



PRESSURE

TO BE

PERFECT

IN THE 00s



Research Report:
THE
THIRTYSOMETHING
ERA



weighty issues

food: friend or foe

pregnancy & motherhood

attitudes to ageing

celebrity role mums



the
vitality eating
system

FOREWORD

By:

PROFESSOR GEOFFREY BEATTIE

The **'Pressure To Be Perfect'** research offers a fascinating insight into the life and mindset of thirtysomething women. Issues to do with weight, motherhood and ageing all seem to bring a unique set of pressures to bear on women in this age band. Super thin models promote the thin-ideal and thirtysomething women still feel the pressure intensely. Most women in the group may be of normal weight, but nearly three-quarters feel discontent with their body image. Previous psychological research highlights that feeling overweight, when you are in fact not overweight, leads to a dissatisfaction with life and greater feelings of loneliness, depression, plus poorer self-acceptance. Women must learn to recognise what is normal in terms of weight and body shape; the possible psychological benefits would be huge.

Thirtysomething females feel that society is too obsessed with looks and body image. Yet nearly half report that they would consider

plastic surgery in the years ahead. Clearly they feel the psychological pressures to conform to a youthful ideal. When it comes to sources of fulfilment, motherhood is regarded as the greatest source. However, motherhood brings its own unique set of pressures, including the pressure to lose pregnancy weight in the minimum time, just like the super-thin celebrities in the media.

The **'Pressure To Be Perfect'** research is innovative because it shows how a number of psychological pressures intersect with each other. There is the pressure to have babies and yet return to a trim figure in the minimum time afterwards; the pressure to mature and yet stay looking youthful; the pressure to aspire to the body shape of celebrities in the glossy mags and yet have a normal life. After the turmoil of the teens and the uncertainty of the twentysomething decade, the thirties should be more serene. This research suggests otherwise. Women need to recognise and identify what exactly is normal weight and reject super-thin celebrity mothers as potential role models. This strategy might bring thirtysomething females the highest level of genuine fulfilment they both desire and deserve.

INTRODUCTION

The **‘Pressure To Be Perfect’** research was commissioned by the **Vitality Eating System** campaign, to examine the psyche of British women aged 30 – 40 years old. The key aspects which the research focused on were body image and eating habits; pregnancy and motherhood; attitudes to ageing; influences and sources of self-esteem.

The aim of the research was to examine the extent to which women in this age group feel pressurised to live up to a physical ideal, perpetuated by the media. The idea for the study is based on the first **‘Pressure To Be Perfect’** research which was developed in 1998, and focused on the 18-24 age group.

The objective of the **Vitality Eating System** is to encourage women to realise the importance of consuming a healthy, balanced diet which includes complex carbohydrates such as bread, cereals and pasta. Developed by a dietitian, it consists of a balanced

eating plan for a week, plus lots of advice and tips on weight management and how to achieve a healthier diet. The latest version of the **Vitality Eating System** can be downloaded from:

www.fabflour.co.uk



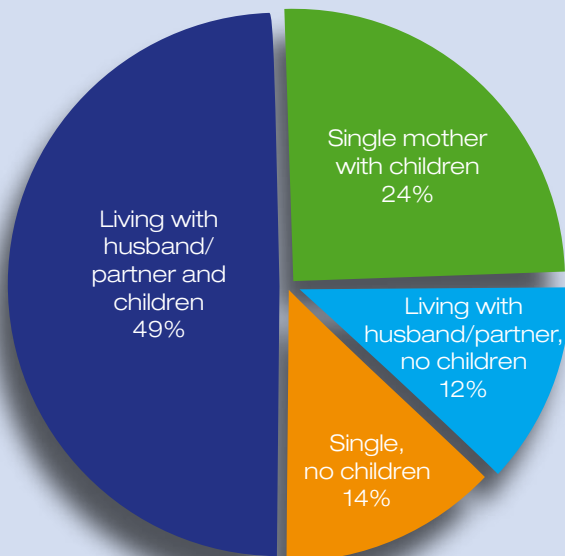
METHODOLOGY/

DEMOGRAPHICS

The research was conducted by Kember Associates during January 2006. It comprised **1008 women aged between 30 and 40**. For the purposes of the survey, the country was divided into five regions: London and South East; Wales and South West; Scotland; East England, East/West Midlands; North East/West and Yorkshire.

A representative sample was achieved in each region by varying interview points and times of day/week.

The overall profile of the women surveyed is summarised as follows:



An important aspect of the survey was to compare the perceptions of women of different sizes and weights. To this end, each woman was asked to give her height and weight, then a **BMI (Body Mass Index)** was calculated for each respondent.

The **BMI** was then used to classify each respondent into one of the following categories:



WEIGHTY

ISSUES



52% of 30 - 40 year old women

are a healthy weight.

However **27%** are overweight and **15%** are obese.

Single mothers and those not in paid employment were more likely to be overweight. In terms of regional differences, there was a relatively higher percentage of underweight women in the South East, and a relatively higher percentage of overweight or obese women in the West Midlands, North West, Wales, and Scotland.

Despite over half of the women being a healthy weight, nearly 70% expressed discontent with their weight. 22% of 'ideal weight' women said they struggled to maintain their weight, and 27% of them said they were unhappy and always trying to lose a few pounds.

You're always on my mind

A worrying trend was indicated by the fact that over a quarter of women in their thirties (28%) said

they thought about their weight 'several times a day', with a further 18.5% thinking about it every day. 30% weigh themselves once a week.

It seems women are reminded of their weight by a variety of factors. When asked what prompts them to think about their weight, the following factors emerged:

What prompts you to think about your weight

Fashion for fitted clothing

30%

Going on holiday or special event

20%

Overindulgence

18%

Seeing glamorous, thin celebs in the media

18%

Seeing glamorous, thin celebrities in the media was equally likely to make underweight and obese women think about their weight.

FOOD

FRIEND OR FOE

A key indicator that thirty something women have body image issues, is reflected in the fact that nearly half of respondents (43%) are on a diet most or all of the time. This also includes 26% of women whose BMI puts them in the ideal weight range. Even underweight women are sometimes tempted to diet, with 40% claiming to have started a weight loss diet for a special occasion or a holiday.

39% of those who are always on a weight loss diet claim they

tend to weigh themselves once a day.

Food and emotion

17% of women admitted that they comfort eat every day, while over a quarter (26%) of women resort to comfort eating a few times a week. 41% of thirtysomething women claim the stress of being a multi-tasking mum is the number one reason which triggers emotional eating.

Emotional reasons which trigger comfort eating

Stress of being a busy mum **41%**

Low self-esteem **27%**

Argument with my husband/partner/boyfriend **21%**

Work deadlines **17%**

Guilt trips

85% of the women in the survey said they have felt guilty about eating certain types of food. Fast food was the biggest guilt tripping food, with 57% putting it top of the list, closely followed by chocolate (55%), chips (52%) and cakes (42%).

Healthy eating

Women are no longer shunning carbohydrates. Bread, pasta and rice were all rated positively by over 66% of the group. Fruit and vegetables achieved the highest ratings

Over 70% of women check food labels. Within this category, 37% claim they label check to avoid artificial additives and preservatives, while 25% claim it's because they're weight watching.



When asked to describe their eating habits, 45% said they had a healthy, balanced diet which includes treats. However this was equally matched by 45% of respondents, who claim to have problems following a healthy diet.

Within this group, over a quarter admit to struggling with trying to maintain a healthy diet, while the remaining 20% are involved in a constant food battle – overeating followed by fasting and/or exercise.

Those who were on a diet all or most of the time were more likely to say they struggled to stick to a healthy diet or they fought a constant battle with food.

PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD



Kids and our diets

Nearly one third of mums (30%) claim they put so much effort into ensuring their children eat a healthy diet, they don't have time to look after themselves. Comments from the mums, suggest that while they prepare fresh meals for their kids, they make do with convenience and fast foods.

At the other end of the spectrum, 50% of the mums claim they eat a healthier diet, as a result of having

children. Those mums who were overweight or obese were more inclined to blame their poor diet on having children.

Over half of the sample described their children's diet as a combination of healthy foods with treats. The relationship between a mother's diet and that of her children is clear. 65% of mums who had an unhealthy diet said their children had a similar type of diet.

Pregnancy and our bodies

60% of women said they enjoyed the changes in their body shape during pregnancy, but the remaining 40% had fears they would not be able to regain their former figure post-birth.

With regards to their behaviour during pregnancy, 60% of the women said they relaxed and ate foods they normally wouldn't. The remaining 40% ensured they stuck to a healthy diet and exercised, in order to avoid excess weight gain.

The group who exercised moderately and ate a healthy diet were more likely than other mums to say they enjoyed pregnancy and the changes it brought. In contrast, those who relaxed and ate foods they usually wouldn't were less likely to enjoy their pregnancy, and showed greater concern about regaining their figure.

Post-birth, 62% of mums admitted they put themselves under pressure to get back into shape. Surprisingly those who said they were desperate to get back into shape post-birth, were much more likely to have exercised moderately and followed a healthy diet during pregnancy.

Over 60% of mothers said they started a weight loss diet after having a baby. Within this group, 15% started a diet less than one month after giving birth, and a further 22% started a diet within one to six months.

The pressure mums feel to lose weight is reflected in the drastic methods of weight loss they adopt. 32% admit they have resorted to either fad type diets, excessive exercise or fasting to lose the weight gained during pregnancy. Only a quarter of mothers (27%) combined a healthy balanced diet with exercise to lose the weight.

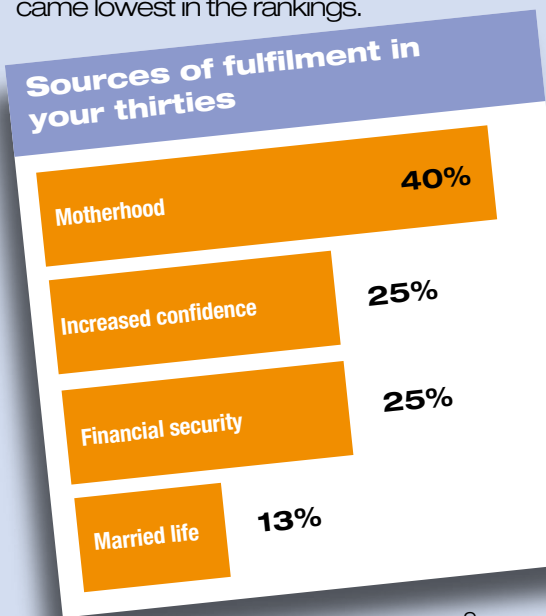
Diet, weight and relationships

40% of the sample claimed that their food preferences or weight loss methods had caused friction with their partner. Naturally those who were unhappy or in despair because of their weight, were more likely to admit that food and diet had resulted in relationship tension.

The unhappiness women feel towards their bodies, is further demonstrated in the fact that 42% are uncomfortable with being naked in front of their husband/partner.

The thirties era

When the women were asked what provides them with the most fulfilment in their thirties, 40% claimed motherhood. This outranked increased confidence, financial security and married life. The latter came lowest in the rankings.



ATTITUDES

TO AGEING



42% of respondents said they used anti-ageing products.

The average age at which they started using them was 28 years. The most popular anti-ageing products were creams and facials. Botox was used by 10% of anti-ageing product users.

Most desired anti-ageing procedure

Liposuction on thighs/stomach **31%**

Breast job **19%**

Tooth veneers **19%**

Facelift **16%**

Enhancing techniques

Just under half of respondents (47%) said they would consider plastic surgery and the most popular age to start would be 51 years.

Liposuction on the thighs and stomach emerged as the most desired treatment, followed by breast enlargement and tooth veneers.

The future

The biggest fear for women in their thirties, as they age, is illness, followed by losing their looks.

So much for the added confidence which the thirties are reputed to bring. When the women were asked if they are more comfortable with their body/appearance in their thirties, compared to their twenties, over 60% of the sample said no.

Feeling the pressure

85% of the women agreed that society is too obsessed with looks and body image. 65% admitted they feel the pressure to stay slim and young looking.

Future Fears

Illness **43%**

Losing my looks **19%**

Weight gain **14%**

Relationship break-up **14%**

Kids leaving home **10%**

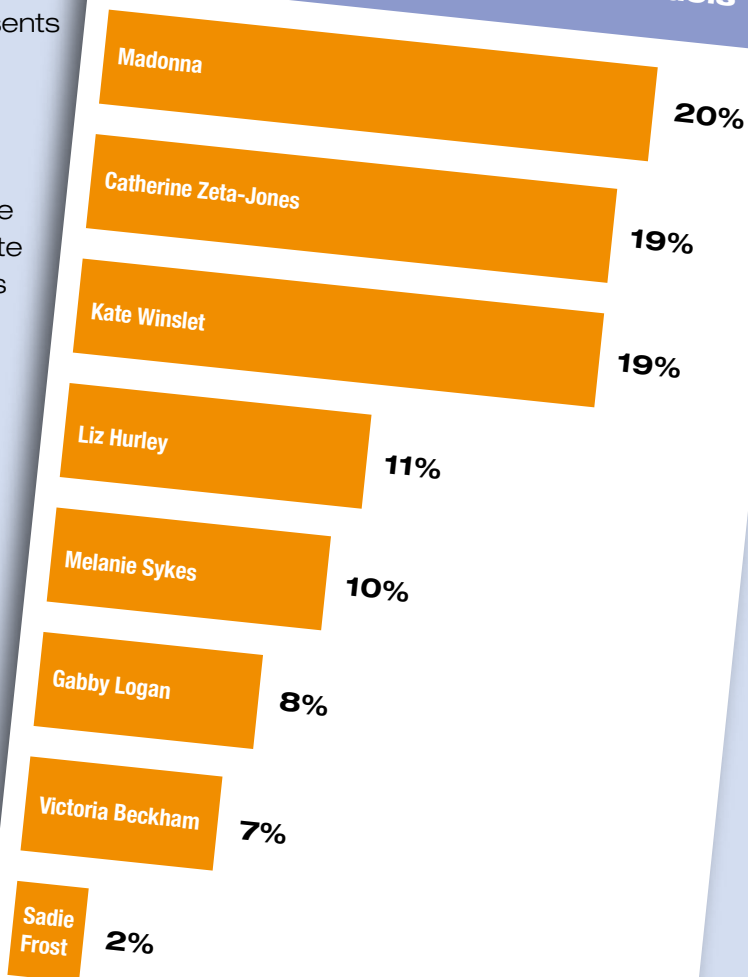
CELEBRITY ROLE

MUMS

The women were shown a list of celebrity names and asked to choose who represents the best role model for thirtysomething women.

Madonna, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Kate Winslet emerged as the most popular choices.

Most Popular Celebrity Role Models



PRESSURE
TO BE
PERFECT
IN THE 00s

is a joint campaign between
the Federation of Bakers,
the Flour Advisory Bureau
and the Grain Information Service

For further information or to obtain a copy of the
PRESSURE TO BE PERFECT RESEARCH or
VITALITY EATING SYSTEM

please contact:

Claire Donnelly or Eva Neary on
020 7493 2521

Angela McGrandles on
020 7808 9732



www.bakersfederation.org.uk



www.fabflour.co.uk

Grain Information Service



www.graininformationservice.co.uk