

Ninety percent of young women report using a filter or editing their photos before posting

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Professor Rosalind Gill, from City, University of London's Gender and Sexualities Research Centre, has today published a new report to mark International Women's Day.

The report—Changing the Perfect Picture: Smartphones, Social Media and Appearance Pressures—is based on research with 175 [young women](#) and nonbinary people in the UK.

Covering a range of issues—experiences of lockdown, feelings about 'body positivity', how to show support for Black Lives Matter—the research documents young people's persistent anger with a [mass media](#) that they deem 'too white', 'too heterosexual' and too focused on very narrow definitions of beauty.

Professor Gill said: "A critique of perfection ran through the research like a bass track, with young people telling me that they feel overwhelmed by images that are 'too perfect'.

"Women of color, disabled [women](#) and gender nonconforming folk told me they rarely see anyone like them in the media."

The report raises particular issues about how appearance standards are narrowing and how the affordances of smartphones (e.g., magnification and screenshotting), together with editing and filtering apps like Facetune, are contributing towards a society in which young people feel under constant forensic scrutiny by their peers.

Ninety per cent of women report using a filter or editing their photos before posting to even out their skin tone, reshape their jaw or nose, shave off weight, brighten or bronze their skin, and their whiten teeth.

Young women in the study also described regularly seeing advertisements or push notifications for cosmetic procedures—particularly for teeth whitening, lip fillers, and surgery to enhance bottom, breasts or nose.

Social media algorithms mean that, as one 21-year-old put it: "Once you

look, you will never be allowed to forget."

Professor Gill said: "With nearly 100 million photos posted every single day on Instagram alone, we have never been such a visually dominated society.

"Posting on [social media](#) can produce the intense pleasure of 'getting likes' and appreciative attention, but it is also a source of huge anxiety for most young women.

"I was struck by young women saying to me again and again: 'I feel judged'."

Professor Gill noted that, while the research would have been important at any time, the unique context of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown gave it a particular urgency.

She said: "Day after day, reports were published highlighting the devastating mental health impacts of the pandemic on young people: their education suddenly halted, their freedoms curtailed, with many experiencing financial hardship, emotional difficulties or bereavement.

"This research helps to shed light on how a diverse sample of young people navigated this challenging time, as well as offering more general insights into their lives.

"In some ways, [young people](#)'s familiarity with online tools and platforms better prepared them (relative to older groups) for the lockdown period in which so many aspects of life moved online—including work, education, psychological and health services, and social lives.

"In other ways, as this report shows, they experienced heightened

pressure and distress."

The research was funded by City, University of London, and carried out at the Gender and Sexualities Research Centre (GSRC) during 2020.

The GSRC analyses how gender and sexuality intersect with other social divisions and identities in a rapidly changing world, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, collaboration and research.

A summary report was submitted to the Government Equalities Office's Inquiry into Body Image.

More information: www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/141111/90-Percent-Report-web.pdf

Provided by City University London

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