

# I Just Wanna Be Perfect

## Social Media and Our Body Image

*Social media has become an integral part of our society and it provides us with lots of benefits and joy. Especially in recent times, when we are alone at home in quarantine, we are longing for social contact and interactions. Platforms like Instagram build a virtual bridge to our loved ones and, thus, ensure that we don't go completely nuts over the isolation. However, we should consider that positive aspects as well as negative repercussions are two sides of the same coin. This is why I want to dig deeper into several problems that can arise from social media use.*

### **Instagram, Facebook and All the Rest: Curse or Blessing?**

My personal relation to social media platforms can be described as rather ambivalent. On the one hand I draw benefit from them as I obtain a lot of helpful advice and inspiration for my drawing projects. They also allow me to satisfy my almost insatiable hunger for memes. On the other hand, however, my Instagram feed is full of pictures of friends having a blast or sponsored ads showing models in stylish and sexy poses. They appear to have the perfect body, being extremely skinny yet big-breasted. Simultaneously, I get my daily dose of weight loss tips and promising diets, if I like it or not. It feels inescapable. There is always something wrong with how I look, and the message seems clear: Don't be too fat. Cover your stretch marks. Do sports. At the end of the day I look in the mirror and even if I pretend that I don't mind, I must confess that sometimes I do have feelings of not being beautiful enough. I see

my life unfiltered as it appears to be boring and gray compared to the colorful, flawless life of everyone else. Then again, some would claim that there is an online trend towards embracing a positive self-image, take body-positivity influencers such as Alissa Rumsey or Candice Huffine as an example, right? Nonetheless, when taking a closer look, "real imperfections" are still lacking. Embrace your body; but only if it follows the beauty parameters set by society! So, which impact does the constant comparison with other people have on us personally and mentally?

### **Mental Health Diseases on the Rise**

A positive body image and self-esteem are important to a human's health and wellbeing. Our relatives, friends, the media – all of them have an influence on our self-perception. Being constantly confronted with allegedly perfect images is associated with too poor body image and feelings that our own bodies are not okay. A study conducted by the Florida House Experience, a healthcare institution, observed 1,000 men and women on this matter. They found that 87% of women and 65% of men compare their bodies to images they consume on social media, whereas 50% of women and 37% of men compare their bodies negatively. Sadly, a poor body image can cause a wide range of mental health and physical effects. It should be mentioned, though, that these effects can be profound and complex. Social media is not solely blamed for the development or aggravation of certain diseases; however, they play an important part.

### **Depression and Eating Disorder**

A negative body image and self-esteem is related to various health conditions like depression. It directly influences a person's feelings, thoughts, and actions. If you don't like your body, it is hard for you to feel good about your whole self. The problem is that once people start to focus on shortcomings in one area, it becomes very easy to only see problems in other fields, too. According to Aaron T. Beck, a highly renowned psychiatrist, depression is originated and sustained through the following concept: You have a distorted idea and feel anxious and ashamed of your body. This can result in a negative view about the world in general, which in turn leads to a negative future prospect. Social media fuels this vicious circle by ensuring that you always feel inferior to others and bad about yourself. Therefore, people who are affected can't break through this thought pattern. There are other diseases coming along. General statistics claim that at least 30 million people in the U.S. have an eating disorder and that this disease has the highest mortality rate of any mental illnesses. In this article's context, it should be noted that the portrayal of unrealistic body images on social media skews people's perception of an ideal, but still can't be seen as the only reason for developing mental disorders. It can basically affect anyone of any background. However, there are certain people who are more likely to develop this disease. Besides genetic predispositions or underlying mental illnesses such as depression, those types of people are not

only unhappy with the way they look, they constantly seek perfection in every aspect of their life. Pursuing perfection and optimizing yourself are highly respected features in our modern, capitalistic world. The most shared posts on Instagram are about fitness and self-optimization. Only if you share something in this area is it likely that you will be rewarded with many likes which pushes you even more. And exactly this concept can be a trigger for vulnerable people.

### **Protecting Yourself**

When spending too much time on social media it can seriously harm our mental health in various ways. The younger you are, the more likely you are to be affected negatively by it since younger people still have to find their role in society. In order to make sure to profit from the positive sides of social media, while protecting yourself from negative side effects, why not try FACE.

#### **FACE**

**F= Filtering** out the negativity you encounter online (might include banning certain pages).

**A= Avoid** social media at least for some time (or set a daily time limit).

**C= be Careful of Comparisons.**

**E= Evaluate** things you see.

# The Pressure of Physical Appearance

## Value of Women in Our Society

### Impact of Society's Opinion

*How a woman looks – that's what her value in our society depends on. Or at least that's the feeling you get...*

*You're more worthy when considered "good-looking", no matter in which context, whether it is in your professional life, your romantic life or finding your spot in a new social group.*

*Imperfections in appearance, at least according to what societal standards tell us, are seen as flaws, although nobody is perfect and everybody has them.*

*As a result, women frequently struggle with being themselves. Many of us feel the constant "need to improve" until being perfect.*

*Regardless of whether you are being considered attractive or not you will face issues.*

### Being Criticized No Matter What

Being good-looking not always has a positive impact on how you are seen. As "just a pretty girl" one is easily under-estimated - assumed not to be very intelligent – and so in turn often not taken seriously. On top, the desired feature of beauty tends to come with the consequence of attracting shallow interest in people and being seen as a sexual object or trophy.

On the other hand, a lack of beauty standards frequently results in judging females for being less worthy than the more attractive ones. If you do not try to improve your body-image you will be asked why, because obviously you cannot be happy with that. It is considered normal that a woman has the desire to be pretty and if that is not the case, she might be a nerd or freak. Some groups of society may not even be interested in getting to know you if your appearance does not please them. Oh, and do not forget: you will never be able to find a partner and have a family if you look, dress or behave that way! (granny-voice)

So here is the thing: no matter how a woman chooses to act, her behaviour will be criticized anyway. And that is the problem - why do people care about what she does? It is her choice and

nobody needs to worry about it.

A common example is the amount of make-up you wear. It should not be too much because, otherwise, you look too artificial and not like a natural beauty. But if you don't wear make-up at all you should care a little bit more about your appearance.

You are supposed to be thin, because that makes you look delicate and apparently healthy people are always supposed to be skinny. But watch out! You should still have curves at the right places and always make sure that you don't have an eating disorder.

The skirt is too short, the neck of the shirt is too deep and the shorts are too revealing... but that blouse makes you look prudish!

### Other Consequences Due to (a Lack of) Attractiveness

In professional life, it often feels like attractive people are more successful than the less attractive ones. But might that be because they are given preference in getting hired or getting the better position?

Another sad consequence of this social dilemma is a kind of comparison or rivalry between women. The question of which one of them amongst a social group is more attractive and thus more worthy. Less pretty women feel frightened by the more beautiful ones, attractive women tend to consider themselves superior to others. Just because of social standards?

### What Really Matters

Why do many women have a lack of confidence when they don't feel attractive? Why do they base their worth on their physical appearance? This should not have such an immense impact on a person's courage. Confidence should be based on thoughts, personal values, ways of thinking and acting.

In the end that is what defines someone as a human being, not the way they look.

# How Can You Still Be Shy at 18?

## Misconceptions about Introversion

More than ever, people are interested in personality and learning about how their brains work. Just look at the ever-growing amount of people that "would love to study psychology" or take Buzzfeed personality quizzes during class (calling myself out). If you have ever found yourself in a pedagogics lecture, you might even have encountered some models that attempt to scientifically define personalities.

### Introducing: the OCEAN Model

The Big Five or OCEAN model is one of the most common models of personality. It embodies five personality traits on a spectrum: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism. Chances are that you have heard of the term extraversion and its opponent, introversion, before. But what do they actually mean? According to the quality source Wikipedia, "extroversion tends to be manifested in outgoing, talkative, energetic behavior, whereas introversion is manifested in more reserved and solitary behavior." Keeping in mind the model's rules, this trait exists on a spectrum – so you are probably rather introverted or rather extroverted.

### Let's Ask an Introvert!

Susan Cain, author of several books on introversion, explains in a TED TALK that about thirty to fifty percent of the population are rather introverted and that "introversion is more about 'How do you respond to stimulation, including social stimulation?'" Introverts tend to be overwhelmed and quickly drained by overstimulation, so social situations like parties can be extremely exhausting to them. Cain adds that skills are best explored in environments that rightly stimulate us.

### An Extrovert Society?

That's a huge problem, as most social environments are specifically designed for extroverts. Big offices or simply schools

promote heavy social stimulation: teamwork, presentations, networking – these things can be very draining to introverted people. It feels like everyone is set on wanting an extrovert society. This issue has also affected me, like it has many other people. Growing up, I was always a shy kid. I pretty much never raised my hand in class, even though my teachers continuously tried to persuade me to. I got extremely nervous before any presentation I had to give, even if it was just two minutes. My body shifted into flight mode whenever I was called on unexpectedly and don't even get me started on "Everyone say something about x, let's start by the window". Horror. Panic. People screaming. A baby is crying in the distance. Also, lots of my friends were introverts, too. Needless to say, we had a blast.

### Introversion = Shyness?

Now get ready for a plot twist: I, an introvert, am studying teaching. But how does that work when I just claimed that schools are designed for outspoken, perfectly sociable people? Psychology professor Brian Little gave a TED TALK explaining this phenomenon. He describes himself as an introvert who feels rightly stimulated when talking about psychology, a subject he enjoys greatly. Meaning: his introversion doesn't hinder him from teaching, because being an introvert ≠ being shy.

I might be your success story: ever since I've left school and gone to university, I've realized that I've grown a bit less shy – sometimes, I even call people and don't panic. Personally, I am convinced that this is all due to this one co-worker I encountered at my job after graduation who asked me, disbelievingly, "How can you still be shy at 18?" I owe it all to him.

*If you are curious to learn more about ways to make schools more introvert-friendly, check out the follow-up to this article on the eMAG website!*

# Having Ablutomania During a Pandemic

*It's safe to say that the pandemic has changed our daily routines quite a bit – between lockdowns and online classes, this term has been rather different from what we were used to. But what if constantly showering and washing your hands had been part of your life even before COVID19?*

## What Is Ablutomania?

Ablutomania (from Latin *ablutio* = washing) is a psychological disorder characterized by obsessive cleanliness.

## My Pre-Pandemic Routine

I wake up in the morning and shower for the first time – there will be many more showers throughout the day, maybe five on average. From there, it depends on what my plans are for the day. I shower every time I come in from outside, after every trip to the toilet – this also means that I can't use public bathrooms unless it's an absolute emergency –, most times I touch (or get touched by) other people, and whenever I feel "dirty". I can't say what exactly constitutes feeling dirty because I don't have an exact definition for it; sometimes it happens when I touch the wrong thing, sometimes it's because I saw a bug. I just feel my skin crawl and I can't stop thinking about it until I've washed it off.

Then, there's washing my hands. In addition to all the situations in which "normal" people wash their hands, like before and after handling food or after using the bathroom, this happens before every shower, after touching any type of packaging or shaking hands with another person, after touching my phone and laptop chargers, after touching books or paper, and after touching something with a texture that just feels wrong – for which, again, there is no clear definition. In general, I struggle with touching anything that's dirty or feels sticky, from used plates to pizza dough to things that fell on the ground outside. It's not just that I feel gross after touching them; sometimes I literally cannot bring myself to touch them at all, and doing it anyway is extremely distressing, sometimes even to the point that I think about self-harm or worse. When I'm out and about, I always carry disinfectant wipes with me. I also have two active sets of clothing at any given time: one for outside, and one for inside. I can't sit on my furniture in outside clothes (except for one designated chair, which I sanitise afterwards).

Ironically, all of this makes chores extremely difficult: I like things to be clean, but getting there is a different story entirely. After all, you can't really clean something without touching it. When I have a bad day, I can't touch dirty (or "dirty") things even while wearing gloves; I often find

myself putting off chores because of this, but that only makes things worse: the more chores pile up, the more stressed I get – and the more stressed I am, the worse my ablutomania gets. It's a vicious cycle that's incredibly hard to break. The hardest part, I think, is that I can't out-logic it. I know, rationally, that most people don't constantly shower or wash their hands – and they survive just fine! But all the logic in the world can't turn off the part of my brain that keeps reminding me that I touched something bad and that I need to wash my hands right now.

## What Has Changed

Generally speaking, stress makes everything worse, and the current situation is pretty stressful for a lot of people. In some ways, my behaviour hasn't changed that much – I washed my hands a lot before, and I still do so now. Still, there have been some changes; I can no longer eat takeout food, for example. I have also started wiping down all my groceries before they go in the fridge or cupboards – something I was close to doing even before, and that I'm worried I won't be able to stop after the pandemic is over. The container my medication comes in now feels dirty to me, so I bought a second container to transfer them to by first dumping everything on a clean surface, then washing my hands and putting away the

original container, and then sorting everything into the new, "clean" one. My hands-washing and showering habits have become more extreme, to the point where there are only a few select things I can touch without needing to wash after.

## What the Future Holds

There's no neat conclusion to this (no pun intended). As for the future, I worry that my more extreme pandemic hygiene habits will stick around even when life goes back to normal. I worry that this is something that will follow me all my life and that I'll never be able to break these habits. So I try to celebrate the small victories – like the other day, when I made it through a whole movie before washing my hands after I plugged in my laptop.

# It's All About Presence

## Staying Mentally Healthy through Presence in the Face of the Coronavirus

Numbers everywhere. Coronavirus infection numbers. Worldwide, continental, countrywide. Numbers of cities, numbers of towns, numbers of regions. Numbers of deaths, numbers of recovered. Numbers reporting new cases of infected children, infected men, infected women. A thousand different kinds of ratings caught in large and crashing numbers and yet, some statistics are left out still: Those concerning not the physical, but the mental health of humanity. Isn't it expectable that we'll soon have to cope also with increasing numbers of panic attacks and anxiety disorders?

### What Is Anxiety?

An uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future (Cambridge Dictionary)

### The Breakdown of the Well-Known "Me-and-My-Life" (Illusion) - a Catalyst for Anxiety ?

I'm not quite an early bird – on the contrary. My dad and I used to call ourselves sleepyheads when I was little. That was fun. Not so much for my mom. She always used to get angry when I was late again and again and all the while she kept telling me: "One day you will just have to learn to get up! This is just how life works!" Well, she used to be right. But now that the coronavirus is in charge of planning life for us, I can return to the sleepyhead mode again. There are no 8.15 lectures I have to attend

anymore, no Zoom Meetings before 10. And I'm 22, living currently alone, as my 4 flatmates have returned to their parents' houses for this semester, so there's no one there to shout at me when I don't want to get up.

But sadly, all of this sleeping isn't as nice and cozy as it used to be during childhood, for now I've (unfortunately) not only left the age but also the mindset of a 10-year-old. Voices resembling senses of duty, diligence and preoccupation have moved into my head, which have recently grown up to having huge discussions about what to do now during this pandemic, usually resulting in a fierce compulsion of unending trains of thought.

Before Corona, this wasn't like this. Sure, my inner driver had had a lot to say by then, but his predominant voice stopped as soon as I went out, got my things done, slipped in my routines, talked to people. Enjoyed the distraction the busy world offered me every day. Enjoyed its noise drowning the noise inside my head.

Now it's all quiet outside and the inner driver is confused. He's not used to filling such long, silent gaps with thoughts. So he chose himself a new hobby to stay constantly busy again: Worrying.

You cannot worry too much, you know. There's always something to worry about, especially in the time we are living in. I'm almost entirely sure that every single one of you has also been worrying by now. If not about yourself, then about your parents, or your grandparents, or your holidays, or the reopening of the university library or your favorite

restaurant or, well, whatever. I guess it's clear what I'm heading for.

### The Coronavirus – Releaser of a Collective, Anticipatory Grief

Through the virus, we all suffer loss. Some suffer the loss of their own health, others the loss of loved ones, but I dare say all of us suffer at least a loss of routine and connection, although for some this may be more far-reaching than for others. This is heavy and causes grief on a personal as well as on a collective level.

But not only the things that have changed let us grieve, also the things that are to change or might change keep us imprisoned in anticipatory grief, spreading insecurity about what the future may hold. We somehow know that something bad is happening but we can't really see it. You cannot see the virus flying around, but we do somehow feel it. In the loss of things that have given us safety. In the inciting anxiety boiling up in our stomachs.

Anticipatory grief can let the worst scenarios arise in our minds and lead to constant states of intense anxiety, when not identified as what it IS. A scenario, a "what if", followed by the most dreadful mental image we can think of. A protective mechanism of the mind, trying to gain back some control. But there's nothing real about it right now. It's the mind trying to process something it cannot see into a picture. And for a lot of people this results in the worst nightmares.

It's still too early to make clear statements about the increase of anxiety disorders (mostly due to the great importance of conscientiously collecting all the essential numbers I mentioned in the beginning) but doctors are already letting their predictions about an increase slip. The amount of people seeking therapies has risen during Corona, so it's only a question of time until we have it in writing.

### Overcoming Anxiety by Staying Present

We're so used to controlling everything that we forgot that life is nothing we are actually in charge of. Luckily, life doesn't need to be controlled. It just needs to be. Anxiety and anticipatory grief always concern the future, but never the present. Here and now is where we are safe and where we are to be. When we are located in the present moment, we can let these dreadful images come and go without continually feeding them with thoughts. And we will cope with what the future holds in a future moment. Which is what we would do anyway - poisoning the present moment with a destructive thought or not.

# It's A Salad Bowl, Old Sport

## The (Not So) Great Gatsby

*Those who have read the Great Gatsby know that being compared with the popular character isn't necessarily a compliment. Jay Gatsby is successful, rich and well known. He's seen as a good and generous man. But it's different when he's alone. You learn that he's an obsessed man who does everything he can to fulfill his only goal, namely to be loved and chosen by the woman he loves, just to be disappointed in the end.*

### A Gatsby- What?

But what defines a Gatsby- personality? Fitzgerald created characters that are stuck in a world of illusion. The figures are designed as mask- like phantoms and the implicit question every reader should ask themselves is: Is there anything behind those masks, and if yes, what exactly? Jay Gatsby himself is controlled by his strong feeling of shame. He's ashamed of his small hometown, his simple-minded parents, his lower-class origin. So he created a persona of himself: he left his home for the army, became a very successful man and even changed his name from James Gats to Jay Gatsby.

### And That's Interesting Because...?

What this unbearable feeling of shame can do to people is awful. A feeling that something about the self is wrong or damaged. Worries about what people might think of you. Being afraid for people to recognize all the negative things about you. So it's not unusual that people have different versions of their personality. At school they are a sunshine, carefree and self- confident. But at home they could be lonely, insecure, stressed out, maybe don't have the easiest life. What you do seems to be insufficient and who you are is just not who you want to be. But what can

you do? And here's what Fitzgerald already saw many years ago: people are like picture frames and dependent on where they are and who they're with, they just put another picture in the frame. We create this perfect illusion and people may look at you – but they can't really see you.

### Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...

The person we show on the outside isn't a lie – but it's only a fragment of a personality. And there are reasons some people don't show their full mosaic of characteristics. There will always be people who try to tell you, you're too naïve, you're fake, you cannot be a happy person and sad at the same time, you cannot be smart but don't understand mathematics, you're too quiet but also too attention grabbing, you cannot be that nice, you cannot not hate people. Well it's not a surprise people start feeling lost, and think who they are isn't okay. For me, it took too long to realize that I am great, just the way I am. I am clever, I am talented, I am nice and don't see any point in hating someone else, and that's okay. I don't need people to confirm who I am. I don't want people in my life who think I can't do the things I want to do. There will always be people in this world who will value and love you for you who are. Even if you're not always happy and uncomplicated. Instead of telling you that you can't do something, they'll help you achieve your goals. To come to an end here I'll just say: Embrace all the things that define you, the good and the bad ones. Start building a relationship with yourself. Start loving yourself. Cause every one of us is unique and great, just the way they are.

# KEEP IT LOCAL

