**Podcast: Body Image – Transcription**

**Podcast duration:** 43 minutes

**Hosts:** Monica and Kate

**Guest:** Dr Sita Madaan and Darius Smith

**OAC representative:** Dot and Nesreen

**Kate:** Hey everyone,

**Kate/ Monica:** I’m Kate and I’m Monica and this is the Perspectives podcast by Oxford Against Cutting, also known as OAC.

**Monica:** OAC is a rights-based charity working to end harmful practices suffered by girls and women.

**Kate:** In today’s episode, we are going to be talking about body image and social media, and are joined by Dr Sita Madaan and Darius Smith along with our OAC colleagues Dot and Nesreen.

**Monica:** Before we kick off, please note that this episode covers topics of a sensitive nature including bullying. This podcast is age-appropriate for 16+

**Monica:** Welcome, Sita and Darius; thank you so much for joining us today. It is really great to have you on board, so today, we will be discussing body image. We are touching on topics such as social media, the presence of advertising, and how it plays a role in our day-to-day life.

I am going to hand over to you, Sita. If you could just introduce yourself and what you do that would be great; thank you.

**Sita:** Hello, thank you very much, Monica. It is lovely to be here today; thank you so much for having me. My name is Dr Sita Madaan. I am a dentist with a special interest in restorative dentistry, working in City Centre, Oxford. I do a combination of dental and facial aesthetic procedures. My work is largely centred around providing good functional dentistry with an aesthetic element, but that is usually secondary to the functional interest that I have.

**Monica:** Darius, over to you if you could just introduce yourself and what you do.

**Darius:** Hi, I am Darius; thank you, Monica, for inviting me on.  I do a lot, so I am a dancer, YouTuber, writer. I am a trustee for a charity called Oxfordshire Youth, the youngest trustee, which is really, really cool. I am very interested in, I guess, social activism, body image because it is something that I have struggled with my whole life and still do. Yeah, I have previously worked in a social media company, so I thought, like, this is quite an interesting conversation for me to be a part of.

**Monica:** Thank you so much; so, we are also joined here today by two OAC members, Dot and Nesreen. Dot, do you mind introducing yourself and explaining your role at OAC, please?

**Dot:**  Sure, thanks, Monica. My name is Dot, and I work as the project coordinator for Oxford Against Cutting, so I am involved with kind of some of the day-to-day runnings of the charity but also working on different projects. I do work quite a lot on our body image work which we are increasingly developing and really excited to be developing. Body image is something I am really passionate about, and I am really pleased to be here today to talk about it.

**Monica:** Thank you, Dot, and finally, Nesreen over to you.

**Nesreen:** Hi, I am Nesreen. My day job is as a paediatrician, but I have joined OAC, and I work as a facilitator in two of the projects. One is FGM, female genital mutilation and other one is body image. Me and Dot developed some sessions about body image for age 7 and 8, which was really successful, and yes, I want to continue with providing this. Thank you.

**Monica:** Perfect; thank you all for your introductions. We are going to kick off with one of the questions, and this is really an open question, so everyone feel free to chip in. The question is, what are the positive and negative impacts of social media on body image for young people? I am going to kick off with our guests first, so Darius, what is your thoughts on that question?

**Darius:** I feel like social media as a whole, it is neither positive nor negative because all it is simply, as a tool, like anything that exists in life, like a microphone, a speaker, a glass of water, they can be used for goods and they can be used for bad. I think the positive impacts for young people is the ability to see body types or different kinds of people who you would not normally see in mainstream media, which is really empowering.

Then I guess the flip side of that is like there's so much trolling that happens online, and there is so much of like there is only one specific monolithic way that you have to be in order to be fit and healthy, which is not true. I think it is, as long as you can differentiate for yourself as a young person, what is good for you and what is not, then you should be fine. Unfortunately, because it is constantly shoved down young people’s throats to look a certain way, it is really hard to differentiate what is good and what is bad.

**Monica:** Thank you so much. Sita, what about you?

**Sita:** Yes, thank you for the question. Social media, I feel whilst it can be used, you know positively. It brings people together; it makes the world that much smaller. I feel it probably has a little bit more of a detrimental effect, the way it is so accessible nowadays and the way it is given so much importance.

Certainly, you know young people that look at it as a way of aspiring to be like celebrities that can be very damaging. I do not think we have got a lot of control on the age ranges of people that have access to this material very, very early on.

Even just as a professional in the community that uses social media to promote myself and make my services available to other people. Even amongst my community, you see, peers and colleagues that are equally promoting themselves as and you do succumb to pressure, feel compared to other people you know.

Certainly, from a personal perspective, you are constantly critiquing your own work, which is, of course, a good thing, but equally, you can feel a sense of pressure to adhere to perhaps what other people are doing or comparing yourself, and it is just about setting healthy limits which some people are better at doing than others. People are always posting the best stuff on social media, whether it is their best case, whether it is the best patient feedback, whether it is themselves on a happy day, whether it is the most romantic photo of them and their partner.

I am talking both personally and professionally. Though it is very easy to get a warped sense of an ideal, very unrealistic sense of what is happiness or what is beauty. These are misconstrued ideals, which have, I think, become more of an issue since social media has taken off in our communities that much more vulnerable people, younger people, people that are impressionable. These are the people that probably suffer the most by getting sucked into some of these ideals.

**Monica:** Thank you, Sita. Dot, Nesreen, so Dot first - what are your thoughts to that question?

**Dot:** Yeah, I definitely think that there are some positives of social media. I think it is a great platform for activism and for, like Darius said, showcasing a wide range of body types. For example, you can kind of show diversity, but I do not think it always does do that, and I think there are a lot of negatives of social media, and I would be inclined to say that these outweigh the positives.

One of my biggest concerns with social media is that it creates this culture of comparison, but the problem is often people are comparing themselves, particularly when we are talking about body image, people are comparing themselves to altered versions of bodies, so maybe pictures which have been really heavily edited or bodies which have had work done on them.

People are not only comparing themselves to other people, but they are comparing themselves to really unrealistic or kind of giving themselves unrealistic expectations, which I think is really problematic.

**Monica:** Thanks, Dot. Nesreen?

**Nesreen:** Yeah, I think we all agree here that it is has the positive effect and the negative effect, but the positive is a bit small in comparison to the negative because I think it is my idea. It is like everything - the negative is more apparent, and people look at it more than the positive in anything. So, the simple example is how many (before COVID; of course), thousands of planes would take off every day, but we only hear and talk about the one that fell down in the ocean or something crashed.

The same thing I feel for the social media, so we hear a lot about the bullying through social media. You know, some people would just put their picture on it in an instant, and then they get all these negative feedback about it like, I do not know, “you have this big nose; you should have a nose job”. Anything that is negative, and sometimes people take it really, really seriously, and we hear about all the suicide that happened due to social media bullying. It is a very big issue, and you cannot just control it. You cannot have regulations on it, so that is really, really tricky, especially in the vulnerable teenagers or anyone with low self-esteem.

**Monica:** I think the angles that we have all come in is so interesting because it is such a different perspective, and for me personally, because social media is my line of work, I see it in very much different light. Also, through academia, what I am picking up is that how it is almost co-constructed. It does depend, and I am not saying what you see is based on how your thought process is; obviously, there is lots of ads and whatever. But it is almost based on your community, and when I say community, about your online community and who you buy into, you do not buy into.

My next question is around, do we think that the images of women and men in the media encourage young people to have positive self-esteem? Sita, I am going to start with you because I know personally by being on a journey with you; actually, it was your social media that brought me into the journey with you in terms of my teeth and the procedure; it was very much around positive self-esteem.

For me, your service, your product has definitely shown me that across social media, but could you just expand on what you do and how you think social media plays for men and women?

**Sita:** Thank you, that is really kind, and I am so glad that my social media was able to inspire you to come to me. I think everything I have said about social media having, sort of, quite a negative impact and just to expand that a little bit more to do with body image. There is, as you know, so many celebrities now, who are doing themselves up and presenting themselves to almost look different versions of themselves, and I think this is where the biggest issue lies.

There are celebrities out there, not to name any in particular, but I am sure you know, people in particular who have promoted themselves to look completely different, perhaps to how they started, and that is really sort of fine line. Specially for somebody like myself who is providing aesthetic work, so I think I have tried to use social media really powerfully, and I am glad that has come across.

Anytime I talk about cosmetic services available or make it apparent, I have tried to really kind of make it about empowering the patient. Making them feel like if ever they were to have any work done, it would be looking a better version of themselves and I think you take that a step further once, you’ve obviously, you are sort of campaigning should attract the right people and the people that sort of match your professional ethos. It gets taken a step further when you meet these people in person, for example, you and I, Monica; I feel that we needed to be very much on the same page. Whether it was, you know, functional, dental work or anything with slightly more of a cosmetic element, we needed to be on the same page.  You spend time with somebody in a consultation appointment, really going through thoroughly what some of these ideals are. They want something that is unrealistic, or the image you know stems from an unhealthy place.

We hold the tools and the keys as health professionals to ask the right questions in these appointments, and I think the best practitioners will turn people away if they feel that perhaps somebody wants something that will impair themselves in the long term because they

will be over-treating themselves or trying to see or emulate something that they have seen on social media.

I think it is just so important to use social media to attract the right people who fit your treatment goals. You guys need to be aligned in that, and then you spend a lot of time with that patient on that journey before you even treat them before you even touch them. You want to make sure that the person is it a safe, stable place to be treated. People, I feel, have started to overanalyse themselves during lockdown. I have read things about zoom consultations with like cosmetic doctors and dermatologists, having gone up by 70% and so forth. That is fine. I do a lot of zoom consultations myself, but you have got to question people's motivations for treatment.

If they have been sat at home, in their four walls and they have got depressed, and this is precipitated marital issues or stuff like that at home, and if that is the driving force between them starting to feel insecure or wanting a change or picking up their features or wanting to look 360 different version to themselves; that is where you identify the issues. These are the people that need different sorts of assistance instead of going straight into it.

**Monica:** Thank you, Sita. Darius, what about you?

**Darius:** I feel like with the images that are portrayed in the media, and it also depends like what media you talk about, are you talking about mainstream, social media, editorial magazines; they’re all quite different. I would say social media and the images that have been presented, on the whole, I would say they probably do not like to portray in the best way for young people to have positive self-esteem. However, there are still avenues, and young people have access to find the places that give, will give them that positive self-esteem.

Recently there was an image shared of Jonah Hill, an actor who was, just like anyone shirtless on a beach and paparazzi got some photos of him and was effectively shaming him for being topless and basically saying that, oh, it is so brave for someone of his size to do that. He very, positively, and amazingly kind of clapped back at them and was like, actually no, it has taken a very long time for me to become comfortable with my body the way it is and love myself.

For many young people who are of a bigger size, like myself, it is really empowering to read. That, you can go to a beach or a pool and not have to wear a T-shirt, so I think that there are areas where it can be positive.

I feel like there are very much different standards for men and for women; for example, with that Jonah Hill scenario, it is, I guess, directly shameful, but from like one specific source. Whereas for women, it is, like, everywhere, so it seems to be everywhere based in misogyny, based in like the men around you, the women around you, just people around you will say something about your body. It is like, well, hold up; I am just learning and progressing and learning to love who I am currently. Why are you telling me that everything that I am is wrong?

I think for me personally I have been in various situations where I have been bullied for a very considerable part of my life, and a lot of that was to do around how I looked, whether that was being bigger, whether that was being black, lots of those things were very much preyed upon. Being in a time where the only representation of a black man in the media was a robber, or you would probably have like Will Smith in a film. You would have things that, when reflected onto you, are not the best stereotypes and if they are decent stereotypes, which is fine. They do not reflect who I am, so people will automatically assume that because you are black, because you are male, you have to like basketball, or you have a flirt with loads of girls and sleep with them and have children with them all over the place, which just is not me.

I think those stereotypes can also be extremely harmful because people grasp this perception of what you should be based on, what you look like, your gender, like all of these different things, which can completely warp someone’s self-esteem.

**Monica:** Thank you. Kate, I am going to actually hand over to you because I think this is the perfect point to introduce your question.

**Kate:** Thank you, Monica. Thank you both, Sita and Darius, very interesting points there.

In particular, the issues around stereotypes. Can I ask both of you, do you think that young people are able to make informed decisions when it comes to cosmetic procedures and if they are not, what do you think the influences are? Can I put that to Sita first?

**Sita:** Yeah, sure. From a consent perspective in the clinic, we really try and make sure that that is a very rigorous process from understanding what the product is, and I am sort of addressing this mainly towards facial aesthetics. This strict cut-off ages, which I adhere to.

We do not accept anybody below the age of 18. These people need to be fully aware of what they are signing up to. What the risks and benefits are, what the procedure entails, how long some of these treatments are going to last.

I make sure that I go through very, sort of, structured checklist for anybody that I am treating: whether these people actually understand the change that is going to be received, and everybody perceives a change that they go through in a very different way. Whether it is a small tweak, mild enhancement, or something significantly more, and you never really know how somebody is going to react to having a treatment until afterwards, until it has done.

Certainly not from personal experience, but I have watched videos and spoken to colleagues who have treated people, and they cannot come to terms with the result because changing something highlights problems somewhere else, perhaps on the face that they do not like. Or perhaps the underlying deficiency that they were feeling was not something cosmetic, and they thought that a cosmetic enhancement would be beneficial that would serve as a pick me up, and it has not.

This is why the consultation process is so important, and I feel a lot of the time you can consent, somebody, till the cows come home but does somebody really know what they are getting themselves into?

If they have got a mental image of a Kardashian in their mind, and afterwards if they do not feel like - they do not quite meet the standard that they set for themselves, purely because they are an individual and they are beautiful in their own right. These people are not always happy with the results of any cosmetic procedure.

If there's sort of an underlying deficiency of self-esteem, this needs to be flagged before, and I think consent is always going to be something that you try and deliver to your utmost best potential but can never really prepare somebody for having a cosmetic change that very much comes afterwards.

**Kate:** Thank you, Sita. Darius, what do you think about young people's ability to make informed decisions around cosmetic procedures?

**Darius:** I feel like Dr Sita, I think that was actually amazing, what you just said because I feel like it is the consent thing is extremely important.

I feel like it is. I guess that is it for stop-gap between them actually going to do something and it will … and it just being idea, but I feel like the actual informed decision part starts a lot earlier.

Unfortunately, with, like, lots of things, for example, with the creation of Snapchat. Snapchat, like, filters are based on plastic surgery, like facial things that can be changed, bodies, things that can be changed.

When I hear, my friends were like, no matter their gender actually. When they say, “oh my goodness, I look so much better with a Snapchat filter on”. It is actually like, “you do not”.

You look amazing as you are, but that perception that is constantly being drilled into their head will make them think, hmmm, maybe I need to get some work done because I do not look like this. Or look like these, like, people in the media. It is completely fine that we do not look like these people because we are all different.

I think, the actual ability to, I guess, make those informed decisions, I believe, starts a lot earlier, and I think if from like various perspectives. From a home perspective, the people that you are living with, if they are not reinforcing how amazing and beautiful you are, just as you are, not with any changes or tweaks or anything. I think that has a big impact in the same way that the people who you surround yourself with, like your friends, people you go to school with, all of those kinds of things; all inform what you look like or what you perceive that you want to look like.

Another thing with certain cosmetic procedures really link in with the idea of cultural appropriation because the enjoyment of certain body parts or certain extensions of body parts that are typically deemed with a certain people group, i.e., the Brazilian bum lift, which was named after those people who have the, you know, bigger bums, was created from that.

Well, actually, you do not need to look like another race or another how a race is structured like physically in their body. You do not need to look like that to fit society's ideals of perfection because you already are perfect. You already are amazing. The ability to make that decision has become a lot harder, specifically with the conception of different things on social media.

**Kate:** Thank you, Darius, really interesting. Can I ask Nesreen, can I bring in the OAC facilitators?

**Nesreen:** Can I just link it to something I have just done today for my son. The school sent me a consent form for swab for COVID. Oh my God, it has been a very long one and repeated question just for me to say yes about something that I am happy for him to have. While for this consent forms, it short, very short. It does not give you the full information.

It may say, for example, (like back to my medical background): this may cause perforation or bleeding or tear but does not give you the details about it. At this age, you would think, “Oh, but that is a very rare side effect or a very rare complication, so no, it will not happen to me”*.*

I think the consent form is not really informative as it should be, and for this age, it is really difficult to make a decision and informative decision based on this consent form. Have like a psychological support before doing this. Like for example, in transgender, they have psychological sessions for how many months. Just to make sure that it is what they want, and I think the same should be for cosmetic surgery.

**Kate:** Thank you, Nesreen, that is really interesting. Dot, do you have any thoughts around making informed decisions and the influences on young people?

**Dot:** Thanks, Kate. I think for me, informed consent is not just about understanding what goes into the procedure, what the procedure entails, and what the consequences of that might be in the longer term, and the harms, etc. For me can informed consent also include a person’s understanding of where this desire to have cosmetic surgery is coming from.

I think for me, that is also a part of informed consent, is really having that understanding of why is it that I would like to have this procedure? Where is that desire? Where is my desire to have this procedure really coming from and really understanding whether it is societal pressures, perhaps mixed with low self-esteem. Maybe there is, feeling like you are having to compare to people on social media.For me, that kind of comes into informed consent as well as really understanding where that needs or desire to have the procedure is coming from.

**Kate:** Thank you, Dot. Now go back to Darius and ask how can we support young people in the choices that they make so that we can minimise the harm that they experience?

**Darius:** I think intentionally listening to them, as I mentioned earlier, I was bullied throughout almost all of school. So, from age 7 to age 15, I was bullied for pretty much anything you could think of, like racial stuff, and because I did not look a certain way, did not act a certain way; just bullied throughout, through and through.

What made it worse is teachers just did not listen to me at all. There was an incident where I was being bullied in a class, maybe in arm’s length away from the teacher of the class, and even though she was in earshot, everything happening. I was not believed, and if there was not a TA in the room who just so happened to know me. I would have been in trouble because, what, all that was seen was me getting upset after forty minutes of consistent bullying that was happening in her classroom, yet she chose to ignore it.

Intently listening to what young people are saying, not just listening to if they say, oh, I want to change this on my body. Actually, listening to - you know what is deeper in there? If they are saying that, like why do you want to change that? Where has it stemmed from, as Dot said earlier. Is it because of something that someone said to you? Is it because of what you are seeing? Is it because of the people you are surrounding yourselves with?

I feel like all of those things are deeply involved. If I put myself in that position if teachers would have listened to me and would have like genuinely taken me for me, saying these people are laughing at me because they believe I am fat. I would tell them that, and they are like, “Oh no, just ignore them”. You can only ignore someone saying something like that every single day for a very short period of time.

It is very difficult to ignore something like that, and I feel like it is the same with body image.

If people are constantly saying stuff like that, and you try and inform someone, and they just dismiss it. It makes it even worse, so I feel like just intently listening to young people is definitely one of the most important things.

**Kate:** That's wonderful, thank you, and that really feeds into the question we were discussing previously around making informed decisions. The kind of factors that influence young people with things in their history or their experiences that might lead them to a certain point where they do want to have cosmetic procedures and to change themselves, feel that they need to change themselves.

Sita, can I ask the same question of you in terms of how we can support young people in the choices that they make and so that we can really minimise harm as much as possible?

**Sita:** Sure, yes, and I would like to agree very much with some of the other points that have been raised about consent obviously being much wider than just touching on risks and benefits of the procedure itself. Certainly, driving home on this point even further. We can ask the right consultation questions and really find out from these young people why they want to change? What the inspiration is behind some of these decisions. Give them time,

so, I think presenting the information in different ways, whether it is written, and they have got time to go away and think about it, whether they just have a bit of a cooling-off period after the consultation altogether. I think there is a lot of things that practitioners can do to put in place to make sure that, particularly if it is somebody younger, somebody that has never had treatment before, that extra measures are put into place before any treatment is carried out.

I myself use a questionnaire that I give to some of my younger clients to gauge any elements of body dysmorphia. We are just so unaware of how much of that is prevalent in the community, and so people in this tender ages. I think you have just got to go through these more rigorous sort of process is with them before they have treatment, and asking those questions is absolutely key.

I mean, I know there is a lot of practitioners out there who really incentivise their treatments. Almost like buy one and get one-half price or buy six and get your 7th syringe of filler a little bit cheaper. I mean I think it is absolutely disgraceful and this will particularly appeal to the youngsters. Who perhaps are bit strapped for cash, saving for higher education or whatever it is. These are the people that are going to be perhaps a little bit more susceptible to going for these offers, and this encourages you know not to go for treatment that is right of them or something that's sort of recommended on consultation by a professional. But, very much to do with profit margin. I think it is just so sad if that is the kind of person you end up going to to have your treatment from.

Anybody young listening to this I would strongly advise to make sure that you do not just go to somebody who is necessarily, “you are doing a good deal”, but really make sure that you pick somebody that you feel is right for your journey of treatment.

If they are quick to treat you in the same appointment as your consultation or sometimes like before we even sat down, there, like, ready to inject your lips or whatever it is you are having done. Those kinds of people are really just in it for one thing and do not necessarily care about you or your welfare, so I think that is a huge thing. There are the young people of the population that we need to be most aware of that they need to be protected most of all.

**Kate:** Thank you, Sita. Yes, that is very worrying that something which could have potential for damage down the line, is something driven so much by a commercial kind of experience or driven by desire to make money regardless of the impact on that young person.

**Sita:** Absolutely.

**Kate:**  Can I ask Dot if you have any thoughts around how we might support young people in the choices that they make to ensure that the harm is minimised as much as possible?

**Dot:** Yeah again, just reinforcing this point. I think really using social media or different avenues to help young people to really understand where these pressures are coming from.

I think once they have that knowledge, that understanding of where these pressures are coming from, they will feel more empowered to make decisions and make more informed decisions. Really just helping them to build their self-esteem as well so that they can feel confident in their bodies, and perhaps not actually feel like they need to change them, particularly at such a young age.

**Kate:** Thanks, Dot. Nesreen, did you have any thoughts on supporting young people?

**Nesreen:** Yeah, well, I have got this example in front of my eyes that keep hitting me. I cannot remember the names; I am very bad with names. This model with Vitiligo, and she just does this social media, and she does not care. She is a famous model now, and she has got all this changing colour on her body. She always talks about her story that she has been bullied when she was young, but now she is famous, earning a lot of money.

I think it is these people that we need. From them - to talk more about their experience and that yes, I look so different from others, but I am still me, and I am still proud of me. This feeling that I am me, and I am proud of me, is so difficult to get. Especially with the young age and especially if they come from conflict background, family or whatever other factors that are helping and supporting this low self-esteem.

Yeah, with social media, we need to talk more about these positive images and these positive ambassadors that can really encourage young people.

**Kate:** Thanks, Nesreen, that is fantastic, and that really ties back into some to be points we were discussing earlier that are positive impacts of social media on body image. I am going to hand back now to Monica for the final question.

**Monica:** this question is more about steps that we can take forward and how we can use our own social media. Sita, I am going to first hand this question to you because I think you have actually touched on it quite beautifully, like the tips that you would give to someone that is looking at going through a procedure or just trying to get to know their body better. In what ways can we use social media so this could be imagery or terminology to promote positive body image and self-confidence?

**Sita:** Thank you so much, and I recently posted on social media about this because I regularly post a combination of materials to do with dentistry and both facial aesthetics. Particularly for the aesthetic treatments available, I think my main, sort of, take-home message to anybody finding a clinician out there is - you have just got to find a clinician who cares.

This again is coming back to perhaps something a little bit repetitive, but really just finding somebody that spends time on the consultation. I mean, I would like to think that even you and I, even though we were discussing largely, sort of dental treatment with yourself. I like to think that you felt very heard in your consultation, and we spent a good amount of time together, and it was very much a patient led experience for you.

I am the operator at the end of the day. I am just, sort of, the person doing the work but all the decision making and aims and objectives of the treatment; I very much like to be patient-led, of course, with my input and guidance. But certainly, somebody that is big on the consultation from start to finish—finding out about you as a person and trying to implement anything specific into the treatment journey. I think that is really important.

Look out for the sort of cardinal signals on somebody's Instagram if they are promoting deals and offers for syringes of filler. Trying to get you to have more than what might be right for you, I think that is a massive red flag. I would avoid those people at all costs, even though it might look more affordable than somebody else. That is not somebody that cares.

If you look at perhaps some of these clinicians’ past work, you want to see that their treatment is very much in line with, perhaps, something that you want to go for. I am very much about natural enhancement, keeping it very minimalistic but looking the best version of yourself. If as long as their, sort of, motives for treatment are very much in line with somebody that is healthy and happy and, sort of, is not suffering any other ways and they do not want to change the way, they look because they are embarrassed of who they are.

They, you know, just want certain tweaks and improvements to be the best-looking version of themselves. I think that is a huge thing that you need to look for and make sure that you find somebody that is in line with the kind of enhancement that you want.

I think people should also ask how many people, not just somebody injects, but actually how many people their clinician is turning away. So, you find out a lot about a person based on people that they refuse treatment too. I mean, I know myself that I have turned many people away, such as people that I feel I cannot satisfy, I cannot address their needs. If I feel they are after over-correction or overtreatment, or if I feel aesthetic treatment is not the first port of call and is not what they require at all. Just looking at these sorts of five things in somebody, I think you can get a lot from somebody's social media, and these are the things that are going to set up a very healthy patient journey if you require any treatment.

**Monica:** Thank you, Sita. Darius, what about you?

**Darius:** I started a blog when I was twelve called ‘Victory for you’. It still exists. It still runs.

It is what I kind of promote myself under, and it is all about, similarly to Dr Sita, is encouraging young people to be the best version of themselves because I just believe that, just the best version of who you are. We all have the ability to be able to get to that person, but the thing is that person does not look any different to how you look now, and that person does not necessarily act any different to the person that you are now. That person is you.

It is just you finding yourself and being more comfortable and confident within who you are. That could mean that you know you can cry, and that is fine. You can have an off day, and that is completely fine. Or you have a day where you are exercising and a day where you are just not; you are just eating food, and that is completely fine.

I feel like me personally coming from a background that involves lots of fashion, attending London Fashion Week and all these different places. Imagery on social media: the diversity within that imagery, whether that's body diversity, gender diversity, racial diversity. The whole thing is so important because when you see yourself, especially as a young person, you kind of see it, and you are like, “oh OK; so, if this person can do it, so can I”, which speaks volumes. It really, really does, and Nesreen, the model that you were referring to earlier, her name is Winnie Harlow.

She is one of my favourite models out there because even when she has makeup looks done, or makeup put onto her face; she makes sure that the makeup artist does not completely cover up her Vitiligo that she has in her eyes or on her face. She wants to make it look exactly how it looks, just with the addition of makeup. Just so it is fine for the camera, and I feel like us continuing to do that on our personal platforms. Whether it is sharing our own personal like body image journeys if you feel comfortable to do so. Or sharing images of other people who do not necessarily look like what society deems as the norm.

There is an amazing Instagram account called ‘Models of diversity’. They feature models from all different walks of life.

They can be disabled models. They can have Down’s syndrome. They can be black, white, Asian; it does not matter; they genuinely promote them all. I think it is absolutely amazing. They can be bigger or smaller. I feel like that there is a change.   There is a shift that is happening. Recently on the cover of UK Glamour, they did an issue where they had, I think it was like nine different women who have different body types, different lifestyles, different races, and it was phenomenal.

It is one of the best Glamour covers I have ever seen. You saw disabled women just existing. Just slaying everything, and I think it is important to also realise that people who are different from you, it does not mean that they are any less beautiful or any less attractive, or any less of anything. They are still exactly as we all are. Like, just because someone is blind or disabled or bigger or transgender or anything like that. It does not lessen who they are. It does not lessen, like. how we should perceive them.

It is just you should love them and respect them and lift them up in the same way that you would do someone who is not that. I feel like specifically with body image, when we continue to show other people what other people look like, what we look like. Obviously, if you feel comfortable enough to do so. I feel like it really does empower people.

Specifically, now, as this is Endometriosis Awareness month, there are so many people who deal with Endometriosis, and they may look absolutely amazing. Their body image may be absolutely amazing of what the world perceives them to be. But they are still struggling. It is also important to talk about your mental health and talk about all of these things because they interact with each other, interact with each other, and affect your self-confidence and your self-esteem.

I feel like that more holistic approach of social media, not just being about the image being about the person, being about the mental health, is so important. I feel like it can really help everyone collectively to step in the right kind of direction to where social media does become a more loving and amazing place.

**Monica:** Thank you. Nesreen, what about you?

**Nesreen:** Oh, I like what you have just said, Darius. I know about it because my son has got Down’s syndrome, so I know all about it, and you have these models with artificial leg or artificial arm, and it is really amazing, and you covered most of the points.

I totally agree with you, but that is in a perfect world, in our dream world that will be that you like that person as a whole and as you mentioned, Endometriosis is really good because inside the woman really suffers. As a doctor, I know it is really hard, but from outside, she is just wonderful. She has got all the makeup, and her image is amazing, but again, I am with you that it is changing now.

Few years ago, I would open Facebook or social media, whatever, and you will see all these glamorous women or men, and you know they like an advocate for the glamorous look.

Now, as this model, sorry, I am bad with names that you mentioned and everyone else, it is more and more advertised on social media that like that we are part of the community.

We are exactly the same. We may look different, but we are the same. We have the same rights. We have the same hopes. We have the same dreams, same as everyone. My look does not judge me, does not identify me. This is increasing, and this is the positive part of social media, but still, we have the negative part.

I mean, Sita, you are doing your job, amazing, as you are saying it. You are talking about it; you are an honest person.

The issue is with the other people who are in the industry of cosmetic surgery. I would not say most, but some of the times it is a wrong decision to change how you look, but still, it is a big industry with big money, so there is a lot of political things behind it. It is not just a simple decision that should be an informed decision.

There is a lot behind it, if I may compare it to tobacco. For example, you have on the packet of cigarettes you have the signs that is dangerous for your health, and sometimes you have a picture of bad lungs or bad heart or whatever, and still, people will consume it because it is still in the market.

The same with cosmetic surgery, it is still in the market, and people who perform this, will continue, advocate for it. It is our role, I think, to advocate against it, not because we refuse all surgical procedures. There are some that are in need. There are some that really help.

We have babies with cleft lip, for example, that they do really need it sometimes to correct it. It is not to be used as the fashion or the trend. The trend now is fuller lips; in two years’ time, it will be thin lips, “so I am going to change that”; this is just a simple example.

I think we need more and more advocacy. More of people like this model, people like us who are really passionate about making people informed and looking as Dot said - looking at their mental health, why did they choose this from the start?  It is not waiting until the action is done. As I said, you need psychological sessions to make sure that this young person, even older person, really needs this and really is 100% sure that they need this, and it will help them mentally or physically.

**Monica:** Dot, over to you.

**Dot:** One of my tips for, kind of, using social media to promote body image and self-confidence - a personal tip would be change your feed so we can control to an extent what we see on a platform like Instagram.

So, follow body positive accounts, follow accounts that make you feel good, that have really positive messages and also exercise your critical thinking on platforms like Instagram even I follow a lot of wellness accounts.

I do yoga, but sometimes even when I am looking at yoga accounts, I think, are these really promoting diversity, for example, are they really realistic? Often, you will see wellness accounts, quite slim white woman doing a very unrealistic yoga pose.

Being really, really critical when we are on social media is important, and I hope that over time, and I am seeing this more. I hope that social media can be used more to kind of emphasise key messages. Like the fact that somebody's value or self-worth is not determined by how they look. I hope that we can start to see a shift from or kind of, I hope, that we can start to redefine our idea of beauty as being purely based on how you look. Yeah, if we could see a bit of a shift from looking at beauty purely physically.

**Monica:** Thank you, Dot and just a big, massive shout out to our speakers, Sita and Darius.

I think it has just been such an interesting conversation to see it from both a professional background and through personal, through life journey and how social media does have a role in the way we are going, I think, will always continue to have a role and what I have taken on board is that we really need to listen and not just say we are listening.

There needs to be active listening; we need to really ensure there is consent, and people are making changes because it is something they want to do and not feel the pressure to do so. I do think there does need to be a change across social media with that, and I think Dot you have touched on that, about who you are following.

Thank you, Sita and Darius. Nesreen and Dot, for your expertise. Kate, is there anything that you would want to add at this point?

**Kate:** No, I do not think so. I think we have had a really, really good range of discussions here and a good range of viewpoints, so I do not have anything to add.

**Sita:** Thank you so much.

**Darius:** Thank you so much for having us on.

**Monica:** Thanks for listening! All the resources discussed in this podcast will be listed in the description.

**Kate:** If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with others and post about it on social media. Keep an ear out for our other podcasts. Until then stay safe, join the conversation and help us protect women and girls.