



**mindlab**

INTELLIGENT INSIGHTS



# Body Love

Can the right activities get us out of a negative body image spiral?

Faye Turner & Juliane Beard | May 2023 | Quirks London



# What's the Problem?

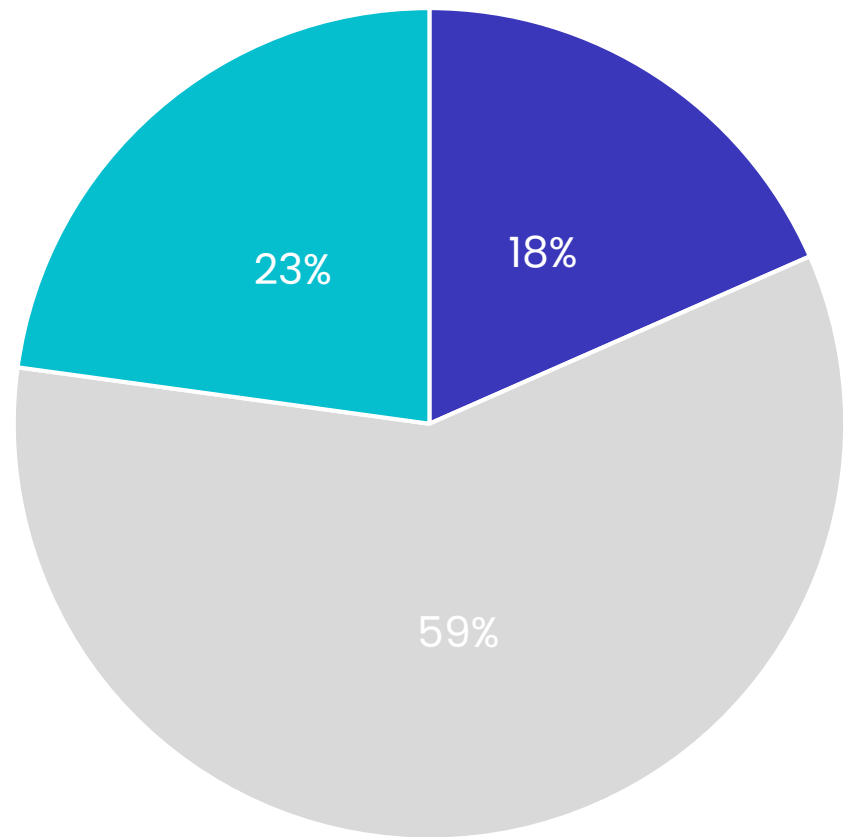


# How UK women describe themselves





More women in the UK rank their body confidence as low, than high.



■ High 8-10   ■ Neutral 3-7   ■ Low 0-2

# The Downward Spiral

## Women with low body confidence:

- Believe that their confidence level is ingrained and cannot be changed
- Often receive external input negatively
  - Are more emotionally affected by
    - set-backs



# Our Study



# Test overview

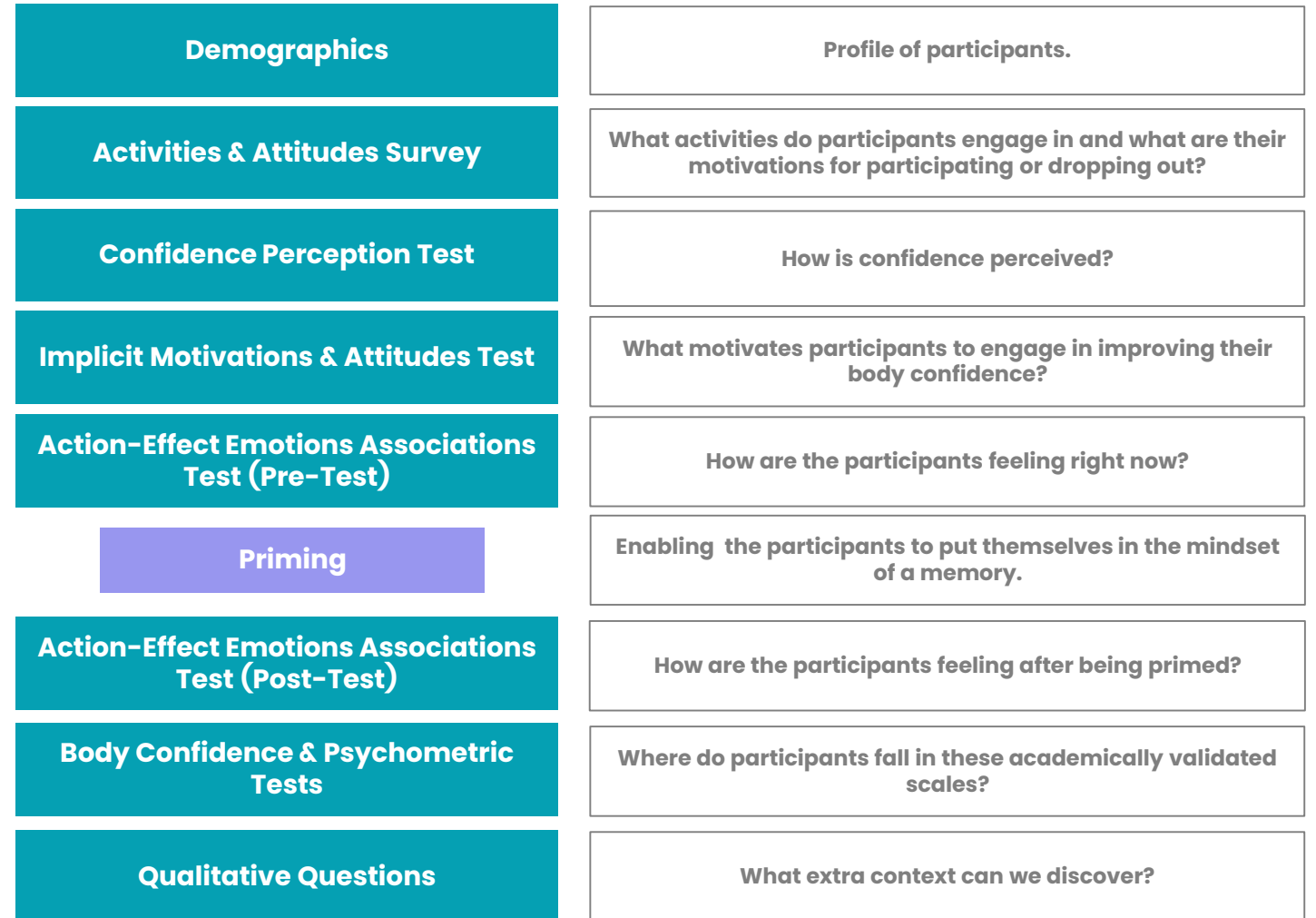
**Sample:**  
**N=2413**

- n=1038 general population
- n=1375 Hearst UK panel

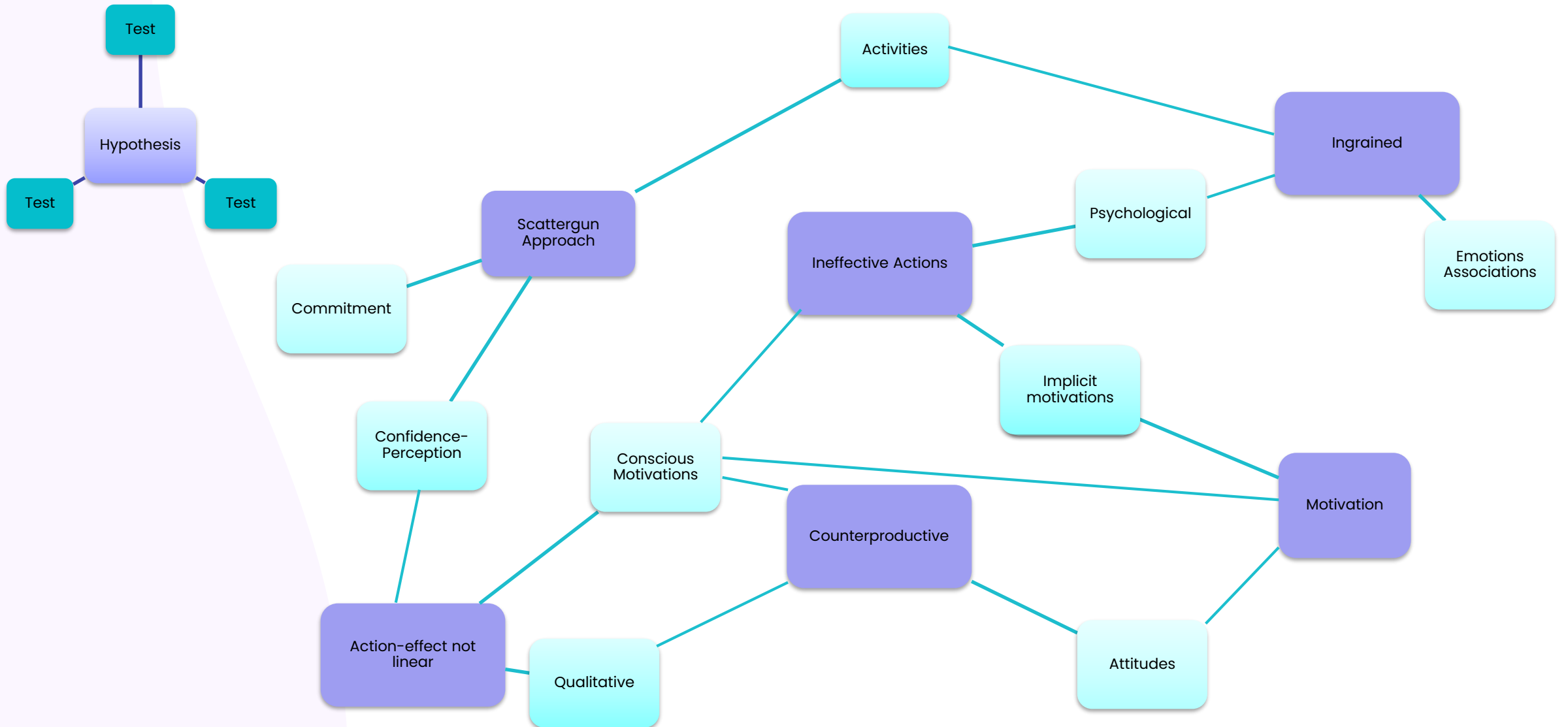
**Market:**  
• UK

**Recruitment criteria:**  
• Age: 18+  
• 100% Female

The study was structured to minimise and manage bias by slowly escalating participant sensitisation to the topic of body confidence.



# Addressing the hypotheses





# Activities & Body Confidence





Low and high confidence women differ greatly in the types of activities they take part in.

High confidence

Low confidence

Select activity categories	Difference
Relaxation activities	28%
Socialising	19%
Fitness or outdoor activities	12%
Meditation / mindfulness	6%
Reading / learning	-9%
Changed eating habits / dieting	-13%
Social media	-14%
Shopping	-17%
Entertainment activities	-31%



**These more passive activities have potential for 'trigger moments'.**

Low body confident women invest more of their time in distraction or entertainment activities.

High confidence

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# Remember the downward spiral?

**Women with low body keep engaging in activities that they feel have a negative impact on their body confidence.**

- ***'Browsing social media makes me feel worse about myself.'***  
(low confident: 52% agreement, high body confident : 34%)
- Low body confident women **were 35% more likely** to have used social media recently than high body confident women.





**They 'put themselves out there' more, and invest in intentional and focused activities that boost both self confidence and mental well-being in the long term.**

High body confident women engage in more holistic self-care, social connection and exercise.

High confidence

Low confidence

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The neutral body confidence group shows us that balance is key.

	high	neutral	low
Socialising	52.4%	52.0%	43.9%
Fitness or outdoor activities	42.4%	45.9%	38.0%
Used social media	62.8%	69.8%	73.0%
Shopping	58.6%	70.5%	70.5%
Entertainment activities	49.7%	67.7%	72.6%



**So what's the solution? Do we just tell women to socialise and exercise more, and it'll solve all their body confidence issues?**

Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that..

# Motivations & Mindsets





It's not just the type of activity that matters, but also the underlying motivation.

*Agreement (low body confident women):*  
**Improving body confidence takes  
commitment and time:**

83%

**I give up on my goals easily if I do not  
see results fast enough:**

63%

**I feel confused about how to achieve my  
goals:**

61%



# More confident women have the bigger picture in mind.

Reasons for starting a new activity	High	Low	Relative Difference
To truly express who I am	8.1%	5.6%	44%
To get more creative	7.6%	5.8%	31%
Because of pressure from people around me	1.4%	1.8%	-23%
Because of pressure from society in general	1.6%	2.2%	-29%
To improve my body confidence	7.2%	6.9%	5%
To improve my overall confidence	8.5%	7.0%	22%
To improve my physical health	10.2%	5.6%	81%

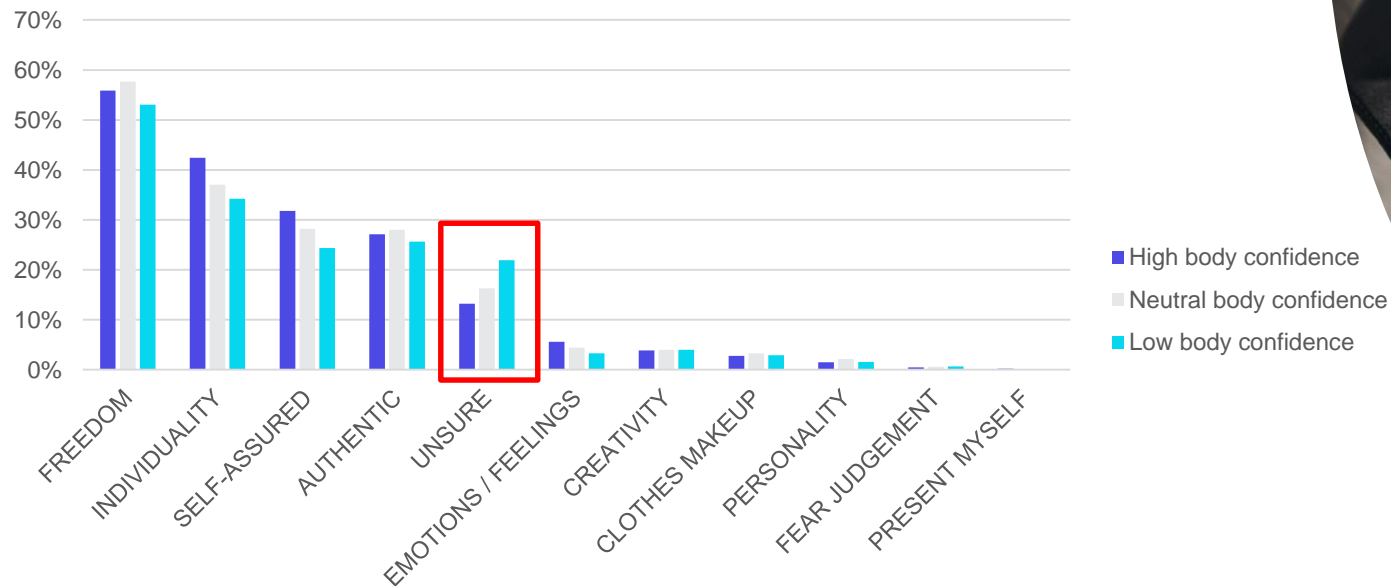


# The biggest difference: Expressing your authentic self.

Low body confidence women don't feel they can express their authentic self (only 28%, vs 83% of high confidence women).

Many didn't even know what self-expression meant to them!

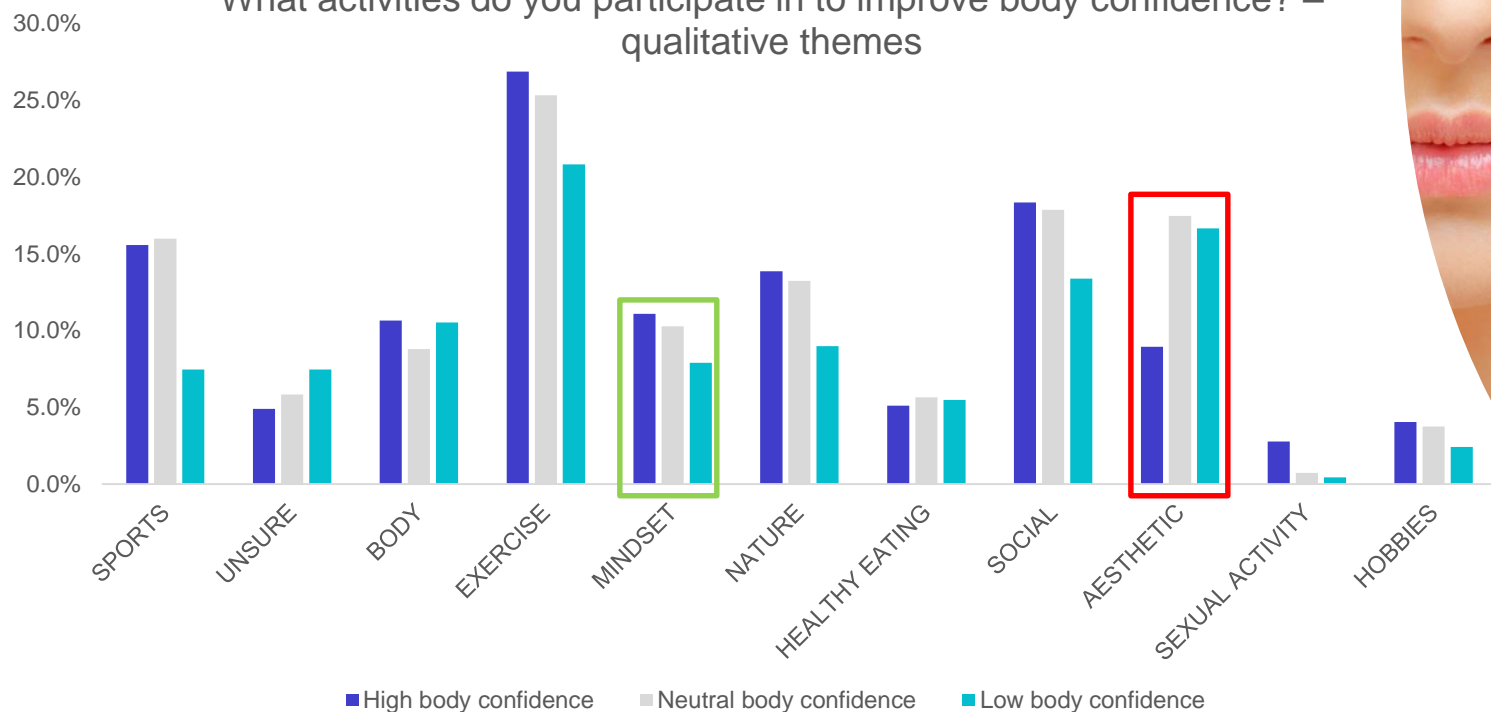
*Self-expression: Qualitative themes*



# The biggest difference: Expressing your authentic self.

They think aesthetics are the solution.

What activities do you participate in to improve body confidence? – qualitative themes



# Can the Media Guide a Way Out?





**Low confidence women have high engagement with the media.**

**This places a responsibility on media channels to represent them, but also provides a fantastic opportunity to reach them and compassionately support their body confidence journeys.**



# How can the media help?

## 1. Ensure representation



[Fitness](#) > [Celebrity Workouts](#)

**40 naked women let us in on body confidence & self-acceptance**

### What are the best plus-size friendly training programmes?

Because healthy comes in all sizes...

BY ABBI HENDERSON PUBLISHED: FEB 5, 2023



[Women's Health Collective](#) > [Ask The Women's Health Collective](#)

### My boobs (34H) really hinder me in exercise. How can I adapt my weights routine?

We ask the experts how to get the most out of your sessions

BY ABBI HENDERSON PUBLISHED: FEB 26, 2023



# How can the media help?

## 2. Diversity beyond body type

### 'I'm 31 and living with an ostomy bag - here's why we should all be talking about gut health'

'A little knowledge can be very empowering'

BY ELEANOR JONES PUBLISHED: MAR 13, 2023



INSTAGRAM

Fitness

### How to exercise during Ramadan: 'I'm a Muay Thai champion and PT, here are my tips'





# How can the media help?

## 3. Understand the holistic nature of the issue

conscious decision to lose weight is fast becoming divisive as pineapple on pizza. As a new study reveals that it shouldn't be, *WH* digs into the facts and feelings - around weight loss in 2022 and asks...

...should

# DIET

really be a dirty word?

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**  
For anyone who's embarked on a lemon detox, the keto diet or a clean-eating lifestyle, the anti-diet movement is a tantalising idea. An ultra-

You're catching up with a friend over lunch when she eschews the bread basket, orders a sparkling water and rolls her eyes, complaining that none of her clothes fit and she's in a desperate bid to get 'skinny' for a colleague's wedding. Your immediate reaction is one of conflict. Her words, and the idea that a public event demands her to change her body, make you feel uncomfortable. She shouldn't be defining her own worth by clothes size. And no one uses the word skinny any more. But, would you be lying if you didn't admit that you too have had similar thoughts of getting 'back on track', keen to lose any excess weight that crept on during last year's lockdowns and winter hibernation?

Let's face it - as 2022 begins, weight loss occupies a curious cultural space. On the one hand, fad diets and restrictive eating plans continue to do the rounds, TikTok videos tagged #WhatIEatInADay - mostly showing women eating dangerously few calories - have clocked up more than 7 billion views. On the other, weight-loss brands that used to blatantly market a January sales spike have rebranded as holistic wellness solutions. There's also more social currency in posting a photo of a dripping-with-jam doughnut than a green smoothie, and anti-diet book sales rival the latest Sally Rooney. Such mixed messaging can feel confusing if you don't know where you stand on the subject. The upshot? Publicly admitting to wanting (and committing) to shift pounds can make you feel as conflicted as pondering the carbon footprint of your bulk-returns to Zara.

liberating take on health that encourages its followers to stop demonising food and idealising weight loss, it's been around for decades - inspired largely by radical feminism and the fat-acceptance movement of the 1960s - but has hit the big time over the past few years. That's largely thanks to the sought-after 'clean-eating' boom and consequent backlash; the likes of actress Jameela Jamil's *I Weigh* project, and the increasing awareness of the role that prescriptive, rigid information on weight loss can play in fuelling a whole spectrum of disordered eating (not to mention the rise and rise of that which connects them all - social media). 'It's about not being a victim of diet culture,' explains dietitian Lyndi Cohen. 'I don't think there's a place for the traditional diet any more. Research shows us that a healthy lifestyle that is free from restrictions and absolutes is more effective.' Sounds reasonable. So, the current pushback against diets is justified, then? Michael Lowe, a US professor who has devoted more than 30 years to studying and

# Strong Mind<sup>®</sup>



## Stop the shame game

Ever worry that you aren't 'enough' just as you are? Then you need to read this guide to self-acceptance - and the improved health status that comes along with it

→

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# How can the media help?

## 4. Hormone help

### **Are you tapping into the perimenopausal power window?**

BY REBECCA GILLAM PUBLISHED: JAN 8, 2023

**As new research shines a light on the metabolic potential of the years proceeding your final period, *WH* investigates**



ADAMKAZ // GETTY IMAGES



[Fitness > Workouts](#)

**'5 Things I learned working out with my menstrual cycle for 8 weeks'**



# How can the media help?

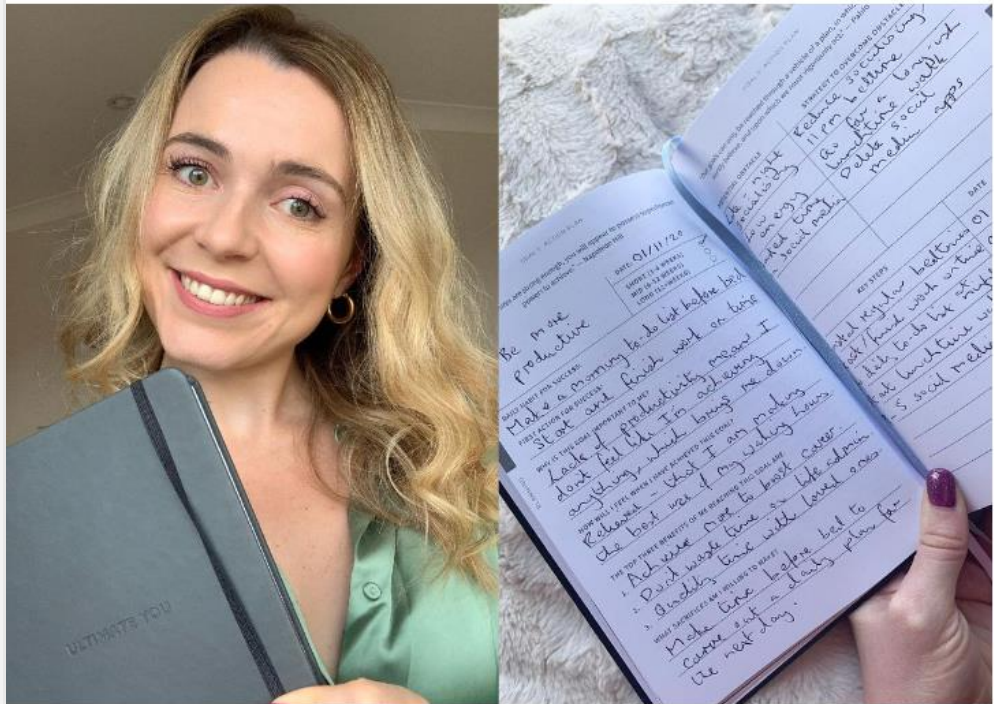
## 5. Let's get intentional

### 'I used a goal planner to train myself to be more productive - and this is what happened'

Your 2023 needs one of these



BY **LAUREN CLARK** PUBLISHED: DEC 19, 2022



### Four simple language swaps for more positive and clearer thinking

The words you use, both inside your head and to communicate with other people, can be such a powerful tool in shaping and changing your behaviours and mindset.



BY **VICTORIA JOY** PUBLISHED: JAN 16, 2023



# How can the media help?

## 6. Promote what works

### 'I did two weightlifting workouts per week for six weeks, and here are my honest results'

I switched from HIIT and cardio for the first time, and I'll never look back.

BY **BRIDIE WILKINS** PUBLISHED: JAN 2, 2023



### Is self-compassion the key to better training?

Getting a PB might just be down to POV...

BY CELIA JARVIS PUBLISHED: MAR 12, 2023



# How can the media help?

## 7. Share first-hand accounts

### 'Cosmetic surgery didn't fix me - I did'

When one woman underwent a breast reduction, aged 41, she thought it would help her to finally accept her body. Instead, she was forced to reckon with her disordered eating



Emma Gunnschwarz, 41, journalist and podcaster from London

When I hit puberty, aged 12, my body changed drastically. I went from child-like to very curvy almost overnight. The change I found hardest to accept was my large breasts. My first bra, a 32D, was thick-shouldered, full-cupped and all about giving me support. I gained weight during puberty, yet my breasts - the things I had to heave up and strap down every day - were the greatest source of my unhappiness. Still, it was another three decades before I decided to do something about it. Aged 41, I opted for breast reduction surgery in the hope I would finally feel comfortable in my own skin. I reasoned that without these large 38F breasts - that were a struggle to dress, always making me look matronly - I'd look slim. Or at least not fat. But looking at myself after the operation was... anticlimactic. That something as drastic as cosmetic surgery, requiring a general anaesthetic and six weeks' recovery, didn't fix how I felt made me face the underlying issue: my unhealthy - frankly, disordered - relationship with food.

The groundwork was laid between the ages of 12 and 17. When my breasts and weight changed significantly with the onset of puberty, I also developed acne, facial and excess body hair and was extremely lethargic. My mother took me to the doctor aged 12, but I was told I was just 'eating too much' and it took another five years until a specialist diagnosed me with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Five years is a very long time to feel disconnected from - and uncomfortable in - your body and it was during this time that I began to develop some extremely unhealthy eating habits. Comfort eating

and bingeing only added to the weight gain caused by my out-of-balance hormones. In the following years, I'd lose weight, only to put it back on again - and by the time I reached my forties, I was exhausted from decades of yo-yo-ing. Part of me wanted to tap out and just embrace my body for how it looked. But, deep down, I realised that if I accepted my body as overweight, I had to accept I wasn't going to do anything about the disordered eating that had got me there. The effect on my self-esteem was huge: I believed that, because

### I'm not going to tell you that confronting your demons is easy to do

of my size, 'normal' things - boyfriends, parties and success - happened to other people. I didn't feel I deserved them because if I couldn't stand the sight of myself, how could anyone else? It's no wonder I'd pinned my hopes on surgery.

Diet and exercise had never solved my issues so, after speaking to a friend who had overcome her own disordered eating by reading Kathryn Hansen's *Brain Over Binge* (£10, Camellia), I got stuck in. I recognised that I had

a binge-eating disorder similar to bulimia, minus the purging. It was more than a little confronting. I'd avoided admitting that I ate too much for a long time. And, trust me, you don't spend the majority of your life carrying excess weight without people mentioning it might be prudent that you eat less.

The book allowed me to see the urges to binge for what they were and it radically changed both how and what I ate. There was no dieting, just a new link in the chain between feeling the urge and attempting to satisfy it, which meant I stopped where I would have previously continued to eat. I started to appreciate the nutritional value of each meal, and if I ever found myself feeling like I wanted more, I could rationalise that there was no way I could physically

be hungry, which meant I could then dismiss the urge accordingly.

Five months later, in February 2020, I'd lost 30lb and it hadn't felt like an effort. A year on, the weight has stayed off and my new way of eating has become... normal. I occasionally feel the urge for a blow-out, but I recognise the difference between indulgence, like a takeaway, and a binge. I feel like I've found the key to unlock the door that kept me trapped in a cycle of food guilt and shame.

While the process has been life-changing, I'm keen to emphasise that this is me in recovery, as opposed to me recovered, with my disordered eating being solved and my body image issues tied up in a neat bow. Most days are straightforward, but occasionally there are times that I need to dig a bit deeper to prevent myself from retreating back into the cycle that restrained my life for so long.

I'm not going to tell you that confronting your demons is easy - but the struggle is probably worth it. A book was my catalyst to finally being honest with myself and understanding the role I was playing in my own discomfort, which allowed me to make



## 7. Having Botox won't necessarily boost your self-esteem

That women are seeking Botox out at a young age makes the framing of injectables as a tool for self-empowerment all the more concerning, says Renee Engeln, professor of psychology at northwestern university in the US and author of [Beauty Sick](#).



**Rich, in-depth research  
has the power to drive  
real change.**

**Thank you!**

