



# FLAWSOME

'There is not one standard definition of beauty or one perfect size.' - Ashley Graham

## Body positivity: Revolutionary or just an empty buzzword?

**There's something that happens to many of us when we see members of our family for the first time in a while. Whether intentionally or not, they are first to remind us that, when all is said and done, our bodies are what make us. Harsh unsolicited comments about our weight and appearance are often made in greeting, and even though we know it's wrong – that what we look like shouldn't be a deciding factor in our capabilities – society still bashes us for not looking perfect. Enter the body positivity movement, designed to help us reclaim our power and joy, no matter our appearance.**

### INSIDE THE BANDWAGON

Users of the anonymous app Whisper define body positivity as 'being okay with flaws' (35.1%), 'loving yourself' (29.3%), 'being confident' (21.1%) and lastly, 'appreciating your body' (14.5%). Judging by a number of brand campaigns, it's also about celebrating bodies that are 'different', and redefining beauty to make it inclusive for all ethnicities and sizes. It's seen popular magazines such as *Seventeen* and

*Sports Illustrated* vowing to feature a more honest and diverse representation of women on their covers and in editorials. All over Twitter timelines and Instagram pages, we are also seeing a celebration of fuller sizes and unconventional looks, but is this as far as body positivity goes?

### BEYOND THE MESSAGE

Seeing different body types and expressions of beauty is indeed refreshing, but I sometimes get the sense that something's missing. I wonder if the emphasis should be on bodies at all.

Body positivity speaker and burlesque teacher Kaila Prins says on *Psychology Today* that body positivity can come off as a 'candy-coated movement'. 'Many popular weight-loss and fitness companies run so-called "body positive" campaigns whose surface message is: You should feel good about being in your body. But the subtext is, you can't feel good in your body as it is.' This idea of 'creating a body you love' is too focused on the outer appearance and not the internal work that leads to true acceptance.

### IT'S ALL RELATIVE

Body-image advocate and founder of Beauty Redefined, Lindsay Kite recently gave an

enlightening TEDx talk on the issue. 'Girls and women aren't only suffering because of the unattainable ways beauty is being defined,' she said. 'They are suffering because they are being defined by beauty.' And it's this that brings me back to my opening statement: It's not the usual teasing between relatives that's the problem, it's that even when we haven't seen them in a long time, they reduce the life that's happened in-between to how our bodies have changed. Weight fluctuates and bodies transform, but who are we, to ourselves and each other, beyond that?

### GOING BACK TO BASICS

It seems the real challenge the movement faces is actually acknowledging the work involved in becoming body positive. 'Self-image is the mental picture we create about ourselves,' former social worker Zanele Mthombothi says. 'Because this is a result of many factors, including supportive families and the presence of positive role models, we must prioritise improving and creating a positive one.'

We inherit messages that our bodies are wrong or that they're all we're worth, but true body positivity means unlearning these beliefs and figuring out who we really are beyond our bodies.



# issue

## Body positivity: Get out of your head and step into your body

**Whether you are fat or thin, love the skin you are in. This is the core idea of body positivity, a new movement that encourages all people, especially young women, to embrace their bodies as they are. Stemming from the fat acceptance movement in the 1960s, it has gained popularity in recent years. Today's message: 'Every body is the perfect body' – and that's great in theory, but to actually believe it is an entirely different matter. One can't shift the way one sees one's body overnight, especially if they've become so used to hating it.**

### MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

When you look at your body, what do you see? Is it an accessory that you love to flaunt? Perhaps it is no more than a vehicle that gets you from point A to point B. For me, my 13-year-old body was

a reminder of all the flaws that I was trying so desperately to cover up. I hated that I was tall, dark, gangly – things that made me different from everyone else. I thought that puberty would change the game, but I just got taller, thinner and more insecure than ever. The reason for my insecurity was simple: I didn't look like Beyoncé.

'We're all kind of suffering underneath these ideas that our bodies – no matter what they look like – are not good enough,' says Caleb Luna, an activist for body positivity from The Body is Not an Apology, an organisation that aims to promote radical self-love and body empowerment. It suggests that body image affects the way we all engage with the world around us.

Since I saw my body as a mountain of flaws, I could never accept a compliment for what it was. How could I believe something that I couldn't see?

### CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Our body image is exactly that: an image – and images can

change. The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa suggests that the standard of beauty changes roughly every decade and so is unattainable. The 'ideal body' is no more than a trend. So if it is a myth, it makes sense to embrace the body we have. This was my light-bulb moment, and over time, yesterday's flaws became today's assets. It begins with our mindset. To fall in love with our bodies is to plant a garden: the more love and care we put in, the more we'll have something to be proud of.

### BODY POSITIVITY 101

**Stop comparing** Copies will always come second to the original. Take care of Number One.

**Affirm yourself** You know that moment when you notice something looks great on you? Say it loud and proud, don't keep it to yourself. It's a seed – plant it.

**Don't believe the hype** Eleanor Roosevelt had it right when she said that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent – that includes you. Good vibes only! ✕



## T W I T T E R

HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE HAD TO SAY ABOUT #BODYPOSI ONLINE

Im throwing myself a party to welcome the new stretch marks that chose to call my body home ✨ #loveyourlines #lovelines #bodyposi

I'm looking at myself naked in the mirror and I just go "awe HELL yeahhhhhh!!!" #bodyposi :')