that you will have good days and bad days, and focusing on the body's functions (i.e. keeping in good health) rather than aesthetics²

The body positivity movement³ has also had an impact on people – particularly the young – in learning how to love themselves

“ I have **neutral feelings** about my body- the **same amount of positivity and negativity**. Can be good and bad depending on the day.
– other, 16-24

There needs to be more **acceptance** of all body types as good enough. ”
– female, 55-64

→ **33%** of 16-24 year olds report feeling positively about their body image, and **63%** do not believe there's an ideal body type – we can assume this is an effect of this movement which has been prevalent on social media in recent years



Q. How do you feel about the way that you look (your body image) most of the time? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]² Deralto (2020) What is body neutrality? And why is it so hard to achieve? Swell by Dame <https://swell.damewellness.co/what-is-body-neutrality/>³ Cohen, Newton-Job and Slater (2020) The case for body positivity on social media: Perspectives on current advances and future directions . Journal of Health Psychology March 2020

For the majority, exercise is used as a means to improve overall wellbeing, but weight loss is a leading factor for almost half

Reasons for exercising [top 4]

FITNESS	72%	Improving fitness is the most selected reason for exercising
MENTAL HEALTH	54%	The release of endorphins through exercise helps clear the mind, de-stress and re-energise people – it simply makes people feel good
BALANCED LIFESTYLE	52%	Exercise is used to stave off health issues and build up immune strength
WEIGHT LOSS	48%	Those who select exercise for weight loss are often using it to 'balance out' (i.e. burning calories to counteract food that they've eaten)

Young people are more likely to be aware of movements such as Tally Rye's 'Train Happy', which promote intuitive movement and sustainable, joyful exercise



Q. We are now going to show you a list of reasons people might exercise. Please select all of the reasons in the list that apply to you. [base: 1139, 16-24: 113 25+: 1036, male: 492, female: 642]

A look at body diversity intersectionality

In this study we found some significant differences between groups:

ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

Ethnically diverse people vs white people are more likely to consider **diet culture as very dangerous** (69% vs. 51%)

More likely to have felt emotions of **Joy** (19% vs. 9%) and **Confidence** when it comes to body image (41% vs. 26%)

More likely to **avoid certain food groups** (74% vs 59%)

More likely to **fast** (46% vs 33%)

More likely to **skip meals** (72% vs 53%)

DISABLED PEOPLE

More likely to face challenges such as:

- **Struggling with body image** (46% vs 37%)
 - **Emotional** eating (48% vs 38%)
 - **Overeating/binge** eating (42% vs 32%)
 - **Undereating** (18% vs 9%)
- **Avoiding social occasions** because of food (14% vs 7%)

More likely to feel very **negative** about the way they look (21% vs 10%) and more likely to have felt emotions of **Depression** when it comes to appearance (46% vs 29%)

More likely to say they **don't exercise** (33% vs 15%) and more likely to say the main reason they do exercise is to help with a **physical condition** (22% vs 6%)

LGBTQIA+

Those in the LGBTQIA+ community vs. heterosexuals are more likely to struggle with **body image** (58% vs. 37%), **undereating** (22% vs. 10%), **avoiding social occasions** due to food (19% vs. 8%) and **struggling to recognising own hunger** (21% vs. 9%).

More likely to say they **hate their body** (51% vs 35%) and more likely to **feel shame** and/or **anxiety** about how they look.

LGBTQIA+ community are significantly more likely to believe that **social media, friends, parents** and **childhood experiences** are key factors on the development and maintenance of eating disorders/ disordered eating.

A look at body diversity intersectionality

In this study we found some significant differences between groups:

C2DE ADULTS

More likely to **not feel pressure** to look a certain way (58% vs. ABC1s 48%)

C2DE Adults are twice as likely to **not exercise** (33% vs. 15%)

More likely to have **never checked nutritional labels** on food (22% vs. 15%)

Less likely to have said/ heard **diet related comments** (e.g. I need to lose weight!)

C2DE's are significantly more likely to believe that access to **health care & support, workplace/place of education, and current/previous illnesses** are key factors on the development and maintenance of eating disorders/ disordered eating.

ABC1 ADULTS

More likely to **count calories** (60% vs. 51%)

More likely to **check nutritional labels** on food (85% vs. 78%)

More likely to **categorise foods as good/bad** (62% vs. 54%)

More likely to face challenges such as:

- Experiencing **guilt/shame** with eating (31% vs 22%)
- Constantly **thinking about food** (22% vs 16%)
- Feeling like they need to **earn their food through exercise** (18% vs 8%)
- **Crash dieting** for specific events or holidays (11% vs 6%)

base: 1139, C2DE 268/183, LGBTQIA+ 102/74, ethnically diverse 46/32, disability 249/171. Classifications based on occupation of the head of the household.



03

EATING DISORDERS

Trigger warning: This section of the report explores the realities of living with eating disorders and the surrounding issues, please be advised that it may be upsetting to those struggling.

A note on types of eating disorders

Whilst not an exhaustive list, these are a few of the most prominent eating disorders, taken from eating disorder charity Beat's website.

For more information, visit www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Anorexia Nervosa

People with anorexia limit how much they eat and drink. They may develop "rules" around what they feel they can and cannot eat, as well as things like when and where they'll eat.

Bulimia Nervosa

People with bulimia are caught in a cycle of eating large quantities of food (called bingeing), and then trying to compensate for that overeating by vomiting, taking laxatives or diuretics, fasting, or exercising excessively (called purging).

Binge Eating Disorder

People with Binge Eating Disorder eat very large quantities of food without feeling like they're in control of what they're doing. Evidence suggests it is more common than other eating disorders.

Orthorexia

Orthorexia refers to an unhealthy obsession with eating "pure" food. Food considered "pure" or "impure" can vary from person to person. As with other eating disorders, the eating behaviour involved – "healthy" or "clean" eating in this case – is used to cope with negative thoughts and feelings, or to feel in control.

Eating disorders represent the most dangerous effect of diet culture

Eating disorders are understood by respondents to be any sort of unhealthy relationship or obsession with food which can cause chronic overeating, under eating and impact exercise

75%

believe that people of any age can develop an eating disorder

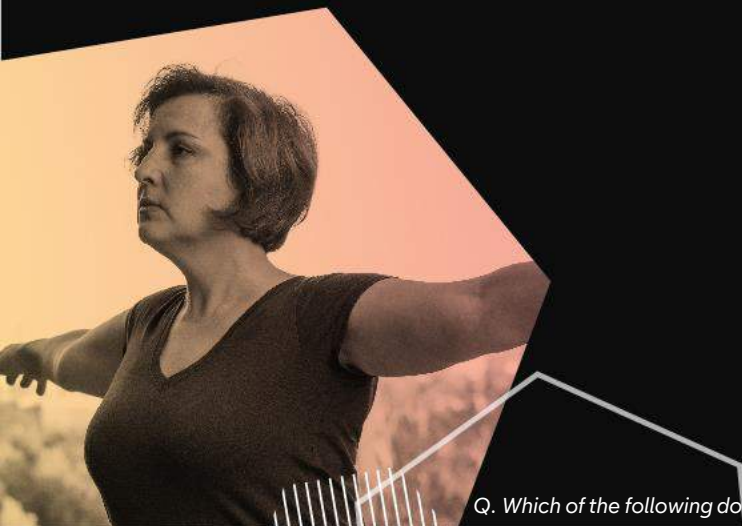
“ **Diet culture celebrates thinness** – it normalises the restriction of food and following of unhealthy diets. For some this can **escalate massively into an eating disorder.**
– female, 35-44

“ One of **diet culture’s biggest effects is that it can cause people to develop eating disorders** such as anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, all of which are serious mental illnesses.
– female, 16-24

“ I believe that anyone of any age or sex can be affected by eating disorders. **Eating disorders do not discriminate** because they have such a wide range of influences.
– female, 16-24

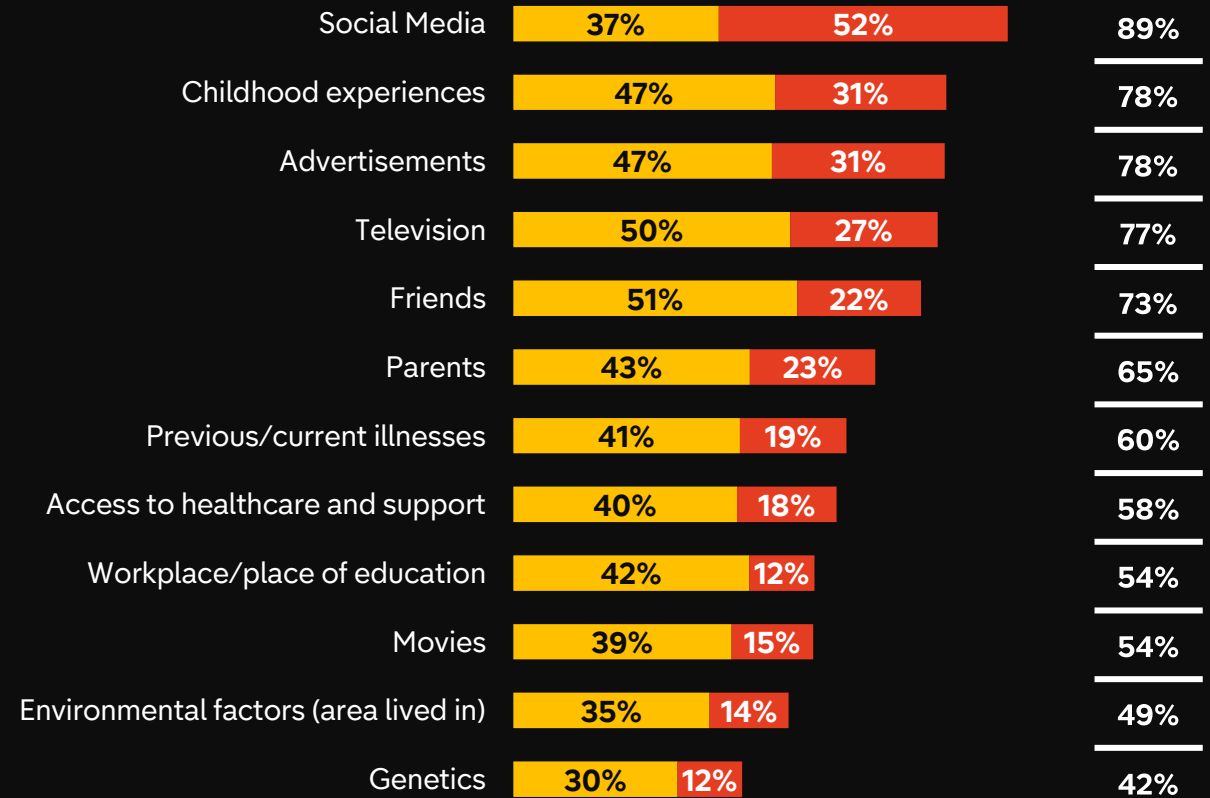
Q. Who, if anybody, is most affected by eating disorders/ disordered eating? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

Social media, TV and advertising have the biggest influence on the development and maintenance of eating disorders



Eating Disorder influences

Top 2 box – a lot of / major



■ Influence ■ Major influence

Q. Which of the following do you think can have an influence on the development and maintenance of eating disorders/ disordered eating? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

Disordered Eating is a less well-known term; those who do know it understand it to mean irregular eating patterns which sit outside of the definition of non-disordered eating

To many, disordered eating encompasses any irregularities with eating like rigid rituals or routines, feelings of shame or guilt associated with eating or not listening to hunger cues – a challenge that 51% of females face



Described as a “precursor to eating disorders”, having disordered eating behaviours can be a slippery slope to the development of an eating disorder





Of the people we spoke to...

13%

currently have or have had an eating disorder

This figure rises to **19% with 16-24 year olds**

There is an even more significant difference when looking at gender, with **20% of females** vs 4% of males

55%

know someone who has or had an eating disorder

This figure rises to **69% with 16-24 year olds**

There is an even more significant difference when looking at gender, with **62% of females** vs 45% of males

Whilst these groups may have a higher proportion of cases, that is not to say eating disorders only impact young women. They can impact anyone - of all ages, genders and backgrounds - they do not discriminate, and they don't only look one way. We should also remember that some groups may feel less comfortable sharing this information.



Q. Please let us know which answer option best applies to you. If you do not feel comfortable answering this question, please select the final answer option.

Q. And do you know anyone who has/had an eating order/ disordered eating? Again, if you do not feel comfortable asking this question, please select the final answer option.[base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

We asked those who have had, or know someone who's suffered from an eating disorder what they would like people to understand...

- "Having an eating disorder **doesn't mean you have to be skinny**; eating disorders can impact people regardless of weight, age, gender, or race"
- "Eating disorders are **not diseases of vanity**, or the fault of the sufferer but serious mental health conditions"
- "**Fat people are not lazy**"
- "Eating disorders are **more common** than most people assume"

Eating disorder experiences...

“ I was a fat kid and was incessantly picked on for it. I struggled eating in public, and it just got worse as I got older. When I was seventeen it just seemed to get particularly bad - I couldn't eat anything in public for fear of being judged, at one point I ate an apple a day, I would spend three hours a day on Just Dance YouTube tutorials etc. **I had an intervention where my mum just cried saying she was going to call an ambulance to send me away for help. That was sort of a turning point for me, and I slowly improved.** In my first year of uni I incessantly tracked everything, locked away food etc. It wasn't coming from a place of trying to be thin but trying to be fit. To be fair I did get very fit but it just wasn't sustainable or healthy mentally. I also have had issues in the past of bingeing and purging when I get very stressed. **I get bumps here and there but generally I'm on a far healthier and mindful path with food. It's not the enemy anymore but sustenance and just enjoyment.** ”

- female, 16-24

Eating disorder experiences...

“ I don't know how it started, I think it was about five years ago though. It made me full when I was eating after just a little bit, which gave me anxiety about going out and worried me that I would never be able to enjoy food again. **I remember involuntarily vomiting some mornings after breakfast, which made me depressed that I was this way.** I don't know how it stopped, but over time it just became less of an issue ”
– male, 16-24

“ I have suffered from anorexia since I was 17 (nearly 7 years now) and have had ups and downs throughout these years. **In school I felt pressure from social media and from my peers to lose weight as I thought I would be “more attractive” and more liked.** As I lost so much weight, I became obsessed with cutting out any food I enjoyed until I didn't want to eat anything. I became obsessed with weight and weighing myself and never wanted to socialise or do anything that involved food or eating. As a result, I lost so many friends and missed out on so many experiences and opportunities in life.
– female, 16-24 ”



04

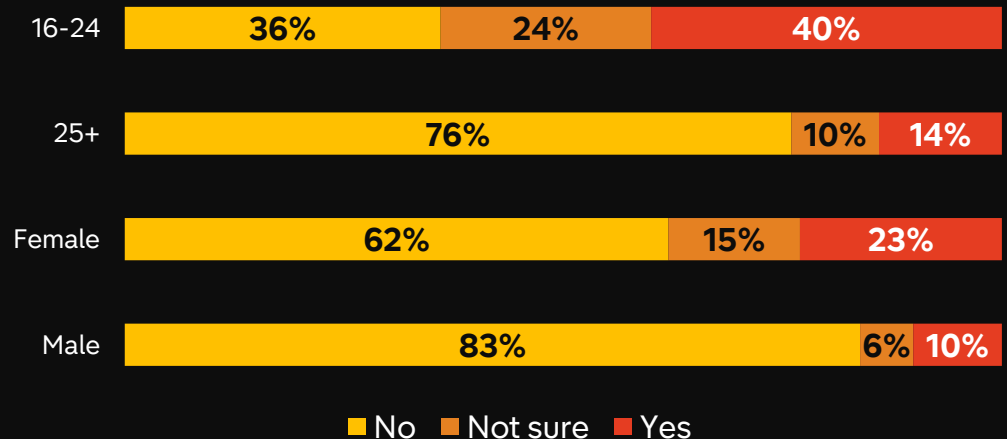
INFLUENCES: THE ROLE OF THE
MEDIA, CELEBRITY, SOCIAL MEDIA &
BRANDS

16-24 year olds are significantly more likely to recall changing something about themselves due to something or someone they've seen in the media

Of those who have changed something about themselves, they recall feeling pressured by the media to lose weight, get plastic surgery, go to the gym or dress differently to fit in with the ideal image

While most do not regret the changes they made, they are surprised upon their own realisation of how easily influenced they are

Changed anything about themselves due to media influence...



Findings from this research encourage us to hypothesise that the numbers reported do not consider the fact that many do not recognise the impact media may or may not have had on their need to change something about themselves

Q. Have you ever changed something about yourself because of something or someone you've seen in the media? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]



Misinformation

Widespread misinformation surrounding diets and health means that many don't know who to trust

Misinformation from media outlets (and the internet in general) telling people what being healthy means, what constitutes unhealthy, the latest fad diet, exercise trend (promising instant results) is confusing and exhausting

- Our community members are hyper-aware of the spread of fake news and the dangers, but this doesn't make it any easier to navigate as diet culture is continuously pushed in their face



Health experts have continuously warned individuals of the dangers of fad diets and fake health news – they acknowledge it's overwhelming and easy to get sucked into a trend¹

“ I think it can be very **dangerous when influential people are spreading misinformation to vulnerable or impressionable people** ”
– female, 25-34

¹https://www.farminguk.com/news/fake-news-is-a-health-risk-nutrition-experts-warn_45641.html

Celebrities: Bad or good?

Celebrities have a lot of power in influencing the way people feel about their bodies; and in society today people feel that they need to think very carefully about whether the impact they're having is positive, or negative

⊗ NEGATIVE

The promotion of unrealistic lifestyles, bodies and heavily edited images sets the bar very high for many people

16-24s called out the Kardashians as putting young people at risk of developing unhealthy relationships with food and their bodies

✓ POSITIVE

When celebrities show themselves looking natural with no make-up or filters it creates a sense of solidarity with fans and promotes self-acceptance/ body positivity

This is strengthened when celebs speak about their own struggles - Jameela Jamil, Stacey Solomon and Lizzo were singled out as showing the realities of their lives (and bodies) on social media giving hope to many



82% feel TV and media are responsible for upholding diet culture; they are consumed daily and have a significant reach



Some believe mass media and its advertising has a vested interest in promoting diet culture due to their ability to monetise it

TV not only reaches a significant amount of people but also has a significant impact on the way people see their bodies; people explain how they learned to look at their own bodies through seeing how TV portrays different body types

Love Island and similar shows were mentioned as particularly harmful – glamorising and sexualising slim and muscular bodies, giving viewers (especially the young) unrealistic standards to compare themselves

TV/Media responsibility [top 2 box – agree / strongly agree]

Total	16-24	25+	Male	Female
82%	89%	81%	75%	86%

“TV/Media have a responsibility because they have the **biggest platform to reach the most people**. I don't think they are doing enough to stop diet culture. **There are too many adverts encouraging people to lose weight**. I understand this is a global problem but don't think mass dieting is the way forward. The companies are in the business simply to make money.”
- female, 65-74

Q. Firstly, please tell us how much you agree with the statements? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

81%

see **social media** platforms as responsible for upholding diet culture and feel they need more rigid content control

Social media can have severe negative impacts on the way people view themselves, particularly young people

16-24 year olds acknowledge that *even they* only post the 'best version of themselves' and speak to how this is a toxic culture that requires more policing from platforms

Instagram and **TikTok** are seen as particularly harmful in creating unrealistic body expectations due to the the filtering and editing of photos which creates standards that are impossible to meet in reality

- For females this takes place in terms of make-up/ face structures, and body shape
- For males, this can take form through 'gym culture'

People do however recognise that these platforms are also great places for movements such a body positivity to grow, and appreciate that there are opportunities to follow influencers/ celebrities who spread positive messages.

Social media responsibility [top 2 box – agree / strongly agree]

Total	16-24	25+	Male	Female
81%	91%	80%	76%	85%

“ There needs to be something done that **eradicates accounts that promote negative diet culture and something to stop people from thinking the filtered versions they see online are the reality of people's bodies**. There just feels like there's a twisted competition element to social media where the most attractive people win but we need to be teaching kids that you don't have to look like what you see a Kardashian look like on Instagram to be deemed wanted and beautiful and successful. ”
– female, 16-24

Q. Firstly, please tell us how much you agree with the statements? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

78% feel **brands** are responsible for upholding diet culture; many note that some brands are moving in the right direction

Brands' promotional processes and their actual products have a wide influence over the opinions we form

PROMOTIONAL PROCESSES

Models are often extremely slim and flawless which perpetuates unrealistic standards and exacerbates the desire for people to look a certain way. The use of photoshop and airbrushing enhances this.

PRODUCTS

Brands that sell weight loss products can be extremely damaging, especially when promoted by trusted individuals (influencers) to young (impressionable) audiences.



Brands responsibility [top 2 box – agree / strongly agree]

Total	16-24	25+	Male	Female
78%	91%	76%	71%	83%

“ I suppose dieting brands such as Slimfast make **money from encouraging people to go on diets to lose weight**. Other bigger brands encourage diet culture when they only use **size zero models**, however I know that lots of companies now show a wider array of body shapes and sizes to be more relatable and represent their customers.
– female, 16-24 ”

Q. Firstly, please tell us how much you agree with the following statements? [base: 787, 16-24: 90, 25+: 696, male: 336, female: 447]

What does this mean for brands?

At Channel 4 we have a marketing with meaning spectrum, to help brands who are considering creating more purposeful advertising on that journey. So how does everything we've learnt about body diversity and diet culture impact brands, and where on the spectrum could brands get most involved?

MORE BRANDS

LESS BRANDS

SPREAD JOY

Think This Girl Can, different bodies laughing, loving life and moving in a joyful way.

FACILITATE TOGETHERNESS

Focus on what unites us, not what divides us. Help society overcome the empathy gap when it comes to perceptions of overweight people.

REFLECT SOCIETY

Representation matters. It's time for brands to portray a diverse array of bodies within advertising. People in all body types should be able to exist, be happy and represented.

EDUCATE YOURSELVES & OTHERS

Educate both internally (in your teams) and externally (to your consumers). Listen to those in your business who are struggling & provide support where possible.

TAKE A STAND

To really take a stand, brands should think carefully about who they partner with, pushing for inclusive representation, but also not working with brands who perpetuate diet culture where possible.



Thank you



Beat
Eating Disorders

 **Helpline**
0808 801 0677

 **Studentline**
0808 801 0811

 **Youthline**
0808 801 0711

Our Helplines are open 365 days a year from 9am-8pm during the week, and 4pm-8pm on weekends and bank holidays.

 @beatED

CORE 
YOUTH 

If you have been impacted by any of the issues mentioned in the report, you can find information & support at <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk>
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/body-image/>