

DISGRACEFUL



SEX IS SOLD OUT BY AMBER WEYMAN

Amber Weyman challenges the false ideals within mass marketing and advertising that promote a dangerously distorted reality – the ideal woman that doesn't exist.

DISGRACEFUL Q&A WITH EMILY KING

The artist behind the cover, Emily King, talks starting a business, female empowerment, and the strong women represented in her nude paintings.

DYING TO STAY ALIVE BY ALICE CROUCH

Alice shares the intimate details of how she fought her way back from a lesser known disorder that found her almost dying in order to feel worthy of being alive.



WARNING

The content you are about to see might just change your life.

It may empower you, encourage you and embolden you to do all the things you've only dreamed of doing – until now.

By the time you're done reading, you might just be ready to embrace yourself exactly as you are, to throw away the scales for good and to build the business empire you always imagined you'd own one day too.

Here at Disgraceful, we stand for every woman who has ever been made to feel she's not yet small enough, pleasing enough or quiet enough. Those who're told they're too loud, too powerful or take up too much space in the world.

This volume is something we celebrate, and we're passionate about showing strong women just how valuable they are.

Never again will you feel less than.

There's something 'disgraceful' to be celebrated in all of us.

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Welcome to issue one of Disgraceful.

My name's Melissa, Founder and Editor-in-Chief here at the magazine, and I'd like to personally take a moment to thank you for joining us on our Disgraceful journey. When I tell people Disgraceful was formed from an idea I had in a lockdown queue for Tesco, I wasn't kidding – yet the force behind the magazine manifested itself years prior.

At eighteen, I left college with an abundance of ideas but no actual idea of where to take them. I was working at my local supermarket at the time and had recently been made a Duty Manager; the pay was good, I enjoyed the job and the long shifts were made up for by the people I worked with. However, despite my job role, and the differentiating uniform that came with it, it was clear that the majority of customers (often men) who came into the shop had a very hard time accepting I could be in charge when I was a woman.

From derogative nicknames to old men who thought they had a right to 'do as they please' when around me, my experience in management was far from similar to those of my male colleagues. I left this job after a few years, but the small string of retail jobs I had following this role proved to be no different.

The expectation set out by my male counterparts at work was to shut up and put up, an attitude I soon came to realise is echoed throughout every corner of our society; a society made in the best interests of men. 64% of women have experienced microaggressions at work, including sexism, racism and elusive comments. Women are three times more likely to consider leaving a job due to this issue; an issue that, by the age of twenty-one, I had already experienced more than once.

This needs to change.

Disgraceful sets out to claim space in this world where women are expected to do the opposite; in a world where women are pushed to be thinner, talk less and smile more. Disgraceful is for every woman who sets out to build her own empire; the only expectations in sight, are the ones she sets for herself. For our readers, our writers and the team who have worked extensively to bring this publication to life, Disgraceful is a place to be brave, expressive, inspired; a place to figure out exactly who you are without fear of societal pressures or constraints telling you to be otherwise.

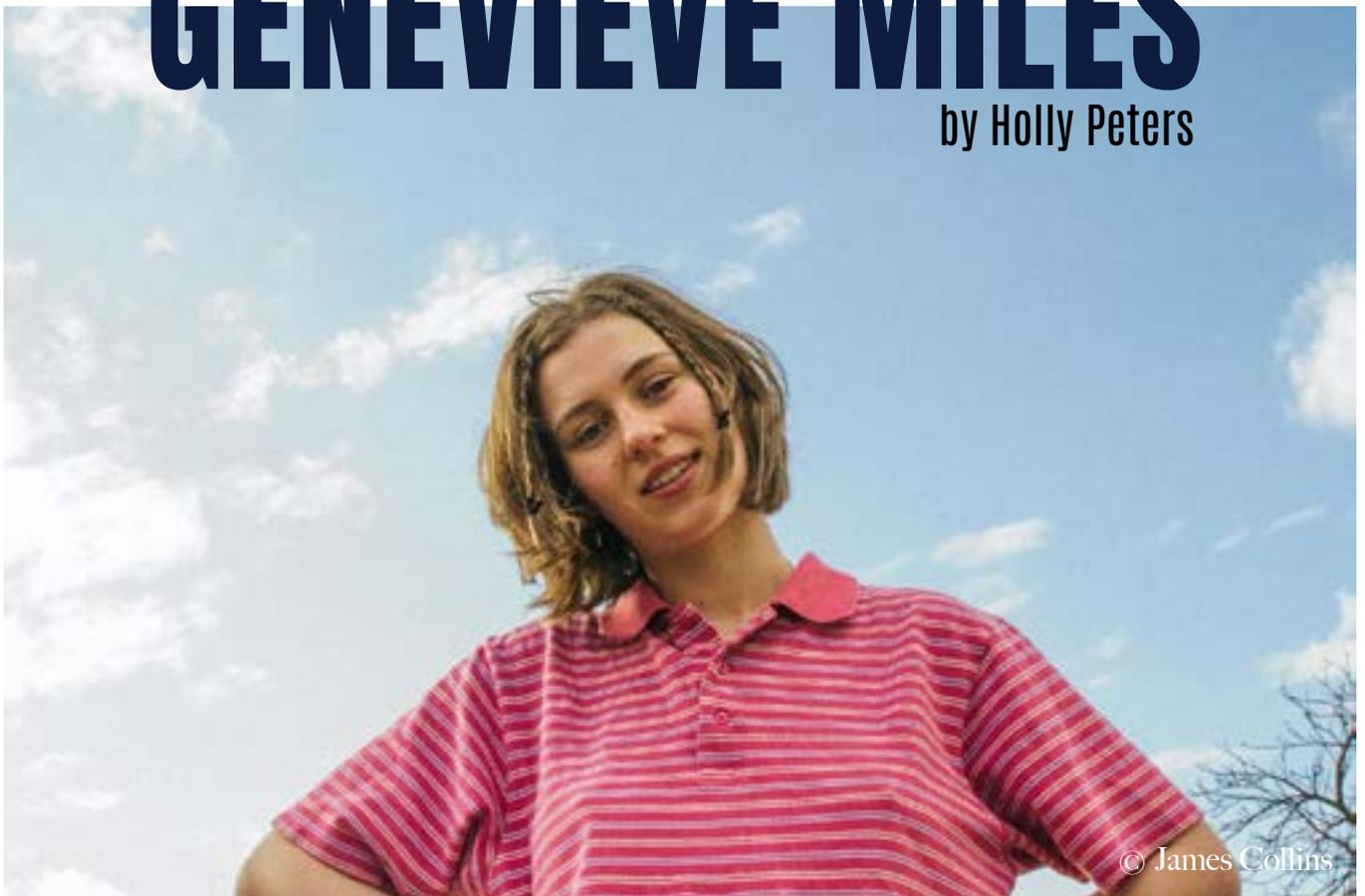
We are powerful; we are loud; we are strong; we are entrepreneurs, business owners, leaders, mothers.
We are confident; we are disgraceful.

And you can't repress a disgraceful woman.

**Melissa Hawkins,
Founder and Editor-in-Chief**

MUSIC SPOTLIGHT: GENEVIEVE MILES

by Holly Peters



This year has been the whirlwind none of us were ready for. We're all having to change and adapt constantly, and the music industry has taken plenty of hits. But for Genevieve Miles, indie-pop artist from Birmingham, the last few months have been a chance to re-evaluate what success means to her, allowing her to reclaim her love for music as her own.

"It felt really good to release new music with Magic Man. I learn so much every time I release music and this time was no different," says Genevieve. "It was also a good challenge because I've really found power in honesty this year; whether in my lyrics, or telling the truth in what I want when in the studio. Releasing songs with this brutal honesty rather than just trying to be polite was new."

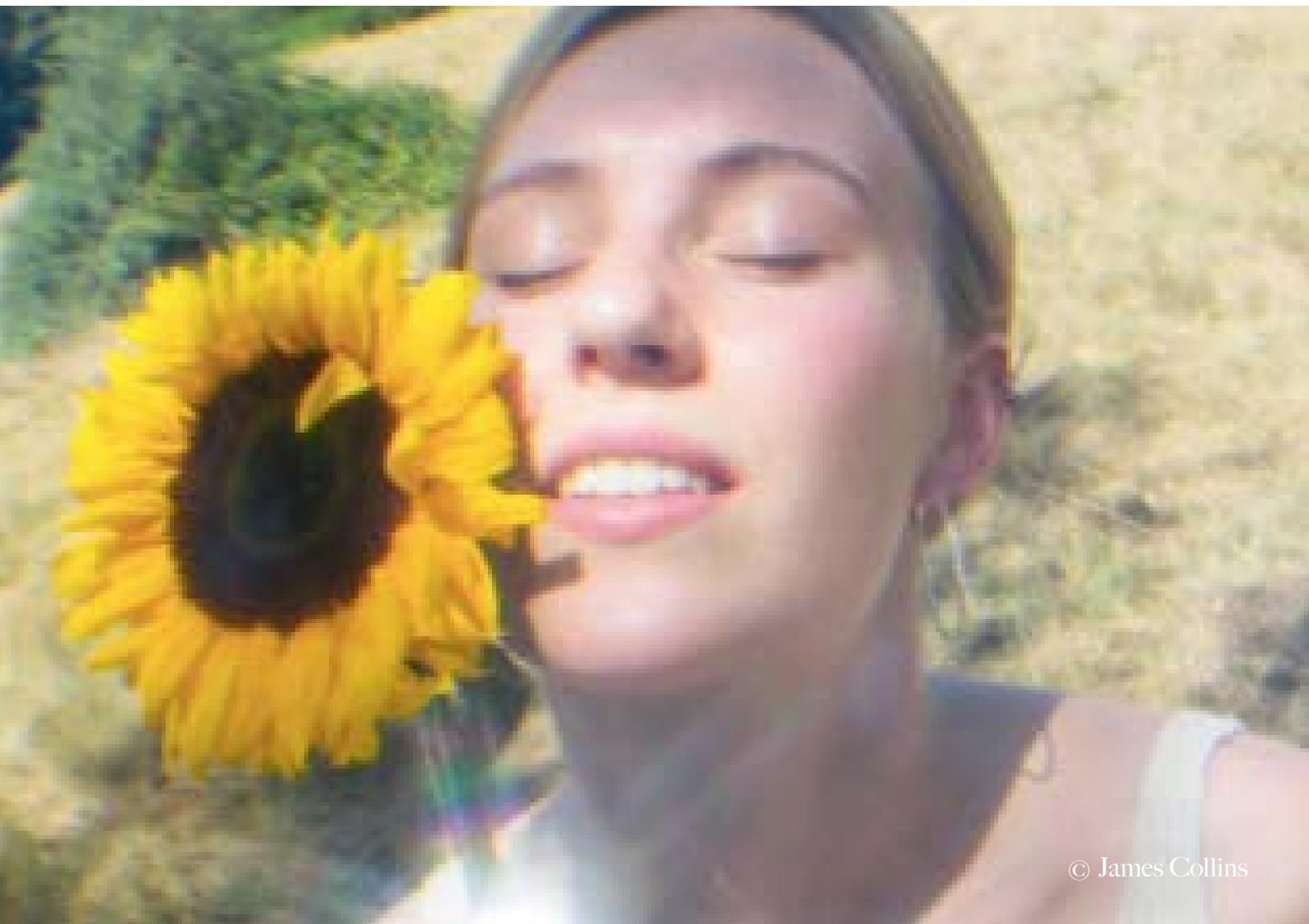
"An up-and-coming female music artist already faces so many daunting obstacles, but in an industry dominated by men, there's the added challenge of putting your foot down and making yourself heard."

She worked on her new single Magic Man and its b-side Sad Song during the deepest depths of lockdown; the lyrics grieve the end of a relationship: "Sad Song was written two days after the break-up. It's so raw and I didn't think I'd ever show it to anyone. I was at the point where I literally couldn't imagine being able to function without that person."

An up and coming female music artist will already face so many daunting obstacles, but in an industry dominated by men, there's the added challenge of putting your foot down and making yourself heard. "People have said things like: 'he only wants to work with you because he fancies you', 'girls don't play lead guitar'. Stuff like that really sticks with you." Sexist comments like these made Genevieve second-guess her ability to take charge of what she was capable of whilst making her music.



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D & BISHOP





“I try and challenge my own internalised misogyny, reminding myself that despite what I’ve been taught my whole life by society, other women in my industry are not a threat.”

“It’s weird how normal it is to be completely surrounded by men at gigs and studios,” Genevieve says. “I rarely speak up when I feel like I’m being treated differently, and I always wonder if I’m being too sensitive. Leading a band always felt weird for me too – I was constantly asking my bandmates, ‘what do YOU think?’, instead of just asserting myself more.”

“I was feeling so stuck and I didn’t understand why. I only caught onto it recently and in these past few months I’ve learned to love challenging myself – I’ve realised I can do literally anything I want. It’s very freeing.”

Over the last few months, Genevieve has found herself reassessing the nature of the music industry, which all-too-often pits women against one another. She’s glad to be reclaiming her music and her image all for herself: “I try and challenge my own internalised misogyny, reminding myself that despite what I’ve been taught my whole life by society, other women in my industry are not a threat. We can all have every success we want and more. We’re all worthy and we all deserve it. It’s hard to unlearn this stuff – I don’t think the unlearning will ever end.”

“I’ve always tried to make myself and my music sound pretty and make sure everything I do in my work is polite, that I’m not going to upset anyone. But not anymore. I’m learning to be a disgraceful woman myself, for sure.”

This is all just the beginning for Genevieve Miles. With backing from BBC Introducing and an array of gigs under her belt, we can all anticipate many exciting opportunities for the young artist.

“I’m challenging myself to make my next release as creative as possible, so hopefully there will be some cool stuff for people to get involved with. It’s exciting having to challenge myself so much to adapt to being a musician in these crazy times.”

Want to hear more of Genevieve Miles? Find her on Instagram at [@genevieve_miles!](https://www.instagram.com/genevieve_miles/)



POETRY SHOWCASE**SHANNON BUNNEY****BY EMILY ORAM**

Shannon Bunney is from Caerphilly and studied Media, Journalism and Culture at Cardiff University. She finds inspiration in the calmness of nature for her poems, which are drawn from her life experiences.

Having studied poetry at GCSE and A Level, Shannon loved interpreting all forms of poetry, and so turned to writing poetry herself as a creative outlet. Shannon says that she loves the subjectivity of poetry, and admires the way in which people can relate themselves to poetry in different ways. She has been writing poetry since she was thirteen, but has only recently felt confident enough to share her writing with the world; she has one self-published collection of poems.

Using poetry to discuss female empowerment is a way for her to discuss sensitive issues in an artistic way. Shannon says:

“female empowerment is so important and I feel like the arts are a beautiful way to express these feelings. I love feeling like I may have helped someone feel better, or a bit more empowered, from reading my poems.’ Shannon’s goal for the future is to have a second collection of poems professionally published.

PEAR SHAPED



© Monika Kozub via Unsplash

I admire,
and hate,
all at once.

Something so unique,
and so powerful,
yet so pear shaped,
and repulsing.

I look and stare,
and tell myself:
“look how far you have come”
in hope of acceptance.

But still,
like all of us,
we see imperfections,
in our perfect selves,

don't we?

-S.J.B

This poem articulates the difficulty of loving our bodies and the way they are formed. The underlying message is that we are all perfect, and we should encourage one another to love the imperfections in our perfect selves.

SELF LOVE

The tricky thing
about self love,

is your mind
constantly contradicting,

yellow bellied thoughts
and glistens in your eye,

that one time you actually thought
okay, I can work with this,

your mind instantly rejects
and installs fear
of judgement
and that really

“I’m just kidding myself”

thy should love thyself

but thy, shall experience such a
battle
between mind and self

persevere sweet ones
you deserve to be loved

at least by yourself

-S.J.B



© Gantas Vaičiulėnas via Unsplash

This poem is about the battle of loving yourself. Despite societal standards which make us believe otherwise, we are all beautiful in our own ways. This is a topic I have forever battled with, and am slowly coming to terms with. Self love is not easy; it is a battle, but a necessary one. Love yourself like you want to be loved.

A WHOLE AND A HALF



© Kevin Laminto via Unsplash

This poem is about being a whole person on your own; being independent and proud, but also being in love with another. It's about knowing you'll be okay either way, confident in your own independence but happy to feel the warmth of another too.

I am whole on my own.
I am my own happiness.
I am my own growth.
I am my own strength.
and my good mornings and good
nights.
I am responsible for myself.

but I'd be lying if I didn't say
you make it a hell of a lot better.

A whole other human,
happy to share so much,
keep each other safe,
keep each other warm.

to share happiness,
to share love,
to share warm morning glances,
and late evening gazes.

I am whole on my own,
but my oh my
am I thankful for you too.

- S.J.B

MUSIC SPOTLIGHT: REYA JAYNE

by Holly Peters

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Hailing from Sheffield, Reya Jayne is an up-and-coming country artist. Each of her songs capture your attention through the silky vocals and the narrative lyricism that creates heartfelt stories you can get lost in.

“Storytelling is such an important part of writing country music that I think it is ingrained in me to make sure that every song has this transformative quality,” Reya Jayne says. “These can be fictional or real-life stories. Homeless came from a very personal place,

whereas How Good You Are was written as a modern-day romance.”

Reya Jayne’s debut single Homeless, released in February 2020, is a delicate track that shines the spotlight on Reya Jayne’s tender, honest voice. Written during her first trip to Nashville, it’s the story of an eighteen-year-old moving to London and struggling to decide where felt most like home: her hometown, Sheffield; London; or Nashville, Tennessee. On the song, Reya Jayne says: “I think it’s my twist on a coming-of-age song and was the

best way I knew how to introduce myself to the British country music audience.”

The stories told in Reya Jayne’s songs – both fictional and from a place of personal truth – showcase a powerful vulnerability. For many artists and individuals, the act of framing your vulnerability and allowing anyone to see it and consume it can be overwhelming and intimidating.: “I think being an artist is all about being vulnerable. Audiences respond to that honesty as it brings them a lot closer to you as a person. I think it can be difficult to open



© Bryony Fuller

yourself up to strangers in that way, but if you have written something you believe in enough to put it out into the world, that should outweigh the fear of being vulnerable! I also think displaying your most vulnerable thoughts almost makes you stronger - you have nothing to hide.”

For the young country singer-songwriter, writing songs is equal to writing stories. When asked about the writing process, Reya Jayne acknowledges that each song’s creation is unique, and that inspiration can strike from pretty much anywhere.

“Most of the time lyrics come first, piecing together these fragmented ideas to see what concepts work together,” Reya Jayne tells *Disgraceful*. “I also like to flesh out the ideas with the storyline to start off with so

that I know what I’m writing is on track. In terms of knowing when it’s ready to be heard, I will sometimes finish three or four iterations of a track before I am happy to say it is finished, and some songs never even get to that stage. The ones that are always best are the ones that seem to write

“...keep being you, unapologetically - don’t adjust yourself to avoid unwanted eyes.”

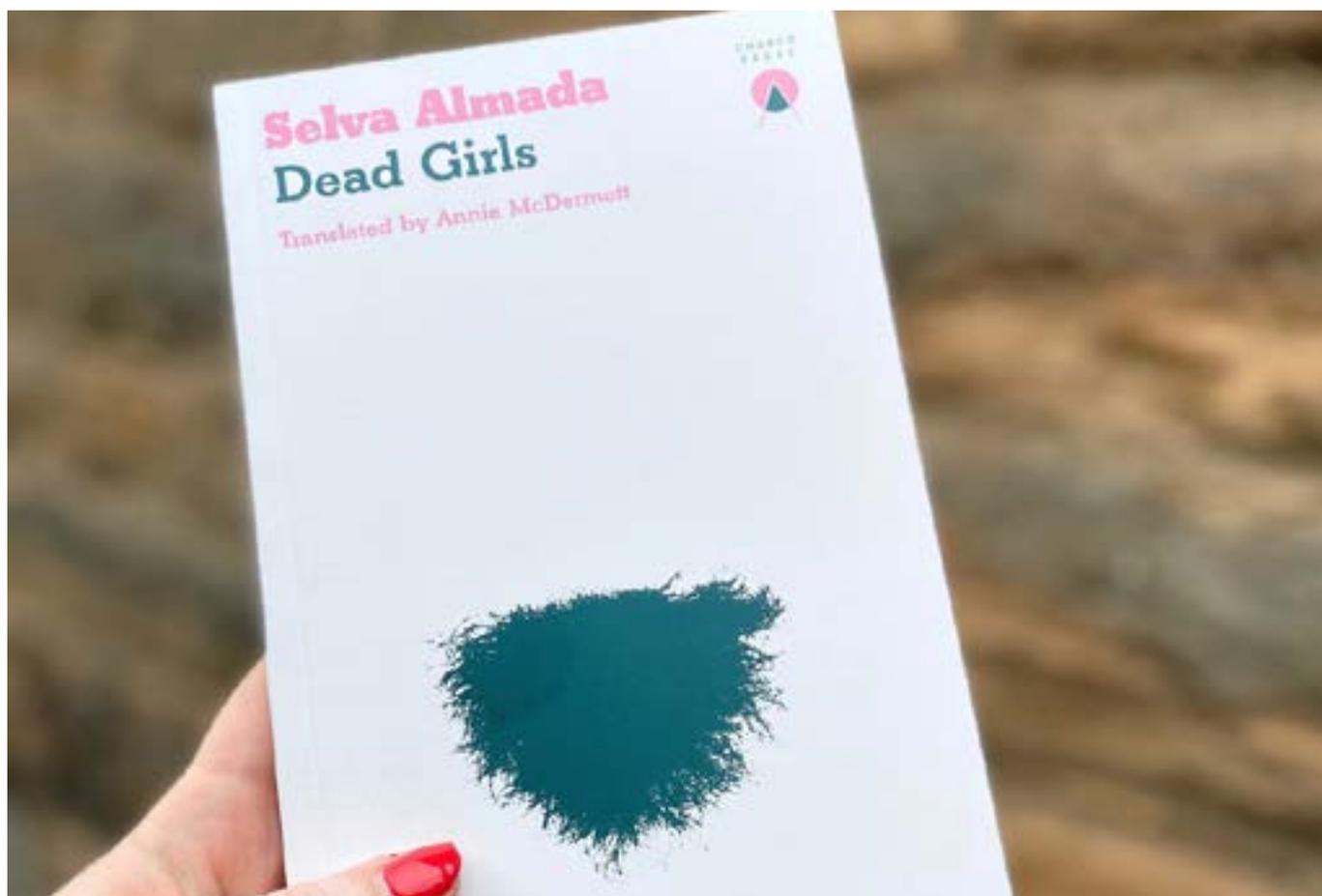
themselves, and I always know a single-worthy track as soon as I’ve written it!” There are already many obstacles to be faced by an indie artist in the current music

climate, and being a female artist doesn’t make that any easier. Reya Jayne tells *Disgraceful*: “The most difficult thing I have come across is establishing boundaries with both fans and colleagues in the industry - you have to set the tone early on that accepting inappropriate comments is not part of the singer-songwriter job description.”

“My advice would be to keep being you, unapologetically - don’t adjust yourself to avoid unwanted eyes. Also don’t be afraid of setting people straight for the fear of losing a fan - anyone that truly respects you as an artist will understand!”

Reya Jayne’s second single *How Good You Are* was released in May 2020 and she is currently working on the concept of a potential EP for the new year.

DISGRACEFUL REVIEWS



Jenny Sharman reviews Selva Almada's *Dead Girls*, translated by Annie McDermott (Charco Press, 2020)

Selva Almada's *Dead Girls*, translated from the original Spanish by Annie McDermott, tells the stories of three girls who were violently killed in rural Argentina in the mid-to-late-80s: 19-year-old Andrea Danne, 15-year-old María Luisa Quevedo, and 20-year-old Sarita Mundín.

The femicides of these three girls remain unsolved, and act as a painful reminder of the ubiquitous gendered violence that women around the world continue to encounter every day. Femicide is generally defined as the murder of women simply because they are women. Having been of a similar

age to Andrea, María and Sarita when they were killed, Almada weaves her own experiences of growing up as a young woman in Argentina into the book, reminding us that violence against women exists on a continuum:

'Alongside these situations sat other, more minor examples. My friend's mum, who never wore make-up because her husband wouldn't let her. My mother's colleague, who handed her whole salary over to her husband each month to take care of. The woman who couldn't see her family because her husband looked down on them. The woman

who wasn't allowed to wear high heels because they were for whores.' Sitting somewhere between journalism and fiction, *Dead Girls* occupies a liminal space between genres, making it a unique and powerful text. Almada's immediate and visceral topic, paired with the necessary minimalism of her prose, elicits the immense sorrow and loss which continues to be felt by the girls' families and friends. Spiritualism also plays an important role in Almada's investigation of the femicides; through her visits to the Señora, a tarot card-reader and psychic medium, *Dead Girls* gives voice to the voiceless in an incredibly poignant manner, granting speech to the young girls who had it violently taken from them.

Aphrael Spindloe reviews Natasha Walter's *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (Virago, 2011)

Even now, there are stories that still have to be heard, many more women and men who should be joining this struggle and many battles that still have to be fought.' -Natasha Walters, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*.

Living Dolls outlines the way that society tends to argue that women 'choose' to live a gender-conforming life. In rebuttal, Walters talks to gender scientists, professors, and individual women, to highlight the way biological determinism has reinforced a stereotyped culture which is still prevalent to this day. From the colour differences in shops for kids (pink for girls, blue for boys); to the sexual pressures forced on young girls; to the pressures for women to raise children whilst the father works; there is still an expectation for women to evolve from 'dainty princesses' as children to a domesticated mother figure as they grow up.

Walters noticed that rather than question this, people shrug their shoulders and argue that women choose to be this way because of their biological differences to men. When Walters looked closer, she noticed that scientific evidence which disputes biological determinism is not published in popular media to the same extent as science that seems to reinforce this argument. She argues that we need to question how society reinforces and punishes

This book speaks powerfully to the threats of violence and all-too-familiar microaggressions that women encounter on a global scale. Published in September 2020, *Dead Girls* is also very timely; whilst reading the text, I often found myself reflecting on the worrying rise in cases of domestic abuse which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdown. Almada's text is a visceral, hard-hitting examination of violence against women; *Dead Girls* is by no means an easy read, but it is absolutely a necessary one.

Star rating: ★★★★★



certain 'female' roles. Although she understands that things have definitely improved for women over the course of the last century, she finishes her book by encouraging people to still question and fight for gender equality.

If you are interested in the concept of 'choice' among men and women, I would definitely give this a read. *Living Dolls* provides a huge insight into how society can impact your life decisions and make you question why we have accepted the biological deterministic argument for so long.

Star rating: ★★★★★

Jenny Sharman reviews Eliza Clark's *Boy Parts* (Influx Press, 2020)



Dark, twisted, and incredibly unreserved, *Boy Parts* is the explosive debut novel from Eliza Clark. *Boy Parts* is centred around Irina, a sardonic and outspoken erotic photographer from Newcastle who is invited to display her artwork at the acclaimed Hackney Space gallery in London. Everywhere she goes, Irina scouts ordinary men to photograph in explicit, out-of-the-ordinary situations; she finds them at bus stops, in bars, at house parties – even in Tesco. As the date of her exhibition approaches, Irina enters into an erratic spiral of drug- and alcohol-fuelled, self-destructive behaviour, which reveals the sinister backstory to her sadistic tendencies.

“...a unique and powerful text.”

Clark's narrator is brutal and witty, and unapologetically so; one highlight of her acerbic narrative is when she critiques her roommate's taste in men: 'the boyfriend she had when we first met was this NME-cut-out, landfill-indie looking cunt with a porkpie hat and a huge fringe. She liked Harry Styles a few years ago, and now she likes that white-bread, absolute fucking baguette of a lad from Call Me By Your Name.' Although

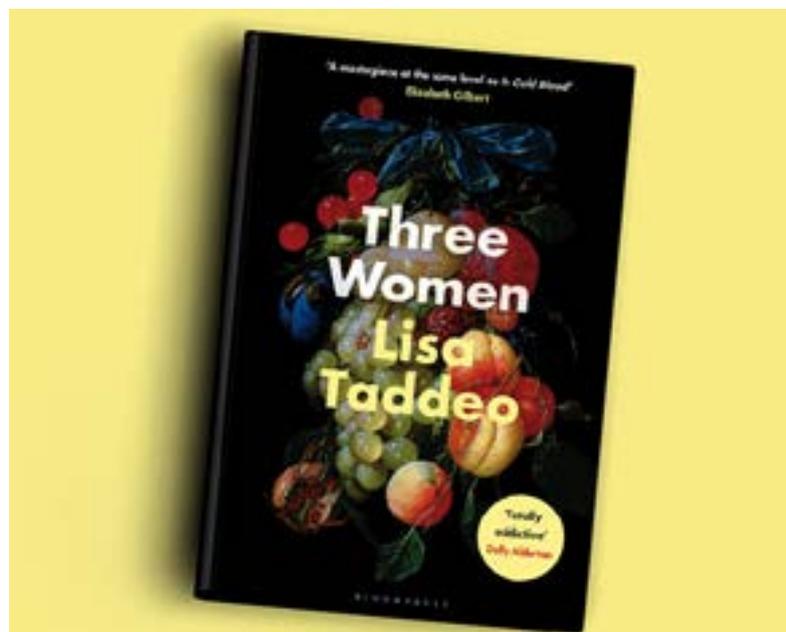
she'd hate to admit it, Irina is a powerful reflection of twenty-first century femininity – the embodiment of a 'disgraceful' woman. Her artistic photography is a stark counterpoint to the phallogocentric male gaze which permeates all aspects of contemporary society. In a number of shots, she captures male subjects wearing her own nightgowns, smeared red lipstick, and fetishized bondage outfits (which are too frequently modelled by the female form).

Towards the end of the novel, Irina's humorous commentary underlines the reality of the female body as an object of spectatorship: 'I'm hyper-aware of a room full of Tories looking at my arse, and tutting, and assuming I'm a call girl because I suppose it is now a crime to wear a see-through dress to a posh restaurant. My fanny isn't even out. There's a panel. There is a fucking panel.'

Another standout element of Clark's novel is her writing of Irina's northern-isms. The text is peppered with Geordie remarks and turns of phrase which I could really relate to. Clark frequently reminds her readers that the North is home to a thriving arts and culture scene, and that the region has a history which encompasses so much more than disused coal mines and crumbling seaside towns.

Boy Parts is an immensely enjoyable, dark-humoured read, which exhibits an uncompromising view of gender, taboo, and female desire.

Star rating: ★★★★★



Sophie Fisher reviews Caroline Criado Perez's
Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men
 (Penguin, 2019)

Caroline Criado-Perez is a social activist and journalist who studied behavioural and feminist economics at the London School of Economics. She won the Liberty Human Rights Campaigner of the Year Award in 2013. In *Invisible Women*, Criado-Perez exposes the gender data gap through a variety of shocking case studies that explain how systematic sexism is built into every aspect of daily life. The book exposes how systems are consistently designed without taking into consideration the impact they will have on women. *Invisible Women* has won several awards including the 2019 Royal Society Science Book Prize and the 2019 Financial Times Business Book of the Year Award.

This is an eye-opening book that draws attention to the unconscious biases that women face on a daily basis. For example, women are 47% more likely to be seriously injured in a car accident, due to crash-test dummies all resembling the male body. It's alarming to read about all the ways women are forgotten when it comes to medical studies, technology design and even transport. *Invisible Women* is a thoroughly researched book and each statement is backed up with supporting evidence. This is definitely not a



light read; each paragraph is packed with statistics and written heavily in an academic tone, which can make it difficult to absorb information. At times, I found myself having to re-read sentences if I lost my focus. It is also a book that leaves you feeling quite frustrated, so I would recommend reading this when you are in a good headspace.

What I love most about this book is Criado-Perez's strong sense of justice. It's always inspiring to see strong women fighting for what's right and aiming to create positive change. I'd highly recommend this book to everyone, it's an extremely important read that spreads awareness about gender inequality.

Star rating: ★★★★★

Maddie Bazin reviews Lisa Taddeo's *Three Women*, (Bloomsbury, 2019)

I implore every single person in the world to read this book. Having picked it up on a whim after hearing incredible reviews, I was sucked in and read the entire thing in two days. Taddeo's journey across America to meet the three women she features takes her between situations that seem outrageous, but actually are probably more common than we'd all like to admit to ourselves. Taddeo focuses on the sex lives of three women: Maggie, who is taking the teacher she slept with in high school to court; Lina, who is rekindling her relationship with an

old (married) flame after her divorce; and Sloane, a woman whose 'swingers' marriage dissolves into a scandal when the wife of one of the men she sleeps with finds out. Through semi-fictionalised accounts of their love and sex lives, Taddeo tells the stories of the three women; but in all of the narratives, the women have no voice. They are the victims of a society which does not allow women to have an autonomous relationship with their sexualities. In the eyes of society, Maggie is simply a young girl trying to destroy a man's career, Lina is a toy of

distraction for an emotionally-absent married man, and Sloane is the woman who took down a marriage because her husband and another man both wanted her for their pleasure. At no point does anyone in their stories take a step back and say, "Wait a minute, there are other people to blame here. These women are victims."

It's a heartbreaking book, but an eye-opening one. If you already find yourself getting angry at the treatment of female sexuality in this day and age, then Taddeo's accounts of these women will truly have you shaking with absolutely well-placed rage. While the stories are about the women and their 'sides' of the story, it is the men who become the focal points; they represent a society of those who still believe that women's pleasure is secondary and symbiotic to men's

pleasure. Women are both expected to control it and give it up. To give and allow it to be taken.

Taddeo's book documents what happens when women accept what is offered to them, when they seek out what they desire for themselves, and consensually engage in taboo sexual activity - according to this society, they always get it wrong.

Star rating: ★★★★★

Emily Oram reviews Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet* (Tinder Press, 2020)

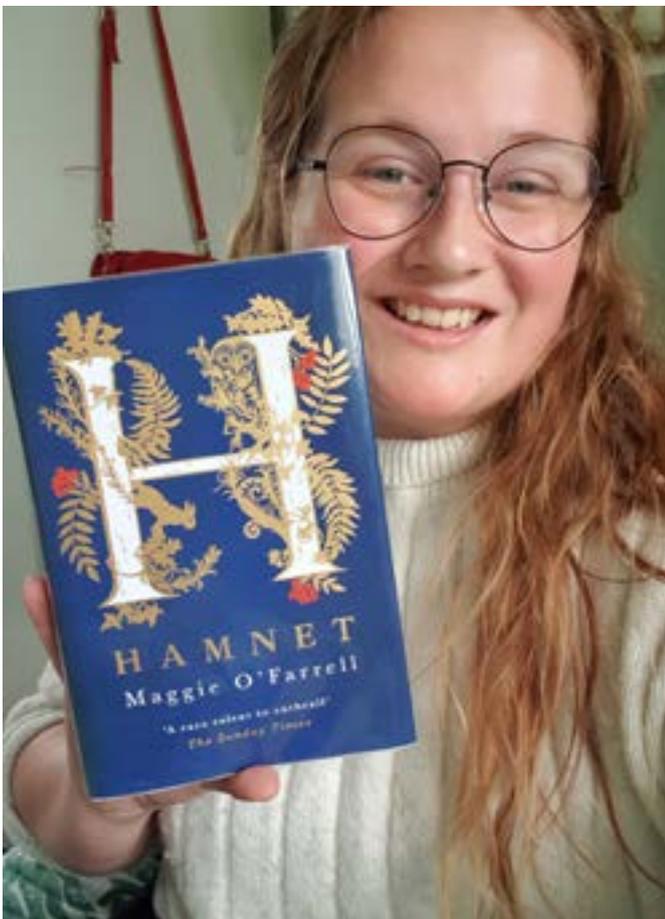
Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell follows the lives of a sixteenth-century family as they navigate loss, grief, and love. Inspired by Shakespeare's celebrated play Hamlet, the novel is a reimagining of the life of Shakespeare's son. But this is not a novel about William Shakespeare. Winning the 2020 Women's Prize for Fiction, O'Farrell's Hamnet tells the story of a woman and her family. The theme of motherhood is a key feature of Hamnet; O'Farrell captures Agnes' love for her children along with her fears, and the grief of unimaginable loss. O'Farrell's imagining of Agnes shows her as an inspiring woman, never quite fitting the mould that others expected of her, valuing her gift for healing and seemingly supernatural connection.

O'Farrell captures multiple narratives within Hamnet, seamlessly moving the reader through time to tell the love story of Hamnet's parents.

This is an emotional novel. O'Farrell's use of language perfectly connects the reader to the characters, enabling us to feel how they feel. Her ability to capture and describe feelings of loss and grief brought me to tears on more than one occasion.

You do not need to be familiar with Shakespeare's Hamlet or even his work more generally to enjoy this book. It's a beautiful reimagining of the life of a mother and her family.

Star rating: ★★★★★



Aleena N. Amjad reviews Elif Shafak's, *Three Daughters of Eve* (Viking, 2016)

From world-acclaimed novelist and women's rights activist Elif Shafak, *Three Daughters of Eve* is an allegorical tale which charismatically explores the mysticism of life and true love.

Shafak is an advocate for women's equality and freedom of speech, and her writings demonstrate her nuanced approach to feminism. Having grown up supported by two strong women – her diplomat mother and traditional grandmother – Shafak had a turbulent relationship with her father. Admirably, Shafak has a Master's degree in Gender and Women's Studies as well as a PhD in Political Sciences, and has been a TEDGlobal speaker twice.

Three Daughters of Eve, Shafak's eleventh novel, focuses on the character of Peri. Alternating between the past and the present, the decades of Peri's life permeate through the pages of the text. One poignant section recounts an evening where Peri, with her teenage daughter Deniz, attends a dinner party held by one of their acquaintances. Their evening is marked by heated debates on politics, the role of women in Islam throughout history, and concerns about the gendered power dynamics which dictate society in contemporary Istanbul.

Caught between her secular father and religious mother during her childhood, Peri grows up to be a woman who explores faith, love, her close relationship to God, feminism and her multifaceted female identity. Her two friends, Shirin and Mona, embody two conflicting models of womanhood; one is a bold, sinful woman, and the other, a modest, religious one. Following her involvement in a deplorable scandal with a professor named Azur during her time at Oxford University, Peri finds herself in a precarious position, torn between speaking out or silencing herself. Peri, having chosen the latter, soon finds out that speaking out is a necessity, discovering that only with clarity and self-confidence can a woman be an advocate of her own life.

Although I found the story a little monotonous in the beginning, the narrative which follows Peri's time at Oxford University made me ponder deeply about many topics of life.



Star rating: ★★ ★



DRAMA FEATURE:

**SUCCULENT
THEATRE PRESENTS
NASTY GIRLS**

by Megan Seabright

This article shines a spotlight on Amy and Rio, the two brilliant women behind *Nasty Girls*, an autobiographical and confessional production from Succulent Theatre group. Buckle in and get ready to read an open and frank conversation about femininity in the theatre industry.

Nasty Girls explores the inner worlds of two girls in their early twenties as they battle with body image, eating habits and female self-pleasure. Amy and Rio take their audience on a wild ride, uncovering what it really means to be a 'big' girl in a society which worships the thigh gap. It's a shocking, outspoken performance which will challenge every conventional idea of femininity that you may have encountered. Nasty Girls is an explosion of honesty, bodily fluids and unapologetic conversations that the girls feel are long overdue. Amy and Rio wrote a dissertation to support this MA theatrical project, entitled NASTY: 'big' girls being gross, mean and sexy. Disgraceful Magazine interviews Amy and Rio to get the low-down on their truly 'disgraceful' production.

What sparked the idea for Nasty Girls?

The idea began on our beds at university; we were just telling each other funny stories about being gross and nasty and then - 'EUREKA!' - Nasty Girls was invented. As we talked more, we spoke about how women are always taught to be sweet and private about their body. We don't understand why, in general, men are weirded out about women burping for instance, but when men do it, it's seen as funny. If [a woman] does act more 'manly', they're called a 'ladette'. Why can't we just be women? Everyone bloody burps! This is something we wanted to challenge [in Nasty Girls] to expose the truth.'

Why do you believe this show is important?

A: 'Nasty Girls gives us women a chance to talk with honesty about our bodies, bringing attention to things that others may not always want to pay attention to. In particular, we focus on the functionality of the body rather than its aesthetic or 'look'. I think [women] shy away from talking about our bodies as it can lead to feelings of shame.'

R: 'This show strives to represent the 'middle' or 'medium' woman. Amy and I felt quite underrepresented and saw that gap in the market. Nasty Girls creates a sense of community which is centred around the way



women feel about their bodies. We hope to give inspiration to women so that they can share their stories.'

Do you feel that being female in the theatre industry has affected you?

A: 'I can remember doing a reading of Romeo and Juliet when I was younger. The guy who usually played Romeo was sick, so I stepped in to read in for

him and I remember it was seen as such a big deal. People were constantly questioning how I (a woman) could possibly play a male character such as Romeo.'

R: 'Yeah... we were both in a show performed by our theatre arts society at uni. It was an all-female cast playing male roles, but it didn't feel as though it was done for the right reasons. There just weren't enough males in the theatre group to fill all the roles. If there were enough males, I think it would definitely have just gone ahead with an all-male cast.'

What would you say to other women who are starting out in the theatre industry?

A&R: 'Be authentic to your true self and be confident in the ideas you have. Don't let others in the industry alter your art - trust yourself. Never be afraid to take risks; if you believe something works, then go for it and trust your gut instinct. You don't need to justify every creative idea you have. We've got first-hand experience of having our art altered. When we sent off the initial video of Nasty Girls for editing and approval, we received feedback which said that the performance was 'too pornographic'. I mean, yes, I was squirting whipped cream on my arse... however, I can't help but think that if a man were to do that, it would be considered hilarious rather than pornographic. Quite a bit was cut out of our initial performance, so we aren't as happy with this version as we were the original. That's why we really want to put emphasis on trusting your gut instinct.'

Publishing Feature:

Interview with **SMASHBEAR PUBLISHING'S CEO LOREDANA CARINI**

by Beth Shelper and Maddie Bazin

Smashbear Publishing is a small indie publishing house based in Kent, specialising in e-book publication. It was set up by masters graduate Loredana Carini, who decided that rather than place her career into the shaking hands of furlough and the 'what-ifs' of the COVID-19 lockdown, she would set up her own small press. She chose to publish the genres she was passionate about; urban fantasy, paranormal romance, and horror. We spoke to Loredana just after the publication of Smashbear's debut novel, *Storm's Child: The Rune Caster Chronicles Book 1*.

First of all, congratulations on your debut publication of John Ortega's *Storm's Child: The Rune Caster Chronicles Book 1*! Tell us a little bit about this new novel.

'This novel is the debut for both John and SmashBear which means it's been doubly stressful and rewarding! It sets up the entire Rune Caster Chronicles and stars Nathan Mercer, an innkeeper for supernatural beings who is pulled into a sinister plot. We managed to get the book from the first draft to publication within six months, which was an experience to say the least, and wouldn't have been possible without our incredibly supportive team.'

You set up your publishing house, Smashbear Publishing, on your own pretty much straight out of university. Had this always been your plan?

'No, absolutely not. I thought I'd get a graduate placement in project management and be on the fast-track to a highly-paid corporate lifestyle. However, the graduate market is tough, and eventually I just picked any job that would take me. Then COVID-19 happened and I was placed on furlough. I knew I'd be made redundant after the furlough ended, so I needed to come up with a way to support myself in these new tricky times. I had always wanted to go into publishing; I love books and did my undergraduate degree in Creative Writing. Starting a small press seemed like something I could commit myself to without getting that 'selling out' feeling.'

When you took on your first novel to publish, were there many obstacles you found you had to overcome? Were they the sort of problems you had anticipated or were they a surprise?

'I think I was surprised at how much we ended up actually changing the original manuscript. We completely rearranged it; took some subplots out and rewrote entire chapters. I did feel bad for John and the editors when they would work so hard on a

section and I'd come in with my metaphorical red pen and rip it to shreds. But I don't think we'd be having the success that we have now if I hadn't been such a perfectionist!

I didn't anticipate how difficult it would be to find a good cover designer who would be willing to make the necessary edits to their own work. I was so lucky when I found our cover designer, Matt Seff Barnes, who worked with us perfectly. Part of what makes SmashBear unique in the industry is the relationship we build with our authors, so finding a cover that both John and I agreed on was such a relief.'

What does a typical day at Smashbear Publishing involve?

'I check in with acquisitions to make sure that everyone's running to schedule, and to see whether there are any stand-out manuscripts that will be coming to the editorial board soon. I check in with marketing to make sure that content for our social media is being created and then I'll have a discussion with the marketing managers about upcoming campaigns. I'll also do some editing if we have an active project.'

We noticed that Smashbear released a Halloween Anthology raising money for Women's Aid this past October. What was your inspiration behind this?

'I knew that I wanted to build the most sustainable and caring business that I could whilst providing people with relevant, practical experience. I picked Women's Aid because more people than ever are trapped in abusive situations, and it's important that they can reach help.'

Have you and your team got any exciting projects in the pipeline?

'Apart from our previously mentioned charity anthologies, we also have a manuscript that we're looking to release in January, so it's going to be very busy over the holiday season.'

What you've managed is an amazing feat. When you think of Smashbear Publishing, what are you most proud of?

'Thank you! I think the fact that I've managed to build this amazing team is what I'm most proud of,

currently our team is made up of graduate volunteers and those seeking experience within the industry. I'm glad I can offer a range of experiences like editing, marketing and acquisitions. We managed to get a book edited and published within 6 months which is currently sitting at 4.5 stars on Amazon and Goodreads! There's so much I'm proud of and so many people I'm proud of. I also think that getting to this point without any detriment to my mental health - which I've always struggled with - has been an achievement.'

Thinking about the future of Smashbear Publishing, what long term goals do you have for the company?

'We're the small press with big goals. I see SmashBear being the next big name in fiction publishing, but I want to get there whilst keeping our core values of compassion and honesty.'

As an incredible woman in business, what advice would you give to those in your position a year ago, who might have a similar goal or dream?

'Youtuber Bailey Sarian constantly says 'get better idols'. I think it is so important to have good role models in your life! When I was graduating from my BA, I became aware of Grace Beverley and Patricia Bright. These women are working to change the stigma of women in business, creating an open conversation about it and pushing the limits. I look at women like Grace and Patricia and I want to be like them. They are using the influence they have to do good within their communities as well, which influenced my business model and almost made it acceptable in my mind that I could do this as a young woman. If you have a dream, just go for it! It's better to look back on a failed business then constantly ponder the 'what ifs'. I think this is a great time for women to be starting their businesses, whether you're starting a lash and nail empire or starting a small press like I have. However, don't go throwing your life savings into something that's likely to fail and please do your research!

Creating SmashBear has been the best experience of my life and even if we go bankrupt within the next six months (fingers crossed we won't), I can still look back on Storm's Child and our Halloween Anthology and know that I achieved that; I did that and no one will be able to take that from you. But you won't have that unless you start!'

FEMALES OWNING FILM

by Megan Binning

Film and TV is a constant presence in all of our lives, whether we are a film buff or casual watcher. Personally, I'm a film buff who binges Netflix daily; some of my favourite films and TV shows include Glee, The Godfather, and Just Go With It. Do you know what all of these have in common? They were all written or directed by men. Whilst this is by no means a terrible thing, the sad fact is that the film and TV industries are heavily male-dominated. According to the Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film, women comprised only 20% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and cinematographers working on the top 100 grossing films in 2019. With male directors blocking the limelight and receiving the most opportunities, many women in the film and TV industries have been forgotten about or hidden away despite their phenomenal talents. There are so many successful women in the film industry who are claiming their space and owning their position with pride – let's celebrate them! Here are some of my favourite female directors, screenwriters and producers who I believe should be celebrated and supported.

Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens

Even if you haven't seen the Lord of the Rings trilogy, you'll have heard of it. When we think of the screenwriting and directing figures behind the fantasy series, Peter Jackson is often the only name that springs to mind. However, did you know that two female powerhouses helped to create the series?

Alongside Jackson, Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens helped to translate the much-loved fantasy saga to the screen, creating and visualising the famous story through their incredible screenwriting abilities. Together, they came up with iconic lines such as Eowyn's "I am no man," which is a compelling proclamation of female empowerment. Walsh and Boyens helped to create an on-screen world unlike any other that audiences had seen before, constructing complex dialogue and characters in immense depth for the big screen. Boyens has also worked on huge titles such as The Hobbit trilogy, Mortal Engines and The Lovely Bones.

Ava Duvernay

Duvernay is an absolute gem of the film industry who has dedicated her career to teaching audiences about Black Lives Matter and the history of the movement. She has helped create many highly-acclaimed works such as Selma, When They See Us, and 13th, as well as many more. She was born in Long Beach, California, and attended the University of California, where she studied English Literature and African-American Studies.

Despite having never attended film school, in 2012 she made history by becoming the first African American woman to win Best Director at the Sundance Film Festival. Duvernay's films encourage powerful emotions in her audiences, and she uses her art as a tool to fight for social justice.

Phoebe Waller-Bridge

In recent years, Phoebe Waller-Bridge has become one of the best-known British screenwriters and playwrights in the industry, having created works such as Fleabag, Drifters, Crashing and Killing Eve. Starting out as an actress, Waller-Bridge has blossomed in the screenwriting industry, and is the only person to have won an Emmy, SAG, BAFTA and Golden Globe for the same TV performance. If you haven't watched any of her work, I would definitely recommend it. Her shows and performances are so relatable, and are packed full of outspoken humour. In her works, Waller-Bridge captures female transgression in a remarkable way, exploring themes such as fear, friendship and pain through developed and in-depth characters. She has said: 'I'm a huge fan of basically anything written about complicated women. I'm drawn to them really quickly.' If you feel the same, you would love her work!

Diablo Cody

Diablo Cody is a full-time stripper turned award-winning screenwriter. She's best known for her work on Juno, Burlesque, Young Adult, Paradise, and is working on an upcoming biopic

about Madonna with the singer herself. Cody has won over 20 awards at the BAFTAs, Golden Globes, Oscars and a number of film festivals. A common theme in Cody's work is the story arc of a young woman who struggles in the public eye, who also hides a personal internal struggle. Cody uses her screenwriting to challenge female stereotypes; she has said, 'there is an imbalance in the way that women's sexuality is presented - and I hate that. So, I want to write film[s] that challenge that.' If you enjoy gritty, dark comedies that explore female sexuality and break the stereotypes of femininity, then Diablo Cody's work is for you.

Jane Goldman

Jane Goldman is a female powerhouse in the industry, identified by her striking, brightly-coloured hair. She has produced and written films such as Kick-Ass, Kingsman: The Secret Service, Kingsman: The Golden Circle, X-Men: First Class, X-Men, Days of Future Past and Stardust. Goldman is dedicated to confronting stereotypes and bringing the exciting women of classic comic books to life on the big screen. She has co-written multiple films that set the precedent for comic book film adaptations, such as the highly-acclaimed X-Men saga.

Mindy Kaling

Have you ever heard the phrase 'girls aren't funny'? Well, next time you hear that, mention Mindy Kaling. She's helped to create big names such as The Office US, The Mindy Project and Champions. The US version of The Office has become even more successful



“According to the Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film, women comprised only 20% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and cinematographers working on the top 100 grossing films in 2019”

than its UK counterpart and has been nominated for numerous awards such as the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing in a Comedy Series, as well as being nominated five times for Outstanding Comedy Series. At the age of 26, Kaling was one of the first female members of writing staff for *The Office*. By the end of the series, she was one of only two remaining women who wrote for the show. With her dry, sarcastic humour, she is loved by audiences around the world. In her screenplays, Kaling creates women who are strong and opinionated, but who also have some stereotypical attributes, showing female viewers that you can be funny, smart, strong, and opinionated, as well as conventionally ‘girly’.

Patty Jenkins

Patty Jenkins is a writer and director, best known for directing *Wonder Woman* and her debut feature *Monster*. Jenkins studied film at the American Film Institute. After this, she created her debut film *Monster*, starring Charlize Theron, which

was lauded by critics. Some of Jenkins’ trademark themes include strained mother-daughter relationships, strong-willed female protagonists, quests for identity, and uncompromising storylines. These tropes are present in her best films, where she has developed female characters with depth and complexity, and has constructed storylines which expose challenges of identity and strength. *Wonder Woman* went on to become the highest-grossing film of 2017.

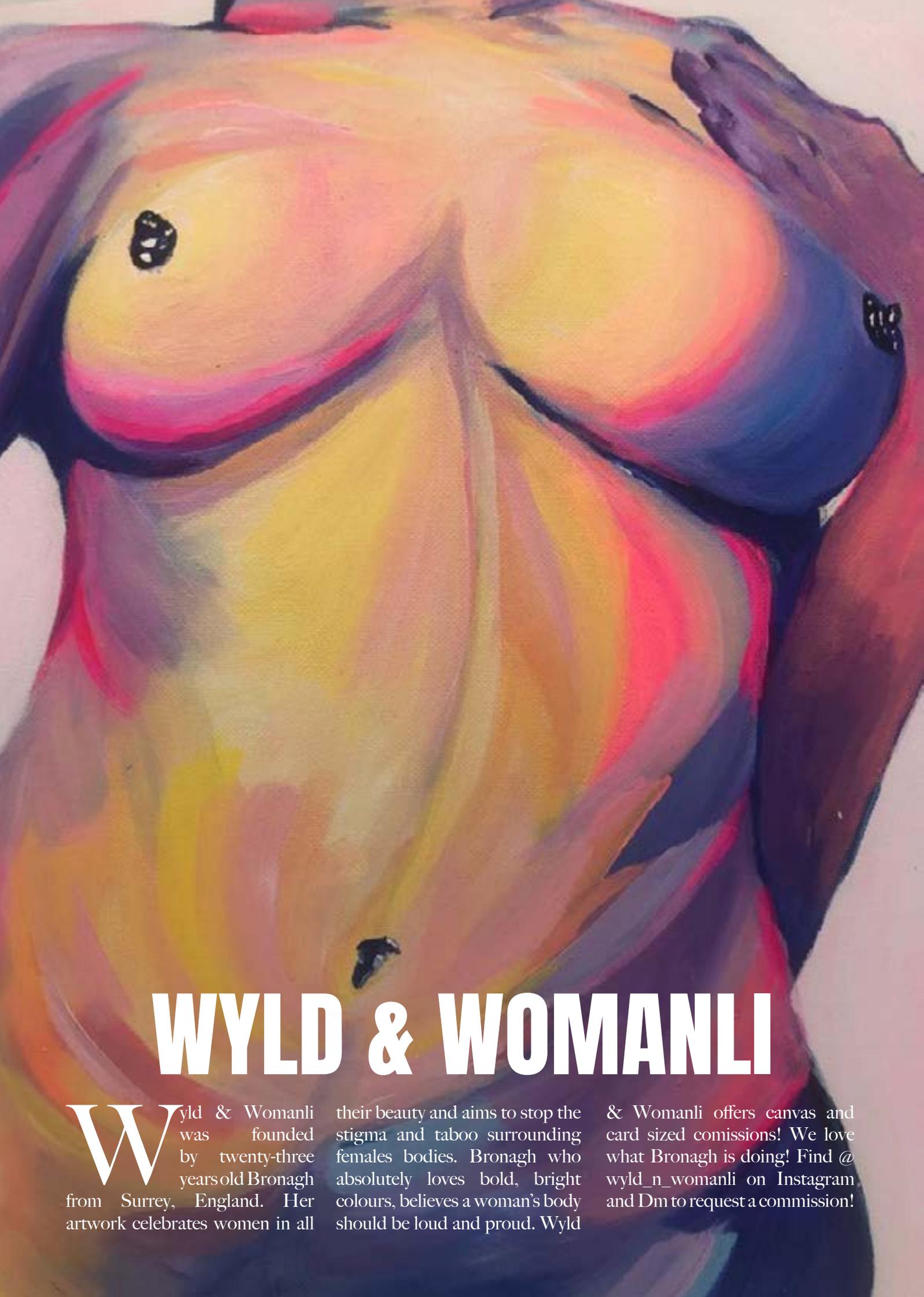
Linda Woolverton

Remember all of those beloved Disney films such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Maleficent*? Well, Linda Woolverton was the woman at the core of the screenwriting process for each of these animated films. Woolverton helped to create many of the beloved characters of our childhood that we all still love to this day. Woolverton’s storylines set a precedent for family films, with heart-warming storylines and a moral premise. She’s known for writing strong and complex

female characters such as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, which became the first animated film to be nominated for Best Picture at the 64th Academy Awards. Woolverton helped to create strong female characters that young girls can look up to for generations to come.

All of these women have created different stories with different characters, but what ties them all together is their underappreciation in the public eye. These female screenwriters, directors, and producers are all strong, independent women who have created admirable female characters that all ages can look up to. At the moment, a lot of women don’t see film or screenwriting as a viable career choice due to the male-dominated nature of the industry; but this needs to change. If you enjoy writing for film and TV and want to follow in the footsteps of these impressive women, then do it! These women are changing the future for females in film, owning their space and creating pathways for budding film producers.

MEGAN BINNING



WYLD & WOMANLI

Wylde & Womanli was founded by twenty-three years old Bronagh from Surrey, England. Her artwork celebrates women in all

their beauty and aims to stop the stigma and taboo surrounding females bodies. Bronagh who absolutely loves bold, bright colours, believes a woman's body should be loud and proud. Wyld

& Womanli offers canvas and card sized commissions! We love what Bronagh is doing! Find @wyld_n_womanli on Instagram and Dm to request a commission!

TALK TO ME

BY KELLY BRYAN

Kelly Bryan's project entitled Talk To Me was created during her final year at university. This photography project, Bryan says, 'peers through a phenomenological lens in order to explore my inner world.'

Within this collection of images, Bryan explores themes which question the traditional family structure and the dynamics of a mother-daughter relationship. During a particularly stressful time in her life, Bryan used the meditative attributes of outdoor running to cope with a family separation. In the making of this body of work, she re-visited and photographed her running routes located around the homes she, her mother, and father now occupy separately, in the hope that she would find her sense of place.

Positioned alongside are photographs of her mother's home which helped Bryan reflect on her understanding of her mother's new lesbian relationship. Accompanying these are a number of candid, organic shots of Bryan's mother with her partner, Sharon. Sequenced within a photobook, these images work alongside diary entries made during a flux in Bryan's mental wellbeing. This deeply personal collection of photos is an exploration of the intangibility of family, love, and inner narratives.















PUBLISHING FEATURE: DIVERSITY IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

BY CHLOE WARD

The UK publishing industry's lack of diversity and BAME representation has a significant cultural impact on the content it produces. The majority of published texts are largely representative of the white, middle-class demographic, which means that a huge proportion of society are only exposed to this singular narrative perspective.

Ensuring representation and diversity in books isn't just important for BAME people or those within marginalised groups – it's important for everyone. Books are more than just a bunch of words strung together; they are powerful, important tools that build bridges, helping us to understand cultural differences. Books promote tolerance and allow individuals to develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, a variety of cultural perspectives. Most importantly, books normalise identities that differ from our own.

People seeking a job in publishing typically need to gain an internship within a publishing house, which remains to be one of the only ways to gain experience within the industry itself. This means that young publishing hopefuls face many barriers to employment, including the necessity of finding accommodation (often in London), or having to commute should they not have any immediate contacts in the big cities. Without access to these privileges, it is often infeasible for individuals from working-class or marginalised ethnic backgrounds to access these internships, which are often unpaid. Consequently, such individuals lose out on the opportunities that publishing internships create.

The trickle-down effect of this has resulted in the majority of publishing houses being located in the south-east and London, often run by employees from white, middle-class backgrounds. Indeed, a survey conducted by Spread the Word in 2018 shows that 'the majority of people working in publishing grew up around the south east of England (19.8%), London (15.1%), and the east of England (12.5%), followed by the Midlands (9.5%), the north west (4.9%), Yorkshire (3.2%) and just in 2% in the north east (2%). Similarly, only 6.8% of publishing staff were Scottish, 1.4% Welsh and 0.9% Northern Irish'. A 2019 article entitled 'Where Britain's wealthiest live' from The Financial Times supports these findings: looking at the locations of 1.45m households, the FT discovered that 'the highest earners (those with an income of more than £100,00 per year), made up 60% of the results and were situated in London and the Southeast'.

Staff in publishing who are from privileged backgrounds are less likely to relate to content that differs from their own lived experience. Therefore, publishing houses that do not have a diverse workforce may have an unconscious bias towards content that reflects their own lives. In turn, this leads to a lack in the representation of marginalised individuals – purely because there aren't enough publishers that recognise or relate to the BAME experience.

A survey was undertaken in 2019 by Creative Access, an organisation offering paid internships within publishing houses to individuals from BAME backgrounds. They partnered with established companies and surveyed staff to determine the survey results, which revealed that 55% of participants felt that the publishing industry was not open to change or at least even welcoming to people from different backgrounds. Almost half the participants (45%) said that they were yet to see any progress in diversity or inclusion within the workforce at all.

Data like this shows that there is a continued need to endeavour for more representation and inclusion of ethnic minorities in the publishing industry. I myself am a member of the BAME community and grew up within a working-class environment; I was not exposed to black authors or their stories during my education, which is an important time of development and self-discovery. As an avid reader, I would blast through any book I could get my hands on. However, these were not stories that I could relate to; there was nothing to envisage my future success as a person of colour and I

was only ever exposed to the white perspectives which dominated many books. Simply put, representation matters, because unfortunately there are still many other young girls just like me who don't get to experience their culture through creative content, and find themselves unable to connect with many written storylines.

If I had been able to access books that celebrated my skin tone or afro hair when I was 11 years old, I would not have suffered the self-hatred which continued for years, stemming purely from having darker skin and gravity-defying hair. I never would have damaged my beautiful natural hair with chemicals and heat just to give off the appearance of straighter locks, to the extent that it started to fall out and I had to shave it all off. I wouldn't have grown up considering plastic surgery to make my normal nose look less 'black', and I most definitely wouldn't have spent years thinking my lovely brown skin was the definition of ugly. If I had been able to identify role models in the books I read, I would have escaped a lot of pain and wouldn't have struggled with an identity crisis at a very young age. Upsettingly, situations like this are still frequent and continue to affect young girls throughout the UK.

It is encouraging to see that a number of publishing houses are making moves to diversify their staff by modifying their in-house recruitment processes. These publishers include many players within the 'big five' such as Penguin Random House, Hachette and HarperCollins, who are delivering internships and supportive programmes targeted at BAME individuals. The BAME in Publishing network hosts monthly sessions to give BAME people in publishing a space to meet, make connections, get creative, share job tips and even find a mentor. Another initiative from BookTrust offers an extensive amount of opportunities for writers or illustrators of colour, providing access to job opportunities, open calls for submissions, and scholarships for BAME applicants to roles in publishing.

Working towards a more progressive industry which provides opportunities for talented creatives, whatever their background, needs to be aggressively addressed head-on. For real systematic change to happen, it is programmes and initiatives like these that give the young creative schoolgirl in me hope for a more inclusive and diverse future. There is still a lot of work to do, but we are on our way.

BGROOVYDESIGNS



Statement polymer clay earrings handmade with love, bgroovy aims for 0 clay waste, creating unique colours and designs that are sure to get you compliments. Make sure you get the bgroovy official launch date, 3/12/2020, in your calendar to get your hands on a pair or two (or three!) just in time for Christmas! Head over to Instagram and give this Disgraceful Favourite a follow at @bgroovydesigns now! We are absolutely obsessed with the work of this fierce entrepreneur!



SKIN DEEP

WHY MY KERATOSIS PILARIS WILL NEVER DEFINE ME

BY HOLLY PEARSON



© Holly Pearson, L-R



The appearance of your skin can hugely impact your confidence and self-worth, especially for women, whose bodies can be a source of self-loathing when physical perfection is praised above anything else.

I want to encourage you to release yourself from these miserable cycles and instead empower you to celebrate, love and appreciate yourself - and your skin.

“Make a wish!” The common phrase roared at me annually as I blew hard at the flickering flames of my birthday candles.

“I wish for my rashes to disappear” I repeat to myself, over and over again.

For as long as I can remember, I saw my rashes – which cover my arms and legs – as flaws. Fixating on how they appeared, I relentlessly covered them up like they were something to be ashamed of. I rarely wore tops that showed my arms, shorts that revealed my legs or dresses that displayed both.

It was a continual and exhausting anxiety. These thoughts were only exacerbated when my worst

fears would come true and people would comment on the blotchy red patches, like they were something to be openly examined. Phrases like ‘crocodile scales’, ‘now that’s sore sunburn’, ‘why are your legs so blotchy’ and ‘it’s like touching sandpaper’ will always remain in my memory.

I’ve only recently been able to put a name to these rashes which coat my limbs, medically known as Keratosis Pilaris, all as a result of The British Skin Foundation’s ‘A-Z Skinfoinformation’ search engine. This resource is essential, informative and fundamental in regards to skin education, and I’m eternally grateful for it.

The relief that washed over me when I discovered that Keratosis Pilaris is extremely common within the population, affecting around 40% of adults, was immensely refreshing.

It’s essentially the overproduction of Keratin on the outer layer of skin, blocking the hair follicles and producing rough and uneven goose-bump looking patches. Alongside this, I also have mild Ichthyosis Vulgaris, usually genetically inherited. The condition is characterised by widespread dry, scaly skin

and is also extremely common – affecting 1 in 250 people.

I’ve found a sense of comfort in putting a name to a characteristic of mine that I have for so long hated and let define my entire life.

Yet, for such a defining thought pattern, I have never thought to question why I take such affliction to a simple characteristic feature. I am acutely aware that this self-inflicted hatred is not individually applicable to me. My adverse feelings towards my skin come from a wider issue of appropriated, unrealistic norms within society and our pervasive pursuit of perfection. When the historical beauty ideals feature slim, usually white, smooth skinned models, it takes time for society to change perspectives and become more accepting.

It’s universally acknowledged that nearly everyone suffers with their own insecurities. For decades upon decades the majority of such insecurities have been burdened upon women, who have historically been seen only as desirable and abiding ornaments.

In periods of history when physical appearances took presidency, it was a women’s



sole purpose to appear beautiful, young and fertile. There are stand out moments throughout history that saw changes in desirable female qualities, from the virtues of makeup wearing, which began to take popularity in the 18th century, adorning pale completions and red lips, to the Victorian era when it was deemed attractive to be meek, weak and wholly ill looking, with small and slim frames.

But there has always been a restricting rule book of essential qualities women must abide by. And, as we march proudly into a new era of diversity and celebration, we are shredding up the pages of this archaic rule book, chapter by chapter.

The body positivity and skin positivity movements are just the beginning: and as normal bodies become, well, normal, the meanings and values of body image must be redefined to encompass the whole spectrum of unique body types and characteristics. The continual

cycle of self-objectification running through our minds, as we attempt to monitor our bodies from an outsider's perspective, is soul destroying. We struggle to truly value our own healthy and dazzling vessels of life, that we call bodies, which carry us through the world.

It is time for change.

Empowerment is the order of the day, where voices previously refused the right to speak are now beginning to shout, and everyone must do their part to amplify their words and listen carefully.

We live in a world that is so beautifully diverse, where cultures, experiences and identities share spaces. We must all feel comfortable to openly talk about our insecurities without fear of judgement or resistance and regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

I am on the journey to accepting my skin for what it is and loving myself accordingly. The process

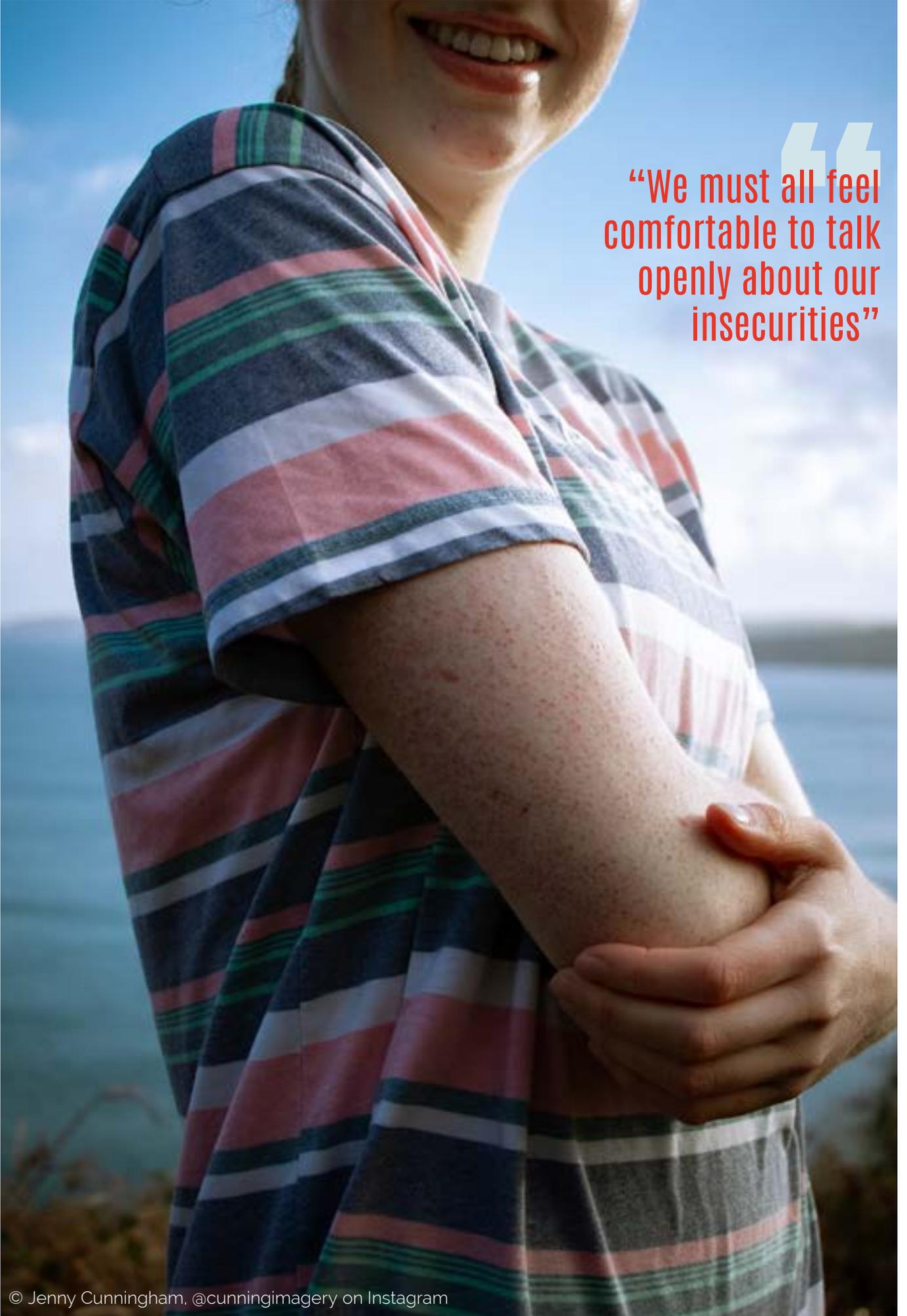
is not an easy one. With years of negative and emotional ammunition built-up towards me, it takes time to carefully break this down and move towards becoming a more self-accepting and supportive human being.

The pursuit for an idea of perfection that doesn't exist is tiresome and boring, and I now refuse to keep chasing. I wish to celebrate my skin for what it is and what it has done for me, and I implore and encourage you to do the same.

Know that your body is not an accessory. Your body is a precious tool and instrument for discovery, so love it and treat it accordingly with respect and compassion. We are all beautifully unique, that's what makes us extraordinary, and our lives are right there for the taking.

Don't let your thoughts hold you back.

HOLLY PEARSON



“We must all feel comfortable to talk openly about our insecurities”

NATURE, NUDES AND OF THE FEMALE

Katie Pritchard, aka KP Paints, is a 22-year-old emerging artist based in the North Cotswolds, who primarily specialises in nude acrylic paintings and linear pieces. Having studied pottery at Bristol University - which was sadly cut short due to COVID-19 - Katie revived her creativity in March earlier this year, when she began upcycling pots and vases by painting nude figures on them. Since the start of this year, Katie has grown from strength to strength, taking on client commissions from America, launching new posters and postcards and recently releasing the new Linear Faces collection.

Speaking about her source of inspiration, Katie says: 'I am surrounded by women who empower me, who I consider to be incredibly strong, independent, opinionated, beautiful, witty and fun. It's fun to try and capture that in paintings which aim to desexualise the female form.' The core influence behind Katie's work has remained the same throughout her artistic career; her work aims to empower women and desexualise the female form, and she encourages her clients to view nudity as an art form.

In recent months, Katie has made a true effort to encourage women - and anyone identifying as such - of any size or shape, to be her next muse. This has led to new bodies being showcased on her Instagram page and ultimately greater diversity in her client commission requests. When asked how her artwork

speaks to societally-prescribed standards of female beauty, Katie responded: 'I think it is the artist's responsibility to ensure diversity in what we choose to show and make a conscious effort to challenge and question societal ideas of female beauty.'

The latest work showcased by KP Paints includes the new collection Linear Faces and larger nude pieces. The nude paintings as part of the Autumn

painting series have been an opportunity for Katie to develop her style on a larger scale, maintaining a core vision of empowerment. The Linear Faces collection, launched in October 2020, features six new designs inspired by female figures from Greek mythology. These simplistic yet bold designs are all unique, original pieces designed to be bought individually or to complement one another.

Going forwards, KP hopes to expand into limited edition prints, and will be continuing with her Linear Faces collection, as well as launching a new collection of painted vases before Christmas. Professionally, Katie is looking to collaborate with independent bars and cafés in order to get her work displayed in public.

For commissions and enquiries, Disgraceful readers can message Katie via Instagram (@kp.paints), browse her Etsy shop (KppaintsUK), or drop her an email to kp.paints@outlook.com.

“The core influence behind Katie’s work has remained the same throughout her artistic career; her work aims to empower women and desexualise the female form, and she encourages her clients to view nudity as an art form.”

CELEBRATION FORM



LOVE LETTER

AN OPEN LETTER TO 'PLUS SIZE' GIRLS

I was 13, on my first shopping trip without my mum. It was in Primark, and I picked up this gorgeous denim skirt with black flowers on it. It was my size and in the sale for £2. It fit, it was the perfect length, and it pinched in my waist well, but I didn't buy it because I could see the outline of my tummy through it. A £2 Primark skirt that I loved, put back on the hanger because of one, relatively insignificant part of me that I deemed unworthy.

I placed more value on a cheap Primark skirt than my own body, and I did that for years (still do, sometimes).

I treated clothes as a hedge maze for my figure; I hid amongst the layers of fabric so nobody else could see the things I didn't like, or that society didn't like either. And how unfair is that? That we have to lock up our bodies like criminals, like they're something unworthy of love or recognition. The fashion industry has come a long way, but I still can't think of a single model with a double chin. Plus size models commonly still have that hourglass figure, with above average breast sizes and long, shapely legs – and plus size acceptance is slowly growing into plus size fetishisation.

You can have the smooth skin and the hourglass figure and the DD cups, but you can't have armpit fat or tummy rolls or anything else society doesn't like.

It's the same for other body types too; our weight and physical appearances are just juggling balls to the influencer makers in the fashion industry. Shave this, curl that, wear Spanx and push up bras. According to Glamour, plus size women represent 68 percent of shoppers on the high street and yet I still remember the outrage when Nike unveiled their plus size mannequins not long ago.

The thing about fatphobia is that people will hide it with thinly veiled concerns about ‘health issues’, when in reality they just only want to see women that fit into their sphere of attractiveness.

Women have the right to exist in whatever we want or choose. We can show our rolls and our stretch marks and eat unhealthy food in restaurants without feeling bad or ‘fat’. Fat is not a feeling, it’s just what we have. I identify as female so I call myself a woman. I have brown hair so I call myself a brunette. Fat is not a weapon to humiliate and degrade women with. It’s something we all have, just some in more quantities than others.

Men lust over “real women” who eat the same unhealthy food as them, as long as they don’t pose a risk to their sexual desire; fetishisation of plus-size women is a lethal ally to female sexualisation. Both enforce the concept of striving to be beautiful in other people’s eyes and not your own. And clothes play a crucial role in this – how we see, view and accept our bodies.

But the range of clothes that’re deemed ‘plus appropriate’ always seems to neglect fun, creative styles. Crop tops over a size 16 are pretty much unheard of and we are steered away from horizontal stripes and bodycon with a gentle, yet forceful, hand. It’s hard to imagine something gentle yet forceful at the same time, but here we are. Plus size exclusion is, if anything, more dangerous because most brands in the fashion industry think adding a few extra sizes of shapeless, plain, and downright unappealing clothes is enough.

They seem to think that the concept of fun, creative fashion dies down suddenly after a size 14. And it’s not enough.

From the age of 10, I believed being fat was the worst possible thing I could be. Sometimes, life still makes me, and loving fashion and beauty and everything in between doesn't mean that you can't call it out on its failures. A common catchphrase in the media is 'confidence is sexy', but how can we be confident when we're treated as less important by retailers? How can we be confident when everyone treats our health like it's their business?

Being allowed to be fat and love your body isn't something we should be thankful for. It's the bare minimum of acceptance. Being told you're worthy of representation, of adoration, of presence, is not something that deserves applause. We're told we should stop pushing for more after one social media post of a model in stretch marks.

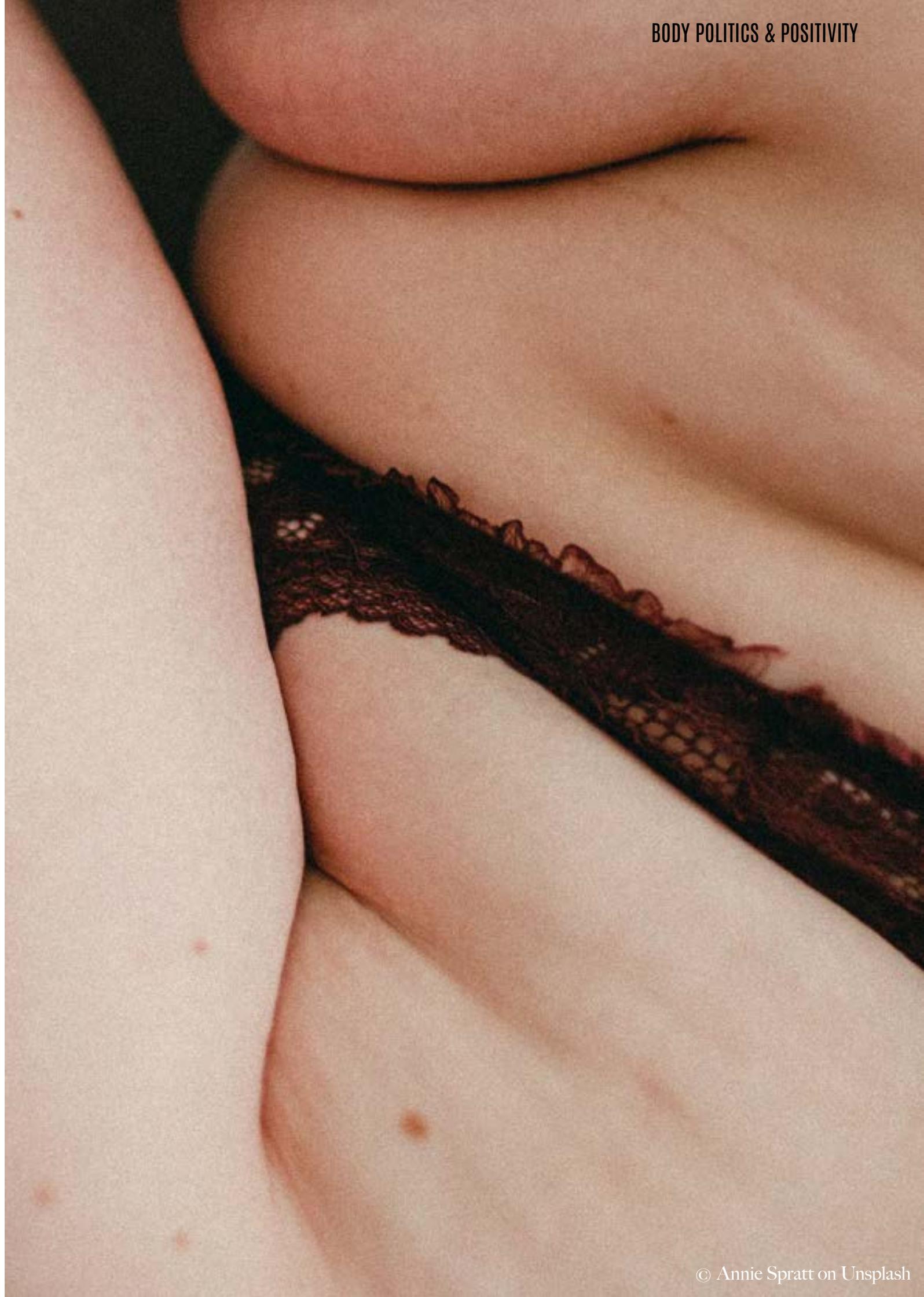
Plus size women are not just a marketing tool or target; we're people. And our clothes deserve to be treated with the same detail as normal clothes.

There is no word in the fashion industry that is as overused as flattering. The concept that our tummies need to be hidden, our waists pinched in by Spanx, our thighs kept out of sight and out of mind – just to appeal to someone else's concept of beauty – is an abusive one. It's okay to say that it's not acceptable, to push and strive for more for ourselves.

And it's okay to still be afraid of the skirts and the crop tops too. We should never, ever beat ourselves up over being afraid of something we've been told we can never have. Worldwide recovery over plus size representations won't take a day, and it won't all happen in the same way; but your recovery is your own, just like your body is.

Now, get out there and own it.

BY ABBIE HOSKEN



NILOH



Niloh is a contemporary candle brand based in Birmingham on a mission to make a stand. Our mission is to create beautiful goddess candles which celebrate the female form in all its glory. We firmly believe that every womxn deserves to see themselves as the goddess that they are!

Founded by a WOC, inclusivity and diversity are of great importance. We offer two body types: original and curve. Our designs are a bespoke, custom design exclusive to Niloh. The current collection consists of 5 nude inclusive skin tones along with Ivory and Noir. We truly believe that every-BODY deserves to be represented.

We're an eco-conscious brand and sustainability is something we deeply care about. All our candles are vegan friendly and made from soy wax, with each candle meticulously hand-poured in small batches. Our goddesses arrive in environmentally friendly packaging and should you wish to burn your goddess, you can re-use the melted wax as wax melts. From production to the final product, we aim to be as sustainable as possible.

Infused with our signature, celestial scent of meadow lily, cotton and musk - they really do smell as good as they look! It's our aim to create candles which bridge the senses of sight and smell to offer a truly unique piece of home decor."



DYING

TO STAY

ALIVE

BY ALICE CROUCH

TRIGGER WARNING: EATING DISORDERS

When I was thirteen, my whole clothing style became an early 2000s hip hop video. Your whole insides can be on spin cycle for months, but as long as you look thin, you look 'good'. 13 is when the dashboard on my pancreas lit up every single warning light known to man and my weight decreased dramatically. The odd backhanded compliments of 'You look amazing!' And 'Wow you look so skinny' forced me to stick a line of duct tape over my dashboard and carry on going as if I was perfectly okay despite my body rattling and bumping along the way. I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. After

"I STARTED GOING DOWNHILL AT 70MPH ON A BIKE WITH ALL THE BREAKS STUCK".

being told by my attending nurse that I 'Should be dead' (which basically makes me some sort of miracle right?!) the weight started to creep back when I wasn't watching, like a younger sibling sneaking into your room when you're out and after a few occasions you noticed things have moved around and you can't figure out how to get everything looking 'how you want it' again. I'm sure I'm not the only one that has an internal voice whispering over my shoulder anytime a pair

of eyes are laid on me, like I'm able to hack into the mainframe of the human brain like the a stereotypical isolated, socially awkward nerd, who has only his appliances and half-eaten Chinese takeaway boxes for company.

Honestly, the more depressed I got about the person I saw in the mirror, the more food I sneaked into my room when the house shook from the vibrations of my

"DIABULIMIA IS ONE OF THE MOST UNRECOGNISED EATING DISORDERS THAT EXISTS IN THE WORLD TODAY."

parent's sleepy snores. I hid my eating from everyone as best I could. I started going downhill at 70mph on a bike with all the breaks stuck. My boyfriend at the time was possibly the most toxic thing I have ever done to myself. A gym and fitness buff, I felt like I stuck out like a really painful spot on your chin right before a first date. Unappealing and a pain.

In a few years I went from UK size 8 to UK size 14. A couple of years went by, and I found myself single, binge drinking every weekend and sleeping with a string of guys I had no intention of seeing again. This was what my self worth came down to: seeking approval through sex to feel like, just for a moment, I wasn't completely unfuckable to anyone who made my fanny tingle.

Diabulimia is one of the most unrecognised eating disorders that exists in the world today. I'd read about it previously and scoffed at my mum wondering who could be so irresponsible to put their lives at risk just to be skinny (Even then I was ridiculing my future self). To put Diabulimia

(I can't believe this word isn't recognised by my spellcheck) into layman's terms, it's the restriction of insulin with the intention of losing weight. I dangerously ran my blood sugars so high over the past couple of years that I have ended up in hospital 5 times, so much so I was considering getting a subscription card (they must do those right? Like get admitted five times and you get a free extra jelly at dinner?).

I was beside myself, I couldn't believe it was this 'easy' to lose weight! I dropped over a stone and a half. I was fitting into a size 6 for the first time ever in my life. I felt good. I looked good. I didn't look ill. But I felt it. Everyday, I felt it. The unbearable cramping in my calves. The blurry vision. The dehydration. I was peeing like a woman in her third trimester. I dropped out of university and started my first full time job. Every job I have done, I have had my absences investigated because my attendance was poor. I was killing myself and nobody knew the full extent of it.

"THIS WAS WHAT MY SELF WORTH CAME DOWN TO: SEEKING APPROVAL THROUGH SEX TO FEEL LIKE, JUST FOR A MOMENT, I WASN'T COMPLETELY UNFUCKABLE TO ANYONE WHO MADE MY FANNY TINGLE."

After my fourth time in hospital since meeting my boyfriend, I finally confided in him (like hey I've been hiding this massive secret from you and that's why I've almost died countless times no biggie right?). I cried. I cried for a solid two hours (I literally looked like I had an allergic reaction my face got so puffy). That was earlier this year in January. I tried being honest with myself but life

seemed easier to live a lie than try and admit I had an eating disorder. I was bingeing on all kinds of unhealthy crap (the best stuff to eat though right?) with no moderation and no insulin.

I was warned by multiple health professionals that if I were to become pregnant, the baby would die. If I kept harming myself in this way, I would never be able to conceive and hold a baby for a full term. I would die young. I would face multiple amputations and blindness.

“I WAS WARNED BY MULTIPLE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS THAT IF I WERE TO BECOME PREGNANT, THE BABY WOULD DIE. IF I KEPT HARMING MYSELF IN THIS WAY, I WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO CONCEIVE AND HOLD A BABY FOR A FULL TERM.”

Life is fucking hard, but 2020 and the coronavirus pandemic pushed everything into hyperdrive and I felt like I was stuck going light speed into a black hole with the big red STOP button disabled. I was taking more insulin again. I was outgrowing my clothes, and I resorted back to baggy jumpers once more. Shrouding myself in material was the only way to keep myself feeling protected. Towards the end of lockdown, I had gone up to a UK size 12 again. My insulin intake went down, and I ended up in hospital in July, dying once again.

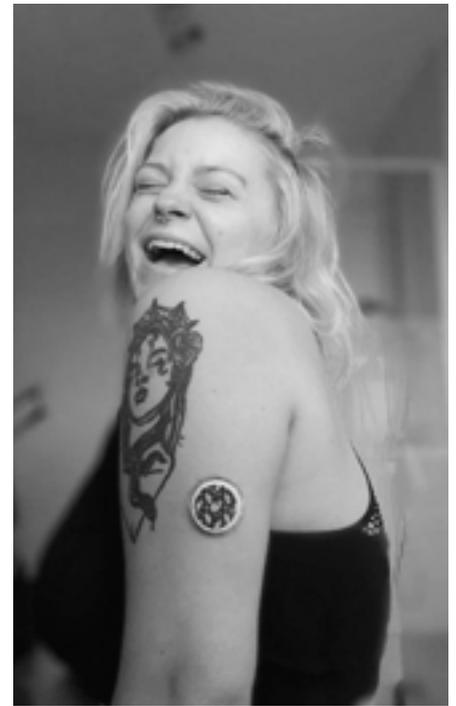
When I got out, I made a promise to myself and my loved ones that I would never take my life for granted again, and that no matter what I looked like or what the scales said, it was better than a one-way ticket to the morgue at 21. I had a lightbulb inside

me that had been broken for years that I had ignored, using a pathetic little hand torch to guide my way through life. This time, I wanted to change that. I fitted a new lightbulb, and I suddenly saw how fulfilling life could be, that everything was different now I didn't have tunnel vision.

I finally admitted to my Diabetic consultant that I was struggling with my weight, my eating, my body image, my eating disorder. He listened and I'm now on the referral list to get help from the eating disorder unit. I had never been acknowledged like this before. I took control of my eating disorder, and instead of hiding it, tucked away in my seemingly ever-expanding back pocket, I'm finally starting to have an open discussion about it because it is SO important. Diabulimia is still not an international medically recognised term, and I am determined to keep talking, keep raising awareness until it is. Nobody should feel like they don't feel recognised. Don't get me wrong, this isn't a story

“WHEN I GOT OUT, I MADE A PROMISE TO MYSELF AND MY LOVED ONES THAT I WOULD NEVER TAKE MY LIFE FOR GRANTED AGAIN, AND THAT NO MATTER WHAT I LOOKED LIKE OR WHAT THE SCALES SAID, IT WAS BETTER THAN A ONE-WAY TICKET TO THE MORGUE AT TWENTY-ONE.”

about how I suddenly got my shit together and everything is great now and I am fully recovered and it was as easy as turning on a switch that had been off for so long. I still struggle with my body image on a daily basis, avoiding mirrors and measuring my waist



everyday to see how 'fat' I am. I still look longingly at the clothes I used to fit into and wish I could be that skinny, that confident again.

Now, I'm trying to look at my future and what I want. I want to grow old with the love of my life. I want to have children with him. I want to live to see just how much more fucked up politicians can make this world (although right now how that seems possible I don't know). Even though every time I whack out my insulin pen and get stared at like a very public heroin addict when I plunge a needle into my leg, I still close my eyes and think about how much better my life will be.

My life will be more than just a number on some scales. It will be filled with laughter, happiness, and opportunities that I would never have known. I am more than just my weight and an image reflected back at me. **My name is Alice and I have an eating disorder.**

MY NAME

IS ALICE

AND I HAVE AN

EATING

DISORDER

NANCY & VIRGO

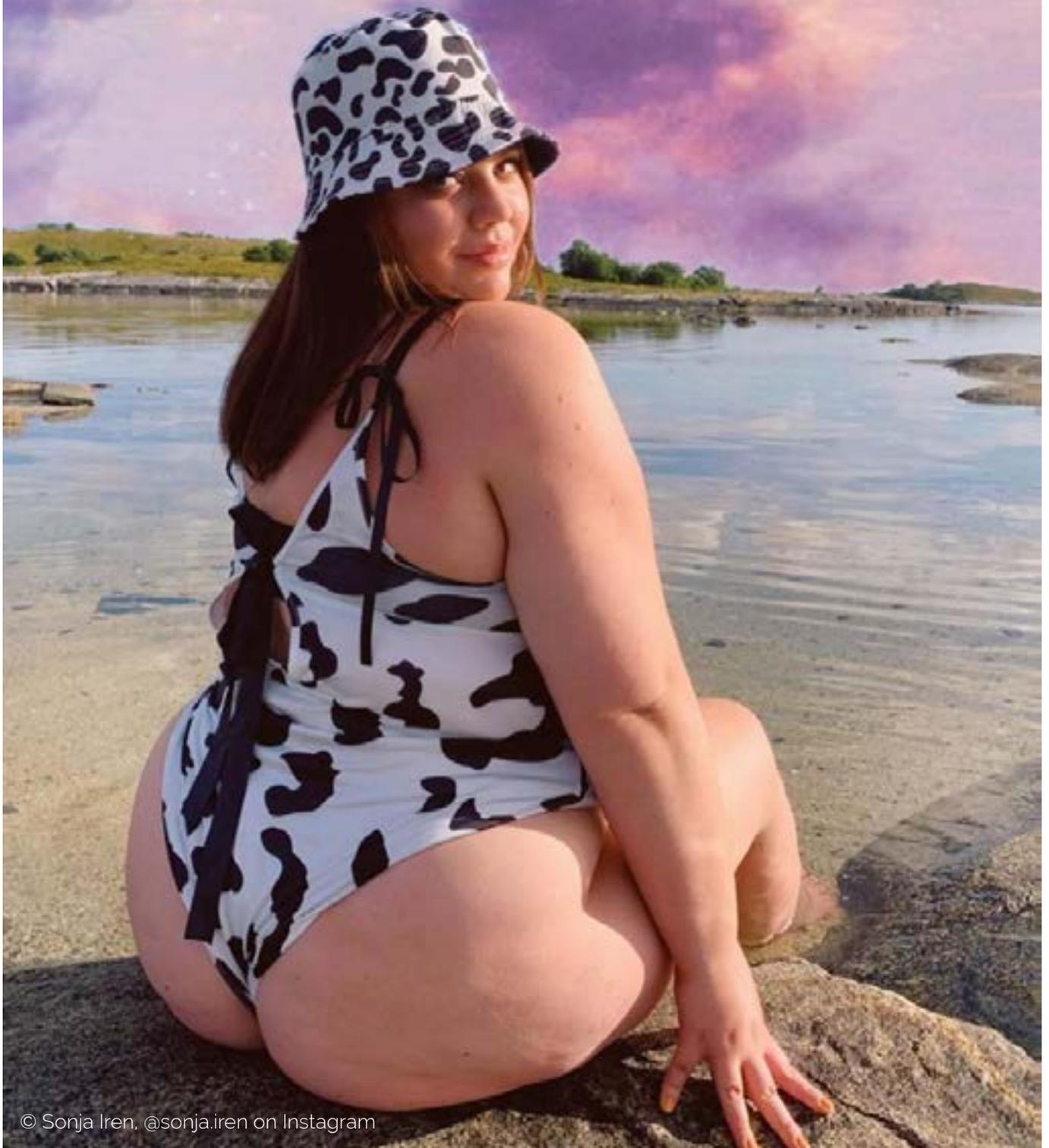
Head to @nancyandvirgo on Instagram to shop!





WHY CURVY IS NOT REVOLUTIONARY

AND BODY POSITIVITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS SO IMPORTANT



© Sonja Iren. @sonja.iren on Instagram

Sonja Iren is a Norwegian plus size model and body positivity activist. Over the last five years, she's built a community on Instagram where she empowers other women to love themselves and feel powerful in their own body.

BY ISABELLA EHRLICHER

The last few years have been all about body positivity and women empowering other women through social media. The movement has taken over our feeds, telling – and showing – women that all body types are beautiful and deserving of rights and respect. More fashion brands than ever have started plus size collections, and models like Ashley Graham and Iskra Lawrence have become more popular.

The times where only size zero was beautiful are now over.

However, with all the progress today's society has made, we're still not quite there yet.

Because when we speak about 'curvy' models, we're not always talking about plus size women. 'Curvy' body types have curves, yes, but curves in favourable places above all else – namely the hourglass shape we're all so familiar with, having big breasts and a big bum with a small waist. Gosh forbid a woman has a belly though, right?

And when you're bigger than the standard curvy girl, you're still likely to be insulted and thought of as less than your hourglass peers. People too often get stuck in the old-age association of size to beauty, and forget there's a person behind the screen they're pelting with quick-typed trolling.

So, where has the body positive mantra of 'everybody is beautiful' disappeared to in these moments? Rather than shaming bigger bodies and following this outdated trend, we should empower ourselves and each other. At the same time, self-love is easier said than done. Sometimes we get out of bed in the morning and feeling positive about our bodies and the changes we can make for society seems so far away.

How can we feel empowered in ourselves, and make sure we feel comfortable in our bodies in a way that allows us to do better by others too?

Sonja Iren, a Norwegian plus-size model, body positivity activist and influencer, is empowering other women through Instagram. And when she deals with nasty comments from other people, she confronts these people openly on her account. "The days where I don't feel positive about my body are the days when I am not active, and when I get a lot of hate comments."

Even though these comments can often get to her, she tries to stay positive. When speaking about these issues, she said: "I often have to remind myself that I am the one living in my body and I am good enough." She feels most empowered when her supporters message her and thank her for the confidence, freedom and inspiration she has brought to



Love yourself, love yourself, and don't be so hard on yourself. We are all beautiful

their lives. "People tell me that I help them and make them feel better, that also helps me a lot", she shares kindheartedly.

Rather than seeing your body as an object only, maybe we should be looking at the whole image of 'us'.

What have you accomplished in your life? What can you be proud of? Would you have achieved all these things without having the body you have?

Sonja's main tip on how to achieve this kind of self-love (including of, but beyond, your body) is to look after yourself - to take care of yourself like you do with the people you love. She tells us: "Remember, you only live once, so love yourself, love yourself, and don't be so hard on yourself. We are all beautiful."

With her inspiring words and gorgeous self-portraits she's inspired many people, proof of which lies in the 69,000+ people following along on

her Instagram journey.

So, if you feel like your Instagram's become a bit of a toxic environment lately and you want to see more body diversity on your feed, then here are some great pages to follow:

@sonja.iren
@plusbabygirl
@luluandherselflove

@feminist
@curvycampell
@thebirdspapaya

These influencers will definitely give you a much-needed body positive boost, and their self-love content is second to none.

In times where we are all observing social distancing, we can't forget the importance of human connection. We need to be empathic with each other, support one another and instill confidence into every person we meet. This way, we can feel positive about ourselves too.

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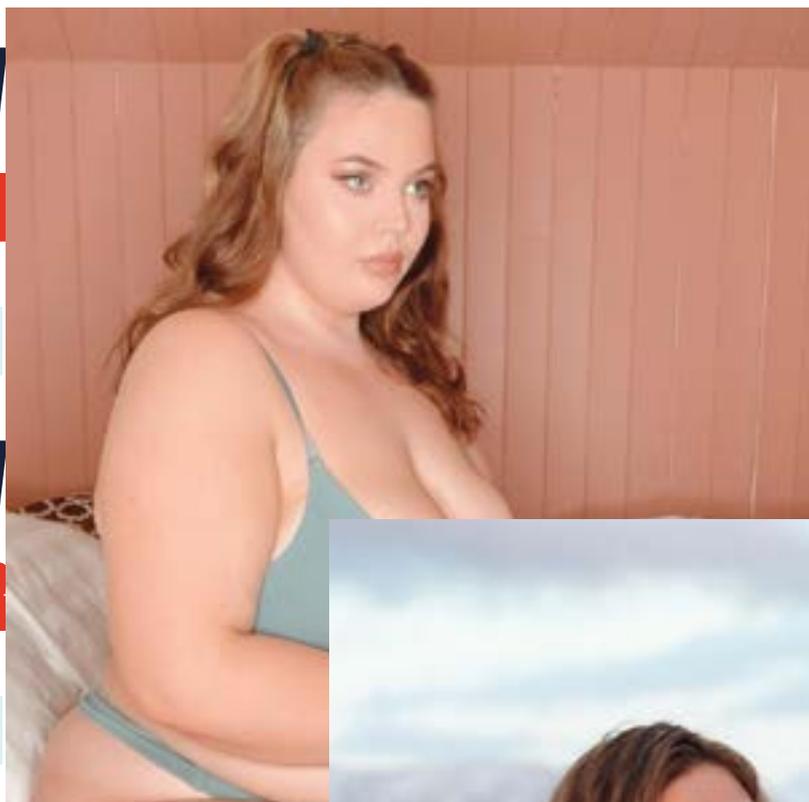
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© Sonja Iren. @sonja.iren on Instagram, L-R





CREATED BY LAURA

Created by Laura was founded by photography student Laura. Over the last year, Laura's love for graphic design has developed and she took the pandemic as an opportunity to create her Instagram and Etsy shop [@createdby.laura](https://www.etsy.com/shop/createdbylaura) selling original handcrafted notebooks. Illustrated by Laura, the notebooks are made up of 140gsm recycled paper. Her illustrations are inspired by fashion, architecture, landscapes, beautiful colours and interesting shapes and her art is as a way of spreading kindness and positivity!

Q&A

EMILY KING

THE ARTIST BEHIND THE COVER

Tell me about yourself!

I'm Emily, a 23 year old interior designer by day and artist by night! Emily King Art is my new found side hustle and I absolutely love it! I graduated with a degree in Interior design just over 2 years ago now and landed a job in yacht design in my home town of Plymouth.

I've always been creative, always making things, painting things, drawing on my bedroom walls! I started to 'specialise' I suppose in portraiture in my GCSE's and A levels, but since leaving school, university and then work took over and painting was put on the back burner. I think I did 1 or 2 portraits in those 5 years! During lockdown, I found the time to finally pick up my brushes again. I've always loved painting people but wanted to do something

different to my usual portraits, so I decided to give female nudes a go.

'IF YOU DON'T SHOOT, YOU DON'T SCORE'

My life motto (thanks Dad) has always been 'If you don't shoot, you don't score' so after a surprising amount of interest from friends and family, I set up a dedicated Instagram account for my art and it's completely snowballed since then. It's been a really exciting few months and I can't wait to see where it all goes!

Tell me about the women you represent in your paintings.

I started off painting models (plus one sneaky painting of myself), but have slowly began

painting more and more portraits of women who have submitted their own images to me. Women of any shape and size are starting to get involved and it's so exciting for me to be able to turn any woman into art and give her that confidence boosting, powerful portrait! It really proves how brave and strong these women are, to not only share their nudes with me but also to share such wonderful stories about their motivations and reasons behind wanting a painting done.

What obstacles have you faced whilst creating your art?

I won't lie, I haven't faced too many obstacles, yet anyway! I do feel incredibly lucky saying that, I think the main thing I struggle with is not having enough time and space to create as many pieces as I would like to. I've been so



© Emily King

lucky that all of my customers have been so understanding and happy to wait a few weeks or months for one of my pieces!

I have found however that shipping can be a real nightmare, and definitely learned that the hard way when one of my paintings, despite being wrapped so carefully, did get somewhat obliterated during transit! My customer sent me some photos as it had arrived with the frame completely smashed... I was so shocked and heartbroken but hopped straight on the phone to a local framer who thankfully

managed to reframe it for her in 24 hours and it was good as new. That's definitely the part I find most stressful but thankfully it hasn't happened since, fingers crossed that lightning doesn't strike twice!

What inspires you and your work?

It has to be people & the person behind the portrait. I started drawing and painting people when I was around 15 years old, and became so obsessed with creating intimate portraits of people that they've become all

I've painted since. I love trying to evoke the emotion behind the person, and it just felt natural to progress into painting the female body all those years later. The beautiful brave women who have sent me images of themselves to paint are such an inspiration now. From young women who want empowering portraits to represent their journeys of self love after struggling with body-image issues, to mothers who want to teach their daughters more about self love and body acceptance. It has been a real honour to be trusted to turn so many women into art and I've been blown away



by the amount of women who want me to paint them too.

Another big inspiration of mine is colour and using colours in unusual ways. I always hated painting anything too realistic, and now love layering unusual colours to create a really bold, statement painting.

How do you think your work empowers women?

It's a hard one to answer, different people find different things empowering and I'm just so honoured that my work has empowered even just one person, let alone multiple. I recently completed a commission for a wonderful customer who gave the most beautiful feedback regarding this.

“THE BEAUTIFUL BRAVE WOMEN WHO HAVE SENT ME IMAGES OF THEMSELVES TO PAINT ARE SUCH AN INSPIRATION NOW.”

She wrote that the painting serves as a reminder that she is not just a mother, but also a friend, a daughter, a fighter and 'still me'. I hope that my pieces, through strong & energetic brushstrokes, help remind women how powerful and strong they are and can be.

What has the response been to your artwork?

Honestly it's been amazing, which was totally unexpected but I am so so grateful! I never thought that this many people would be interested in a painting of mine. I started off doing some paintings for my friends and within a month had already been approached by

my first international customer! The overall response has been so positive, not only in terms of the quality of the paintings but also the empowering effect that they are having on the viewer. It's feedback I could only have dreamt of.

Who would you consider to be your professional support network?

The art community on Instagram, is hands down the best thing to come out of this platform! I'll stand by that. The artists I've connected with, in particular female artists, have been far more supportive than I could have ever imagined. In an industry where there could be a lot of jealousy and hostility, I have found it to be completely the opposite and I'm sure others would say the same.

“THE COMMUNITY ON INSTAGRAM, IS HANDS DOWN THE BEST THING TO COME OUT OF THIS PLATFORM!”

Aside from that, my customers have all been so amazingly supportive and I'm super grateful for them for investing in me and my work. My family, friends and boyfriend are all absolute legends too and I can't thank them enough for constantly sharing my work and letting me fill their walls with nude paintings!

How can we support your business as well as other people on the field?

Any support, whether it's a 'like' on my posts or an enquiry about a commission, means the world, not only to me but to any small business! A like and a share really goes a long way, my Instagram @emilykingart_ (shameless plug)

is really everything to me at the moment! It's how I've received all of my orders so far and I'm so grateful to anyone who follows and shares my work, or leaves a like or comment.

Aside from my larger canvas paintings, I've also introduced some smaller 'mini nudes' which I released over the summer which are a more affordable option. If you are interested in purchasing any of my work, my DM's are always open!

“HAVING A PLATFORM WHERE YOU CAN CONNECT WITH AND SUPPORT OTHER WOMEN IN THE SAME BOAT AS YOU IS INVALUABLE.”

What are your thoughts on what we are doing here at Disgraceful?

What's not to love! Supporting female entrepreneurs and women in business is such an important topic and I am so thrilled to be involved in this first issue.

I think especially with starting a new business, or in my case a side hustle, you can definitely experience lots of self-doubt and even imposter syndrome, wondering what people will think of the work I'm putting out there and feeling like it may not be good enough. Having a platform where you can connect with and support other women in the same boat as you is invaluable.

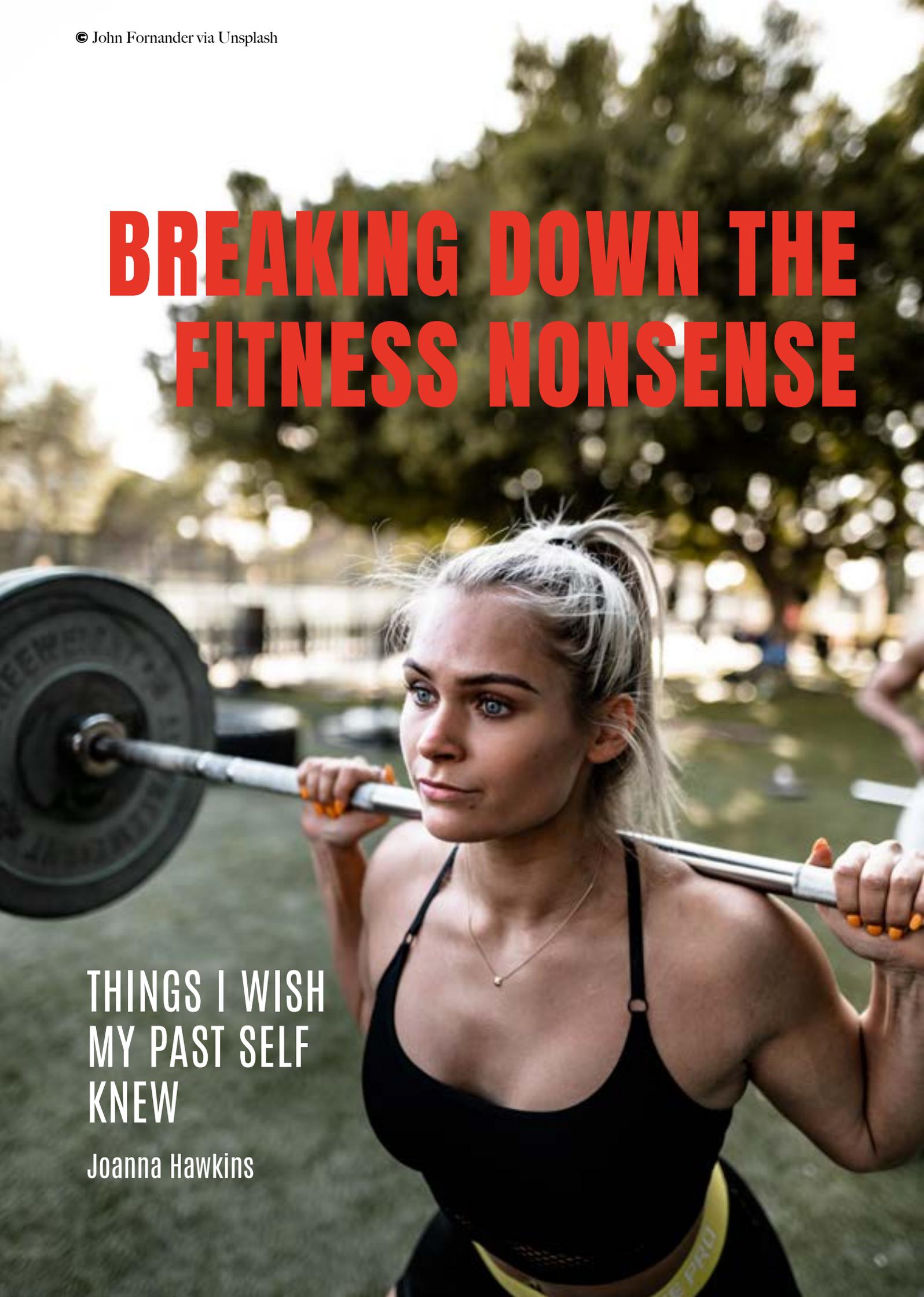
EMILY KING



BREAKING DOWN THE FITNESS NONSENSE

THINGS I WISH
MY PAST SELF
KNEW

Joanna Hawkins



At school, I was entirely below average at sport and it's never been a great skill of mine. But I deeply care about mental health and my physical well-being, and that's an integral part of the fitness puzzle.

There are so many things I wish I'd realised about fitness a long time ago that would've given me a much easier time when scrolling through endless fitness content on Instagram. I hope sharing them here will help you make sense of all the noise in the fitness industry too.

To discuss the role of fitness in our lives, I rallied round my favourite ladies. I asked them what they would tell their past selves; what we wished we'd realised a whole lot sooner.

We discussed what we have discovered works for us, what we've learned from social media and what we hate on there too. Educating ourselves when it comes to internet wellness advice is key – considering what you want to allow yourself to see, you should be sure to read from many different perspectives and sources. Together, we outlined how to handle the information thrown at us; a sort of guide to breaking down the 'b-s' online that we never should've believed. Here's what we came up with:

Stop looking at before and afters. Start looking at the here and now. Don't wait to feel different further down the line; you are your best self from the start - from right now! Remind yourself that different angles can tell two very different stories, and body size or shape cannot determine fitness anyway. Likewise, it's very easy to subtly tweak photos on social media, so the people you are setting as your 'fitness goals' might not be entirely realistic. Influencer Lucy Mountain, found at @lucymountain on Instagram, is particularly good at calling out such rubbish.

Recognising that we are all different. Despite our efforts, no two people can look identical. Acknowledging that even if we ate the same and exercised the same, naturally we are all born to be different, is reassuring.

Weight means nothing; numbers on the scales do not consider muscle, fat or height, and even these things are debatable as measurements of true health. This goes for people's staminas too. The beginners exercise class will still have a range of abilities because people have different natural staminas; not everyone's baseline looks the same.



Protein powders can be your performance's friend, when used appropriately. These products gather a lot of controversy on social media, but education is key. No 'meal replacements' or slim-down shakes will ever be good for your health overall. Do your research on the products you are considering using, and know what they're meant for!

Finding something sustainable. In short, this means finding a form of fitness you enjoy. Weightlifting, for example, may technically be more effective in building strength but doing an activity you enjoy will actually be better for you as you're more likely to keep it up. Don't feel embarrassed to try non-mainstream sports, as you will most likely love having the opportunity to give it a go! Likewise, don't get put off exercise just because of the standard team games at school – look for more individual pursuits if that suits you better (especially in these socially distanced times). Additionally, don't disregard yoga and low impact exercise. They're by no means 'slow' or 'too relaxing' which is often stereotyped, and from experience I can assure you in no yoga class have I ever felt the option to fall asleep. For new and exciting yoga content, check out Kanoa Greene as she documents her journey learning to become a yoga instructor.

Do you actually like your fitness trackers? Does this app actually bring you joy and benefit your life, or do you get envious of those super speedy 5K times that everyone but you seems to manage? In a way, are these apps actually detracting from your fabulous efforts to leave the house and move your body? If you're inspired to run a mini marathon, or any distance, do it, but don't check everyone else's stats. If in doubt, delete it! You run your race. Couchto5K is wonderful help – it will build you up from the first few steps week by week, and you can repeat a week's programme if you don't feel ready to move on.

'Round the block' rule. In a world where we are increasingly working from home and having to be self-sufficient on our own, often working from a table, make sure you get yourself moving in any way you like. We LOVE walking 'round the block'. Find a block, any block, and walk. It will do wonders for your lovely brain, we promise.

Are you really sporty? You're allowed to say yes! Just because you're not the best, it doesn't mean you don't count. When people ask what distances you run, you're allowed to say you're working on running a mile, or a lap down the road, whilst still considering yourself 'sporty'.

But I wasn't sporty at school, why would I be now? Someone has got to come last on sports day. It was me, I took one for the team. And if it was you too – don't hold yourself to it forever. If we all went off our decisions and achievements aged fourteen, the world would be even more dangerous than it already can be. Just because you weren't picked for the hockey team at school or were kicked out of ballet aged five, it doesn't mean you've got to have a forged sick-note from sports forever.

Don't feel bad if you genuinely dislike the gym. Just because you don't fancy this kind of exercise, it doesn't mean you're unfit, or unworthy, or not able to enjoy fitness. Do we think the treadmill is the most boring place on earth? Yes, we do. It very much is. I salute anyone who aces treadmill life – I am in absolute awe. But I get extremely dizzy and am scared to stop because I've fallen off before and then can't walk on the ground afterwards (and I know I'm not the only one with this fear).

It's okay though, because, at the very least, it made the girls on the cross-trainers smile – and showed

me I don't have to love the machines like them. It's good to show a bit of humanity in the gym. It doesn't mean you should stop running, just start taking the treadmill with a pinch of salt. There are plenty of other ways to move your body.

You can, and will, go through phases. I go by the mantra there are only so many things you can do in a day. If you've got to contend with a day of full-time work, and other life responsibilities that we all inevitably have, an intense gym session might just be too much. And that's ok! It sounds like maybe some rest is what your body really needs after all that.

Being kind to yourself. Try not to give yourself



harsh and unrealistic goals. If you smashed life at the gym yesterday, you might not today because you can't be on top form all the time. Be patient and give yourself time to recover. Fitness influencer, Lauren Leavell posts fabulous content emphasising this sense of 'you'; wherever you're at, it is important to celebrate your milestones and your achievements.

Exercise isn't always done in gym leggings. There are many things we do in our daily lives that constitute exercise, such as hoovering, cleaning or simply walking a flight of stairs. Give yourself some credit. Fitness and keeping your head happy are both linked to moving your body, and this can be part of your everyday life too.

Whatever your feelings towards fitness and diet culture on social media, it is so important to stay educated. Remember there is a lot you will have seen online, but also a lot you don't. None of us are perfect and we all deserve to have lazy days and lots of chocolate when we need them – however much we need them.

JOANNA HAWKINS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SOPHIE

Founder of Illustrations by Sophie and Graphic Designer, Sophie entered the entrepreneurial world during lockdown. Wanting to always try and bring in illustration in where she could but unable to do so in her day job, Sophie started her small business by creating custom pet portraits. After these were a great hit, she now branches out and create different prints and illustrations. Be sure to follow Sophie over at [@sophietaylor.designs](https://www.instagram.com/sophietaylor.designs)! We love this amazing Disgraceful Favourite!!!



TIME'S UP, AGAIN:

STRONG IS THE NEW (AND PREEXISTING) BEAUTIFUL

Traditionally, society has always dictated that true femininity is rooted in a delicate fragility of sorts.

BY ATHALIA IBANGA

For many sportswomen, this leaves them unable to fit a mould which calls for them to look and act a certain way. Whilst being muscular is seen as powerful in the male form, women who are deemed 'too muscular' (which, honestly, what does that even mean?) can often struggle with feeling beautiful and seeing themselves as beautiful too.

As an athlete, having represented GB in Handball and playing Netball to a high standard, I know this battle far too well. Too many times I've looked in the mirror and mentally annihilated the very assets which have allowed me to compete at such a high level. It seems almost nonsensical to correlate someone's outside appearance with their value as a human being but, all too often, women are seen as lesser for refusing to conform to a 'more appealing' body weight or shape.

It's about time we reclaim our bodies and fight to overcome the patriarchal restraints used to shackle our minds.

As Amy Winehouse unapologetically said, "What Is It About Men?". What is it about some men that enables them to set universal standards, to which women are expected to abide by?

We're expected to be strong. Strong in birth, strong in managing the household, strong in creating space for ourselves in male-dominated workplaces. Yet, the physical appearance of strength is something which is still typically attributed to men.

The reality is, it's hard to combat societal pressures to be delicate and feminine but also stay true to yourself in your love for sport and owning your time on the court. After the trainers and kit come off, we should still feel unashamedly powerful and strong. When it comes to challenging these norms, representation is undeniably important. Why aren't we seeing more strong women booked for high fashion campaign shoots - in all their athletic glory? Why aren't we seeing more women celebrated for their mental resilience,

especially at a time that is overwhelming for so many?

I think quite often, out of fear of being considered irrational, women will conceal emotions - swallowing their tears in the name of protective privacy. We, as a society, must move away from only celebrating the feminine form when it's deemed to be submissive, un-dominant and unimposing in certain spheres of life. The constant scrutinisation women face is detrimental to not only their physical health, but also their mental health.

Time's well and truly up on these tired ideals, and far gone are the days when women should feel embarrassed of their resilient forms.

It's important to note strength comes in all different shapes and sizes. As someone who has fluctuated in weight, these changes massively affected the way I viewed my body and self-worth. If anything, I felt more insecure once I had conformed to a more



© Sarah Cervantes on Unsplash

societally acceptable weight. It's important to know whatever your weight, no matter your size or shape, you are enough – and you always have been. Being strong isn't restricted to those of us who can physically demonstrate our strength.

As time has passed, I have realised that there is no one ideal physique. The conversation needs to stop focusing on the ultimate body shape and instead promote a central message of self-acceptance and love.

Admittedly, this has taken me many years, but I now realise the discontent with myself was always a deception – a lie which has been told for many generations, to keep women beholden to standards made and maintained for men. Standards that

force women to shrink themselves and make every aspect of their lives smaller.

I now see myself as beautiful in my entirety. And, although we all have those days where we struggle, I know the doubt I always felt of myself should never have existed!

We, as women, need more and deserve more too. More women being unapologetically muscular (thank you, Venus and Serena), more women challenging gender norms and, finally, more men abandoning a warped view on how women are supposed to look and behave.

Our insecurities, quite frankly, were never – and will never – be our problem.

GEN Z: THE DIGITAL GENERATION

BY AMBER WEYMAN

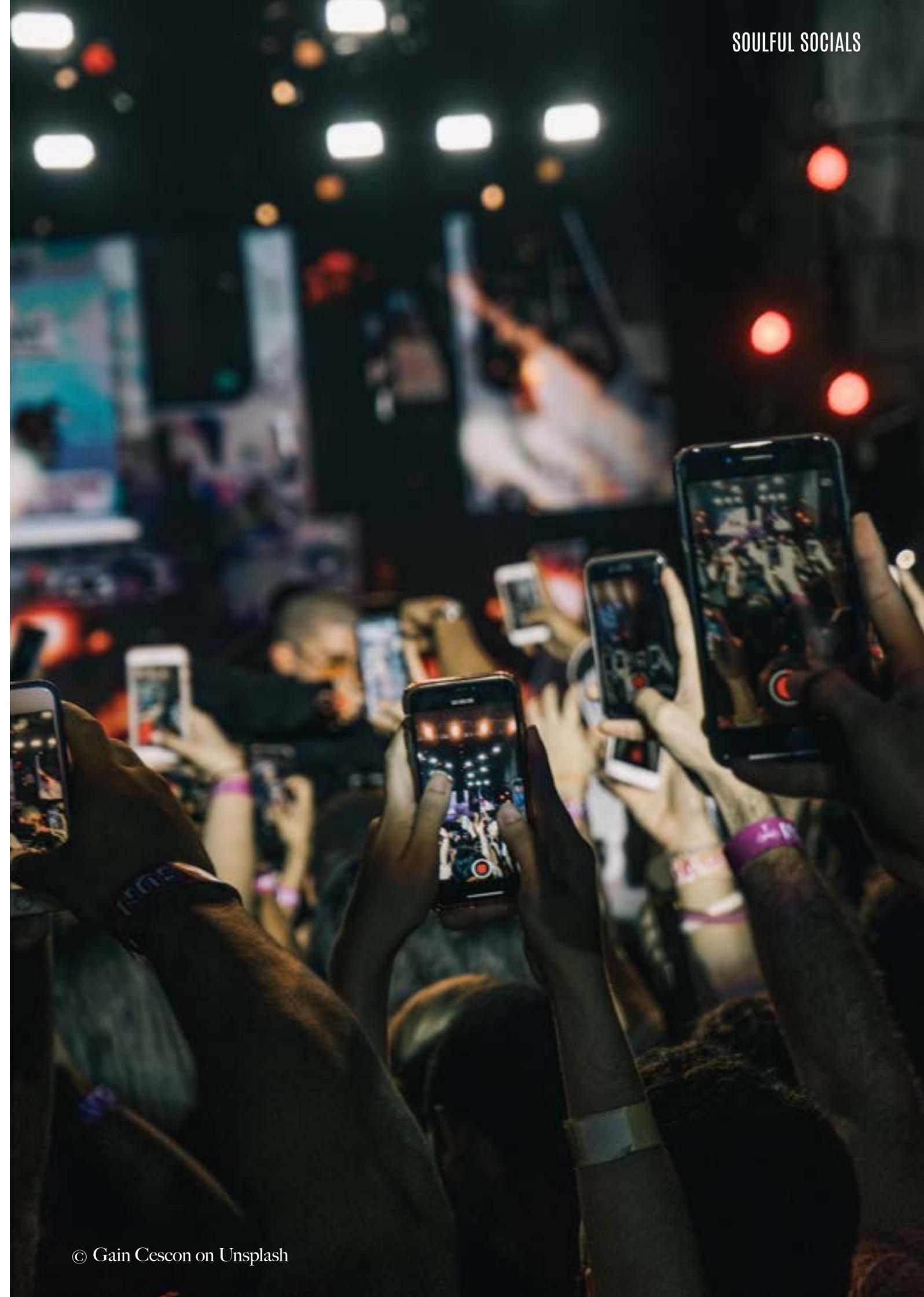
The Gen Z demographic have never known a time without the internet. They were born into a vast digital landscape, which has influenced their behaviours from how they apply for job opportunities to how they interact with the brands they invest in.

Generation Zers are digital natives who adopt mobile technologies from as young as ten years old. Born between 1995 and 2010, this cybernated demographic desires constant connectivity, on-demand content and personalised experiences. They are pragmatic and budget conscious, accepting yet untrusting. With the World Wide Web dominating the life of Gen Zers, the group are immune to obvious marketing campaigns, massively influencing change within the digital marketing sphere. In a bid to remain relevant to the Gen Z consumer group, modern brands are producing engaging video content; promoting their brand values, connecting ecommerce to social media presence, interacting with social influencers and

optimising everything for mobile consumption.

Authenticity and storytelling are now key motivators for Gen Z. LGBTQIA+ rights, racism, abortion, the gender pay gap, mental health and elections are all topics they're greatly passionate about and expect the same advocacy from the brands they purchase from.

Gen Z consumers want the brands they invest in to represent and align with their own personal ethics, as well as meeting personal consumer needs. To engage and stay relevant to the Gen Z consumer, brands are stepping away from the hard sell of a product and instead promoting a lifestyle or experience. This is often communicated via online channels as imagery



that aligns with the ideal aesthetic and beliefs of a brand are easily promoted, accessed and regularly consumed by Gen Zers via social media platforms. Due to this generation's preference towards on-demand visual content, the demographic's favourite social media platform is Youtube; with an official study finding 91% of Gen Zers interact with the platform compared to 66% connecting on Snapchat and 65% on Instagram. Brands have adapted to the popularity of YouTube by promoting products using YouTube's six second banner advertisements, and Gen Z are the perfect candidates to absorb the information communicated via these adverts.

Another platform that is championed by Gen Z due to the consumption of rapid media is TikTok. The constant flow of concise content via the platform's 'For You' page meets Gen Z's ever demanding quick-flow connectivity needs.

Surprisingly, TikTok has also replaced LinkedIn as a professional platform for many Gen Zers. These young digital pioneers are uploading digital resumes and short videos promoting themselves to potential employers. At the same time, others share content revealing how to 'Nail a Job Interview' and tips on how to be noticed by a high profile company.

Clicks are more important than bricks; as a demographic, Gen Z concentrate their spending via social media and ecommerce stores, which has encouraged brands to adjust to the online consumption of this digitally native consumer group.

With Gen Z spending an average of three hours a day on social platforms, brands are ensuring the accessibility of products via digital channels to increase online revenue and consumer-to-brand interaction. The social platform, Instagram, has become a popular marketing tool due to shopping features that seamlessly links products to branded content and reduce purchasing friction. Snapchat offers its own answer to frictionless purchases by allowing users to add a swipe up link to any content posted on the app. Accessibility isn't limited to linked products and a frictionless path-to-purchase though. Both Snapchat and Instagram offer AR filters to their users. These filters allow consumers to virtually interact with a product and have been adopted by a range of brands including Gucci Cosmetics and Burberry. AR Filters are particularly popular amongst luxury brands, as the feature

enables a connection with a vaster consumer base regardless of expendable income. Once an individual has interacted with a branded filter they are able to share this content on. This action, in turn, promotes the brand to the consumer's circle of followers, making the AR Filter one of the most effective digital marketing tools amongst this demographic in terms of audience reach.

However Gen Z won't invest in a purchase purely because the product is easily accessible. This demographic is driven by results. Gen Z consumers commonly research a product and rely on online reviews or opinions of friends before purchasing. Due to this, the consumer group is incredibly fickle and very rarely brand loyal; Gen Zers chase positive products and aren't afraid to jump ship to a brand's competitor if that product adorns regular five star ratings. Brands are hugely benefiting from this purchasing behaviour by incorporating reviews and comparisons of their products through online channels; minimising the risk of the consumer going elsewhere by suggesting similar products with higher ratings, all on one digital platform.

To recap my findings from a vast amount of research – as the line between physical and digital increasingly blurs for Gen Z, brands are continuing to ensure their transition to online channels. By building online relationships with this net native consumer group, brands are ensuring they're future proof. Due to their so-called 'eight-second filter', brands are not given much time to engage with the Generation Z consumer, so captivating imagery is a priority within branded content creation. Brands will also continue to focus on real world discussions closest to the Gen Z consumer group to ensure a 'real' connection. Finally, reviews and recommendations will advance in popularity on digital platforms in an effort to captivate this unpredictable consumer demographic.

Gen Z is greatly reshaping the traditional understanding of how brands interact with consumers, by influencing a social shift between customer and company. The future of digital marketing will rely on personalised content, connections, accessibility and authenticity within a vast digital ecosystem. A strong social media presence and strategy are key to attracting Gen Z customers, supported by a 'keeping it real' approach to brand image.

DIGI

**ART SHOWCASE
BY AABIDAH SHAH**

DISTA

T A L

Aabidah Shah is a 23-year-old photographer based in the West Midlands. Her latest collection, *Digital Distancing*, is a product of the COVID-19 pandemic. She had initially planned to photograph the participants face-to-face in a studio, but, as a result of worldwide lockdowns, Aabidah chose instead to capture images of her subjects via video call - a format we've all become accustomed to using in recent months.

She carried out shoots with people all over the world, in countries ranging from Australia, to Belgium, Germany, Latvia, Norway, Puerto Rico, to Saudi Arabia and Thailand. The forced redevelopment of Aabidah's *Digital Distancing* project demonstrates the global nature of social media; all in all, Aabidah carried out over 80 video calls across 13 countries. During these video calls, her participants were unaware of the conversation topic; all they knew was

that Aabidah was working on a new artistic project, which they were happy to help out with. Aabidah would engage each participant in a casual conversation about the diverse, inclusive nature of the project, which includes a multitude of cultures, religions, sexualities, and genders. At some point in the exchange, Aabidah would drop into the conversation how she thought her subject was beautiful, then captured their immediate reaction. What is showcased here by *Disgraceful* is each participant's genuine, candid reaction to Aabidah's compliment.

In the uncertainty of the pandemic, Aabidah found comfort in the kindness of her relationships with friends, family, and even strangers. The *Digital Distancing* project has allowed Aabidah to highlight the importance of celebrating diversity and self-love. More of Aabidah's photography can be found on her Instagram, [@aabidahsphotography](#).

N G I N G







THE PRESSURES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW TO CONFRONT THEM

AN OPINION PIECE

CHLOE BURROWS

A debilitating aspect of social media lies with the amount of peer pressure it creates. As an entire generation, we are obsessed with social media and what other people think of us. Now more than ever, we're living our lives through our phones and, for some, this can become extremely harmful.

In this article, we'll share some of the pressures we face through social media, and how you can stop them from taking over your life.

Through social media's unattainable standards, we're pressured into believing we should be doing something 'Instagram worthy' all the time. Influencers are known for giving the illusion they're constantly busy; whether it be shopping in designer stores, sipping expensive cocktails with friends or on unimaginably expensive tropical holidays.

So, for the average social media user, sitting in bed and consuming the revolving doors of other people's social lives, it can make them feel like they aren't doing enough in their life – or what they are achieving isn't good enough. If you ever feel guilty for doing nothing when you're watching everyone live their 'best lives' on social media, remember what you're seeing is the best parts of their life. Just like you're not going to upload photos of you sitting in bed, they're not going to either.

The average person cannot afford to go out every night or dine at fancy restaurants every evening, it's a lifestyle simply unattainable for most. Social media trends can create a huge FOMO – 'fear of missing

“Social media trends don't last forever, and missing out on one thing will not destroy your life...”

out'. Whether it's keeping up with friends, the latest celebrity drama or the new TikTok dance craze; people feel the need to constantly be checking their phone or else they are missing something. This fear of missing out on something can cause great anxiety, lack of sleep (if they're staying up late to scroll for updates) and poor interaction with people offline.

Social media trends don't last forever, and missing out on one thing will not destroy your life: even if it feels like it can. It doesn't matter if you missed someone's live video, they'll do another. Seeking gratification through someone else's life is only a temporary fix. You may feel great because you can join in a conversation, but that unfulfilling satisfaction will go as quickly as it came.

Some people feel the urge to post every day or people will forget about them, and they won't be seen as being as popular as they used to be. But I hate to tell you that, unlike these big influencers, no one is sitting with anticipation waiting for us to post something. So, why stress about posting so much?

No one should have to spend their entire day with a phone glued to their hand – and if you do, you need to take a break.

Another form of social media-induced pressure relates to participation in potentially hazardous online activities – one of which being dating apps. I'll say it for the record: I abhor online dating. I find apps such as Tinder and Bumble subjective. How am I supposed to know if I could have a connection with someone based on their looks?

Why am I on these dating apps, you ask? Because I feel like I have to be. I installed them in my first year of university, thinking that I was missing out on something. All my friends were going on Tinder dates and talking about all the guys they'd meet through Tinder. My FOMO overcame



boys, with the mindset of a twelve year old. I felt immense pressure, like that was my only way of dating someone. Why did I care so much? Having a relationship is not the be-all and end-all. And going off my last relationship, I would much rather be self-sufficient for the time being.

Appearance related pressure is inevitably something many of you reading this will have experienced. I feel a need to take multiple photos, scroll through them microscopically and find all my flaws, faults and anything that makes the photo deem unworthy of posting. It's disheartening, but I can't help it. I know it's a form of self-torture, which I intensify by comparing my photos to my favourite celebrities and influencers – which I know is wrong, considering I don't look like any of them and was never meant to anyway.

Each photo then goes through a process of editing; concealing eye bags, smoothing my skin, increasing the detail of my eyes. Why do I care so much? I ask myself every time I do it.

As a woman, I have been socialised into believing that my desirability is my most prized feature. This

“Social media has us all believing we should be making ourselves appear as desirable as possible...”

is subconsciously instilled in the majority of females growing up. What I have to say on social media, what my views are and what I believe in means nothing unless I look attractive. My desirability is what makes people want to follow me or interact with my posts. So I feel a need to make myself prettier on each photo, to keep up the manufactured beauty I have created for myself online.

Social media has us all believing we should be making ourselves appear as desirable as possible, and the number of likes and comments we receive are praises for our efforts into becoming more palatable. Let's face it, we're infatuated by the opinions of other people, most of whom we don't



© Rodion Kutsaev on Unsplash

even know. I think what we have to remember is that what we view online is what people want us to see of them. A model is only going to post her prettiest pictures, just like you and I will. And in regards to likes and comments, it's all a quick, insubstantial, ego-boosting fix.

The number of likes and comments we get might make us feel better in the present, but do they matter after that?

You shouldn't live your life through numbers. And if you feel dependent on social media to boost your self-esteem, you might need to confront the reasons why.

All these pressures, if left to manifest, can result in even more anxiety and self-sabotaging behaviours. If you feel like you are unable to cope, give yourself a break – or at the very least, limit your screen time. If there's one thing you take from this, let it be that the only person you should be doing something for is yourself. Stop relying on social media to boost your self-esteem. Look for ways offline like reading self-help books, listening to podcasts on self-growth and spending time with the people who matter most to you.

It's high time we started learning to love ourselves for the person we are, not the person on our Instagram profiles.

CHLOE BURROWS



HOOCHIE BEAUTY

Hoochie Beauty place an emphasis on quality and affordability to make beauty accessible to everyone. They create luxury, handmade lashes made using fluffy, synthetic fibres that are 100% cruelty-free! They come beautifully packaged in a reusable Hoochie case for simple storage. Find Hoochie Beauty on Instagram at [@hoochiebeauty](https://www.instagram.com/hoochiebeauty) to shop!

MILLIE LAWRENCE: TAKING STYLING TO THE (SOCIAL) STARS

BY ALBINA GASHI

Grab a cup of your favourite hot drink and cosy up into these pages as stylist, Millie Lawrence, shares her ultimate autumnal styling tips - even celebrity hairstylist, Jen Atkins, approves.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

“Caring, creative and ambitious.”

What do you love most about a career within Fashion?

“I love meeting and connecting with other creative people. I’ve loved clothes since I was a little girl, and working within a creative business just doesn’t seem like work to me. My career is only just starting, but I can’t wait to see where it will take me in the future.”

What are your favourite trends for this season?

“There are so many cute trends this autumn. I love the knitted sweater vests, mini bags, chunky chains ([on] belts to necklaces) and leather has become huge which I am here for.”

What inspired you to start your fashion styling Instagram, and when did you launch your account?

“Throughout lockdown I said to myself ‘don’t waste this time, this is the perfect opportunity to work on yourself and your creative skills’. I luckily secured a remote internship, where I created graphics for their Instagram and I just fell in love.

“Once my internship finished, I decided to start my own style page. I only started this at the end of August and I’ve had such a good response from people. My biggest achievement with my page so far was when celebrity hairstylist, Jen Atkin, reposted my style onto her story, saying: “What a clever page for outfit inspo”. I honestly couldn’t believe it! All of a sudden my page started flooding with followers. I had around 300 followers and Jen’s repost led me to gain around 2,000.”



© Millie Lawrence, @styledbymillielawrence on Instagram

What editing software would you recommend others use to bring their styling ideas to life?

“I’ve had a lot of questions on this. In all honesty, it’s what works for you. There are a lot of YouTube tutorials on ‘how to virtual style’, but the most important (for me) is finding product shots on fashion websites, Instagram or Pinterest, as I prefer to use product shots as opposed to clothing cropped from someone’s outfit. I then edit the background out on Photoshop and just piece the outfits together.”

You also work for another brand, right? Can you tell us what a day in the life of an influencer outreach assistant at LullaBellz is like?

“So far, I’m loving it. I only started at the start of October, but it’s so much fun and the team is so lovely. I work all day finding and contacting influencers to collaborate with and I love creating relationships with new faces and maintaining existing ones. I’m currently working from home but I can’t wait for the future with LullaBellz and to progress within the company.”

And what’s your go to outfit?

“My go to is always a neutral fit, mom jeans, trainers, a bodysuit and blazer paired with gold hoops. And I’m also loving matching tracksuits right now – comfy yet stylish.”

And what's your go to outfit?

"My go to is always a neutral fit, mom jeans, trainers, a bodysuit and blazer paired with gold hoops. And I'm also loving matching tracksuits right now - comfy yet stylish."

What's your favourite brand?

"I have a few but at the moment, I think Zara is killing it. H&M are also amazing for blazers and PrettyLittleThing will always be my go to for dresses."

How do you find working from home?

"In all honesty, I would much rather be working in an office space alongside my colleagues, or split 80% office [and] 20% home. Starting a new job under these circumstances is very strange as it's all virtual meetings, which is a shame but I completely understand this is in place to protect the NHS and save lives. Although I am massively looking forward to the day I can go into the office safely, meet and work alongside everyone."

Which celebrity do you think reflects your style the most?

"I think my style has definitely evolved in 2020. Looking back, I would never wear what I wore last year and vice versa with what I am wearing this year. I feel the celebrity that reflects my [look] the most is Rosie Huntington-Whiteley - I love her style!"

What's your star sign?

"I'm a Libra, my birthday is [the] 13th [of] October. 24, wow I felt like I was 16 yesterday! I believe Libra's represent the scales which means we are good at balancing things in life... well, so it says."

What's your favourite colour?

"I'm not sure if this counts as a colour, but beige - anything neutral, I love."

What advice would you give to upcoming graduates, looking to start their career in fashion?

"Do your research and take your time. When I started to apply for roles in the industry I felt the more applications I sent the better. Wrong. Get to know a brand, study their aesthetic and image. A one page CV may work for a lot of jobs, but it won't in fashion. The more substance an application has is so much better than the number of applications you have sent. I learnt the hard way on that one!"

Creative CV or a non creative CV?

"Creative all the way! If you don't want to create a creative CV, you're in the wrong industry. This is your chance to stand out against hundreds to thousands of applications. A standard 1-2 page black and white CV will get put to the bottom of the pile."





@styledbymillielawrence

© Millie Lawrence, @styledbymillielawrence on Instagram

Three top instagram tips?

“Be authentic, don’t try to be someone you’re not. Don’t be afraid to reach out to brands to work with them – I’ve worked with many brands by approaching them first. Most important, don’t let it get you down. Instagram can be a very deceiving place and people act like they have a life they don’t. Just remember people can filter their lives as well as their pictures.”

And what’re your top LinkedIn tips for graduates?

“Connect, Connect, Connect! I wish I knew how powerful LinkedIn was at university. There are so many people on LinkedIn who know people and recruiters,

search for people you believe could help you with your career journey. “Post what you are doing. LinkedIn is a CV in itself, so when a company or recruiter goes to your page, they can see what other work you are doing to support your application. I posted screenshots of Jen Atkins’ story when she reposted my styling page and it’s currently got 21,000 views and growing.”

Any advice on what to include in a fashion portfolio to make it stand out?

“When I graduated university, I had my own portfolio website. It should demonstrate your work and anything creative you’ve done that would support your application[s]. However, I feel it’s important not

to throw in every last detail – study the brand you’re applying for and include what you feel is relevant and role specific!

What accessory could you not go without?

“Earrings, I feel naked without them!”

And, lastly, where do you see yourself in five year’s time?

“I will be 29! Definitely bought my first home (hopefully), maybe engaged? (Don’t tell my boyfriend that). Just generally happy and healthy. As long as I’m those two things, that’s the most important.”

FEMALE BUSINESS

1920's/30's
'Start of Fashion Revolution'



1950's
'New Look'



1940's
'Wartime Silhouette'



1960's
'Decade of the Leg'



ATTIRE

1970's
'Unisex Outfits'



1990's
'Minimalism'



1980's
'Power Suit'

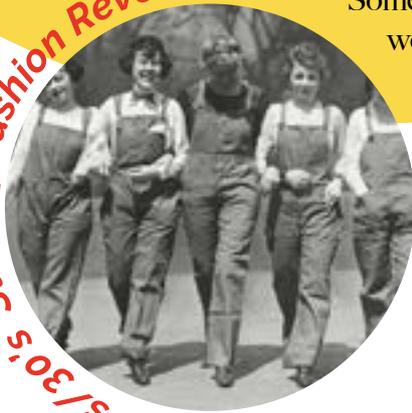


2000's Onwards
'Freedom of Business Attire'

THE TIMELINE

DRESS CODES THROUGH THE DECADES

1920's/30's 'Start of Fashion Revolution'



Some people argue the 20's were the beginning of a fashion revolution for women. Before this decade, women wore dresses that were not only constricting, but attempted to hide most of the female body too. From the 1920's onwards, as women's suffrage rose in popularity and female equality became a mainstream issue, clothes began to change and reflect women's desire to be free of patriarchal chains. Women were now coming into the workforce in higher numbers (mostly because women could be hired for a much lower wage) and due to this, workwear became more popular and more accessible to the masses.

Alongside World War Two, a new workplace outfit arrived for women called the 'Wartime silhouette'. This was a much shorter garment that women wore as fabric was then being rationed. Most fabric at the time was used for the military, so new styles had to emerge for the women back home. Outfits were cut similarly to the men's uniforms, perhaps as more women were joining the armed services in various female roles, so they needed to fit in with their male counterparts to look 'professional'.



1940's 'Wartime Silhouette'

In contrast to the 40's, Christian Dior introduced the 'New Look' with the bar suit. This style was ultra-feminine, and reflective of the attitudes towards women during this period. During the 50's, women were encouraged to become housewives and conform to nuclear familial stereotypes, so outfits became less practical and more aesthetic to push women into more consciousness of their looks. This was also a reaction to the sexless outfits of the 40's, now accentuating the hips and breasts. Pushback towards this and a rising dissatisfaction with women's place in society helped lead to a rise in feminism in the 60's.



In this decade, suits became more casual and the suit skirts became much shorter - why the 60's is known casually as the 'decade of the leg'. Minidresses and miniskirts became popular for the first time, as women began to dress how they wanted, rather than feeling pressured to cover up as society wanted them to. The look started to be less feminine and more androgynous as Women's Rights groups pushed for the equal pay act that was finally achieved in the UK in the 70s; highlighting the desire for a less polarised work environment for women to be allowed into.

Societal changes that pushed women's equality forward led to a change in gender roles. Due to this, women decided to continue wearing more unisex outfits as a way of fighting against the idea of women as powerless sexual objects. Pantsuits became popular, and trousers became a normal item of clothing for girls and women alike to wear. These types of outfits were seen as less sexualised, as they covered the leg and were less likely to emphasize breasts and waists. This encouraged misogynistic men to take women seriously, as people with value to bring to the work place and not just sex appeal.



1980's 'Power Suit'



This decade gave rise to the 'Power Suit'. This reflected the growing presence of women in the workplace, as they would adopt more 'masculine' features such as the shoulder pad to highlight their rightful place in a masculine world. The outfits were less revealing of the female body, and made women look bigger with their boxy shapes – something which played into the idea of women being allowed to be bold and powerful in a society which was still struggling to see women as useful players in the world of work.

Now, a focus on minimalism – plain colours such as beige, cream and black were en vogue alongside a focus on women, and not their clothing. As more women worked and earned more, they had greater freedom to live a life they wanted to and to wear whatever they wanted. Outfits were meant to be there as part of the person, but they didn't want that to be the only thing people saw when they looked at them. Thus, making outfits more neutral encouraged others to care more about the women behind the outfit, and focus less on the outfit itself.



1990's 'Minimalism'

2000's onwards 'Freedom of Business Attire'



On December 21st, 2015, the NYC Commission on Human Rights announced new guidelines that prohibited “enforcing dress codes, uniforms, and grooming standards that impose different requirements based on sex or gender”. This meant a workplace could no longer enforce women to wear clothing (for example, heels) if men do not have to, or vice versa. This has led to changes in the way women present themselves in the workplace, allowing the wearing of comfortable clothes that can make work feel more accommodating and liberating. Workwear is less important than it once was, and can now be used to show personality as this begins to be celebrated more. There are still some regulations and unspoken rules in place depending on your job or position, and the company you work for. However, compared to the past ninety years, women are a lot more free in what they can choose to wear for work.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR SOCIETY TO TREAT WOMEN AS HUMANS AND NOT DRESS UP DOLLS

HOW HAVE THINGS CHANGED, IF AT ALL?

I recently spoke to a good friend of mine, Evie Martin, who attends the University for the Creative Arts studying textiles. She has previously done research around historical fashion and had some interesting insights. Firstly, she discussed how women only started wearing trousers when they 'stepped-into' male dominating roles. As trousers are deemed masculine only, women were accepted into the workforce when they adopted similar traits (think the power-suit making women come across bigger in a male dominated sphere).

She also spoke about the irony of skirts; how in a society that demands women cover up and be modest, skirts do the complete opposite. When talking about today, she highlighted that "now it is

not good enough for a woman to just work or be a mum, instead she has to be everything all at once; the 'Yummy mummy', a yoga goddess, maintain a clean household, have a thriving career and be constantly available but also busy all the time".

Overall, Evie argued there is much more pressure for women to look 'presentable' in the workplace, despite the loosen dress codes. And, finally, she noted how cis-gendered and binary workwear can be. It's considered either feminine or masculine, so perhaps the best way to equalise business attire and accommodate to men, women and all non-gender conforming individuals is for outfits to become more androgynous and accessible for all body types.



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2020 ONWARDS:

2020 onwards: Thanks to the internet, women (and men) can search for popular business attire anywhere on the web and most clothing retailers provide a section of their store dedicated to these types of outfits. This has led to a rise in workwear being commercialised, as clothing trends go in and out of style each year.

As much as it seems like women have been liberated from dress code demands, there is still a huge amount of pressure to wear the right thing or risk facing ridicule and rejection. Women are known to feel a much greater pressure around, and connection to, what they wear, and this can be seen in the way retailers create more variety of outfits for women than men. I myself feel so much pressure to dress perfectly as a way to show an employer they should hire me, as it seems women more than men are still regarded in certain ways depending on how they dress.

There seems to be many more rules for women when it comes to business attire. If you search up 'smart casual wear' online, for men it tends to suggest a blazer, shirt, nice shoes and some fitted trousers. For women, it's always more extensive: fitted dresses, skirts and a plain top, blouses, shirts, jeans and heels, or shoes that match the outfit. The advice becomes so varied that it makes it hard to figure out exactly what to wear. If we are to truly make workwear equal, it is time to streamline women's clothes and treat it as one small aspect of the person like we do

for men, and not the entire package.

There is also a huge pressure on women to be beautiful. One friend at university told me how her boss encouraged her to wear makeup on the shop floor to increase sales. When I expressed outrage, she shrugged her shoulders and told me 'sex sells'. Obviously for both men and women, a level of professionalism will go far to make you seem the right fit for a company. However, women are still heavily viewed through a lens of how they look and not of the content of their character or abilities, and this is something we as a society must work on if we are to make work equal for all genders.

Ultimately, we have come a long way with work wear, and we continue to do so. With legislation in place to prevent sexist dress codes and with women being a natural part of the workforce, strides have been made towards equality.

Now, it's time to nit-pick; for women to start questioning why they have to stay up to date with the latest trends or why they are judged differently if they have no makeup on compared to if they do. Now is the time for society to treat women as humans and not as dress up dolls so that they spend less time feeling pressured to look immaculate, and more time doing exactly what men do: use their abundance of skills to work.

BY LINDA KHUMBANYIWA

**LYNNE KAYENNE
STUDIO:
THE MAKING OF A
GLOBAL BRAND**

Meet Linda Khumbanyiwa, the founder and CEO of Lynne Kayenne Studio, in this exclusive self-Q&A feature.

I started my fashion journey in 2004, working as a commercial model, doing shoots and adverts whilst still in school. In 2008, I started to write for an Italian fashion blog, interviewing designers and attending worldwide fashion weeks. I interviewed designers such as Christian Blaken and David Tlale, getting first hand information on their creative processes.

This further developed my love for fashion, and I began working as a stylist for some of the biggest brands in the world – including Matches Fashion. In 2018, I brought my two passions for writing and fashion together by doing the PR for the brand Lalibella – their clothing entirely made in Africa. Whilst working there, I was commissioned to create a small capsule collection. The deal fell through, but this gave me the drive to try and tell my African fashion story: using my Malawian heritage culture and craftsmanship in a fresh way to appeal to an international audience.

In 2020, Lynne Kayenne Studio was born with the desire to build a socially impactful contemporary African inspired womenswear clothing label – Made in Africa, for the world.





Tell us more about the Lynne Kayenne Studios brand.

“Lynne Kayenne Studio is a contemporary womenswear brand founded and designed by me, Linda Khumbanyiwa. The brand utilises my Malawian heritage, culture and our craftsmanship to create tailored garments for fashion lovers across the world. At Lynne Kayenne Studio, our goal is to build a profitable business whilst also ploughing a percent of these profits back into our community to empower women as well as supporting the youth in the creative sector.”

How long have you been into fashion designing?

“I started drawing designs for clothes when I was a teenager, but have only been professionally designing for two years now. In 2018, I was commissioned to create a collection for a London shop which specialised in African designs. I was so excited to share my Malawian point of view and use chitenje fabric in the designs, but this was the deal that sadly fell through.

“It wasn't until I was stuck in lockdown and having a conversation with a friend who said Malawi is only known for poverty, and its association with Madonna, that things changed. It lit a fire in my bones to put together a collection that would showcase Malawi in a bright light and help tell positive stories about my homeland.”

What would you say you specialise in?

“I specialise in womenswear and strive to curate a world where every woman, regardless of creed, colour and background, can enjoy my Lynne Kayenne Studio designs and feel their most beautiful. I want my clients to feel special, to feel noticed, to feel confident and on top of the world when wearing their LKS garments. I have created designs that are inspired by ‘tailored culture’. I wanted to create beautiful, tailored and classic pieces that are neat, clean and crisp – that transition seamlessly from daywear to night.”

How would you describe your garments?

“I would describe them as pieces which are rooted in my culture and heritage, but made to an international standard. The colour palette is influenced by how our world looks from space; I was into the deep blue and yellow hues you see in pictures of the earth. I did so much research including watching Nasa documentaries and reading so much about how we look from up there. I wanted to create pieces for women across the world.”





You recently launched the Lynne Kayenne Studio e-store on Afrikrea. What has the response been like so far?

“I have had an incredible response to the opening of my e-store. I managed to secure celebrity client, AJ Odudu, who is a famous London based TV presenter to endorse my brand. I’ve also been endorsed by InStyle magazine, as well as Marie Claire. We have attracted clients from across the world including the USA and Europe and feel that the future is looking bright.”

How readily available are your designs?

“They are available to order but certain styles may take longer as they take more time to make. We also have launched LKS loungewear to cater to all women during lockdown. It’s so easy to shop at LKS: you go online to our store, browse and shop our designs with worldwide shipping available.”

You mentioned that you give a percentage of the profits back to your community. Can you share more?

“Philanthropy is part of our philosophy and core values at Lynne Kayenne Studio.

We plough back a percentage of our profits to help empower women at an organisation called Microloan Financing, who train women on financial literacy, financial freedom and running small businesses in rural areas. After the women are given training, they are then given small loans to fund businesses to help them lift themselves out of poverty. We also support the youth in creative sectors to chase their dreams and attain employment.”

THE SINS OF FAST FASHION:



© Maisie Palmer, Maisie May the Label

A Q&A WITH SLOW FASHION FOUNDER, MAISIE PALMER

BY TEAH RICHARDSON

Guest Contributor

Before you could use the next-day-delivery coupon code, pay with your thumbprint and get your weekend outfits delivered to your doorstep, fashion had a more personal touch.

Since then, the fashion industry has transformed into a conveyor belt of clockwork precision. Mass produced, so-called 'fast fashion' has sacrificed environmental considerations, ethical awareness and individuality (once the core value guiding fashion) in its race to create cheap, convenient clothing.

According to Nature Reviews, "impacts from the fashion industry include over 92 million tonnes of waste produced per year and 79 trillion litres of water consumed" – and that's not the only concern.

Eco-Business stated that: "Garment workers, primarily women, in Bangladesh make about \$96 per month. The government's wage board suggested that a garment worker needs 3.5 times that amount in order to live a "decent life with basic facilities".

This type of unethical labour doesn't just happen in Bangladesh. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Labour report found that there was forced child labour in the fashion industry globally, the list of countries including Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Turkey, Vietnam and many more.

Our planet is now burning on the pyre of fast fashion.

Scientists and activists are calling for change, and these cries for help are too often buried underneath last weekend's wardrobe. The fashion industry desperately needs a new season: one that doesn't fuel its greed with the sweat of impoverished workers and the offerings of mother nature. Likewise, this argument extends to us consumers too, who must toss aside our convenient consumption habits instead of one-use £5 tops.

“Our planet is now burning on the pyre of fast fashion”

Maisie Palmer, the 23 year old founder of Maisie May the Label – which sells unique, handmade, sustainable clothing and accessories – is on a mission. She's here to persuade consumers to opt for greener purchasing, to expose the fast-fashion industry for what it is and to reintroduce the joyful idea of making your own clothes.

We sat down with Maisie to get her views on the fashion industry at large, and where to even start with challenging it.

Firstly, could you tell us all about the clothes you make and what inspires you?

"I make everything! From tops to dungarees and skirts. I mostly make dresses as I love to wear them and can never find the perfect one in the shops. I'm mostly inspired by influencers, designers, Instagram and what I see on the catwalk/high street that I can't afford; I distil it down into something affordable and even more suited to my style.

"I also just like to wander through fabric shops and see if anything draws me in. Currently, roughly 40% of my wardrobe is handmade but I imagine it will get more and more handmade in the future. My ultimate goal is to stop buying any clothes, apart from the essentials such as jeans, tees, etc. If I do buy, I would like it to be because it's something I really love, or to support a small business."

How did you start making your own clothes?

"Well, my mum is a seamstress and has taught me everything I know. It has been something I love doing for a long time; I even used to make clothes for my beanie babies and guinea pigs!"

And what's your main motivation for making your own clothes?

"The gratification you get when you make something you love from scratch is unmatched. It's even better when someone compliments you wearing it or asks where you bought it and you get to say, 'I made it myself. Sewing yourself also means you get that perfect fit that is specifically tailored to you.

"I also love having something unique, a print or shape that no one else will be wearing. The quality can be better, the price can be better and let us not forget all the issues, both environmentally and socially, that are involved with fashion production. I myself currently work in the 'fast fashion' industry, and the issues around it are something I am very aware of."

The gratification you get when you make something you love from scratch is unmatched

Speaking of these issues, the UN recently declared the fashion industry as a social and environmental emergency. As someone that works in the industry, what are your thoughts on this?

"Many people don't realise how damaging the fashion industry can be, so I think it's vital for international and reputable organisations, like the UN, to get involved and educate consumers and manufacturers. However, I think it is also important to avoid enforcing blanket laws across the whole industry; for example, understanding and improving factories with poor work conditions instead of closing them down.

"For many, such a job is their only option, therefore it is essential that their workspaces are improved rather than simply taking jobs and livelihoods away."

What are your thoughts and views on 'fast fashion'?

"In the early days, I must admit, I loved it. I was all for it and I would regularly shop from popular 'fast fashion' brands mainly because you could get new trends cheap and fast. However, since studying fashion at university and working in the industry, I've put a lot of effort into changing my ways. My aim is to now make as much as possible or buy second-hand or 'slow fashion'.

"For many, fast fashion is the only option; it's an affordable way to 'fit in' and follow trends, but it just simply isn't a sustainable way to shop. Consumers also need to be aware that major fast fashion brands are constantly hounding suppliers to make the clothes

quicker and at lower prices, and if suppliers can't meet the demands, buyers will go elsewhere.

This is called 'greenwashing' - the brands have still failed to solved the inherent problems

"In recent years, many big fast fashion brands, such as H&M and Zara, have actually launched 'sustainable' collections. Although, this is called 'greenwashing' - as they may have improved part of the process, such as using more sustainable fibres (closed loop viscose for example) or natural dyes, but the brands have still failed to solve the inherent problems. They are still producing mass market products and it is all still super cheap, and they are now trying to appeal to their doubtful consumers."

Do you have any tips for how people can get involved in making their own clothes?

"Now is the best time. I encourage everyone to have a go, especially because learning online has never been easier. There is such a variety of helpful resources that are easy to access and free! One of my personal favourite YouTube

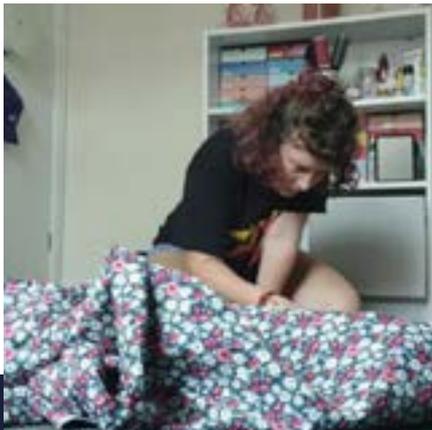


© Maisie Palmer.

channels with great tutorials is Annika Victoria[’s page].

“Although, a quick how-to search will give you lots of options, there are also a few websites that offer free printable patterns and instructions, like The Fold Line and Mood Sewciety also.

“For absolute beginners, I would recommend trying to alter clothes first. If you see something you love in a charity shop that’s a bit too big, have a go at taking it in, or maybe there’s a dress in your wardrobe that is too long, so you never wear it – try taking up the length. It’s really exciting to learn and experiment with sewing, and once you get to grips with a few stitches there is a whole world of opportunities that really do open up.”



Finally, is there anything that you’d like to see change in the fashion industry?

“I would like a lot to change – especially long term.

“I would love to see people shopping locally or with small online businesses and if that’s not possible I encourage people to shop on Depop or Etsy. Although, I understand that’s a big ask for the average consumer and that shift in behaviour is unlikely to happen anytime soon. I think the major change needs to be more visibility throughout the fashion industry, people need to see where clothes and the raw materials have been made, who made them and how much it cost. If everyone was aware, I think less people would opt to use fast fashion brands.”

For more inspiration, you can check out Maisie’s Instagram at [@maisiemaythelabel](https://www.instagram.com/maisiemaythelabel), or buy any of Maisie’s handmade clothing and accessories – all designed and made in the UK – via her Etsy shop (found at www.maisiemaythelabel.etsy.com).



JORDAN ILLUSTRATION

SHOP THIS DISGRACEFUL FAVOURITE AT @JORDAN.ILLUSTRATION ON INSTAGRAM!



“SHOPS
OF THE
SEASON”
THE EDIT

BY REBECCA JACKSON

It's incredibly important to shop with and support small, independent brands – now more than ever. With so many talented, independent, creative designers up and down the UK it was hard to choose favourites, but here are our top picks of places to shop from in AW20.



WE ARE GIRLS

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WE ARE GIRLS WE ARE GIRLS WE ARE GIRLS

We Are Girls is an independent, feminist fashion brand founded and run by Gaby. Gaby's all about empowering women and making them feel like the best version of themselves. She upcycles vintage denim jackets and adds her unique, funky feminist slogans, giving them a new burst of life.

Alongside these amazing jackets, she also adds her quirky stamp to tote bags, t-shirts and jumpers; there really is something for everyone. Everything she creates is eco-friendly and sustainable with the aim to combat the effects of fast fashion. What makes We Are Girls even more amazing is they donate a percent of their profits to a charity called Lancashire Women, which helps to empower and positively change the lives of local women.



© We Are Girls, @_wearegirls_ on Instagram, L-R





D.6 CLOTHING

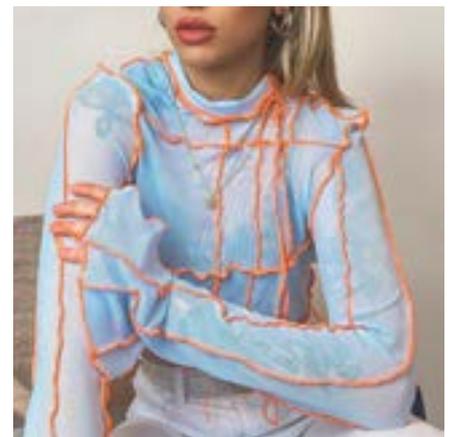
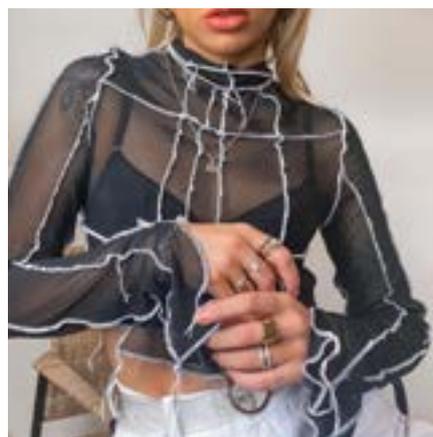
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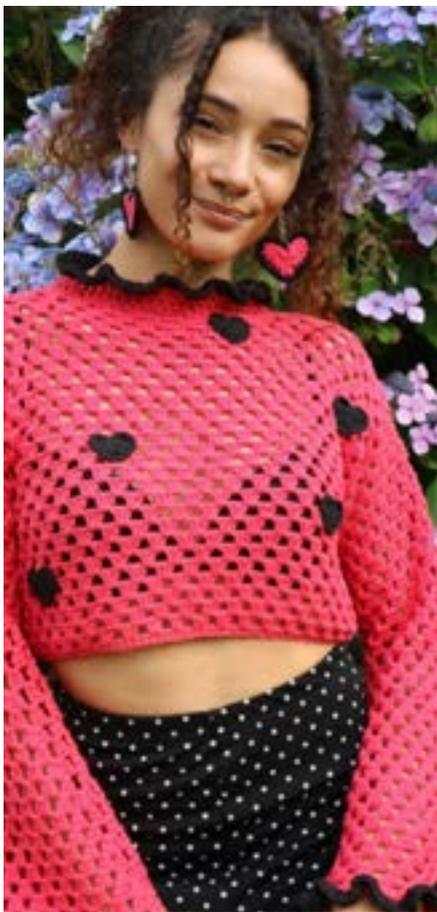
D.6 Clothing is run by Dana, who handmakes beautiful skirts and tops. She designs, produces and packages everything herself, making D.6 Clothing fully independently run. Dana creates brightly coloured garments with contrasting raw seams, giving each look a truly unique design.

She has a variety of different colours of fabric and stitching available, and she also makes items to-order - meaning you can create your own unique pieces.



© D.6 Clothing, @d.6_clothing
on Instagram, L-R



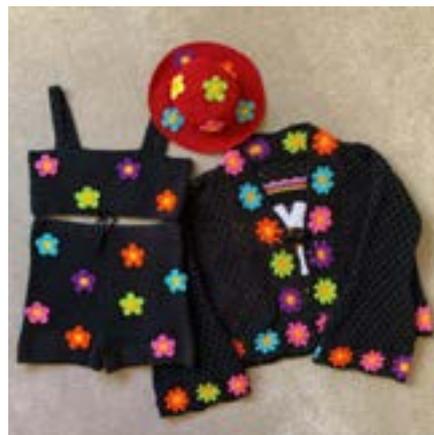


HOOKED APPAREL

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Hooked Apparel was created by Taome back in April, as a way to fill her time during lockdown. Her incredible skills led to the business quickly booming. Taome makes crochet clothing and accessories, all of which are bright and funky, making them perfect for adding some life into your winter wardrobe.

Hooked Apparel is fully sustainable with all products made by hand in Manchester, along with the garments being made as you order. You can even request a custom order, making the style unique to you, with some of Taome's previous custom pieces including a black floral crochet shorts and top co-ord.





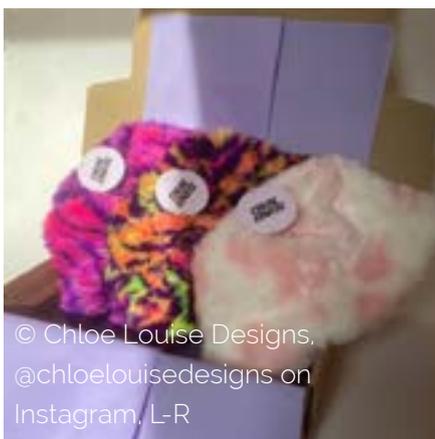
CHLOE LOUISE

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Chloe Louise Designs handmakes bright, fluffy bucket hats and backpacks which are ideal for the fast approaching winter months when you want to stand out in the dismal British weather. Chloe takes inspiration from the 90's and early 00's to create accessories that are very unique and are loved by many stylish individuals.

This brand is playing it's part in being sustainable too, with most items being made to order which helps reduce any unnecessary wastage.



© Chloe Louise Designs,
@chloelouisedesigns on
Instagram, L-R





GALSPIFFY

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Galspiffy is an independent, made-by-hand jewellery brand run by Ruby. She's been creating jewellery for six years, and started selling her work in October 2019. Since then, she and her business have been thriving. She creates unique earrings from polymer clay and resin, and also likes to experiment with 3D printing.

Ruby has recently created some amazing stand-alone figures of the female body, along with more earrings styles and keychains. The figures are inclusive and come in many shapes and sizes, just like us ladies – no two are the same! Ruby's funky pieces will brighten up any outfit, and any room, you have and make it unique to you.



ART SALE:

SPOTLIGHT ON LILIDENIM BY LOUISE MARMIE

by Maddie Bazin

Louise Marmie is the brains and beauty behind lilidenim, an independent hand-painted jeans brand. Using the 2020 summer lockdown to her advantage, Louise took her love of art and fashion to create a sustainable fashion brand centered around painting abstract designs onto jeans. I spoke to Louise back in September, having purchased (and absolutely adored) a pair of her jeans myself. She explains the inspiration for her jeans, the hurdles she's jumped as a female creative, and offers advice to any creatives looking to get into selling their art.



Hi Louise! Thank you for speaking to me to-day. My first question is about you. What's your background? Has art always been something you pursued?

Throughout my life, through growing up and even now, DIY has always been my favourite hobby; I absolutely loved building my own doll's houses, creating little polymer clay jewellery, and making my family's Christmas crackers with little handmade presents in them! As I grew up, and especially since I've gone to uni where I studied Politics and International Relations, I've decided I wanted to challenge myself more and I took up drawing and painting in my spare time. That's when I started thinking of how I could merge my interests for fashion and clothing in general with my interest for art and DIY. I started altering clothes I found in second-hand shops, sewing little tops and scrunchies, and then finally got around to play with fabric paint. I created my first lilidenim jeans with abstract face designs in January 2020 - it's still fresh!

“If it makes you feel good to create and you want to share those creations with others, you shouldn't let your insecurities get in the way.”



A recent endeavour then! Where did the inspiration for these designs come from? Have they always been on clothing?

I actually came up with the design idea a while ago, around November 2017, after I was inspired by Luca Guadagnino's film *Call Me By Your Name*. In the final scene, the main character Elio wears this absolutely gorgeous shirt with abstract designs on [pictured]. It made me want to try and come up with a version of the design for myself, and I ended up creating a 'face' design that I really love. I then decided I wanted to be able to wear these designs, so I got a cheap pair of jeans and a tube of fabric paint, and I ended up loving the results!

“... I started thinking of how I could merge my interests for fashion and clothing in general with my interest for art and DIY.”

Have painting and art always been your hobbies? At what point did you think, 'I can make some money here' and start selling the designs?

'DIY has always been my way of taking a break - a hobby. I never thought much of it, and never thought I'd ever be talented enough to sell something I'd create. But when I started wearing my first ever hand-painted jeans, I received so many compliments, and so many people around me (and online) were so supportive that I decided to give it a go and make a little bit of money on the side. [This money was] very much needed as a student, especially since the pandemic has made it so difficult to get a student job.'



“You are capable, you are talented, you are skilled. Just get started!”



As a female creative and business-woman, have you found any obstacles or issues have popped up? Have you found that the online creative business community has offered a supportive network?

‘As a woman, I guess the one thing that is a pain to deal with is probably people (mostly men) who private message me on my business page disrespectfully, or keep trying to hit on me even though I am just trying to run my business peacefully. But I have found such an incredible support network within the small creative community; it’s absolutely amazing to feel like you have so many insanely talented gals right there for you, who will lift you up when you feel discouraged or that you’re not good enough. The Facebook group ‘Gals Who Graduate’ actually played a huge role in getting me started, and I am endlessly grateful for that.’

Finally, I’d love to ask if you have any advice for any artists or creatives who are considering beginning to sell their work?

‘My biggest advice is literally DO IT. You might not get ten orders in your first week, but it doesn’t matter! If it makes you feel good to create and you want to share those creations with others, you shouldn’t let your insecurities get in the way. And it’ll feel so amazing when you get your first order! To feel like your creativity is recognised and is something that other people are actually willing to pay for is mind-blowing, and such a confidence boost. You are capable, you are talented, you are skilled. Just get started!’

Disgraceful readers can find more of Louise’s designs on Instagram (@lili.denim), with prices starting at £15 for hand painted works. For more information and any queries, please direct message @lili.denim on Instagram.

THE WONDERS OF OUR ISOLATION HEROES

ISOLATED HEROES



© Chloe-Helena Duff, Isolated Heroes

BY REBECCA JACKSON



Chloe-Helena Duff shares a behind-the-scenes scoop on Isolated Heroes, her knowledge on Scotland's fashion industry and talks us through all Dundee has to offer when it comes to female led small businesses.

Chloe-Helena Duff is based in Dundee, a city which is bursting with creative individuals. She's a fashion management student, who also works at Isolated Heroes; an amazing female-run business, who are all about sequins and self-love.

How did you get into fashion, and did you always have an inclination that you'd work in the industry?

"I've wanted to work in fashion for as long as I can remember, as I've always been obsessed with visuals, storytelling, music videos and clothing. It took a long time for me to realise that what I was looking at on Tumblr and YouTube every day could be a career option for me. I'm still just getting my 'foot in the door', but some of the work I currently do didn't exist as a job when I was a teenager, which is pretty cool and makes me excited to see what's still to come.

"My first experience of getting involved within fashion came through one of my favourite indie brands, Little Lies. I started off as a customer and regularly uploaded photos to Instagram of myself in their clothes. The owner, Jade, reached out asking to re-share some of my content and our friendship blossomed from there! I spent a lot of time creating content, styling and assisting on

photoshoots. It really helped to build my confidence, especially with approaching people within the industry. I even got to assist on a shoot with a photographer who's worked with Missguided, Max Mara and Rex Orange County.

What's your role at Isolated Heroes? Tell us a bit about your typical day whilst working there?

"My role is in creative content and customer service, so it's great for fully understanding the brand. I work super closely with the brand founder, Samantha, and the amazing production manager, Christie. I start my day by replying to emails and Instagram messages. Customer service is really important to us because every garment is handmade to order. I spend the rest of my morning communicating with Christie about priority orders, lead times, fabric suppliers and shipping.

"I spend a lot of time doing marketing and creating content, I consult the monthly content plan that I've discussed with Samantha and then plan weekly content shoots to suit our targets. Last week I shot a mini street style edit for some of our key pieces, this week's focus is on our newest sequin sweater launch. I also build product listings and help to manage the order interface, everything.

We know you also have a lot of side hustles going on. Can you tell us a bit about each of them?

"I still do some work with Little Lies; over lockdown I created a lot of content for them (and roped my boyfriend into being my photographer). They sent me a new package of clothes each week and I worked my way through styling them; luckily a lot of the homeware in my flat is from Little Lies too, so this helped a lot.

"I'm also an intern at Ginger Red Social Media, a Glasgow based social media marketing company. I'm learning a lot from the small team of girls and have recently been given my own client to re-brand across all their social channels. We also work with a lot of Glasgow based influencers, some of whom are partnered with Topshop and Tanologist; it's all very exciting!

"I also take on freelance branding and content projects. Social media isn't my career goal, but it's a good way of staying creative and making connections within the industry. My most recent client was a local florist who'd seen one of my Instagram posts where I'm holding their flowers, and asked me to make social contact - we're working together again soon. It's been scary trying to put myself out there but definitely worth it!"



© Chloe-Helena Duff, Isolated Heroes

From your work with this independent fashion brand, do you think as consumers we have a social responsibility to shop at smaller brands?

“Yes, definitely. I’m pretty guilty of scrolling endlessly through ASOS, but since working with smaller brands I appreciate the craft and passion behind their clothing a lot more. Small brands aren’t set up just to make a profit, it’s because there’s a group of people who love what they do. If you’re in the position to spend a little more on something unique, then small brands are the way to go.”

Isolated Heroes are very inclusive with their made-to-order sizing. Do you think other fashion retailers are doing enough in the way of inclusivity?

“A lot of independent retailers have really stepped it up in terms of size inclusivity, which is great as it also shows how easily it can be done. At Isolated Heroes, any size of garment is possible, and we encourage customers to send us custom measurements. It’s really as simple as that. Brands who stock items via wholesale have a different business model and that makes sourcing some sizes a bit more difficult. But I think in 2020, if brands aren’t trying to be as inclusive as possible, it really shows their true colours.”

We saw you recently launched the Halloween Edit with a diverse group of models, and were kind enough to share the shoot with us here at Disgraceful too. How did this whole process go?

“The Halloween Edit was my first ‘big’ project, and it was so exciting. Samantha wanted something fun, glam and unmistakably Isolated Heroes. We launched some new pieces but also showed our customers how they could re-style existing products. We used our gorgeous models, Ash and Jess, who we shoot with regularly. It’s so important to represent our ethos of “Style Not Size”, so each model’s samples were made to measure.

“It was down to me to direct, shoot and edit everything. I shot a lot of it whilst standing on top of a ladder, which was definitely an experience! The shoot was so relaxed and fun, we blasted a ‘Girl Power’ playlist the whole time and I think you definitely get that vibe when looking at the photos. The edit got a great reaction from our customers and gave me the confidence to go even bigger and better with my next projects.”

Have you ever had any negative experiences working in the industry?

“I’ve been pretty lucky so far.

Every job has its difficult parts but overall, people in the industry are way more encouraging and friendly than you’d think. I think people really appreciate it when you’re willing to work hard and earn your place.

“I’ve had some pretty negative experiences with individuals, but I try not to let it get to me. I’ve learned quickly that the people who really are passionate don’t have time for nastiness or drama. The Scottish fashion industry is small, so it helps to be in the know of who’s actually out there really lifting others up and who’s just doing it for the ‘gram.”

You’re also very positive with regards to your Instagram account and what you post. But, do you think there are negatives to our ever-growing social media platforms, and do you ever feel any pressure?

“It’s way too easy to forget that Instagram is the most curated version of the person you’re following. I feel a lot of pressure to be a certain way on Instagram. It feels like a constant way to market yourself, both in a professional and personal sense. I don’t think it’s fully a bad thing, most of my work has come about through Instagram, but I do think it’s important to only follow people who inspire you. “The influencers





**I'VE LEARNED
QUICKLY THAT
THE PEOPLE
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OR DRAMA**



© Chloe-Helena Duff, Isolated Heroes

**BALANCING
'SORRY TO
BOTHER YOU'
WITH BEING A
BOSS IN THE
WORKPLACE**

BY JASMINE HODGE

Working from home is the new normality for over three quarters of us: with a study finding 88% of companies have encouraged, or required, their colleagues to work from home throughout the pandemic.

Are these companies doing enough to keep challenging misogynistic standards in professional communications from their home offices though? Disgraceful explores...

Since moving to predominantly email-based communication, I thought about the gender inequalities that women at work would no longer experience: inappropriate flirting, having to fear how they come across and an entire basic lack of encountering other women in high positions (and who could forget the dreaded, very real, wage-gap?).

But then I wondered, how much of this behaviour has already been transferred to our screens?

I've worked many jobs, luckily most of them have been filled with friends as well as colleagues; however, I was interested to find out whether women altered their language when emailing men.

Emails I have received from female colleagues normally contain softer tones, are less direct and more likely to be littered with emojis, kisses and plenty of these: '!!!'. Whereas emails from men are more often straight to the point, written towards me with a more dominant style.

So, I set out to interview women from all over the country, covering a wide range of job titles – from film producers to confidence coaches and more.

From my findings, most of them agreed that, when asked to look back on emails to men, they had either consciously or subconsciously 'dressed up' an email to come across as light-hearted. Some women agreed that they had written 'if it's okay', 'can you possibly', and 'would you mind' when emailing male

colleagues; whereas they recognised they were rarely on the receiving end of such language.

I have found myself doing this not only in work, but

also in life. Women can subconsciously find themselves begging, rather than instructing, even when they're in superior roles.

Men have always had tribal confidence behind them, equalling more opportunities in the workplace. Typically, your CEO is more likely to be a straight, cis-white man – that's just fact.

Moreover, having your own gender identity around provides constant reassurance that you are welcome in that room.

Whereas, not seeing as many women in the room, although driving some to work harder, can also cause anxiety that you're not welcome or right for the role. This has been engraved in female mentality since the dawn of time and, although we're now working from home, we're carrying over the habits and the lack of self-assurance socialised into us into our online workplace communications too.

One interviewee, all of whom wished to stay anonymous, stated in the past she "stayed very quiet in meetings with men because [she] felt intimidated and inferior". Although acknowledging that she now has more confidence, she felt "it's still an issue that the men in the room feel it's their right to speak and women feel they need to earn that right".



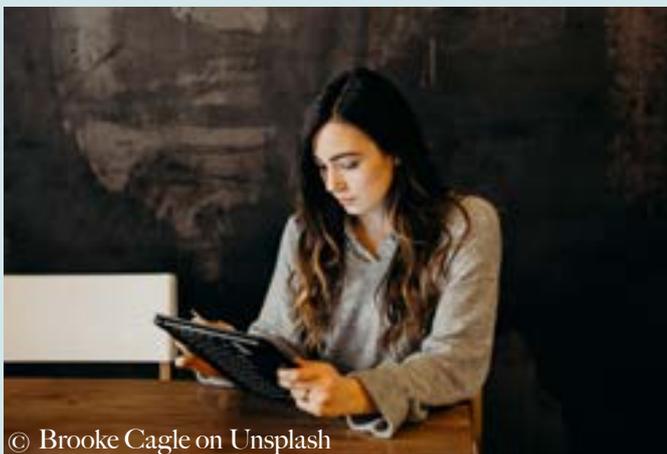
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This is a correlation we see in the way women are adapting to online work; altering our tone and peppering our emails with alternative sentences is us just moving these injustices to our screens.

In an online article from the BBC, written by Mark Peters, he states: “Communal language is mainly applied to women, and it invokes stereotypical female traits like being supportive, showing warmth, and helping the team. Agentic language is mainly applied to men and is more about getting the job done, taking charge, and being independent.”

When I put a call out to speak to women working from home, nearly 100% of participants assumed it was a piece on balancing work life with home life (i.e. childcare, cooking, cleaning, etc.). Would this be the same assumption if I asked cis, straight, white men?

The sooner we stamp out gender stereotypes in the workplace and allow women the security to speak openly and freely, only then can this discussion come to an end.



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GROOVY BOOBS

Groovy Boobs was created during lockdown, says founder Bethany who always wanted to create something that celebrates the female body!

Groovy boobs offers pre-made and custom made boob pots with funky designs; creativity is more than welcome. You can find Groovy Boobs on insta at

@groovy.boobs and make sure to check out the Groovy Boob Etsy shop over at groovyboobs too! We absolutley love Groovy Boobs and their funky plant pots!

HOW TO BREAK INTO THE 'BUDDY BOY' BUSINESS INDUSTRY

Niamh Hutchings

Charlotte Webster is a young businesswoman making a name for herself as a digital marketing communications consultant. After choosing to do a sponsored degree apprenticeship instead of heading to university, she's found herself excelling in a top IT company at the age of only 21.

Apprenticeships are often seen as the non-traditional route into business for many people, even more so for women. However, this route into entrepreneurship is on the rise. The UK government reported that 50.1% of all apprentices over the 2018/19 period were women, across all sectors. With apprenticeships sometimes seen as a second option for those with a lower chance of getting into top universities, Charlotte was more than happy to take the alternative route of an apprenticeship and challenge this outdated idea.

"Originally I was looking at taking a traditional route into higher education, so I actually applied for some University courses to study PPE", she says. "But then I wasn't really sure that was what I wanted to do, so I spoke to a careers advisor at our school and she recommended I look into degree apprenticeships. Quite often apprenticeships are viewed as a backup plan to University, so to have someone speak to me about apprenticeships as a good first choice was really refreshing."

From there, she knew her journey had a new and improved direction: "I looked at different apprenticeships and found one locally for a large IT company. Then about the time my friend's were getting their university offers, I got an offer of

employment on their degree apprenticeship course which I started that September."

Starting out as a software tester, she found the technical roles weren't her calling. "So, I swapped into more of a business role in project management", she tells us, where she stayed for two years and gained invaluable business experience. "Eventually an opportunity opened up in our marketing department so I decided to go for it, and I've been in the digital marketing communications team for a year now."

IT is notorious for being male-dominated. Women only make up a small percentage of the technology industries, making it incredibly hard for them to access opportunities and leading to a lack of confidence in young girls who would like to go into STEM.

Refreshingly, a lot of companies are changing this stigma and encouraging women – especially young women – to begin promising careers in business.

"My company is quite good at encouraging women to get into technical roles. This didn't necessarily bother me, but it was just something you do notice when you are the only woman in the office and certainly the only woman under 30. In the office, there's a lot of older white men which is fine but it wasn't really the sort of young environment I was going for."

"That's why I love the marketing department – my team is a mixed bag of people from a range of different backgrounds. All different ages, different ethnicities, different genders, so it's a very diverse team where everyone is really welcoming, supportive and open."

It's no understatement to say the work environment really helps employees to enjoy their role and contribute more effectively to the business. Luckily, Charlotte has been able to experience this very early in her career, giving her a great introduction to the industry.

"It's been really positive and I think the culture of the business is really important to how you see yourself in your career, and so to have your team morale just day to day be really good – to have that positive culture right at the start of your career – is so important."

"I think the culture the people you work with create is really important to how comfortable you feel, so if you're in a place where you're marginalised or even just not particularly well supported it's going to hamper your career progression. You really need to be surrounded by people you can learn from and who make you feel confident in reaching your potential. I have been really lucky in that regard."

"A thing that can happen to a lot of young women going into the IT industry or just any STEM company is they can feel held back because it's so male dominated. But, I think companies are doing a lot to encourage women in STEM and acknowledging and recognising the benefits that having women in STEM can bring to the organisation."

It's more important than ever to stop the stigma that apprenticeships aren't a viable option for young women, in STEM and beyond. But how does this unconventional route translate to treatment in the workplace?

"I think because a lot of young people start at entry level when they leave University, people assume that's how it goes because that's what they're used to. But as I came straight out of A-level and joined teams at only 18, it was quite difficult for some of the older more experienced professionals to take advice from an 18-year-old in something. They would have the attitude of 'oh, what do you know?'"

She does divulge the details of a memory she'll always have: "I did have one instance in the lift at work. I was stood next to my manager at the time and, quite innocently, someone came in, saw me and said "Is it bring your daughter to work day?" and I was like "Oh, no, I work here, I'm a full time employee" and they were very apologetic but I know

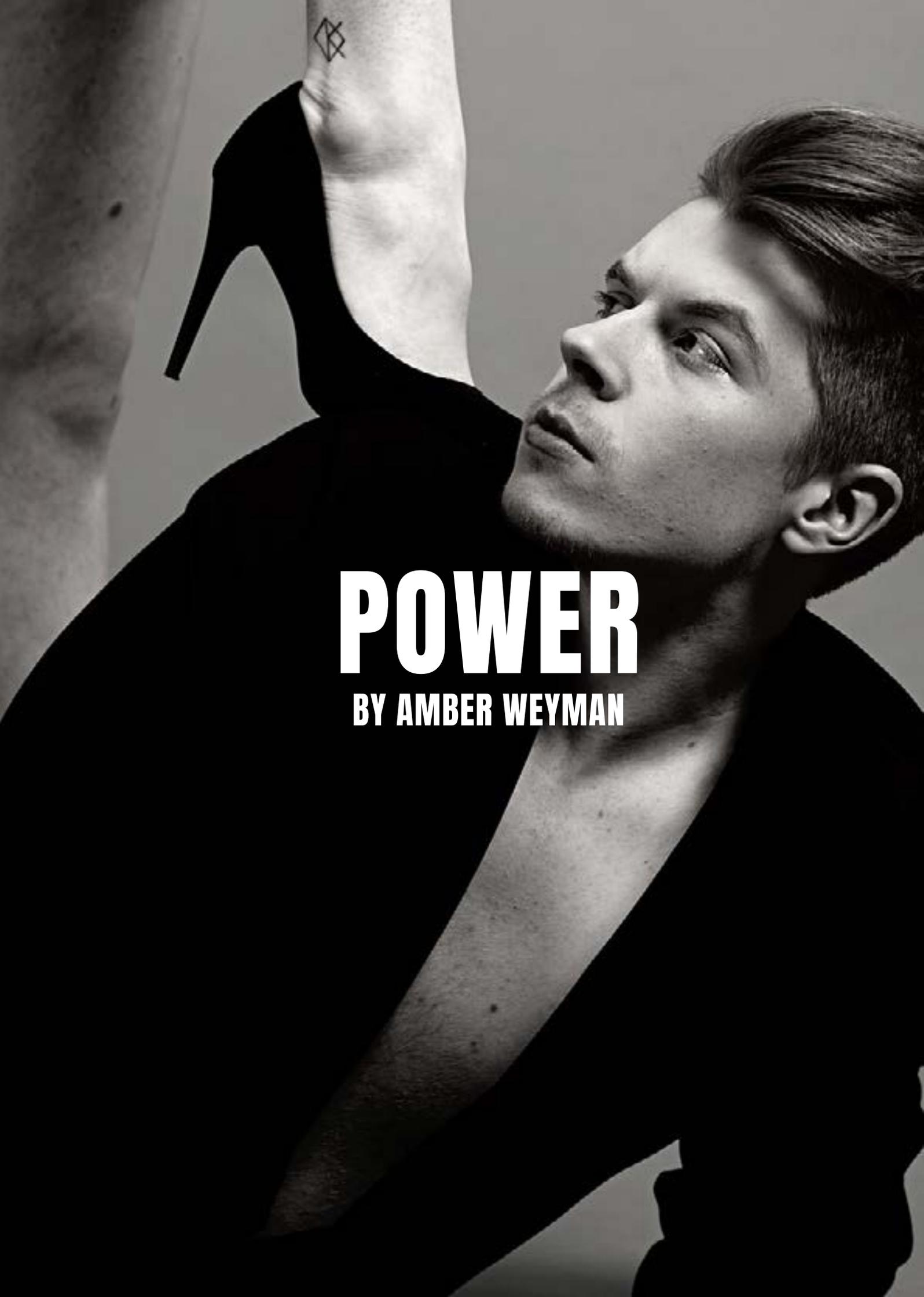
that I look really young. Sometimes people are taken aback!"

"Although I'm only 21 I do have three years of experience working in my company, and one-year experience in marketing, and I think it would be quite easy for people to sort of disregard that experience that I have on account of my age. But at my company that doesn't really seem to happen. People are always interested to know my viewpoints and sort of recognise the value that I can bring to discussions which is really nice, and I am very lucky to have that." It's clear that, whilst the world is progressing towards more equality in STEM, even more needs to be done as early on as possible in the lives of young girls to encourage them into the technological industries.

"If women aren't realising that they have an interest in technology until they've already done a degree in or trained in something else, that's not much good", Charlotte tells us. "So I think we need to do a lot more work in educating younger women and young girls by telling them that current technology is an option for you and it can be really exciting."

"In a lot of companies the discrepancies in pay between men and women [can mean] that men are more likely to go for promotions or more likely to ask for a pay rise. Young girls should be taught at school that it's okay to ask for a promotion, to ask for a pay rise, that women shouldn't just be grateful to be in the positions they're in. They shouldn't be grateful to have the job just because they are a woman. They should be able to recognise that there is career progression for them, and they should have the confidence and the ability to shoot their shot and go for those promotions and those pay rises."

"In my company especially, we have a lot of really strong female role models. Our UK president is a woman and we have quite a lot of women in management so that's really positive. I don't feel like my career progression is limited in my company because I'm a woman, because of the women around me." And, as for Charlotte's best advice? "Don't let your perceived lack of experience hold you back. Just go for it! There's nothing wrong with applying for a job or a promotion. What's the worst that can happen? You don't get it. But if you don't apply then you'll never know what you could have achieved so I think just be bold, be confident, and just take a leap of faith."



POWER

BY AMBER WEYMAN

SEX IS SOLD OUT
SEX IS SOLD OUT

The false ideals within mass marketing and advertising can promote a dangerously distorted reality - the ideal woman that doesn't exist. To challenge this warped female prototype, I created a series of photographs advocating the strength of the modern woman.

'Sex sells' is a phrase I've heard commonly during my short time within the marketing industry. However, this endless sexualisation of women within advertising is irreparably harmful. From an early age, young men and women are fed images of the optimal, yet anatomically impossible, woman. Taught to desire a standard that is only achieved through the exaggerated use of photo editing software.

No blemishes. No wrinkles. No scars. This woman isn't real.

Brands such as American Apparel and Tom Ford are well known for adapting extreme gender roles throughout their marketing campaigns; not only promoting their products, but also a submissive and hyper-sexualised feminine optimum. These campaigns regularly feature a dominant male subject who is dressed in formal clothing looming over his scarcely adorned female counterpart.

Advertising campaigns depicting this false female are now easier to consume by young and vulnerable audiences due to the excessive

popularity of social media. These sexualised images are no longer restricted to print advertorials or physical content, but instead broadcast across the internet for all to devour. According to a study by Adios Barbie, these poisonous advertising tactics are ensuring a girl's self esteem peaks at the age of nine. More alarmingly, girls as young as six realise they are 'expected' to be sexual.

Disturbed and concerned by these statistics, I was inspired to reverse the narrative. To bring to light the common, yet not equally represented, vulnerability of men and power of women. The series of photographs I produced, entitled 'SEX IS SOLD OUT', presents a dominant female figure cloaked in contrasting angles and levels to the male model. The models cast were dressed in matching formal attire to minimise any distinguishing differences in appearance.

Phebe Schmidt greatly inspired this series, as her work rejects the conventional beauty standards and gender roles thrust onto modern women. The Australian editorial and portrait photographer uses her dry sense

of humour to create images with a necessary narrative for today's society. In previous interviews, Schmidt has voiced her disdain towards the overuse of the term 'feminism'; expressing how her work aims to critique the way beauty is marketed and objectified. The dark and all too real undertones of her work are often masked by a bubblegum brightness, but do not mistake this vibrancy for a lack of meaningful and essential conversation.

The insidious use of the male gaze whilst promoting a product has resulted in a continued emphasis on the damaging appeal of the 'perfect woman.' Despite the progress around this topic due to artists such as Schmidt, the conversation must continue. The fanciful lie that is perfection must be replaced with a celebration of idiosyncrasy.

In a time where gender is now identified as a spectrum, sex should no longer be a product in demand.



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MOO'S HOMEMADES

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THIS IS A WOMAN'S WORLD

Here, we've gathered some inspiring stories of women you should know this month. We hope you'll find commonality in the struggles they've faced, and draw inspiration from their perseverance and drive to change the world.

BY SHARON DENNY

Sara Blakely

- The founder of Spanx
- In 2012, she was named Forbes Magazine's 'Youngest Self-Made Female Billionaire'
- She still retains 100% ownership of her company

"Most of the reason we don't do things is because we're afraid to fail. I just made a decision one day that I was not going to do things in my life because of fear." – Sara Blakely

It all started with a pair of cream-colored pants. Like the old saying goes 'necessity is the mother of invention'.

Sara Blakely needed something that would give her the benefits of wearing control top pantyhose, but without all the discomfort that came from wearing... control top pantyhose. Wanting to wear

her new pants to a party, Blakely found herself cutting the feet off of a pair and, unknowingly, creating the first prototype for what would become the future of women's shapewear.

What's truly inspiring about Blakely's story is her drive and perseverance. As a young girl, she had an idea of what her life would look like; following in her father's footsteps as a successful trial attorney. But disappointing LSAT scores stopped that plan dead in its tracks. Hoping to find some happiness, and a short break from reality, she auditioned

to play the character Goofy at Disney World, only to find herself 2 inches too short to join the cast with another dream dashed.

It was at this point she applied for a job at an office supply company selling fax machines. Not knowing it at the time, she'd stepped onto the path that would lead her to where she is today.

Blakely would not be stopped. Not by the disappointments she had faced, or by the fact she had no experience in the fashion industry: no knowledge of patents, a lack of startup funds.



None of this was enough to deter her from pushing forward. She saw a desire – a need that herself, and other women alike, had. And she pushed herself to fill this gap in the market. Spending hours at a time in the library, researching patents, cold calling and planning visits to factories only to have the door shut in her face.

Fast forward to 2000, and Blakely and her new product found themselves on the most exclusive list – Oprah’s Favorite Things. A great product, stand-out merchandising and packaging and incredible word

of mouth were all contributing factors to her success. And, unlike many other large companies, she has maintained full ownership, never accepting investments or partners. As of 2020, she’s pledged 5 million dollars worth of support to female-run small businesses to aid them through the pandemic.

Sara Blakely’s story is truly something inspirational. It’s a perfect example of true grit and determination, of not allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by past failures or disappointments in our life. Rather, seeing these stereotypically negative

things as positives, and drawing strength out of them.

Blakely was never deterred by the circumstances around her. Instead, she took the reins back with a firm grip and forged ahead on her own path. Finding success by first being able to trust in herself – something all women should aspire to be able to do. When we trust in ourselves, in our abilities, in our strengths, who knows where we might go, or how high we might fly.

Reshma Saujani

- Founder of Girls Who Code, a non-profit organisation aimed at closing the gender gap in technology
- First Indian-American woman to run for US Congress
- Named as one of Forbes magazine’s ‘Most Powerful Women Changing The World’



“Teach girls bravery, not perfection.” – Reshma Saujani

“I think that if we’re really trying to crash through the glass ceiling, we’re really trying to change these abysmal numbers we have for [women in] leadership, we actually have to tell women to take more risks, not less, and to really have them embrace failure.”

Reshma Saujani spoke these words when referring to her run for Congress in 2010, after being told she should focus first on a smaller office instead of leaping towards Congress – the word further cementing the strength of her mantra ‘Bravery, not perfection’ from her book of the same name.

The child of Indian refugees, getting involved in politics was something Saujani was passionate about. Listening to the stories of her father, she found a longing to help and give back. This force pushed her towards her run for Congress, her hope for a chance to be able to change things.

The bid would ultimately fail, and would not be the only failure in her life. Saujani had previously been rejected from Yale Law School more than once, and would fail to obtain another bid for public office in the years following. But all of the disappointment she endured wouldn’t stop her. Reshma Saujani’s story would not end here.

It was during her first campaign that Saujani became aware of a glaring discrepancy. Boys

significantly outnumbered girls in computer related school courses. The gender gap was overwhelming and, to Saujani, unacceptable.

A change needed to happen, and Saujani herself would lead the charge.

Two years later, Girls Who Code was born. Saujani created the non-profit organisation with the goal to close the gender gap in technology, aimed at improving the then-current stats that only 24% of all computer scientists are women. A large drop from the 37% it was in 1995.


***A change
needed to
happen, and
Saujani herself
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charge***

“We believe being brave is about being resilient, persistent, and ambitious... We’re not just preparing our girls to enter the workforce: we’re preparing them to lead it, to improve it, to completely and totally transform it”, Saujani shares via the Girls Who Code website.

This sentiment is truly resonating with people, as her TEDtalk ‘Teach Girls, Bravery Not Perfection’ has over 4 million views. There is so much more to this story.

Reshma Saujani was able to achieve becoming a Deputy Public Advocate for Mayor Bill de Blasio, during which time she developed a scholarship program for undocumented students. After that, she partnered with the New York Immigration Coalition and the Public Advocate’s office to create the Dream Fellowship – which aims to provide scholarship funding and training in leadership and personal development. She created the Minority and Urban Entrepreneurship Program, a one-day workshop that partnered students with entrepreneurs in their community who could help to guide them. In addition to Girls Who Code, ‘Teachers Who Code’ was also born.

From the ashes of failure, Saujani rose like a Phoenix. Bolder and stronger than before, and an inspiration for younger generations to look up to..

Bravery, not perfection, is a strong message – one that young girls need to not only hear, but live by too.

If Saujani’s story has taught us anything, it’s that we should never be afraid to fail. Instead, we should look at failure as an accomplishment. A testament to our bravery and our resilience. Push past the boundaries, never settle or accept what others are willing to give you that feels less than your worth. Want more, and go after it. Fight for it.

Who knows what we can accomplish when we too decide to live by the value of bravery, and not perfection.

THIS IS A WOMAN'S WORLD

HOW BUILDING MY BUSINESS HELPED BUILD ME BACK UP

Emma Hersh

Had anyone ever told me I'd pull up roots and relocate from the UK to the USA, I would have laughed with disbelief – and right in their face.

But the truth is, that's exactly what happened, and I'm thankful for it.

It was a somewhat unexpected opportunity, but when it came my way I grabbed it with both hands. Turns out, it was one of the best things I ever did and led me on an incredible 17-year-long journey.

I left the UK in December of 2001. My father had sadly passed away the year before from cancer, so when I got the chance to move countries I figured life was too short to pass up the chance.

It was no easy feat. I was relocating in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, and the climate was tense, to say the least. Then there was the emotional stress of leaving behind my family, especially my mother. I'm an only child and due to the recent passing of my father, it led to a fair amount of guilt on my part. Fortunately, my family was supportive and encouraged me all the way, so off I went to the land of milk and honey.

So began a life-altering journey, and a career path I doubt I would have ever had in the UK. I worked in Logistics and Supply chains. Starting from a lowly dispatch position for a well-known company, I worked my way up the ranks very quickly. Several years, a couple of promotions, company changes and takeovers later, I found myself in

a Senior Management position. I was responsible for ensuring the performance of multiple locations with hundreds of employees across the country.

I moved from Florida to Tennessee and back again, then after 10 years in the States I landed in Atlanta – and boy, what a great city to live in! Logistics is fast-paced, challenging and traditionally a male-dominated industry. There were times when I was the only woman on my management level and for 2 levels below me. Luckily I had a great team and mentor, and I graduated from operations into business management and new accounts.

“There were times when I was the only woman on my management level and for 2 levels below me.”

As my career progressed, travel up and down the United States became more extensive; Miami, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, Atlanta, Boston dealing with customers like Wayfair and Amazon. The working days became a blur as the hours got longer and longer. 2 am and 3 am email chains and phone conversations were a regular occurrence and working weekends were standard.

The number of conference calls held throughout the week was something to behold.

Eventually, at the top of my game, I hit a crossroads. I came to the understanding that I could stay where I was and keep doing what I was doing until the time I retired, or I could do something completely different.

The desire to do something different won out. I opted to start working for myself.

I was 41 and knew I needed an exit strategy to be successful. So, I kept working for 2 or 3 more years, paid off credit cards, the car, store cards and anything else I could get rid of to reduce my overheads.

By being self-employed, I understood I wasn't going to make the same salary I had in recent years, at least not for the first few months. By getting some cash behind me I knew I could survive for a while until the money came in. It took a few years to execute the plan, but I finally quit the day job and went freelance in early 2015.

Now, I know many people

reading this will wonder WHY I would leave such a lucrative, solid career and cast my future into the great unknown? The answer was quite simple; time.

I wanted more time to do the things I enjoy, and more time to travel back home to the UK and be with my family that I'd left behind almost 15 years before.

As I was making the change I noticed a trend among friends and colleagues – many were making similar career changes right around the same age. Interestingly, there are a growing number of small businesses and freelance workers popping up and the statistics show the largest percentage is owned and operated by women in the 40-plus age group. Nice to know I could add to the statistics!

Though, it did get me wondering – why so many women, and why at that same age?

***“...why so many women,
and why at that
same age?”***

It's not scientifically proven but my own humble opinion is that, like me, many women throw themselves into a demanding career for a number of years. You earn the big bucks, prove yourself and then finally come up for air.

Taking that step back and having time to breathe can be a moment of stark clarity. Suddenly, you're aware you are hitting mid-life.

Maybe the kids are more or less grown and off your hands? Maybe the mortgage isn't quite the burden it was 10 years earlier? And maybe, just maybe, we don't need to put quite so much time and effort into our career to prove ourselves, or bring home such a big salary anymore?

When you hit that point it can be quite a catalyst. Life-changing, even.

Don't get me wrong, it's not for everybody. Many women stay in successful careers for years and years until they retire. Many others, myself included, decide to take a new or different path.

I believe, as women, we are constantly changing. Ever-growing, ever-evolving. I also believe we have an inner drive to challenge ourselves and see what else we can accomplish. So, while turning down a solid income may seem reckless to some, it helped me grow in ways I never would've had I remained where I was. Not to mention, I learnt a lot!

Was it easy? Absolutely not.
Was it rewarding? Totally.

Going it alone allowed me to explore areas of business I had never experienced before. I had always been a bit on the 'techy' side, and now I was using those skills to earn a living. I learned how to build websites, perform digital marketing and SEO services. I used my business acumen to consult and help companies grow. I've designed logos and graphics and even developed entire accredited professional training courses for colleges. I have written articles, created product reviews and handled branded copywriting for websites.

Oh, and back to that 'time with the family thing?' I moved back to the UK a couple of years ago. The work I do can be performed anywhere remotely so it seemed logical. Now I get to see everybody when I want.

After dabbling with many business skills along the way, it was interesting to see how that accumulated knowledge can eventually roll up into something else. One thing I've learned without a doubt is that nothing you do is ever wasted, and it's amazing how much can be used in ways you may not have anticipated. Some of the things I did to earn money were discarded along the way as I honed my skills. For example, I quite like building and designing websites, but not as a living, so I let that go.

Social Media Marketing just wasn't my thing so after a couple of years, I let that go too.

As skills developed, the projects and ideas seemed to flow more freely. Having time and headspace allows more room for creativity and originality. Your thoughts are free to roam and grow organically.

Part of that process allowed for GigLeads (www.gigleads.uk) to be born - a website that finds the best possible work for writers and bloggers, founded by me. The idea for the platform was born from my own freelancing experiences and the fact that many times I felt I spent more hours looking for work than actually doing it. That time-consuming task was something I felt could be managed more efficiently.

GigLeads removes this problem by actively sourcing the best jobs from all over the internet and allowing companies to post their own gigs directly to the site. These listings are then sent in a daily email to our members who can then simply click and apply - a great timesaver. It's a project that was well received from the first day we launched. We've built a base of writers and freelancers in the UK and are continuing to grow, and there's a site in the works for the USA market also.



WILTSHIRE MASKS

Wiltshire Masks is a small business selling sustainable handmade face masks. We are committed to providing high quality products at reasonable

prices. When selecting fabrics we ensure that we choose natural fibres which make our masks soft to touch and breathable when worn. We aim to make our

face masks both functional and fashionable, and with many of the designs being limited edition you can ensure you will stand out in the crowd. IG @wiltshiremasks



FRAZZLE SCRUNCHIES

Frazzlescrunchies has recently released an advent calendar, 12 and 25 days as well as a Christmas collection. I keep all my fabrics until they are gone,

so if there is one you are after then just direct message me. All kind of colours and textured scrunchies as well as matching masks and 90s style headbands.

I also try to keep as sustainable as possible from packaging to where I source my fabrics. Go check out [@frazzlescrunchies](#) for some scrunchie fun.

HOW COVID DISMANTLED MY PLANS BUT BUILT UP MY CONFIDENCE

I'm definitely not alone when I say being a 2020 graduate wasn't great, but it's taught me things I never realised I needed to learn.

BY CHARLOTTE MOON

From not being able to say goodbye to friends of 4 years, to not even having a graduation ceremony – graduating in 2020 was pretty shit for us all. However, through all of this, we've had the chance to become more confident and optimistic than ever before.

I was an International Business student also working part-time as a marketing & sales assistant. I'd been told mid-December in a management meeting that I'd be hired full time after graduation, and the sky was my limit in terms of career progression. I thought I had my plans all laid out, then March 2020 hit, and lockdown happened.

As I was at home scrambling to try and get my final project together, I rang my employer and found out, like so many people, I was being made redundant. Confusion and frustration hit and I knew I needed to make a new plan. After applying to what felt like a million jobs, I decided to apply for a Marketing Masters at Manchester University.

With a glowing reference from my head of year and a First Class International Business degree, I was all set to start my Master's journey.

I was rejected.

With no job, and now no Masters, I felt completely lost – and, most of all, embarrassed as I'd put everything on this one opportunity. I had no set plan but knew I needed to get back to my usual, positive and motivated mindset.

After talking with a close friend who felt like she was in the same boat, we wanted to help people in a similar situation and provide them with opportunities and motivation to make sure we all keep pushing towards our personal and professional goals through this weird time we're living in.

So, we did something about it.

At the beginning of October, we started an Instagram called What The F with two main objectives in mind:

1. Provide information and resources on the business sector to help students and other young people.

2. Spread awareness of mental health issues within our community.

The page reached nearly 500 followers in less than a month with an overwhelming amount of positive feedback. Not only has the page helped me build my confidence, but we've also built a community of like-minded people who support and help each other. Through building back my confidence, I've also been able to build my LinkedIn network and start freelancing again alongside my newly landed 6-month role as a digital marketing assistant.

If there are any graduates, or non-graduates, reading this who have no clue what they're doing or what they want to do with their lives, just know that that's okay.

Keep pushing and doing what you love and, eventually, everything will fall into place.

WHY GRADUATING ISN'T WHERE YOUR LIFE BEGINS, OR ENDS

Graduating from university is meant to be exciting, but nerve racking. Full of hope, yet full of second-guessing. It's not, however, meant to happen as the world enters a pandemic, amplifying the already unprecedented nature of life after university.

As a Marketing graduate I, somewhat regrettably, fumbled my way through my four years at Portsmouth - often paying more

attention to the social life the seaside city had to offer than my education. Most young adults go to uni with the intention to study hard but party hard in the process, so I definitely wasn't the only one.

Accumulating overdraft debt, skipping more lectures than I dare to admit and leaving university with a 2.2 are all things I would choose to do differently with hindsight, but I'd be lying if I said it wasn't the best time of my life.

Maybe that's where the fun stops. You have your fun allowance at university, and it expires as soon as you return your grossly overpriced gown and hat. I'm probably being very pessimistic here, as I currently sit on furlough with very little to do other than scroll through TikTok and Klarna my life away on ASOS. But eight months ago, when the first lockdown kicked off in March, I was working full time at a supermarket, gagging to get out and taste what graduate life should really be about.



“Call me naive, but employers should have been knocking on my door to employ me, right?”

I'd worked there since graduating in the summer of 2019, and was adamant it would only be a 3 to 6-month stint. Call me naive, but employers should have been knocking on my door to employ me, right?

Of course, that rarely happens. Graduating is presented as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Lecturers, career counsellors and alumni members don't seem to mention the constant rejection, the relentless job applications that want to know too much about you too soon and the too-often reminder that, yes, you have a degree but you don't have 6 months voluntary experience along with 2 years of industry knowledge.

We're reminded, however, that we're in the top 5% of the country who have degrees. I have no idea of the credibility of this statistic,

“Graduating is presented as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”



© Martijn Baudoin via Unsplash

neither does it matter. It does not matter because, as it quickly became abundantly clear on my journey, a degree doesn't mean employment. It means the beginning of a hard slog to get you to where you want to be post-university, which usually consists of a great job, financial stability and the opportunity to grow as an individual.

I spent fifteen months in my supermarket role, and I'm ashamed to admit I often felt embarrassed about my position. Whilst I was working, clearing off dribs and drabs of my student overdraft and thankfully not paying housekeeping, I couldn't help but feel stagnant and hopeless. I would peek on Instagram and all my uni peers would be on their 3rd holiday or moving in with their partners.

And let's not even discuss LinkedIn. That place is full of achievements and 'Congratulate [blank] for starting new positions', and sometimes you just don't want to see it.

However, perhaps the most important thing I've learnt throughout all of this is you can be happy for others whilst being unhappy with your own situation. It actually became my biggest motivator.

I don't know if it's a girl thing, stemming back to when you were a 14-year-old gullible teen who was sure they would have a house by 20, husband by 22 and babies by 25, but I'm guilty of setting an internal clock, with alarms for achieving certain milestones by a certain age.



I spent more than a year comparing myself and my position to others, almost resenting their successes and feeling envious they were doing well for themselves. In all honesty, I probably spent my whole adult life doing it until now. As women, we already face a shedload of pressures and expectations of what we should be doing, by when, and for who. Everyone's process is different and I'm one of the world's worst for thinking I'm failing because I don't own a home, or have enough money for one, or have a job that fulfils all of my specific and - at times - unrealistic desires.

I didn't think I'd be 24-years-old, working for the same supermarket I did when I was 17. I also didn't think a global pandemic would occur less than a week after my first interview for the job I have now. And perhaps the biggest surprise was that I'd get the job in April and not start it until October.

The feeling of being stagnant has stayed with me throughout life after graduating and I haven't yet shaken it off, even with my new London job. COVID-19 has stripped the world of many opportunities and kept far too many people in limbo, unsure of what the hell is going to happen next.

"I'm just happy to finally be afloat."

I'm beyond grateful to write this article while on furlough. Even though my super meticulous, super organised self would have liked 2020 to have gone my way, I'm more than aware that my position would be envied by many.

It took me way over a year to dip my toe into the world of graduate employment in the midst of the storm we all know this year has been. But, whilst it hasn't been easy, I'm just happy to finally be afloat.



CLEMENTINE STATIONARY

Clementine Stationery started during lockdown 1.0 after the founder Emily's A-Levels were cancelled. With the love of all things paper goods she found herself starting the company. From notebooks to planners and washi tape the range is rapidly growing. Now at university Clementine Stationery is operating out of university halls in a new city and can't wait to see the company grow! Head over to Instagram follow @clementinestationary now!

**DON'T WAIT FOR THE
JOB YOU WANT,
CREATE IT**



© fotografierende on Unsplash

BY SARAH BAILLIE

When Sarah lost her happily employed status, she thought it was the end of the world. She realised, however, it was just the beginning of the new opportunities she could create for herself.

Could you introduce yourself to our readers?

“Hi there, my name’s Sarah Baillie and I’m 22 years old.”

And what’s your current role?

“I’m the Marketing and Events Manager for Durham Distillery. We’re based in the North East of England and we make premium gin, vodka, cask aged gin, mango gin and sloe gin. I recently graduated from the University of Edinburgh with an MA (Hons) in Business with Marketing and started with the company in September 2020.”

If you don’t mind us asking, how did Covid-19 affect your employment status?

“Before the pandemic, I was the Brand and Digital Manager for a nightclub in Edinburgh, looking at graduate options in marketing, events and hospitality.

Unfortunately however, I was unable to stay in the capital and decided to move back home to the North East.”

How did you approach the process of applying for jobs from there?

“During lockdown I really struggled. In a very short space of time, I’d lost my job, moved away from some of my closest friends and felt completely without

purpose or direction – as I’m sure many of my fellow graduates also experienced.

“Over the next few months, I received mixed feedback; those who knew me most told me to look for exciting and stimulating work, while others simply instructed me to make money and fill my time. And thanks to their support, I began to have faith in myself again; as a driven, ambitious and skilled marketer who knows her sauce!

“Ultimately, it comes down to how you perceive ‘work’. For me, it’s not about income or the 9-5 dictatorship, it’s about your unique and rewarding contribution to a company.”

“I would be a valuable asset”

How did you go about approaching companies for employment?

“With my experience in alcohol marketing, I decided to reach out to distilleries in the North East. I emailed Durham Distillery with my CV, a visual portfolio of my work and a cover letter explaining why I would be a valuable asset to the company. I then met some of the team for an informal chat and pitched my ideas to them.”

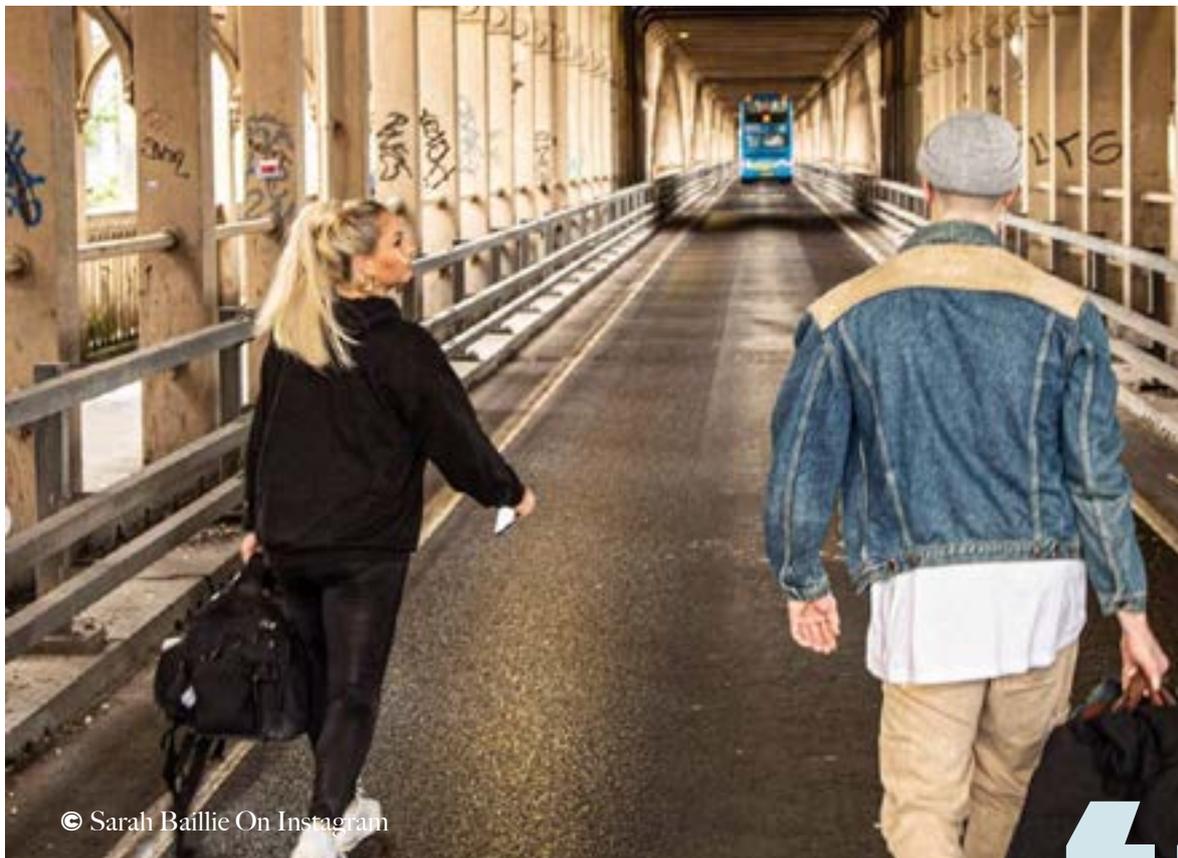
And what was the outcome?

“At first they offered me a consultancy role, working on their social media and digital channels. One month later, I was offered a full time role as their Marketing and Events Manager!”

What’s your best advice to others also hoping to ‘create a job’?

“Remember, this role doesn’t exist – you’ll have to explain to them why it should:

1. Audit: Do a full company audit and understand the areas for growth. This will give a clearer direction of where and how you can add value.
2. Growth: Can you increase their customer outreach, for example can you increase their network or following?
3. Outsourced services: Can you provide services which the company would normally outsource? For example, if you can provide graphic design, Photoshop and photography skills, you can save them external expenses. Often, these expenses will be higher than your wage!
4. Improvements: Tell them how to improve. Could you improve their web layout, online navigation, product offering, branding, pricing strategy, use of technology, economies of scale or their social media?



Prove that you can add value to a company. Provide evidence, provide justification, and provide undisputable reasoning. Don't be afraid.

And your best advice for the interview process?

“My top three tips would definitely be...

1. Paper copies: Put all of your suggestions into a visual presentation and print it off to show the company during your interview. Practically, this makes it easier to pass round and you aren't relying on technology. More importantly this provides a visual cue for your commitment and dedication to the interview.

2. Dress appropriately: If you're a 20 year old applying for a role in a fierce fashion company, don't wear a twee dress and kitten heels. How would the 'brand' dress?

3. Include everything: If you've thought of some fantastic ideas, don't hold back! Don't

be afraid to include more points, keep the conversation going. You might miss out on your most innovative and attractive idea.”

If you could leave our readers with one piece of advice, what would it be?

“Prove that you can add value to a company. Provide evidence, provide justification, and provide undisputable reasoning.”

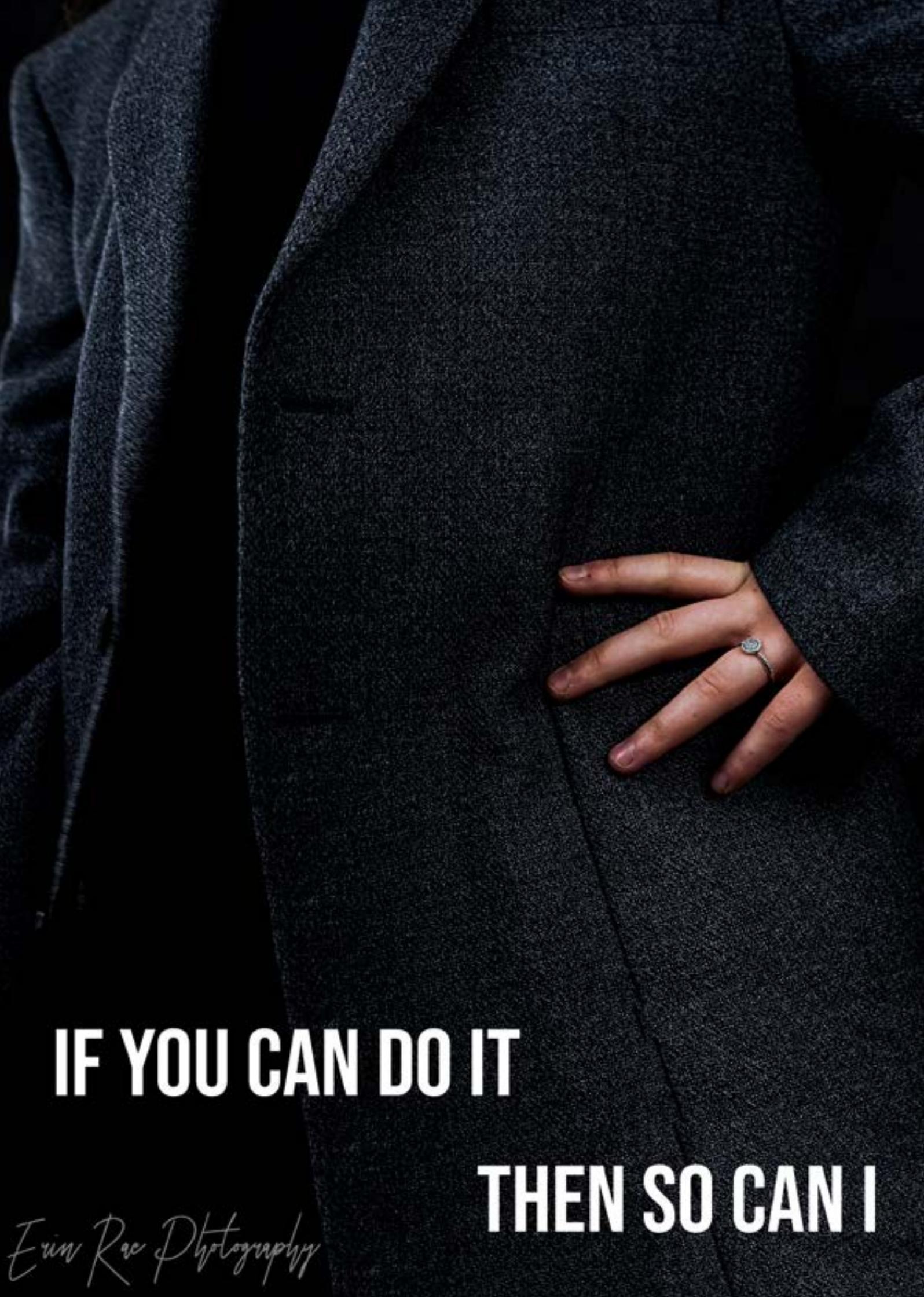
And if they have any questions, can they contact you for more information?

“If anyone would like to get in touch to ask me for advice please message my Instagram page, @xsarahbaillie - I'm always happy to help!”

IF YOU CAN DO IT
THEN SO CAN I

IF YOU CAN DO IT
THEN SO CAN I

IF YOU CAN DO IT
THEN SO CAN I



IF YOU CAN DO IT

THEN SO CAN I

Erin Rae Photography

LEADER?



INSPIRATIONAL?

Erin Rae Photography

A woman with her hair pulled back, wearing a grey blazer, is sitting on a set of stairs. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious, contemplative expression. Her hands are clasped together in her lap. She is wearing a watch on her left wrist and a ring on her right hand. The background is dark and out of focus.

STRONG?

ARTICULATE?

Erin Rae Photography

BETTER?



MOTIVATED?

Erin Rae Photography

CONFIDENT?



POWERFUL?

Finn Rae Photography

MASTERING ONLINE MARKETING FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Online marketing isn't something new, it's been around for a long time and has only had a bigger impact over the years. Here, we explore the importance of making the best of it to allow your business to not only survive, but to thrive too.

Online marketing can help your business to grow. In order to make online marketing successful it is important to see what your goal is. Is it to make more money, gain brand awareness or to bring your business to another level?

Online marketing is a term for multiple methods and techniques used to spread a message about a business brand, products, or services to its potential customers. These methods and techniques include a website, email, social media, display advertising, SEO (search engine optimization) and Google AdWords.

It is not a requirement for a business to implement all of these methods and techniques. Personally, I'm a true believer of doing what feels right for you and your business. Many resources will tell you about how you must do things in order to grow. Although every business is different and has their own unique aspect. I believe that using your knowledge, uniqueness and idea's, you will succeed as a business. There are a few simple

things you can do to implement the first steps of online marketing:

1| Create social media accounts:

Social media has the most daily users. In order to get customers to your website you need to create brand awareness. Social media can help you with this. Choose the account which would fit your business best, and where your target audience is presence. The good thing about social media is, that you can create an account for your business and never use it or even delete it. Please don't feel pressured by anyone to use a certain social media channel. Everyone wants to tell you how they would run your business; they just forget that it is your business and you decide what path you take.

2| Gain a following:

Every target audience reacts differently to content. For example, if you post only quotes on your social media and nothing about your product you will most likely not sell your product. The content you post needs to represent your business and product. There are many businesses who execute this really well, a few examples

are; Perl Cosmetics, Shreddy, Tala and Deciem. Your success is not measured in the number of followers you have, but the willingness of them to purchase your product. Or even to support your business in other ways. Your followers can share your content on their social media, which gives you a lot more reach.

3| Behind the scenes:

These days the customers want a real connection with the business they buy their products from. People tend to feel more connected when they see how a product is made, how it is packed and see more of its owners. TikTok is a good tool to show what your business makes and what you stand for. Not only can you use TikTok but also Instagram stories, reels or IGTV to show some behind the scenes of your business.

Online marketing is super interesting and could help to grow your business. If you want to learn more about online marketing, read my eBook, which you can find on my website!

KIM HEILJGERS

PRETTY LITTLE MARKETER

SOPHIE

June 22nd, 2020. I was sat on my sofa stressing about life after graduation. I'd been in my student bubble for so long, with a student loan to keep me going and no worries about the stresses of full-time work because my part-time retail job was a breeze.

I remember realising that I had not even properly thought about what I wanted to do next, let alone how I'd get there. Do I have the skills needed to stand out? Other students are probably doing the absolute most right now to gain experience and I had, well, very minimal.

So naturally, I took to Google. 6,000,000 pages of information and resources, that makes it easy right?

Wrong. Every webpage had conflicting information, going in a totally different direction to the webpage before. And ones that did have helpful information, gave me no tools or useful tips on how to implement it myself! I was defeated and frustrated.

Why can't there be one place, that has all the information I need as a worried student, that is easy to understand and helps me go away and go at it alone? And there you have it. The birth of PLM. In-

spiration struck. Hey wait, why don't I just create that place... myself? I sat down and spent the day thinking of a name, making a weeks' worth of content using my favourite colour (pink) and made a really crap logo on Canva. 3 weeks later, we hit 1,000. 3 weeks after that, we hit 2,000. And now 3 months after that, we've hit 7,000.

Through sharing the PLM journey, my passion and updates on my personal LinkedIn page I've spoken on podcasts, lectured at universities, been invited to guest speak at virtual events and released an e-book with over 650 downloads.

The journey hasn't always been a direct upward climb, there's been a lot of burn outs, anxiety and the occasional hate comment and nasty DM. But what keeps me going is my community - knowing they have my back no matter what, that I have a safe and encouraging girl gang and whom I know appreciate the effort and behind the scenes prep and research that goes into running PLM.

Sometimes running with your wildest idea is the best thing. You don't know if you don't try! Think of what scares you, what you would dream to do - and simply just do it. I guarantee you'll enjoy the ride.

MILLER

**SOMETIMES RUNNING WITH YOUR
WILDEST IDEA
IS THE BEST THING.**

THINK OF WHAT **SCARES** YOU, WHAT YOU WOULD DREAM OF DOING,

As an Instagram blog owner and manager, it's my role and position in the community I have grown to nurture and guide it. Essentially, I set the tone.

What makes a positive community on Instagram, is a positive host! Now by positive, I do not mean brushing past life's difficulties or hiding the reality of your day to day lives and struggles – I mean being honest.

Recently I had a bad experience in a Facebook group; sharing an opportunity I thought would benefit a potential young student in the group, looking to find some experience and networking opportunities. My intentions could not have been purer, yet sadly I was met with messages and comments calling me “disgusting” and telling me I should be embarrassed for sharing unpaid work experience.

Now, whatever your stance on unpaid work experience, I think we can all agree our stance on cyber-bullying to be one of disagreement. I cried, of course. Because words hurt, and having my integrity questioned by strangers, using such harsh

and disrespectful words and tones was difficult. And instantly I picked up my phone, headed to Instagram stories and updated my community on what was happening, and shared my upset.

Negative experience, but not negative stories nor negative vibes sent out into my community. But rather it was an opportunity for my girls to reach out, to band together and to show support and encouragement – further enhancing the positivity of our community and enriching the supportive nature of our girl gang.

The reminder to them that even though I run the business and own the blog, I'm human just like them and a message to the community that they've got my back and I will always have theirs.

If you're a small business owner reading this, or if you run your own blog – I encourage you to be honest with your community, share the stress of university, allow them an insight into what you're struggling with. You're not dragging them down, you're allowing them to rise up; rise up in encouragement, rise up in resilience.

Sophie Miller

AND SIMPLE JUST DO IT.
I GUARANTEE YOU'LL ENJOY THE RIDE.

A SEA OF CHANGE FOR RENTABLE FASHION



© Leah Winberg

LEAH WINBERG

How years of frustration at the industry I love pushed me to do something about it, and build something I truly believe in.

The need for new has become a norm within our society; the constant validation associated with wear-it-once and influencer culture is creating an unsustainable ecosystem where we throw money at conglomerates and throw our clothes into landfill.

Those at the lower ends of these demographics, such as students and young professionals, are the most susceptible to buying into fast fashion and falling into a rut bestowed upon us by the fashion industry's insatiable concept of 'enough'. The fashion rental market fails to acknowledge this demographic, ignoring the gap in the market and the needs and issues surrounding it.

With a third of 16 to 25 year olds in the UK currently having a Depop account, we can already see a market of 2.3 million young individuals who are pioneering a new relationship with slow fashion and sustainability.

I'm Leah Winberg, the founder and CEO of withLana - a peer to peer fashion rental platform for a new generation of consumers. Growing up in Guernsey, a beautiful island in the English Channel, I developed a deep connection to the sea, and thus our planet;

spending my developing years on any form of surfboard I could get my hands on to fill my time in that unforgiving corner of the Atlantic. Unfortunately, however, over the years I've witnessed a truly detrimental change to our seas, with rising pollution levels from oil and plastics threatening the very landscape of my now-second home.

As such, withLana was born out of an unsustainable love-affair with fashion, compromised by the desire to understand and help the world we live in. After two years of studying fashion, I almost dropped out of university as I fell deeply out of love with the industry.

On a compromise, I took a year out. At 20, I moved to New York and interned at a fashion house 12-year-old Leah had dreamed of. This life long manifestation was met with a similar resentment, of wastefulness and negligence to how disposable we see the fashion industry even when it comes to so-called luxury goods. The exhaustion of sample sale curation was made worse with the torment of strikingly beautiful bags and garments being met with scissors and Sharpies if there was but a nick rendering it less than perfect - ensuring these failures never made it into the hands of the desiring public.

The abhorrent nature of an unpaid intern mutilating these assets worth several times the rent of one's Brooklyn apartment would be enough to leave a bitter taste in anyone's mouth. There sure is nothing luxurious about this destruction.

On a highstreet level, we see this destruction ten fold due to the nature of its mass production. Crippling memories of working at clothing store still haunt me: B-S-ing to customers about the greenwashing of the company's 'sustainability goals' and their ethical promo zines, knowing far too well the masses of plastic bags (filled with plastic bags, filled with plastic bags, filled with microplastic) that sat just behind the 'staff only' door.

Of course, the concerns of a part time sales assistant which are not in line with management's ways lead to a short employment. In fashion, we tolerate a lot of lies and thrive on turning a blind eye, but we need to begin to really draw a line at all this hypocrisy and greenwashing.

With this, we have to ask ourselves - will an industry with more blood on their hands than an R-rated thriller ever change?

Nine years of working in retail meant battling my inner demons over contributing to this unsustainable mass-consumption, all while fighting the tangible demons of head office and Christmas Quotas.

From this journey, withLana was created. Through an understanding of the importance of expression and a human desire to consume, we'll consume in a way that understands the voices of those currently exploited by marketing and fast fashion conglomerates. There have been many defining moments in my fashion career that have led to this moment, and the fabrication of this project.

As someone who's accumulated over 1,000 items of clothing and 200 pairs of shoes over her short life, I'm still met with the dangerous reality of thinking 'I have nothing (I want) to wear'. As of October, we moved the operations of withLana to Paris, to work in the Foundry's Powered by IFA Pari' FashionTechnology

accelerator. This move resulted in facing the boss level of a serial proscastor: packing.

With a limit of 25kg, and no motivation to face three rails of faux pas, the urge to just order a whole new wardrobe was persistent after years of refusing to buy anything new.

The rental industry itself is far from perfect, yes, but it is just beginning. Last mile delivery, emissions from shipping and returns, lack of size and style choice, lack of location opportunity and financial demographic, are just the tip of the iceberg. But bear with us, this is the beginning of a journey that in time I believe will be a pinnacle point of an industry that, without it, would otherwise lead to our own demise.

We are looking to create a tailored experience on a community basis to build a vast network of individuals who share these principles, creating - excuse the buzz word - a 'circular' economy.

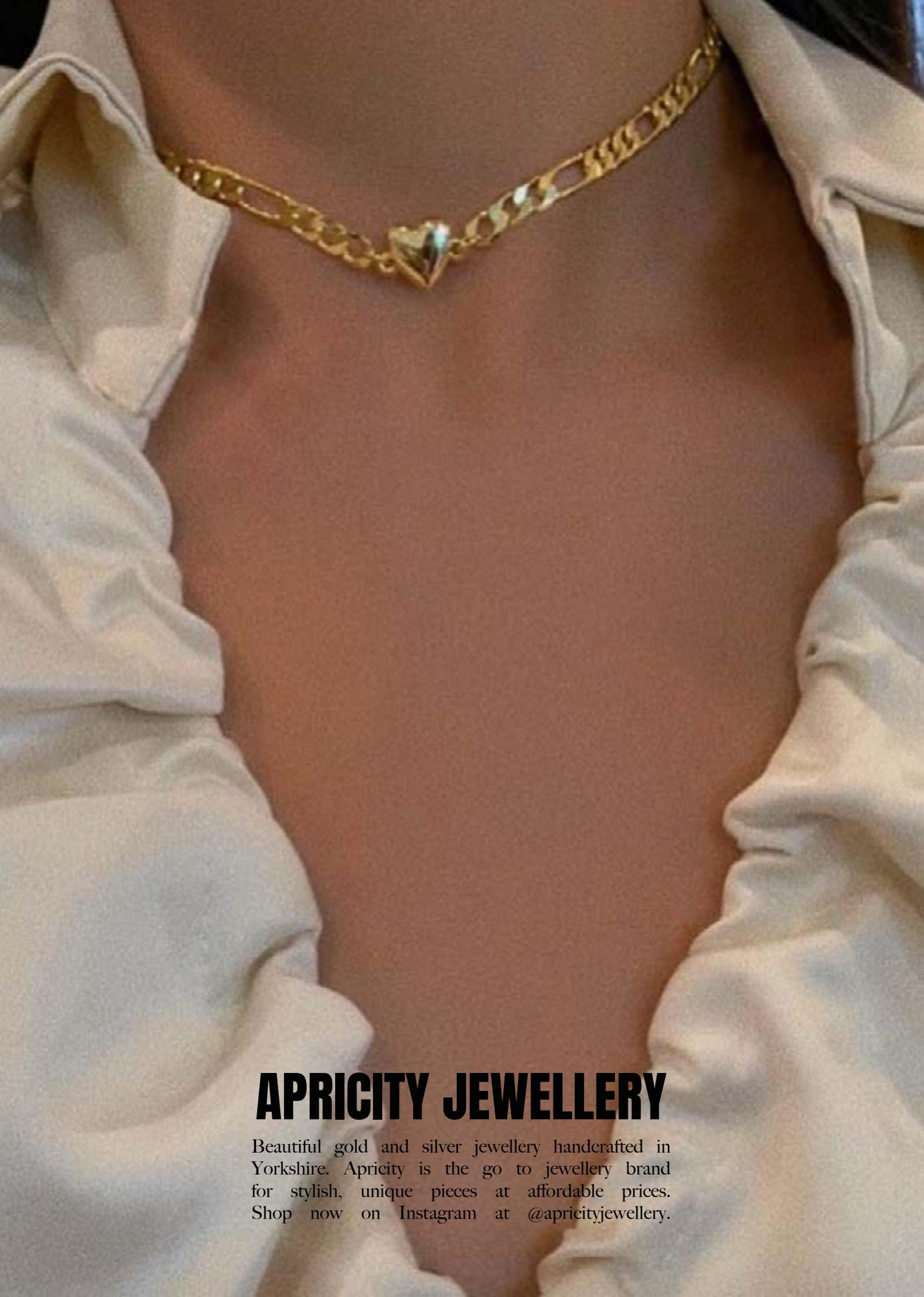
In conclusion, the growing problem is that fashion is endless, and is being endlessly consumed while the end of life for most garments is still the landfill.

We are buying 60% more clothing and keeping it half as long (since 2000). With the vast amount of clothing production happening, UK consumers have approximately \$46 billion worth of unworn clothes in their wardrobes.

That's where withLana comes in.

The app works on community bases, for young people in places such as student halls, making it easy to communicate and grab styles at the last minute. This allows for communication and building trust between lenders and lendeeds. withLana aims to be affordable with a variety of sizes, tailoring the feed to fit the user's aesthetic.

We are sat on wasted wardrobe potential: garments that have been worn to events once, shoes we bought that we aren't brave enough to wear but don't want to throw out or sell for a loss. The idea is to turn these items into assets, and allow them to fulfill their value.



APRICITY JEWELLERY

Beautiful gold and silver jewellery handcrafted in Yorkshire. Apricity is the go to jewellery brand for stylish, unique pieces at affordable prices. Shop now on Instagram at [@apricityjewellery](https://www.instagram.com/apricityjewellery).



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MEET THE MARKETERS WHO MADE IT

Jhanvi Ohri

Here's how two successful women in marketing made it, and exactly how they believe you can too...

Jobs in the marketing sector are some of the most sought after in the UK, with digital marketing being one of the country's fastest growing industries. However, many graduates aspiring to enter this coveted field find themselves lost and unsure of what's actually expected of them.

To get some insight on this tough-to-crack industry, we spoke to Sedge Beswick, founder & Managing Director of SEEN Connects, a London-based influencer marketing agency, and Harriet McCallion, Global Assistant Brand Marketing Manager at FMCG giant Unilever.

Here, our two interviewees shed light on how they did it and what it truly takes to make it.

Job hunting during a pandemic

Whether you have industry experience or not, searching for your first real job can be intimidating – even emotionally depleting at times, especially as economies across the globe witness unprecedented difficulties. This is why Sedge Beswick urges the graduates of 2020 not to take rejection personally; this year, “it has nothing to do with you”, she shares. Jobs are fewer and far between, and applying is more competitive than ever as graduates are pitted against those with more industry experience.

She also recommends that grads take the initiative and utilise their time to up-skill themselves. Start a blog, or even a small business – it's all for the taking right now. It's also important to remember not to get panicked into accepting a position, shares Harriet: “Your first job can be really influential in paving your career, so make sure it's one that excites and challenges you”.

Interview Dos and Don'ts

One of the most crucial parts of the application process in any industry is the interview. Harriet firmly believes an interview can help you stand out and show your interest and passion for the company. She also advocates the STAR technique, which involves backing up a skill with a well laid out example in the situation, using a 'task, action, result' pattern: "Using this method will always ensure that all of your skills are backed up by an example of a time you demonstrated that skill", she informs us.

Sedge, having interviewed several candidates for her agency, seconds this and says she looks for "ambition, drive and initiative" during interviews, alongside industry specific skills like creativity and social media.

How to network

Another factor that can make or break your job hunt is networking. Networking and knowing the right people is what landed Sedge her first job out of college at 3 Mobile, and helped her set up her agency. For networking in times of COVID, she recommends messaging or emailing those who work at your target organisation to find out more about their values and get to know them as aspirational colleagues. Harriet is a believer in the power of LinkedIn as a platform to engage with business leaders you look up to and form long-term connections.

Dealing with impostor syndrome and low self confidence

Both our interviewees agree women often experience impostor syndrome (sometimes mixed with low self confidence) in the workplace. Sedge says, "even I'm bad at expressing myself in board meetings". But she believes women should know their value and what they should be charging, and have the strength to speak up and ask for it.

Harriet believes "hav[ing] personal role models that I look to in times of low confidence that inspire me to persevere" helps her massively. Her role models include women like Michelle Obama and Aline Santos, Global EVP of Marketing and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Unilever. She's also an advocate of women supporting other women – a value she implements in her own life, through mentoring, motivating and encouraging girls and women looking to start a career through The Girls' Network.

Navigating difficulties and taking chances

Once you do get the role that you've wanted, you'll probably be faced with some challenges on the job. For Harriet, this was the frequent rotation that was part of ASOS's graduate programme, and is also true for most graduate schemes out there. It's natural to take a little while to get used to the new department you've been placed in. Harriet dealt with this by trusting herself and keeping one thing in mind: "It's okay not to know the answers and sometimes for companies to be truly innovative they have to fail, learn fast and try again."

Something equally as important is realising and accepting when

the role isn't right for you anymore. Sedge realised it was time to move on from a role in ASOS also when CEO, Nick Robertson, resigned, which would inevitably lead to a change in the culture she loved. She then took the leap and started her now incredibly successful agency whose clients include Nike, Instagram and Red Bull. How's that for taking a chance on yourself?

Sedge Beswick

Sedge set up her influencer marketing agency, SEEN Connects, after quitting her marketing job at ASOS in 2016. She is the author of two books: 'Make Instagram Your Business' and '140 Ultimate Twitter LOLs'. Additionally, she hosts a podcast called 'Verified Views', featuring many of the influencers she works with. Sedge also mentors over 50 young marketers in the UK, and created a 'How to get hired' series on LinkedIn to offer advice to young people trying to find employment.

Harriet McCallion

Harriet began working at Unilever in 2019, before which she was a graduate marketing trainee at ASOS. She worked with Waitrose in their consumer insights team for her placement year, and also gained work experience at American Express. She mentors young women through The Girls' Network in London and was a part of Unilever's 'Dove Self Esteem Project', which aimed to deliver self-esteem education to young people across the globe.



Emily C Designs was created as a little lockdown project but it eventually turned into something more. As an online student at Plymouth University, I had a lot of free time, so I decided to create polymer clay jewellery that's super lightweight and super detailed. It's perfect for adding a bit of fun to your work-from-home outfits! @emilyc.designs on Instagram.

WE ARE ALL SUCCESSFUL, NO MATTER WHAT SOCIETY THINKS

Kika Kubanova

Society puts too much pressure on women. What we should be, what we should do and what we should have to be successful is clearly laid out for us – a one-way ticket to marriage, babies or being a boss bitch with no chance of a return or reroute if we change our minds.

But, really, there is no deadline for success and everyone should get to have their own definition of it. Here, we explore why everyone can be successful in their own way.

We hear it from our friends, and we see it on social media. One is being promoted, the other one is

having a baby and the third just bought a house. We might be thinking to ourselves: What am I doing wrong? Have I failed? Everyone seems to be doing so well and succeeding at life, and I'm still here?

But, what we should be asking ourselves when the doubt creeps in is, is that what I want?

Would all that truly make me happy, or do I only want it because it's a part of society's expectations of me – and all women at large?

Here, I have spoken to five young women, all from different backgrounds with different priorities in life, about how they each view success very differently. Being successful doesn't have to be a perfect body, a dream job and a big family, and their responses are proof of that.

So ladies, what does success truly mean to you?

Nafisa, 26 years old

“Success is acting in a way that truly aligns with who you are. Being congruent and true to ... you. I would also define success as being a good human.”

Juliana, 20 years old

“For me, success is reaching my goals. I feel successful when I manage to achieve something, like a dream or a goal that I had in mind for a long time.”

Mia, 20 years old

“Being successful is not necessarily about wealth or academic [or] job-related achievement. To me, being successful means I am putting 100% into whatever aspect of my life I am focusing on. If I am progressing and growing in my life, if I am working hard to put out the best version of myself into the world, then I am succeeding.”



© Clay Banks on Unsplash

“Getting money and promotions wouldn’t make me feel successful unless I was also putting in hard work, determination and meaning into whatever it was I was doing, whether that be raising my children or working at my job. Being successful means setting a goal and working hard to fulfil it to the best of my ability.”

Veronika, 30 years old

“To me, success is waking up and being able to do the things that I love every day: traveling, exploring and being with the people I love. Success is being able to do those things when I

choose to, not when I have time to or when I’m able to fit them in between other stuff I ‘have’ to do. Success means being content with who I truly am and satisfied with the work I do. It’s not about waking up to go to work that I don’t like and coming home to a house full of unfriendliness and a dishwasher that always seems to be full. It has very little to do with the numbers on my bank statement or how much money is in my pocket. Money is just one product of success and doesn’t equal success itself.”

Alessia, 20 years old

“Success means being financially free and being able to help my mother and give her the best last years of her life. I know I shouldn’t be too attached to money and that money isn’t everything, but my mum and I moved to London from Italy seeking a better life. Back home, my mother wasn’t able to pay for new clothes, school, etc. So, although she always taught me that money isn’t important, to me success is being able to buy, to travel and to live without worrying about money.”



© Clay Banks on Unsplash



”Life is not a matter of right and wrong answers and perfect timing, it’s about taking ownership of your journey, guiding yourself as best as you can, and enjoying the ride”.

about who has the nicest body and who’s the ‘baddest’; who’s got the most expensive clothes, etc”. She also shared that the thing concerning her the most is how, under this pressure, she feels she should have a baby before 25 – even though it’s not something that she wants.

Mia shares a similar opinion on the topic of having children. She says, “I believe as a young woman you are more pressured into having children by a certain age. For example, the older a woman becomes whilst remaining childless, I feel society raises the question of her femininity, and she may even be viewed as being selfish, by society standards”.

She might not feel pressured on this topic right now, as she has already fulfilled what could be seen as a woman’s ‘motherly duties’ by having a daughter of her own. However, she still feels the pressure we place on romantic relationships fireclyl: “I believe there is pressure from our society towards aspects such as relationships, and that society may view relationships as not being ‘real’, or that they may ‘fizzle out’, if one is not married or engaged within a certain time frame.”

able to buy, to travel and to live without worrying about money.”

What’s really upsetting, and shouldn’t be this way, is the fact that when asked “Do you feel pressured by society to achieve certain goals by a certain age?” all of these women agreed there definitely is a societal pressure.

Juliana admitted that with her turning 20, she feels as though she is “entering the age where every decision and choice [she] makes is important and will have an impact on [her] future”.

Veronika was slightly more

relaxed when asked this question, even though she agreed that “society can create deadlines for certain achievements with no logical reasoning”, she thinks that: “Life is not a matter of right and wrong answers and perfect timing, it’s about taking ownership of your journey, guiding yourself as best as you can, and enjoying the ride”.

Alessia, on the other hand, feels immensely pressured by society. She says, “I feel like nowadays, especially among women, it’s all

“I believe all of these layouts and time frames have been based on how things used to be done, “back in the day”, so to speak”, she confides. “Certain factors such as tradition and religion play a huge role, in my opinion, and I think it is wrong that a modern society still expects people in this day and age to follow a routine created in a time of definite power imbalance, with less options and opportunities. Many people in our society still expect women to get married, not to work, to look after children and tend to household duties all day. However, the people that still follow these beliefs seem to forget that these women did not necessarily want that life, but that there was very little opportunity for the women of that time.”

So, do these women feel successful based on their own definitions of success?

Yes, they do. Nafisa has recently gone completely “cruelty free”, and that feels like success to her. Alessia’s making sure that she is her mother’s mental and financial support and giving her the best years her life has seen yet. Juliana, as a young Youtuber and brand owner, has managed to achieve a few goals she had in mind, including collaborating with brands and being paid for doing something she likes.

Veronika considers herself successful, because she managed to get a good job, has a family that loves her, practices kind to others and travels a lot. Mia also believes she has succeeded in her life,

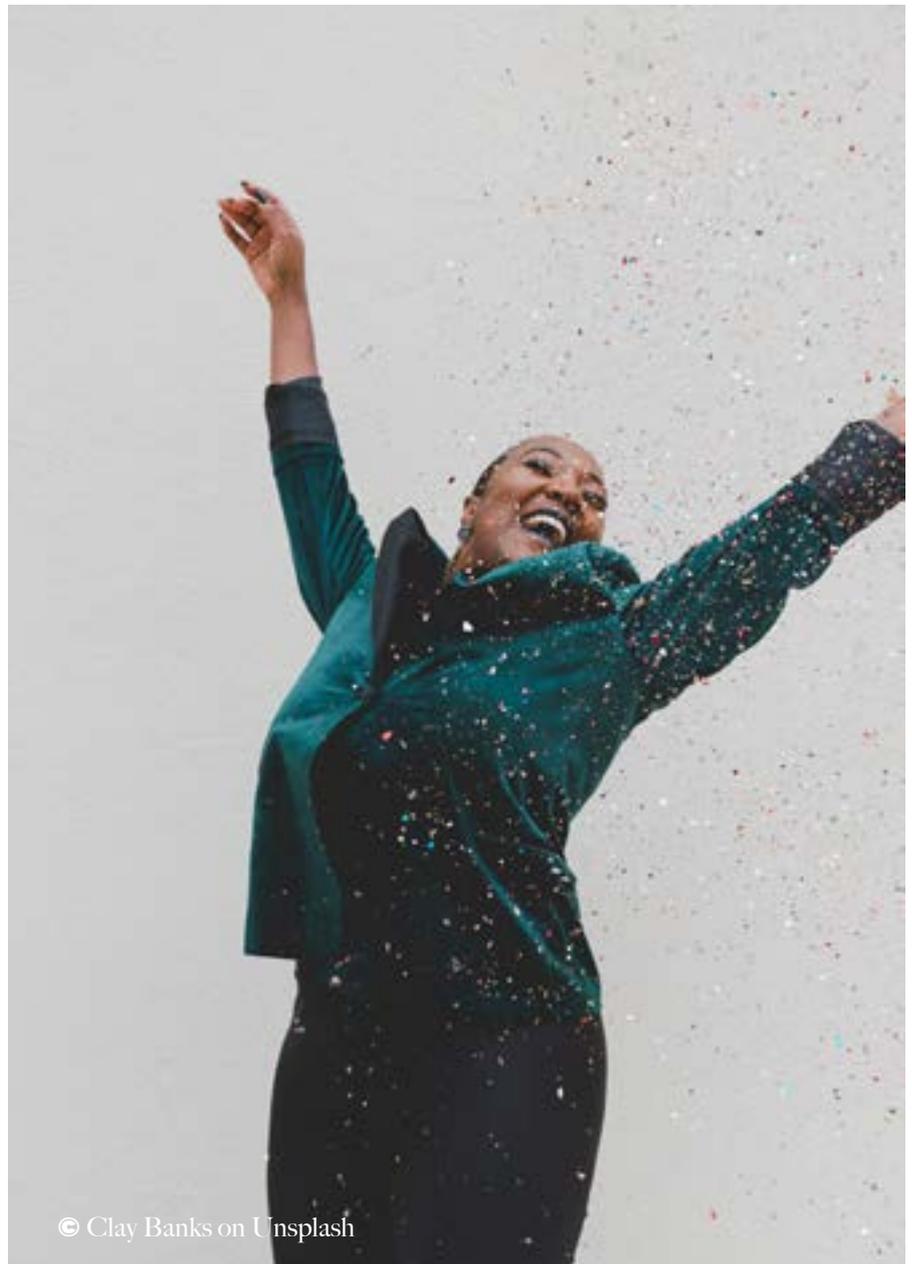
even though she still has goals in progress. To her, success is an ongoing process, but when she looks at her healthy and happy daughter, finishes another crazy shift at work knowing she tried her best to get all her jobs done or hits a new goal in her training, that’s when she feels successful.

This article is here to show that no one should consider themselves unsuccessful based on society’s merits. We should all choose our own definitions of

success, and decide what fulfils us, what makes us happy.

So, next time you’re thinking about how ‘badly’ you’re doing because you are comparing yourself to other people’s success, just read this article. Read these words and think about what success really means to you and not what it should mean to you.

Trust us, after you realise what truly matters to you in life, you’ll feel much better.



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FEMALE FOUNDERS FIGHTING STIGMA

Joanna Hawkins

Even in 2020, there's still so much stigma attached to being female. Here are some wonderful women fighting to change the game for us all.

From periods, to gender equality, to motherhood; there are so many taboos around being female and, unfortunately, many women feel they cannot openly talk about them. For some, there still isn't even an open discussion to join.

Here, we've found some incredible women who've founded non-profit organisations, social enterprises and social media campaigns to fight all the stigma still attached to being female.

Changing the Flow

In 2018, Kate Elliott emigrated to Waterloo, Canada, from the UK. Having just completed her thesis on female inequality, she brought with her a determination to fight the stigma attached to menstruation, and the way periods are received in society and the media.

From this, in 2019, Kate founded Changing the Flow – a social enterprise aiming to “achieve menstrual equity through awareness, education, and implementation” according to their website. However, it’s clear to see across their online platforms, Kate is determined to achieve gender equality as a whole; bringing attention to topics spanning from homelessness to women’s health.

The enterprise’s values are shared as the following: “Integrity. Equity. Inclusion. Wellbeing”, showing exactly this inclusive ethos. Changing the Flow is about education, and challenging the way we see things; the way women’s bodies are understood, and the taboos still to be dissolved surrounding this.

So, what is menstrual equity? Kate defines it on their website as “affordable and safe access to menstrual products when and where they are needed. Without it, we sacrifice the health and dignity of people who menstruate”. Changing the Flow emphasises that “menstrual equality is a global matter”. If we can change the way menstruation is seen and the way people themselves feel about menstruation, we are well on the way to being able to get rid of the stigma and show there is no reason for gender inequality on these grounds; women are truly as capable as men, regardless of natural bodily functions that happen every month.

In order to achieve this, the charity offers

“...there is no reason for gender inequality on these grounds; women are truly as capable as men”

educational workshops, promotional resources and policy consultations. Their mission is shared on site as being to “achieve menstrual equity in the workplace and public spaces through awareness, education and implementation”, so that one day “menstruation will be destigmatised and every public and workplace washroom will provide access to period products”.

During the first lockdown, Kate raised an important point on her Instagram stories: on any given day, she found 800 million people in the world will be menstruating during this global pandemic. So, surely something affecting 800 million people shouldn’t be seen as a taboo.

Even more importantly, it should be ensured that each of these people experiencing periods is supported and educated on menstruation to improve their overall quality of life and raise the bar on equity for all.

Girls Out Loud

Another incredible woman is Jane Kenyon, who set up Girls Out Loud in 2010. Girls Out Loud is a non-profit organisation and social enterprise aimed at improving the lives of, and inspiring, teenage girls across the UK. Using her own experiences of having to flee home aged sixteen, Jane worked in personal development before she decided to use these skills to inspire girls in challenging social circumstances.

Her clear passion for helping girls rise above and beyond their beginnings is truly inspiring. Their social media platforms begin with the slogan “Reach for the stars with Girls Out Loud”, followed by, “Be bold, be brave, be beautiful, but most importantly be you. Because you are already enough and absolutely perfect, just the way you are”.

The organisation’s mission is to find girls of early-to-middle secondary school age when they are immensely impressionable and to show them that anything is possible – and, above all, you shouldn’t settle for anything less than you deserve in either academic or social environments. The various programmes they offer aim to reduce fears of lack of social mobility, improve future exam results and to educate and inspire to avoid girls falling into the NEET group (‘Not in Education, Employment, or Training’.)

Girls Out Loud focuses on reducing teen pregnancies, anti-social behaviour and to encourage body positivity through showing the importance of respecting others. The aim of the programme is to work closely with schools and particular groups of girls to prevent them becoming derailed; to show them the best version of themselves, and the options they have available to them.

Many of the programmes run in schools for groups of girls; intensive coaching programmes are available, as well as larger, shorter and speed mentoring events. Their Big Sister scheme has also become key to the enterprise. In a 12-month structured mentoring programme, year 8 girls – known as ‘little sisters’ – are partnered with ‘big sisters’, who act as their role models and mentors. The girls in the scheme are

considered the ‘middle girls’; they are not trouble-makers and not the loudest in the room; they are quieter and more at risk of slipping under the radar, missing out on realising their potential.

The Big Sister Programme invites women to train to become Big Sister mentors to Little Sister mentees from all walks of life. The hope is through building a connection and experiencing elements of the outside world, the girls will feel inspired and motivated by their role models, whilst having someone to chat openly and securely with. Women of all kinds are welcomed to apply to become a mentor and Big Sister, the only requirements being that: you’re older than 23, have life experiences of your own to draw from, you’re comfortable in your own skin, confident in your own success and committed to improving the well-being of a young girl for 12 months.

If you feel this may be of interest to you, then do visit the Girls Out Loud website [<http://girlsoutloud.org.uk>] for more details. As a result of Covid-19, the schools’ budgets are minimal so this type of training just isn’t being funded. Big Sisters are asked to contribute to funding the programme and this can be done through securing corporate sponsorship, raising or self-funding.

For older girls, Girls Out Loud run an apprenticeship programme called Sister Act. Through this, Jane is determined to get rid of the idea that apprenticeships are only for boys. Sister Act is a collaborative mentoring programme bringing employers and schools together to enable girls to carry out apprenticeships with leading local employers.

Be sure to visit the social enterprise’s Sister Talk blog, hosted via their website, and to check out the Girls Out Loud social media platforms. Their writing is a breath of fresh air: you can read letters to sisters in lockdown, advice for teens and, in one post, Jane Kenyon even talks about her experience appearing in one of Little Mix’s music videos to honour her inspirational work.

Happy Mum Happy Baby

Giovanna Fletcher started the Happy Mum, Happy Baby podcast in 2017 after the release of her first non-fiction book, 'Happy Mum, Happy Baby: My Adventures in Motherhood'. You may know Giovanna as the wife of McFly band member, Tom Fletcher, and the couple have three children: Buzz, 6, Buddy, 4, and Max, 2.

Inspired by her own journey into motherhood, the podcast and corresponding Instagram are designed to reassure parents, and mums in particular, they really are doing the right thing. The podcast, now in its sixth series, challenges the stigmas surrounding motherhood and is designed to tackle all the things that seem to get left out of the baby books.

Giovanna emphasises via the podcast's Spotify description that "no topic is out of bounds", and regular 'Asking for a Mum' posts are reposted on the HMHB Instagram page. Mums are able to ask the impossible questions they are often too scared to ask, and in doing so others realise they're not alone in thinking such things. The sentence starter 'Being a Mum means...' is brought up in each episode, and Giovanna and her guests speak of all the wonderful things parenthood brings. However, the journey is not always easy and the podcast is designed specifically "for those parents seeking solidarity and support", according to its Spotify description again.

Happy Mum, Happy Baby has been particularly helpful over lockdown for women who may be facing childbirth and childcare alone; with a more

limited support network and less access to services in these challenging times. Giovanna has partnered up with so many experts, mums and dads to provide incredible online support in the moments when it's needed most. Content on social media ranges from more serious advice on how to get your children to sleep and develop their communication skills, to a 'Mum on the run 5 min make up routine' and Halloween activity ideas. A free 4-day virtual event ran from the 15th to the 18th of October, and can still be found on the HMHB Instagram page; where providing workshops, stories, classes and discussion panel talks from experts and celebrities talking about their experiences of parenthood are key.

It felt important to include Giovanna's work to show the great work our Disgraceful girls do as mothers. It may go unpaid, and can be viewed as a thankless task sometimes, but it's one of the most important of all.

**“BE BOLD, BE BRAVE,
BE BEAUTIFUL, BUT
MOST IMPORTANTLY
BE YOU BECAUSE YOU
ARE ENOUGH ALREADY
AND ABSOLUTELY
PERFECT JUST THE WAY
YOU ARE.”**

WHY BEING SELFISH IS NECESSARY

Jen Brogan,
@creativewritinglog
on Instagram

I often find mental health gets talked about like it's out of a textbook – throwing facts, figures and phone numbers in our faces, when we should simply be spoken to like human beings as a fraction of a statistic. Here, I explore why it might be time for those of us struggling with mental health to take the work of destigmatising our conditions into our own hands.

It's a form of communication that makes us feel abnormal, unable and inferior to others, and it alarms me how often people who should be helping can jump to conclusions. Giving platitudes that leave us feeling more helpless than hopeful, this is a hypocrisy that occurs all too commonly when you're advised to seek help.

In my experience, I've learnt the key place to seek strength and support to get through mental health is in ourselves. You need to prioritize you: your mind, your

And yep, you
heard that right!



© Manny Moreno on Unsplash



© Noelle Australia on Unsplash

body, your lifestyle, your feelings, and you need to choose yourself over everything else. Sounds selfish, right? With mental health, being selfish is lesson number one in overcoming it and gaining control of your life again.

Learn to say the word 'no' more often.

When I experienced depression and anxiety, my motivation to do anything was gone. Being surrounded by friends all the time made it extremely hard for me to focus on myself because I didn't want to seem boring. Partying was the worst: getting drunk and caught up in my pain was a bad combination that I should have said no to. We prioritize others over ourselves which results in feeling ten times worse.

If you don't think spending time in large crowds of people is a good idea because your anxiety is bad, then say no and don't go. Anything that doesn't feel right, good or beneficial to you, you can say no to – and it's one of the biggest influences you can have over your own mental health.

Rather than being concerned about how saying no may impact you, if it means you're giving your-

self the time to heal and recover, then you are doing the best thing for yourself – and you are not selfish for wanting to get better. I quit drinking and going out for a while because I didn't like that I was abusing something and then dealing with the disappointment and regret I felt within myself after. Saying no is so important because it's the first way out of fueling your suffering and regaining an understanding of yourself.

Occupy yourself, but don't overdo it.

Burying yourself in work and avoiding being alone is a dangerous thing to do. Believing that the busier we make ourselves, the better we are is extremely damaging. What we don't realize is that we are burnt out and too often also physically or mentally drained, and we're doing it because we are subconsciously avoiding the problem. When anyone does ask if you are okay, we blame it on something other than our mental health – 'Yeah, just really stressed with all my work', 'I'm just tired and busy' – sound familiar? We blame our feelings on things we know people won't worry too much, about and by doing that, we're lying to ourselves too. I ignored my body and feelings which

nobody noticed because I covered them up. So I started to set little goals for myself; writing down something you would like to be able to do is a great example. I don't believe that it's a case of trying to distract yourself from your mental health, but a way to train it and get to know it better. Don't let yourself be afraid of it, otherwise you're simmering in horrible feelings and cycles. It isn't meant to be easy – it takes time and patience and if you get frustrated that you have not accomplished this quickly, you're convincing yourself that you've failed before you've truly tried. If you keep trying, you will succeed.

Cut out negativity and do what makes you happy.

I struggled to talk to people when I was at my lowest, and it made me stew in my own discomfort. It was a time where I'd break down, think suicidal or harmful thoughts and it was very unhealthy. I bought a journal and I occupied myself in those moments by writing everything I was thinking or feeling.

When I read them back to myself, I understood myself better. Writing saved me from piling more pain on top of myself in my own head, when I could transfer it all onto pages and release it after instead. Find a way to express yourself that works for you. You don't even need to look back at it, it's just something that works for you in the moment, makes you happy and helps manage your feelings without bottling them up. You can share your pain, empty it out into someplace else and make something beautiful out of it.



© LeeAnn Cline on Unsplash

Sometimes we resort to people and things that we think are good for us, yet they add to the problem. You may believe that having lots of people to hang out with might benefit your mental state, but really you need friends that truly know you. Just because someone might be up for a hang out, doesn't mean that that's what makes you truly happy - it just adds to the concept of busying yourself and disguising yourself to avoid the real issue.

When I was assaulted, I didn't want to go out at all. Though some people did respect that, some would get annoyed at the fact that I'd say no. I felt like an accessory to these people; they wanted me so they could go out

without being on their own.

You do not owe anyone anything in terms of your own wellbeing. These are the types of people that are going to run you down with their own desires and make you feel guilty and selfish if you don't partake in them. Cut these people off, and keep the people that do value you and your needs close.

We don't need a big group of people to feel good about ourselves, we just need ourselves to do that. Do not punish yourself for who you've had to leave behind because they were no good for you. It is a good type of selfishness; it's self-priority, and it's important because you're choosing it for yourself.

“It can take a long time to find our feet out in the sea of everything”

Trust yourself.

Trusting in you is so important because it means you know who's in charge. I still suffer with my mental health and I don't expect it to ever go away, but I'm glad I have it now. It's changed me and helped sculpt me into the person that I needed to become to treat myself the right way.

Trusting yourself, your needs, and your instincts will help you with your mental health in so many ways. It's not denial, it's not fear of the truth; it's a healthy self-ish that you need to allow yourself to have. You don't need to justify your mental health to anyone. You're allowed to feel pain, you need to feel it to make it go away. Instead of seeking approval from others, fight hard to allow unconditional approval of yourself.

It can take a long time to find our feet out in the sea of everything; there'll be plenty of patience, self-discipline, failed attempts and hopelessness. But if you persevere, you'll find there's a lot of relief, happiness, strength and positivity that only you can give yourself out in these waves too.

Minima Basics is an online boutique that sells acrylic desk organizers to elevate and inspire female entrepreneurs, bloggers and planners to design their own dream home office.



A DAY IN THE LIFE (AND SOME ADVICE) WITH **KITTY UNDERHILL**

Kitty Underhill is a model and public speaker based in London. She uses her platform to discuss and raise awareness of issues such as mental health, body acceptance and self-acceptance; she's truly a role model for all.

BY REBECCA JACKSON

Could you walk us through your 'typical' day when you're doing a shoot?

"Shoot days are my favourite days. On a typical shoot day, I wake up with a spring in my step – cheesy, I know! I always make sure to prep my skin on a shoot day, so I'll include a hyaluronic acid moisture boost under my moisturiser for a little skin pizzazz.

"All shoots are so different; if it's a creative shoot that I've set up with a photographer, I'll do a full face of make up before the shoot, subtle at first so we can then build on it if we decide we want to go jazzier. If it's for a brand or a big job, all I need to do is skin prep and get out the door!

"If I have enough time or it's an afternoon shoot, I like to walk to the location - it gives me a bit of time to myself before a very hectic day. If I can't walk there, then I'll walk on the way home; just as a way of decompressing. I like to give myself time where I can really appreciate where I am in my life and let myself have space to celebrate my successes, because I used to be so hard on myself. You should treat yourself with the same kindness that you treat your friends.

"When I'm on set, I'll get to the location for call time. Sometimes you have to wait so I usually bring a book, listen to a podcast or have a sudoku ready to go – this is such a mindful activity for me. From there, I'm into hair and makeup, which is so fun. I love seeing creatives work their magic, and I feel so blessed to be their mannequin for the day. Next is wardrobe. There is something so fun about being styled, you get to see yourself through another creative's eyes. There's been so many times on set that I've been wearing something I would never pick for myself and just think 'okay, I now need one in every colour.'"

"Then it's shooting time. I always feel so powerful and confident in front of the camera and I'm so glad it's what I do for work. Depending on how many looks we're doing, or whether we're doing videos as well as photo content, the day can end up being very long.

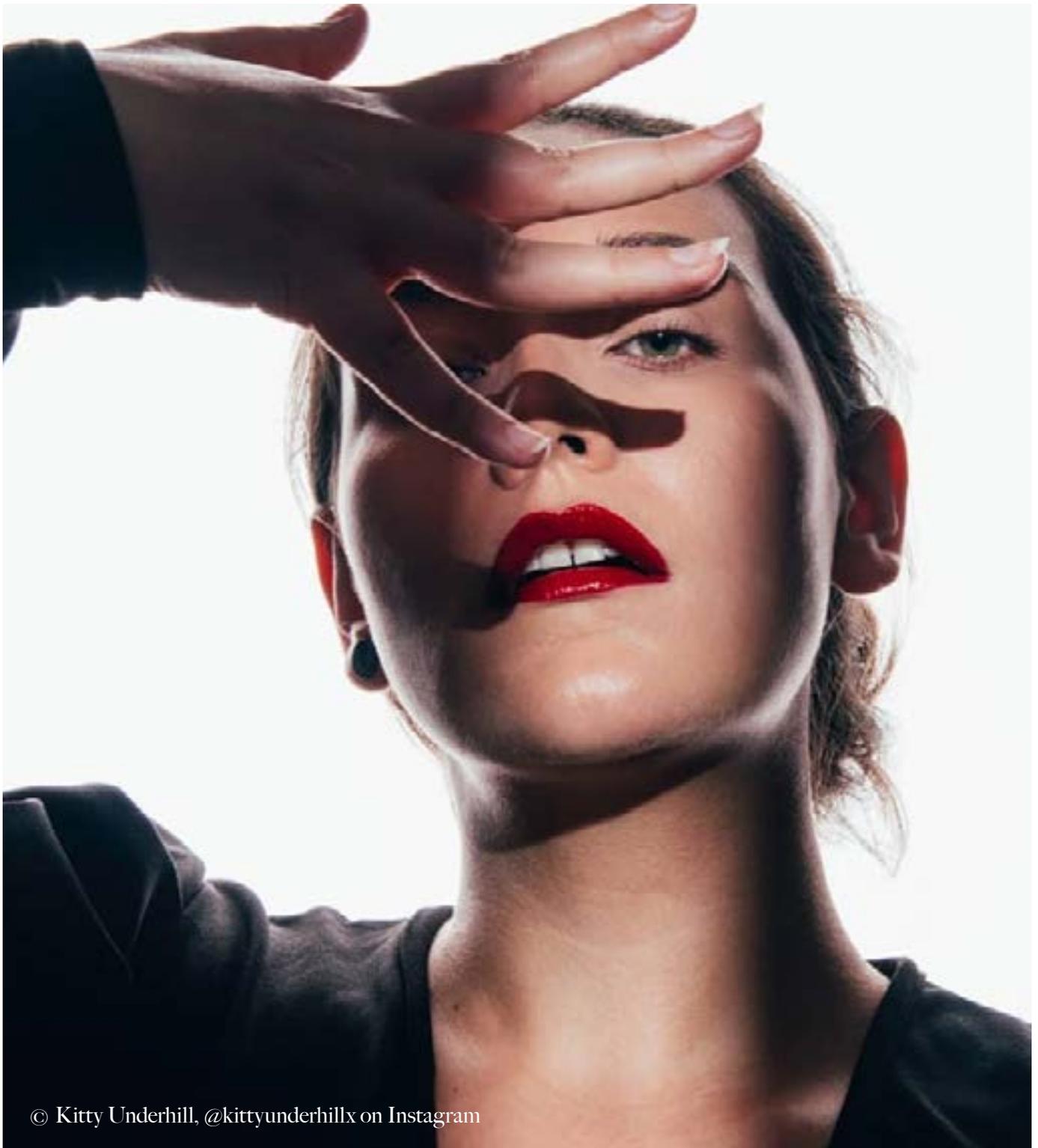
"When I get home from a shoot, I always make sure I have a delicious meal. I'm not sure why, but it's a ritual I have now. I think it's because I want to end the day on a high note, shoots always leave me feeling extremely grateful and on a buzz. Plus, I just love food and cooking."

On your Instagram, we saw that you do #SelfDiscoverySundays. Could you tell us a bit more about how it started, and why you do it?

"As well as being a model, I am a coach in training and have done quite a bit of therapy; both these things have taught me so much about the importance of self-awareness and actively learning about yourself.

"So many of us go through life reactively and on autopilot. Understandably so, it's what we've been taught. I believe that self-love and self-acceptance comes from the outside in; the more we learn about ourselves, our triggers, our reactions, the way we feel, what is important to us, what we value then the more we can come to accept our whole selves.

"I launched #SelfDiscoverySundays to put the training and experience I have to use, with the hope that I can help people to understand themselves a bit more. Each Sunday, I give my followers a journal prompt for them to use as they wish. I think it's so important to be introspective and understand ourselves, especially when we're encouraged to never stop moving, to always be busy and to never check in. I hope these weekly prompts give people the opportunity to stop, take a breather, and have that mental check in with themselves."



© Kitty Underhill, @kittyunderhillx on Instagram

As a role model to many young people, what do you think we can do to continue to change the backwards beauty standards of society?

“Education is the most important thing. When I started learning that hating your body is learnt behaviour, that was when the real change happened. In an ideal world I would have body acceptance on national curriculums, where kids can learn about how bodies are naturally different, as well as where beauty standards come from, how to be more critical of beauty and fashion media. I know that if I had learnt more about these when I was younger it would have made a huge impact on my own self esteem.

“I think it’s also incredibly important to teach kids how beauty standards are rooted within white supremacy; body acceptance work requires an anti-racist approach, and this desperately needs to be taught in schools too.

“We also need to keep up the momentum in terms of representation in fashion and the media. Representation has such an incredibly positive effect on the way people perceive themselves, so the more people are able to see themselves represented, the more positive impacts it will have. We need to get to a stage where positive, inclusive representation is just the standard, rather than a novelty.”



**WE NEED TO
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© Kitty Underhill, @kittyunderhillx on Instagram

*you cannot heal
the internal
by 'fixing'
the external*



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FEEL-GOOD FOLLOWS FOR YOUR FEED

JOANNA HAWKINS

Everyone knows the benefits of filling your social media feeds with content you love and good vibes to nourish your soul. Here are our top five picks for some inspirational ladies to follow to make your scrolling feel great...

Chessie King

This ray of sunshine is on a mission to be every gal's 'online big sister'. Chessie is determined to show it's not necessary to live in the gym to feel good about yourself. As a former victim of online-trolling herself, Chessie is now a huge advocate for showing that women really do come in all shapes and sizes. She posts photos taken just seconds apart but from different angles to show that we can look very different, just by posing in a certain way. Everyone should see this colourful and energetic wonder-woman on their feed.



© Chessie King
@chessiekingg on Instagram

Sonny Turner

At just 21 years old, Sonny is a model changing the way we view the industry. Her Instagram posts are stunning; she is true to herself and fights back against the cliché that modelling is for only size 6 bodies. Sonny shares an important message on looking after yourself: "Not all benefits of working out are physical. And not everyone who works out has a ripped gym body", she shares on her Instagram. Instead, she exercises because she wants to; as a form of self-love, not self-punishment anymore.



© Sonny Turner
@sonnyturner__ on Instagram

Katie Snooks

Katie is an award nominee, 4'11", and a petite fashion and beauty vlogger. Her mission is to show our shorter gal's petite-focussed fashion content and break down any barriers of access to finding this kind of clothing. Katie's charm lies in her honesty, and how open she is with her following. With content that's realistic, she can be found documenting her skin and contraceptive journeys, and creating brand work for sex toys shows she's determined to showcase female pleasure as being non-taboo. Katie loves a night in and has tonnes of content for those quieter moments too, particularly relevant in our world of social restrictions.

© Katie Snooks
@katesnooks on Instagram



Grace Woodward

Grace Woodward is a well-known name in the fashion industry; however, her Instagram handle is distinctly different. With a bio stating she is "currently not re-training" and use of the hashtag #bodyofworkproject, Grace is determined for females to feel empowered, fighting against our harmful representations when in the hands of men. Gorgeous artwork and sassy quotes fill her colourful feed, and Grace's work is honest and bold; showcasing the female body as being unashamedly worthy of being seen. This is how it should be, how bodies should be normalised, and Grace is proving women can feel validated within themselves, far away from the male gaze.



© Grace Woodward
@gracewoodward on Instagram
Photographed by
@favcolblk on Instagram

Keah Maria Brown

Creator of #disabledandcute, Keah is a journalist, author, hope enthusiast and bisexual icon. Keah openly discusses what it is to be a disabled, black and queer female in a mostly-abled white America. Having spent years being trolled by the internet, Keah's Instagram is a space of honesty and inspiration. Her ambition is fiery and limitless; she is determined to fight for proper representation. Her discussions are open, with conversations around her therapy and the fact that we all have down days a story staple. Keah's Instagram motto, "I'm just a girl creating the future she wants to see", will fill your feed with hope for a fairer future.

© Keah Maria Brown
@keah_brown
on Instagram



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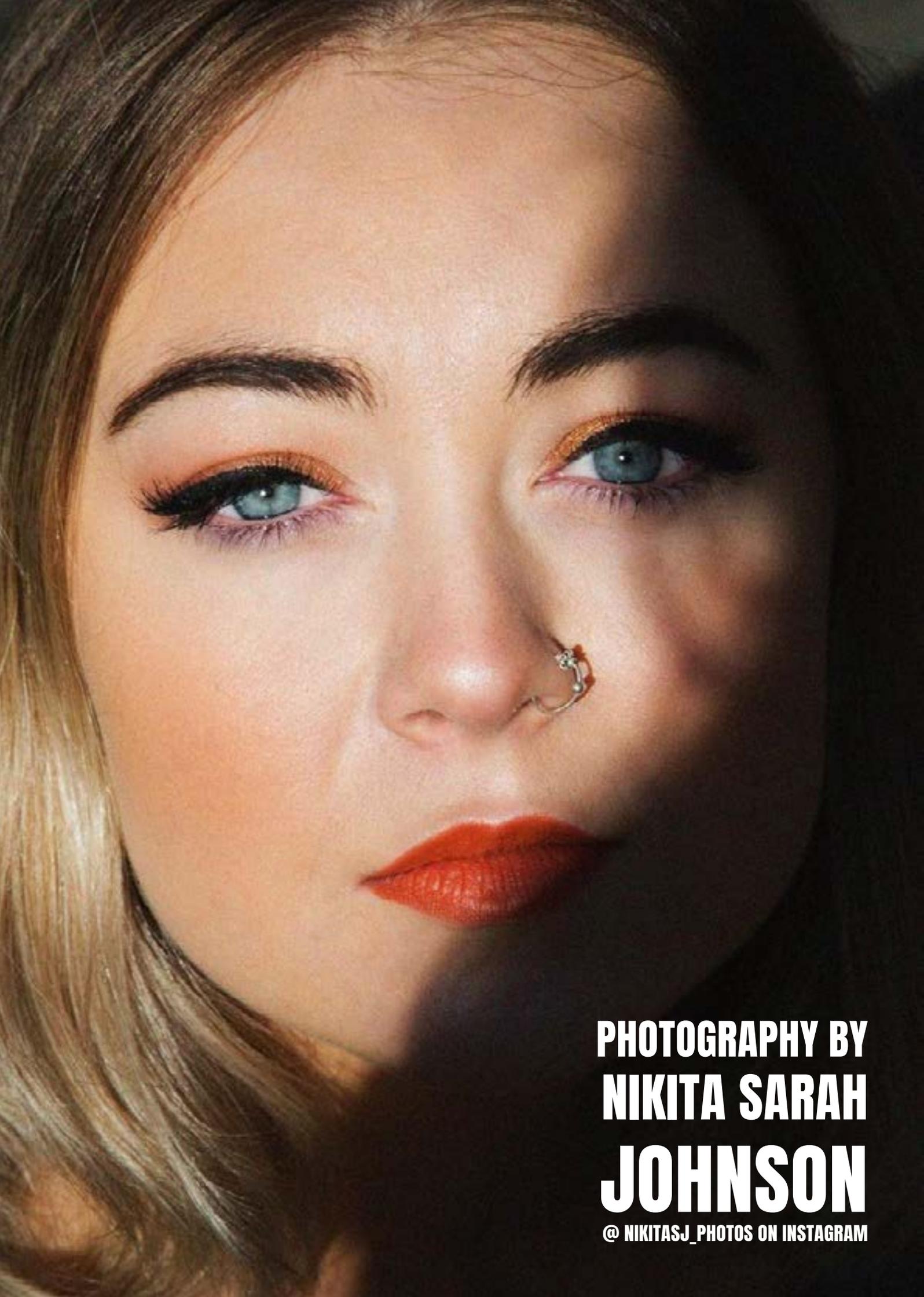
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