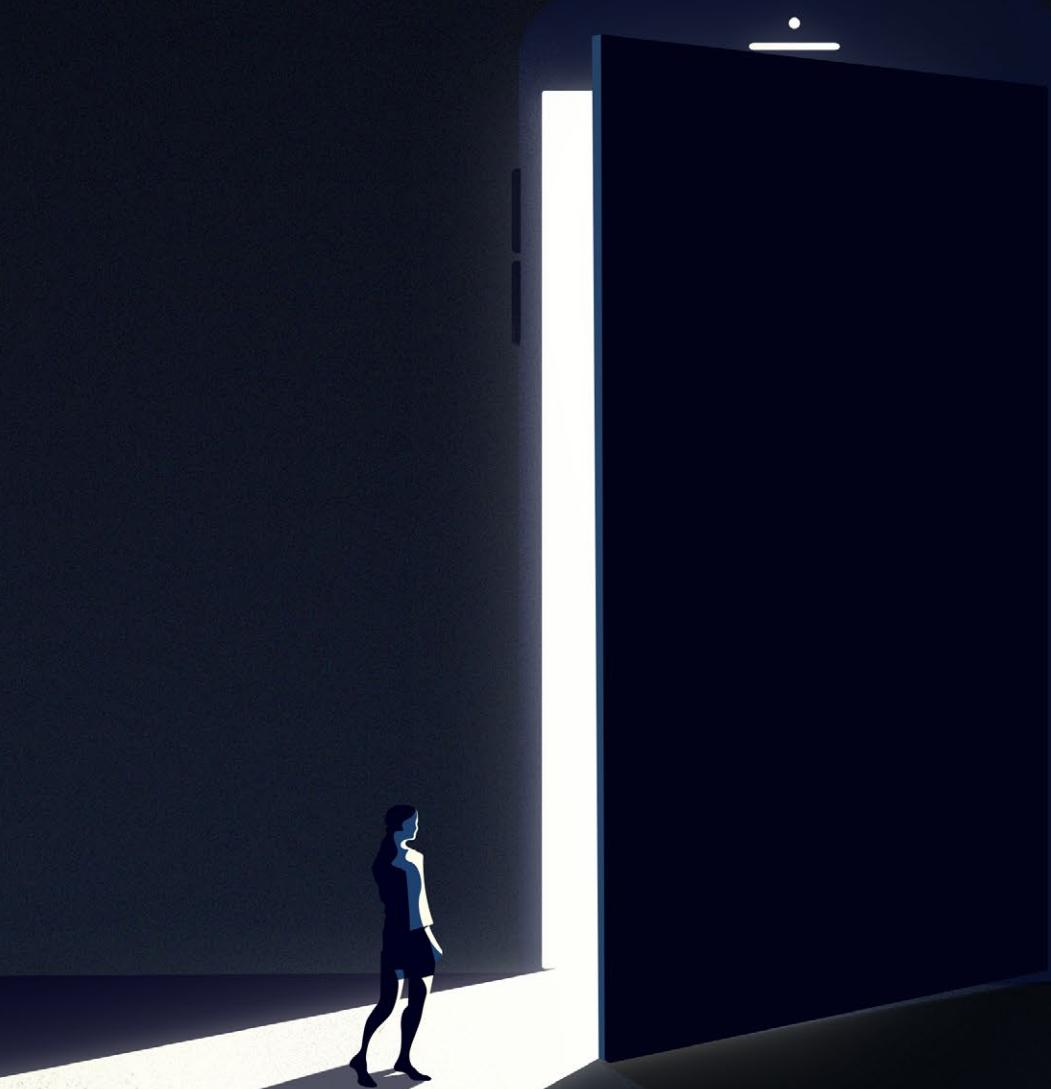


NSR

New Society Rules | A We Are Pi Publication



The Opening Issue

A guide to a new generation of culture. This publication is brought to you by We Are Pi, an Amsterdam-based ideas company. Get in touch with alex@wearepi.com

This is the first edition of an ongoing report into society's changing cultural rules. It's intended for any curious mind who, like us, is trying to figure out where the world is heading.

At the time of writing the world is deep in the midst of a coronavirus quarantine. For those of us fortunate enough to be in good health and have roofs over our heads, this has become an unexpected, enforced period of reflection.

Behind us lies one of the most chaotic periods in living memory. A decade where it felt like everything we knew about the world got turned upside down. One where the internet started to reach its full disruptive potential, where we met a new political landscape we weren't prepared for, and where it often felt like we forgot how to be good to each other.

This future is uncertain but our findings are full of a realistic optimism on where we're headed. That's because they're built from deep conversations with

people that are truly living, and driving, the most important social changes we're heading through.

Taking a moment to listen to what these people have to say has given us a wider and deeper perspective on a period of significant cultural change. It's also helped us see beyond the doomsday headlines that seem to constantly be telling us everything is getting worse.

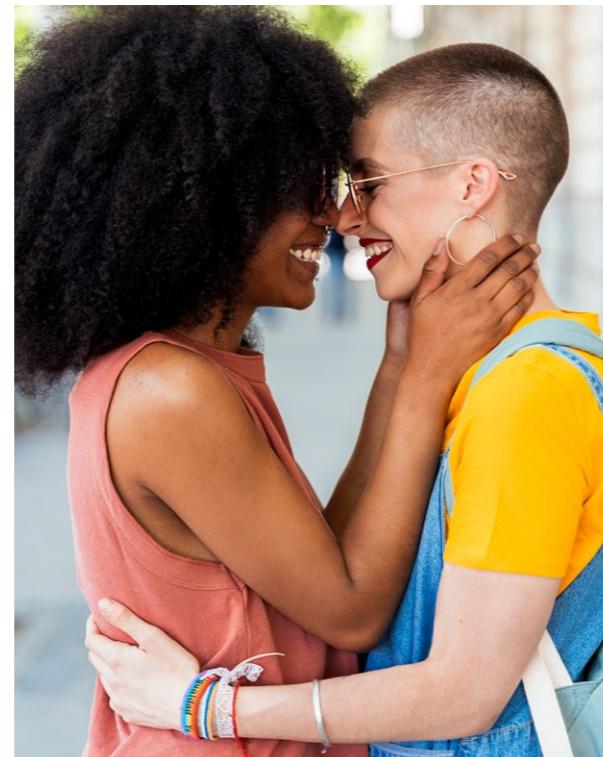
As the world goes on a temporary pause, and we all reflect for a moment on where we're going, we hope you're equally inspired by the conversations in the following pages.

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How Friendship And Romance Are Changing In The Digital Age

If you just listened to the news you might think human relationships are in a hopeless state. Today's headlines report a world where romance is dead and everyone is too transfixed by their screen to truly connect with others.

But the truth of where we're at is actually much richer, and while not perfect, significantly more hopeful. While there are legitimate reports of high rates of loneliness among a significant minority, there are also signs that our friendships are becoming more intimate. Sociologists are reporting that friendship has now reached a significance once only reserved for family.

This makes sense when we understand that while time spent online will never replace face-to-face contact, it can meaningfully supplement it. We all might want to reflect on the statistic that half of kids today have made friends online they feel they wouldn't have made offline. This generation is not only hanging out in person but is also constantly chatting in Whatsapp groups, bonding in video games and sharing their lives

together on social media feeds. It's leading to deeper friendships that are central to their lives.

This is also a generation that is investing more time in their romantic lives than ever before. While this new dating scene lacks some of the sense of serendipity of the old one, it is full of an idealistic commitment to finding a true connection and escaping the peak divorce rates of the boomer generation before them.

However, in both their platonic and romantic relationships, young people are having to navigate a fast changing set of rules and a new set of pitfalls. You might get frowned at for hitting on people at bars, so you'd better get your online banter up to par. You've got plenty of chances to find friends in Fortnite, but you need to know how to do it in a non-cringe worthy way.

It's a new landscape of friendship and romance. One in which the digital and real worlds are truly intertwined, and it has a whole new set of rules.

Relationships 2.0

By The Numbers

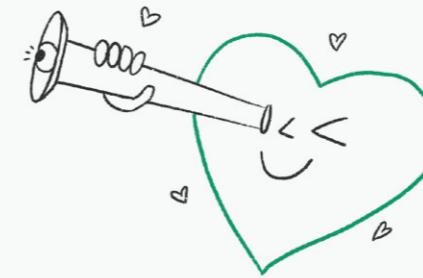
Friendship and romance are changing in the digital age. The Internet is helping people spend more time looking for love, and it's also making friendships tighter.



10 hrs

The average time single millennials spend on dating apps per week.

Badoo Dating App Survey 2018



67%

The percentage of young people who feel isolated if they couldn't talk to their friends via technology.

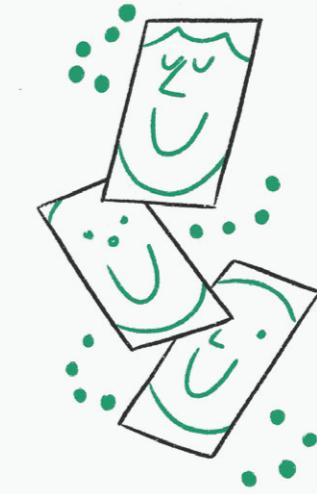
U.K. Safer Internet Centre 2018



65%

The percentage of Gen Z and millennials who are using apps to find a steady relationship, not one night stands.

Protein Dating Trends 2020



50%

The percentage of Gen Z who say social media blends together with other ways they interact with friends.

U.K. Safer Internet Centre 2018

How To Make Friends Online

We sat down with Bumble BFF user *Kristina Baptiste* to talk about the etiquette of meeting new friends online, the stigma still attached to it, and why platonic dates often feel more intimate than romantic ones.



Kristina Baptiste first tried Bumble BFF (Bumble For Friends) when she moved to Austin, Texas. The process of making friends in a new city was more difficult than Kristina anticipated, and she found herself trying all sorts of ways to meet new people. The idea of swiping for friendship on an app was new territory for her, but she ended up giving it a shot and meeting her best friend on it.

Kristina, as someone who has used dating apps for both romantic and platonic relationships, how are the two experiences different?

I feel like a lot of the conversations on first [romantic] dates are not impersonal but, you know, very top level. It gets kind of stale. Even though not all my Bumble BFF friendships worked out, the conversations were a lot more freeing. With [romantic] dating it can be as casual as

“People want to believe that meeting in person is the ‘natural’ way of starting relationships, but I don’t believe that.”

a one night stand. With friendships it’s a little more intentional, so it’s a lot more intimate.

What was it about your friendship dates that felt more intimate than your romantic ones?

The biggest indicator of this for me was that everyone I met was in some sort of transition. Whether it was a move, or they were graduating, or maybe they broke up with their partner. Everyone had something that was a catapult to why they were on there.

I think explaining that transition also makes people a lot more vulnerable. Usually on dating apps people will project the best versions of

themselves. But on friendship apps it’s a lot more about, ‘hey this is my situation and I want someone who’s going to be there for me and wants to have a good time.’ So it’s intimate in the sense that, you learn more about someone’s background other than just how many siblings they have.

You met your best friend, on Bumble BFF. Have you been candid with people about how you two met?

I don’t think I ever introduced her as my ‘Bumble friend,’ but by the time we became best friends we definitely were loud and proud that we met on Bumble BFF. We thought it was really fun because no one that we knew in our lives had ever done anything like that. There wasn’t any judgement about our friendship from family or friends per se, it was more just that people were curious about it. I was pretty simple with explaining it, I’d just say that it’s basically Tinder for friendship.

Is there a stigma attached to finding friends online?

Yeah. It’s almost like something is a bit wrong with you if you can’t just find friends on your own. I just think most people aren’t comfortable with change, and this is a whole new way of socializing. It was the same when dating apps first came out. People would be like, ‘oh you’re online dating and you’re 22, that’s so weird.’ But now dating has been so revolutionized by these apps. People want to believe that meeting in person is the ‘natural’ way of starting relationships, but I don’t believe that.

Do you think apps could revolutionize friendship like they have dating?

I feel like right now a lot of people hangout with friends who mirror their ideas and outlooks because they’re not comfortable with branching out. I think people would be a little more open and put themselves out there more if these apps became more normalized. People are there with dating now, but that’s only because what we’ve been through over the last 10 years has opened them up to it. For some reason dating apps broke first,



Kristina Baptiste met her best friend Dree, on Bumble BFF.

and we’ve obviously gotten to a really interesting place. I’m pretty sure friendships are going to be on that same path in the next 4 to 5 years.

What are some of the do’s and don’ts of swiping for friendship you learned while using Bumble BFF?

Do be transparent in what you’re looking to get out of the friendship.

Do make sure you get specific when making your profile. You want to make sure your personality comes through.

Do be open to meeting all types of people.

Don’t make your profile too over the top a.k.a. don’t write a novel in your bio.

Don’t take the process too personally. Just like dating it’s hard to put yourself out there.

Don’t expect to become friends the second you match, or after the first time you hang out. Friendship requires effort on both ends.

Love and Algorithms

We talked to *Scott Valdez*, the founder of an online dating consultancy, about finding love in a world of calculated algorithms, the hyper-competition of meeting people online, and the high expectations it creates.



Scott Valdez founded Vida Select in 2009 as a 'done-for-you' online dating & profile writing service. He launched it three years before Tinder came out, and right as the online dating scene was first beginning to take off. Fast forward to today, and dozens of similar services have sprouted up across the US and Europe. Each promising to help make the online dating process easier and more successful for single people.

Scott, your company is all about helping people find love online. Why do you think people feel like they need professional help?

Getting in touch with today's dating scene requires a large learning curve. As online dating has become less stigmatized and more mainstream, it's also become more competitive. The more seriously that people take it, the more effort they put into it and the more time they put into their profile, their pictures, and the amount of hours they put in per week. For a lot of our clients who are recently out of a long relationship, they don't want to deal with the frustration of figuring out that learning curve themselves. They don't want to have to be experts at online dating, they just want to meet the right person.

How has online dating changed the modern dating landscape?

I think people now, because they have such an abundance of options, have become more check-list driven. They are more stringent about certain criteria than ever before, so they end up making decisions online that they wouldn't necessarily make in person. Online, if you're a year older or an inch shorter than someone would like, you instantly get weeded out. It doesn't happen like that in person. But now that you can access hundreds, if not thousands, of local potential matches, you have buyers remorse the instant you meet someone that you like. So people have become really selective online and in person. Whether or not that's a good thing or bad thing, it's

hard to say. It has certainly made dating more difficult.

Has this impacted the way we meet people in real life?

One interesting shift that we've seen, is that it's now less common for men to approach women, or vice versa, in real life. We have become so comfortable with swiping, that the idea of leaping out of that comfort zone to actually approach someone scares us. Why do that when you can just sit there, swipe, have a match, and not have to take any risk to your ego?

A lot of people have referred to the services Vida Select offers its clients as 'outsourcing' dating. Is that a fair assessment?

I don't have a problem with the term itself. Hiring someone to do your love-search for you is a form of outsourcing. We are living in a really competitive time and age. We have to be efficient in all areas of our lives to be effective. I don't know that any people said at any point they wanted a more 'efficient' dating market. I think the market just delivered what people needed because of their current realities.

What does this mean for romance? Is it alive, dead, somewhere in-between?

I think in a way we are losing touch with romantic everyday encounters. The reality is that because of these check lists we are often foregoing the opportunity to meet someone amazing. When we are online, we tend to focus on more superficial attributes that don't have any correlation with compatibility. One of the ways that we help our clients is to get a better perspective on what is really important to them in a long term relationship. Is being one inch shorter really a deal breaker? Or maybe, is it more important that they share certain values with you?

"Online, if you're a year older or an inch shorter than someone would like, you instantly get weeded out. It doesn't happen like that in person."





Hinge has become the go-to app for relationship-seekers.

“I do think there will be a point where these algorithms are strong enough to predict who is going to be a long term fit.”

Do you think companies like Vida Select are making the world a more or less romantic place?

The drive for efficiency in dating is something that I believe was inevitably going to happen, and I don't think it's taken the romance out of dating. I think that today the romantic part just starts a little bit later than it did 10 years ago. Maybe it's not as romantic to meet someone amazing on Hinge, but I don't think that the romance has dissipated. I think it's just a desire for more efficiency to find that one person. Once you find that one person, that's when the romance begins.

Where do you think the future of online dating is headed?

Tinder is what brought online dating into the mainstream around the world, but I think that as the dating market matures we are going to see a shift away from gamification. I think it was necessary to

plant the seed of mass adoption, but there's going to be movement towards more sophisticated dating applications than 'swipe-swipe-swipe'. At the end of the day, dating is an information game. In the future we are going to see people taking this more seriously than they do today.

How sophisticated do you think we'll take it?

I do think there will be a point where these algorithms are strong enough to predict who is going to be a long term fit. Where dating platforms are given enough faith by users that the suggestion for two people to meet will be enough, and they won't even have to send a witty line to one another. It's very possible that my children will have a dating platform that they sign up for, and that they will meet each person that it recommends. I think that is the future. But I don't think that's in the next 5-10 years. I'd probably put that in the 10-20 range.

Introduction

How We're Making It More Accepted
To Flaunt What We've Got

By The Numbers

A Closer Look At The Sex And
Body Positivity Movements

Interview One

Taking The Shame Out Of Sex
With Two Online Sex Educators

Interview Two

Broadening Beauty With A
Modern Fashion Photographer



How We're Making It More Accepted To Flaunt What We've Got

Why are we all still so ashamed of our bodies? It turns out the vast majority of us don't like the skin we live in, and would be mortified to share an unfiltered view of what our bodies are really like.

At first glance, it may seem that the digital world isn't doing too much to help us feel more open; it's created a wave of artificially distorted images that only make most of us feel more ill at ease. However, alongside all the Instagram perfect imagery there are some important changes happening in how we look at and talk about our bodies.

A series of related movements are lifting the shame and helping us feel more at peace with the skin we live in. They are united under the banner of 'positivity'. Positivity about the way we look,

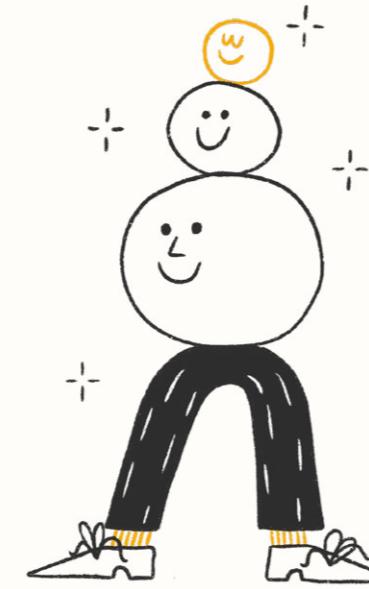
the way we have sex, and all the conditions and quirks that come with it. This positivity isn't just about having a sunny demeanor, it's about policing the things in society that make us feel ashamed of our bodies. So as Lizzo's soundtrack of self love resonates globally, Victoria's Secret and its impossible standards are being shut down.

This new wave of positivity has a big fight on its hands, but it's already put the beauty and fashion industries into a spin, forcing them to reassess what forms of beauty they promote. It's also put pressure on society and social media to rethink our relationship to sex and to bring important conversations out of the shadows.

The No Shame Game

By The Numbers

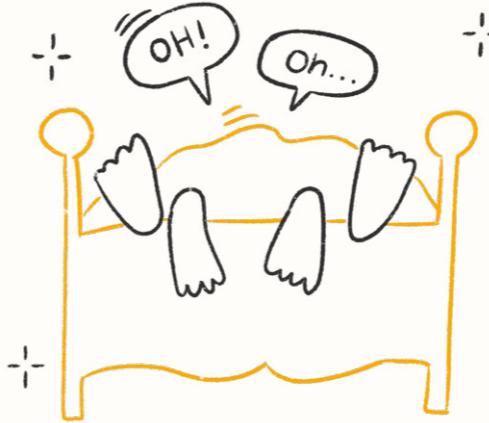
The body positivity movement is growing fast. It wants to make us more happy with our bodies and more satisfied with our sex lives.



16^m

The number of posts tagged #bodypositivity and #bodypositive on Instagram (and counting).

Instagram, 2020



37%

The percentage of straight women who don't orgasm during sex, compared to 10% of straight men.

The Guardian, 2018



4%

The percentage of women around the world who consider themselves beautiful.

The Real Truth About Beauty,
Dove Self Esteem Report



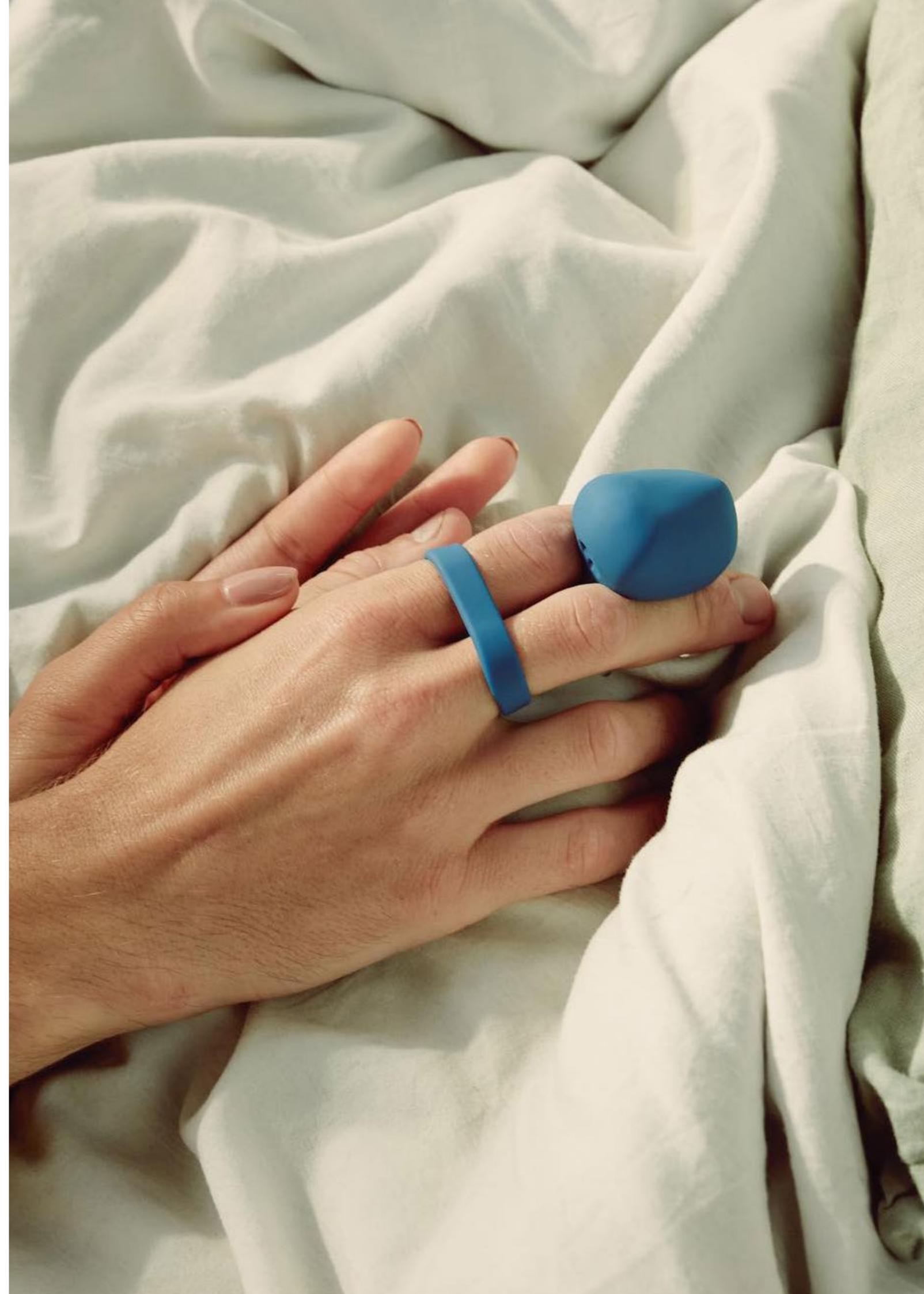
57%

The percentage of Gen Z who feel self-conscious about their body.

U.K., Mental Health Foundation, 2019

Taking The Shame Out Of Sex

We sat down with sex educators *Laureen HD* and *Zoë Ligon* to talk about living openly with STIs, how the #MeToo movement has opened conversations around sex, and why online censorship is holding back our ability to progress on sex education.



Zoë Ligon is a self-taught sex educator and the owner of Spectrum Boutique, a sex-positive online store for people of all identities and curiosities. The self-proclaimed “Dildo Dutchess” is championing the power of pleasure and de-stigmatizing sexual experimentation through her store and Instagram handle @thongria.

Laureen HD is also a self-taught sex educator with a YouTube channel that aims to de-stigmatize and demystify what it is like to live with Herpes. She has helped thousands navigate their own diagnoses, and is helping to fill the STI education gap that exists today. You can find her on YouTube via her channel Laureen HD, or on Instagram @laureenhd.

How did you each find yourselves in the space of sex education?

Zoë: I fell in love with the sex toy world because they were things that I had previously been afraid of; things I felt like I had been kind of programmed to be afraid of. Like the idea that lube is for menopausal women or people who are broken in some way. I grew up with sex education, but was still under the impression that this is the way things were until I was in my twenties. So I thought other people would benefit by me telling my personal story.

Laureen: For me, I think it was more out of need. I found myself in the situation of having to live with a virus [HSV-2] that I didn't consciously choose to live with, and I was in need of tools to process what this meant for my future and for me as a person. I felt very alone trying to figure out all these answers, so I decided to vlog about it. I think most of the time it's just for people to see that a person with Herpes looks normal. There's a big story attached to Herpes. Showing people that I don't look like that stereotype goes such a long way in helping them feel 'normal.'

Why do you think we as a society still find it so difficult to talk about sex and sexual health openly?

Laureen: People are more comfortable having sex than talking about sex. People are not comfortable talking about their barriers and preferences. They just hope that their body language will be perceived the way they mean it. To me, the overall acceptance of sex is to really internalize that your sexuality is all on you, and that there is no one norm. It's on you to figure it out on who you're attracted to, what type of relationship fulfils you and what type of relationship makes you feel unsatisfied. We can't do that if we haven't explored what our body likes or responds to.

Zoë: Exactly. A lot of us haven't been raised to challenge our sexuality and pleasure because we've just had a social script handed to us that we can so easily follow.

As sex educators, how have you seen the conversations around sex evolve since you first started?

Zoë: When I first started six or seven years ago, the questions I was getting were, ‘How do I get into butt stuff? How do I have an orgasm?’ It's not that those questions aren't still there and happening, but now it's also, ‘How do I continue to have a pleasurable sex life with all this trauma I'm processing?’

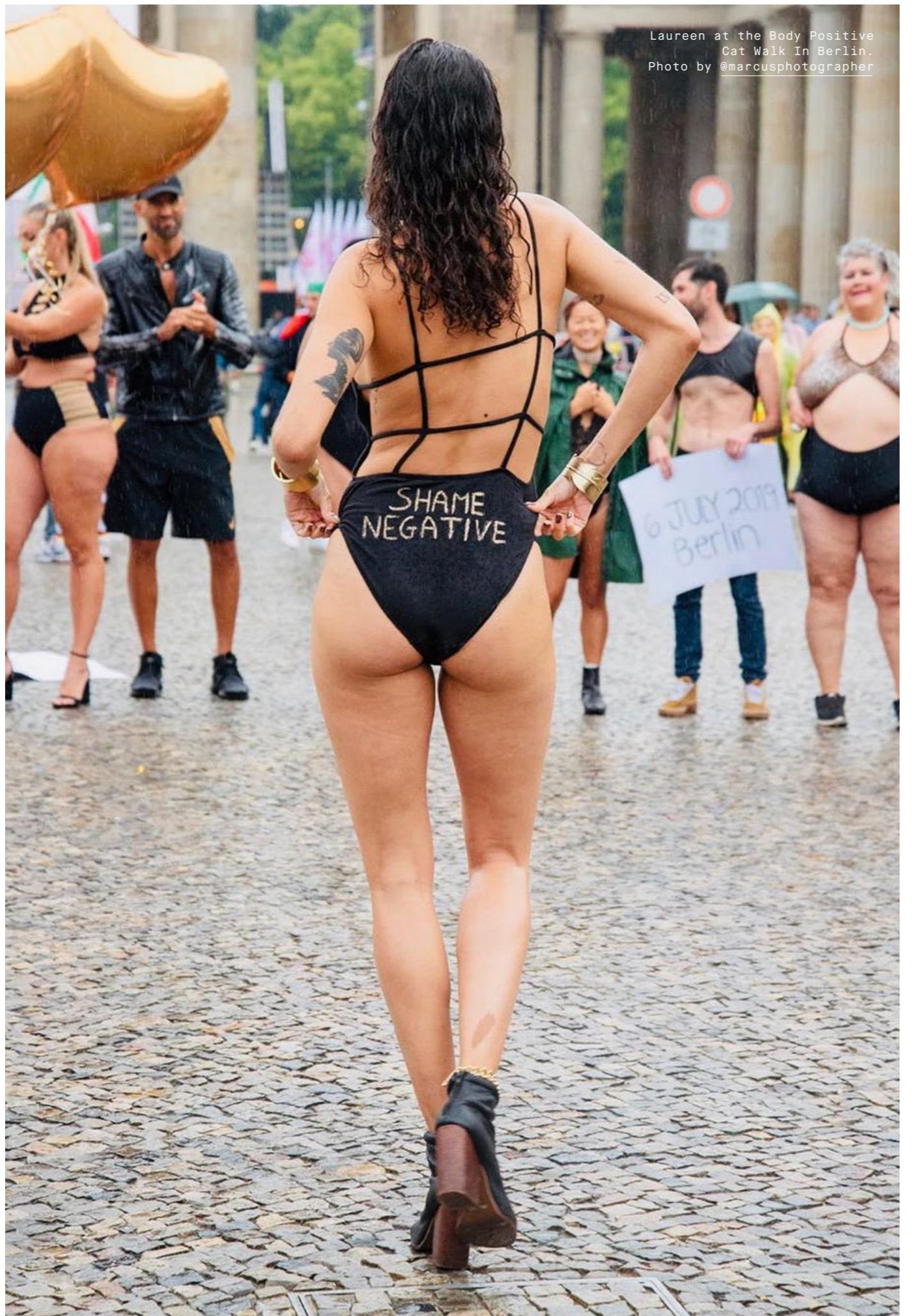
“People are more comfortable having sex than talking about sex.”

A lot of people, through hearing other people's stories in the #MeToo Movement, are now putting their own assaults, rapes, and non-consensual experiences into the context of the sex positivity movement for the first time.

Laureen: I think that people are now understanding that it's okay to explore, and are becoming a little more aware of the demystification of 'normal'.



Zoë uses Instagram as a platform to encourage people to open up about sex and pleasure, @thongria



Sex is a lot of what drives us. Acknowledging that doesn't make us crazy or weird.

As more sex educators and brands move online, censorship has become a subject of intense scrutiny. Is this something affecting you?

“Someone somewhere didn’t do their job, and that’s why people are coming to me.”

Zoë: I have posts taken down constantly. According to various media people I've spoken to 'shadow bans' aren't real. But for a year now my Instagram account has been in a place where you can't tag me in things. You can type in my full username handle but won't see it pop up.

Laureen: Yes! I personally experienced this when I looked for you, Zoë. You didn't come up until like the 15th account, even though I spelled it out entirely and correctly.

It's hard to find us, and it's not helping people in our community. Someone somewhere didn't do their job, and that's why people are coming to me. I think it's really a shame that platforms like Instagram and Facebook, who are chosen by communities like ours to really progress on certain topics, are basically getting in the way.

What do you see being the biggest things that need to be addressed when it comes to sex censorship online?

Laureen: There's no real firm understanding and transparency from social media around what is considered as infringing their policies. It's moderated by people who report content, so it gives the power to anyone to be able to make or break a certain type of education without a firm benchmark to go back

to. It's just based on opinions. When we talk about sex, because it's such a taboo topic, it means we're preserving this toxic environment where sexual health and sexual education are labeled as shameful.

Zoë: Ultimately it really just boils down to the fact that people are only reporting things that they personally see as bad; and the moderators of reported content are humans with their own subjective bias too.

Where would you like to see the conversation around sex evolve over the next 5 years?

Zoë: I want to see more emotional intelligence cultivated. I've heard the saying that 'sex sells everything except sex'. We can passively and implicitly talk about sex, but we can't explicitly talk about it otherwise people get way too uncomfortable and shut down.

Laureen: I would like to see the conversation around sex evolve in a more realistic space. I would love to see sex workers, people who have made it their actual occupation and who are the primary victims of censorship laws, part of a more mainstream conversation.



Photo by [@eleonoraleo](#)

Broadening Beauty

We sat down with photographer *Peter DeVito* to talk about why body positivity needs to be seen as more than a trend, the rise of Instagram as a platform for the movement, and how society's definition of beauty is changing.





At 22, Peter has already had his work featured in prominent publications such as Vogue, I-D, The New York Times and Harper's Bazaar. Peter's work aims to challenge prevalent stigmas around beauty in the fashion industry, and he is on track to becoming one of the industry's leading young voices on inclusivity.

Peter, there's one photo series you did that put you on the map as a photographer. Can you tell us about it?

I've had acne my whole life, and around two years ago I kept seeing people all over social media posting about self acceptance and body positivity. You were seeing people accept themselves for everything else, but I felt like there was this void when it came to accepting acne. It's ingrained in society that it isn't okay to have, so I created a project to normalize it.

The project didn't gain media attention until nearly a year after you posted it on your Instagram. What do you think it was that made it take off when it did?

I've thought about this a lot of times. The one thing I kept hearing in all the interviews when people called was: 'It's so great that acne's trending right now.' It was weird how they phrased it. They'd bring up how Kendall Jenner was spotted with acne, or how Justin Bieber posted a picture with acne. It became a thing that the mainstream media wanted to pick up because celebrities were 'participating'.

How did it feel to know that your effort to add a new dimension to the conversation around body positivity was being treated as a trend?

I mean, when it was first happening I was happy for the exposure and that the topic was finally being brought to light. But when I thought about it more, it didn't feel great. It's important that body positivity isn't seen as a trend, because it shouldn't be viewed as something that's fleeting. A trend is a

short-lived statement and body positivity has had, and is going to continue to have, a lasting impact.

"It's important that body positivity isn't seen as a trend, because it shouldn't be viewed as something that's fleeting."

A key platform you use for sharing your work is Instagram. How do you think the purpose of the platform has shifted over the years?

I feel like when Instagram and Twitter were new, they weren't seen as platforms for spreading awareness. They were seen solely as places where you could just post pictures of your friends, write little updates on your life, and follow a few of your favorite celebrities. As time has gone on, people have seen how social media can be a powerful tool for activism. It gives everyone a voice. It's also proved that you don't need to have a giant following to post your opinion and have it take off and spread.

Do you think the body positivity movement has impacted the type of content people post?

Yeah, the body positivity movement has definitely changed the way people use social media. It's caused people within and outside of the movement to post more about self-love. It's also contributed to how more and more people are choosing not to retouch the images they post anymore.

“The diversity in today’s media shows how society’s definition of beauty is changing.”

What’s one thing that frustrates you about the way society still talks about beauty standards?

When people talk about skin conditions, they tend to say that the people who have them are ‘struggling’ or ‘suffering’. Most people probably don’t realize it, but using these words is very harmful. It creates a negative narrative surrounding skin conditions. Just because you have a skin condition doesn’t mean you’re suffering from it.

Is society’s definition of beauty changing?

Yes. If you look in today’s magazines you will no longer see all of the models looking exactly the same. You will see people of all different ethnicities, skin types, shapes and sizes. Is there enough representation for every single type of person? No. But the diversity in today’s media shows how society’s definition of beauty is changing. It’s always changing. What society considers beautiful today will be completely different from what society considers beautiful in 20 years.

Where would you like to see the conversation around body positivity evolve over the next 5 years?

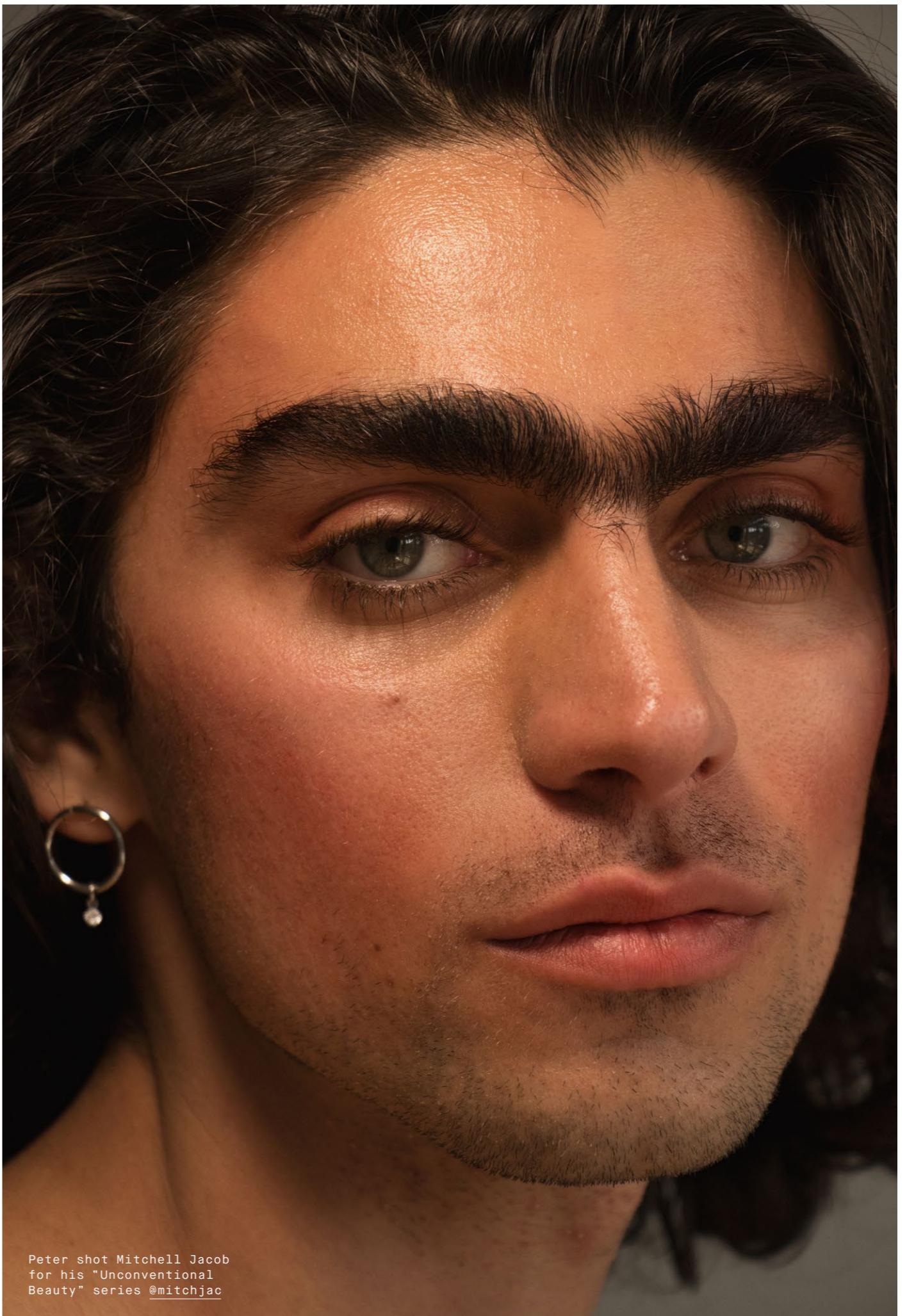
Body positivity was created to be a safe space for all people with marginalized bodies. This includes plus size white women, but also people of color,

transgender people, disabled people, plus size men, etc. All of these people need to be represented more. The media makes it seem as if the whole movement is only about slightly curvy white women embracing their bodies, but it’s about much more than that.

What would you say to the brands who would like to help support the body positivity movement?

You can’t just include a plus sized model in a campaign because you think body positivity is trending right now. You need to be repeatedly and consistently inclusive, that’s the only way you can show your genuine support. Do it because it’s the right thing to do and everyone deserves to be represented, not so you can make headlines.

To see more of Peter’s work:
 Website: peterdevito.com
 Instagram: @peterdevito
 Twitter: @peter_devito





"What's wrong with your skin?"

My battlefield is in my mind. Each day I battle between how others view me and how I view myself. Although I am able to defeat most of my battles they still affect my mind, how, and what I think. In addition, being teased, feared, and viewed differently by others caused a growth in compassion within me for others who suffer from the same discrimination. I do not want people to view someone that is not "normal" as an outcast, but as a pleasant anomaly. Just like the clothes I wear do not define me in a photoshoot, similarly that goes for the skin I am in. I will never forget, I am a man first, who is black, who has Vitiligo.

-Yvesmark Chery

During photo shoots, Peter asks his models to write a letter. Yvesmark Chery opens up about his skin. [@yvesmark.chery](http://yvesmark.chery)

Introduction

How A New Generation Of Voices
Are Redefining The Mainstream

By The Numbers

A Closer Look At Representation
In The Mainstream

Interview One

Exploring New Cultural
Frontiers With Azadi Records

Interview Two

Opening Up The Outdoors With
A Snowboarding Icon



How A New Generation Of Voices Are Redefining The Mainstream

For most of its history, mainstream pop culture was dominated by a limited number of faces and voices. Straight white males, mostly from a few select countries and a few select classes, kept the global microphone firmly in their grasp. These voices told people who they were, who they should be, and (most importantly) who they couldn't become.

But in the last decade the floodgates seem to have opened up, and a wave of new voices have started to pour through. People are no longer willing to tolerate a lack of representation on their screens, in their papers and through their stereos. This shift has gained huge momentum around the world, and it's leading to breakthroughs in content and emerging talent.

We're starting to see traditional publications like *The Guardian* seek input on content strategy from new-generation platforms like *Gal-Dem*. We're also witnessing how the rise of TV shows like Issa Rae's *Insecure* and movies like *Parasite* are making more people feel seen.

This new wave of voices is pushing well beyond the diversity box-ticking exercises of those that stood before them, and are showcasing modern life as they live it.

Together, this new generation of content is familiarizing us with stories and perspectives that weren't necessarily on our collective radars before.

As these new perspectives flood the mainstage, we're beginning to realize how out of touch some of the old ones have been. It's triggering enormous debates on what's socially acceptable and bringing up important questions about why there is still so much privilege in the media and why groups of people are still being left out of certain spaces.

While these conversations aren't always easy to have, it's no secret they are finding their way into just about every media company on the planet.

With momentum too big to stop, it seems as though this decade may be the one that truly resets the rules and defines what representation really looks like.

The Cultural Uprising

By The Numbers

We're seeing a more diverse set of voices take over mainstream culture, but there's still a long way to go in many areas.

#1

Hip Hop has officially taken over as the world's most popular musical genre.

Rollingstone 2019



94%

The percentage of journalism professionals in the UK who are white, despite 19% of the population being non-white.

The Guardian 2016

#2

Black Panther is Marvel's second most successful movie of all time.

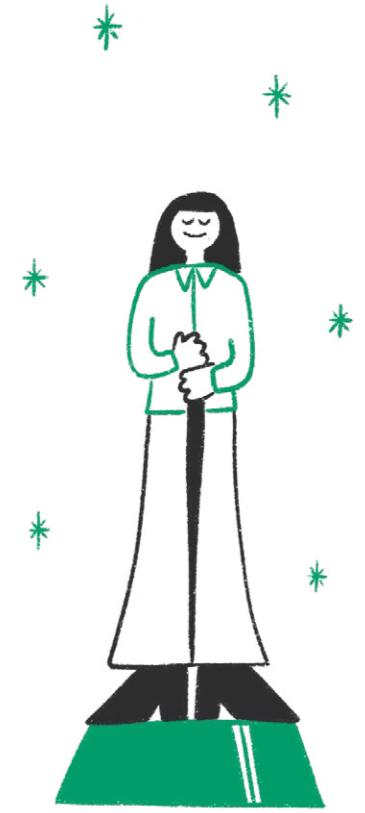
Time Magazine 2019



1

The number of women who have won best director in the 91-year history of the Oscars.

Variety 2020



Exploring New Cultural Frontiers

We talked to *Uday Kapur*, co-founder of Azadi Records, about what it truly means to open up music to people from all walks of life.



Photo By: @awkwardbong

Uday Kapur co-founded Azadi Records, an independent New Delhi-based record label, in 2017. Though fresh to the industry, Azadi Records is already making waves in the music scene for its dedication to platforming voices previously ignored by the mainstream music industry. Named one of GQ's 50 most influential young Indians in 2018, we sat down with Kapur to find out more about his label and the mission that drives it.

Uday, your mission as a music label is quite unique. Can you tell us a bit about where the inspiration to start it came from?

The main driving force behind the label stemmed from my experience working as a music journalist and artist manager at one of India's biggest music companies, Only Much Louder.

“The unwillingness to bet on artists who didn’t come from one of the traditional metropolitan cities was baffling to me.”

The unwillingness to bet on artists who didn’t come from one of the traditional metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore or Calcutta—was baffling to me. I felt like the whole industry congratulating themselves and celebrating the success of the ‘Indian’ music scene was extremely hypocritical. How can artists belonging to only the privileged classes represent the cultural output of an entire country?

Right. So the goal became, let’s challenge the status quo on who gets a voice?

Yeah. It became important for us as a label to find and nurture artists from marginalized communities, so that an accurate picture of the art and culture created by our country could be presented to

the world. Our industry primarily relies on brand support, which means artists rarely speak their mind on issues in fear of rocking the boat and losing work. So one of our guiding principles is to give our artists the freedom to speak about what they want.

We spend a lot of time figuring out what the issues are in their community and what they want to speak about. Then we build a story around that and piece it together song by song. So the focus of their album ends up being on a story or issue that isn’t being talked about, or is under-represented.

What types of communities do the artists on your label come from?

Given the sheer amount of diversity in India—in terms of religion, culture and language—we prioritize the artists we work with by taking into account what’s going on across the country at that moment. So, for example, we’ve recently started working with two really promising artists from the world’s most militarized region, Kashmir. Given what the government of India has done recently, and the general misrepresentation of the Kashmiri people in the Indian media, it’s become important for us to support voices from the region. They can tell us what is going on and help us understand their hopes, frustrations and aspirations.

Finding new talent in these regions sounds like it comes with some challenges. How do you go about discovering them?

It’s mostly off the internet. A lot of nights spent shifting through YouTube and Soundcloud. Because we’re actively looking for narratives that aren’t being covered in mainstream India, finding them is easier.

One of the advantages we have is that we also scout and do shows in cities and regions that the rest of the industry won’t even bother looking in. We are the only people going into villages and conflict ridden areas to look for talent, and we are the only ones that have done a show in Kashmir in the past 6-7 years.



“What’s important to us is to not preach or co-opt someone else’s struggle or pain.”

By giving these artists a platform, what conversations are you trying to spark within Indian society?

Our end goal is to democratize the industry and make it accessible to people from all walks of life. By going against the grain and trying to dismantle the barriers that excluded these communities from the music industry, we are making a political statement.

We’re also putting these perspectives out in the world at a time when critiquing the government and society is being suppressed. What’s important to us is to not preach or co-opt someone else’s struggle or pain. We provide a support structure so people from these regions can come and tell first-hand accounts of the issues facing their communities.

“50 years down the line, if you want to know what a particular part of Delhi was going through in 2017, there’s an album for that.”

What made you decide to start these conversations through music, and not more traditional forms of media?

In most countries young people have shifted to smart phones. The older generations are watching the news on TV, but everyone else is getting it on Whatsapp, Facebook or Youtube. So music then becomes the best platform to speak to them on.

What legacy does Azadi Records want to leave in the world?

The legacy we want to leave is really just to have provided an honest documentation of the society and times we lived in. 50 years down the line, if you want to know what a particular part of Delhi was going through in 2017, there’s an album for that.

What was going on in Kashmir in 2019? There’s an album for that. We’re a generation consuming fake news and propaganda at an unprecedented level. In such a scenario, the most important job we have as creatives is to make sure history is not rewritten or erased, and that we remember our failures and successes as a society accurately.

Any plans in the future we should know about?

A lot of kids come to us saying they want to be artists or musicians, but only a few of them will be able to make it. Rather than discourage them, we want to show these kids how they can be a part of the community and music they love by training them to be culture journalists, DOPs, and sound engineers.

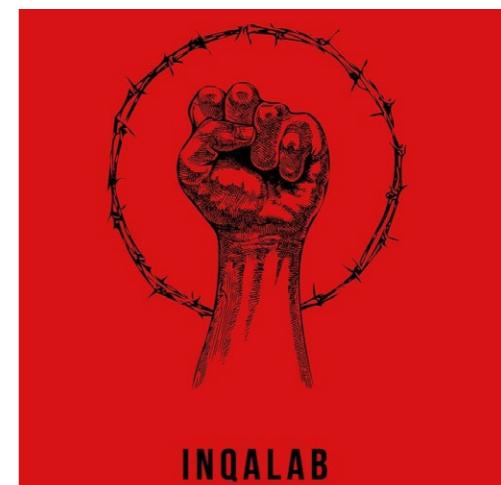
Sounds like a great initiative. One last question: if we want to get an honest look into Indian society today, which one of your albums should we listen to right now?

I’ll give three because all three of them speak to the most important issues in the country right now: the occupation of Kashmir and the rise of fascism in mainland India.

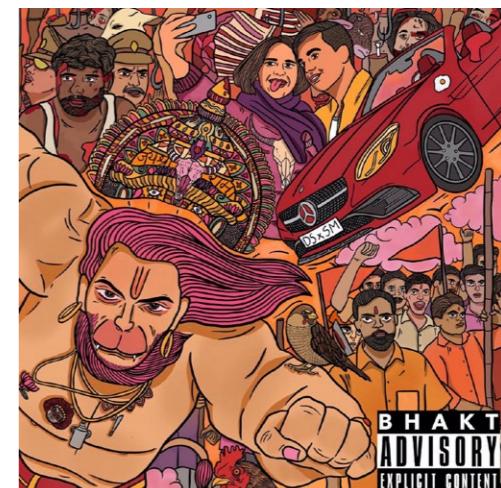
3 Top Albums From Azadi Records



Little Kid Big Dreams Ahmer x Sez On The Beat



Inqalab Ahmer



Scalp Dem Delhi Sultanate x Seedhe Maut

Opening Up The Outdoors

We sat down with *Phil Young*, former co-host of Channel 4's snowboarding series, *Board Stupid*. We discussed the representation gap in the outdoors and how the younger generation is taking matters into their own hands.

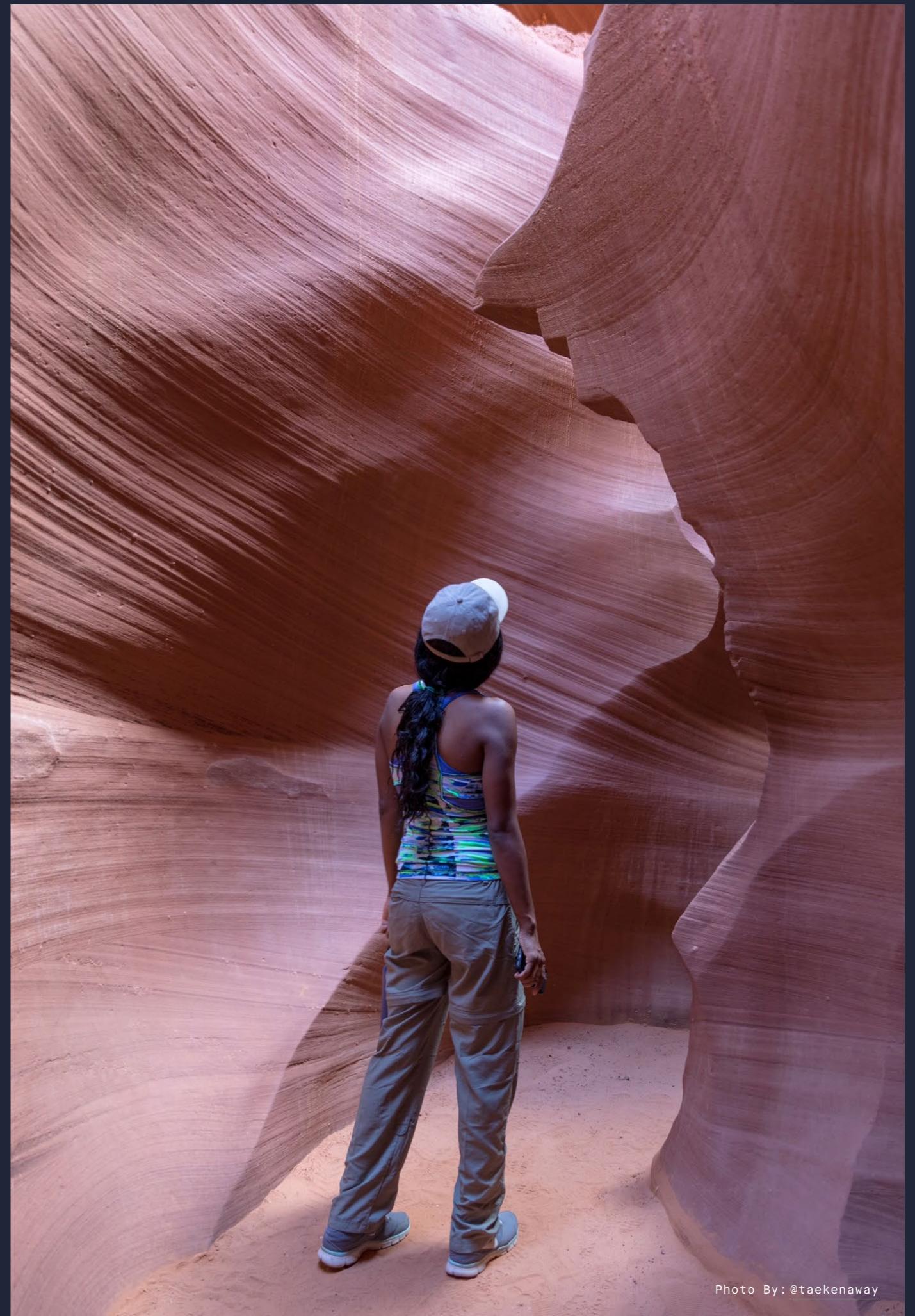


Photo By: [@taekenaway](#)

Phil Young is the former co-host of the series Board Stupid on Channel 4, and the current director of outdoor lifestyle agency Mighty Mighty. Young has been involved in skateboarding and snowboarding all his life and in recent years has made it his mission to address the outdoor industry's lack of diversity.

“I’m a firm believer that advertising and marketing tells you who you are, what you are, and what you should be doing.”

Phil, you became an avid snowboarder in the '80s when it was still an emerging sport. What about it did you fall in love with?

I absolutely fell in love with the culture. When I discovered snowboarding, it fit so much into the culture of skateboarding that I had already found. It was counter culture. There were no rules. No one to say whether your trick is the right trick to do. In the traditional sports we were taught at school there were so many rules. The fact that someone was telling you how you should be having fun, and that sports are about winning or losing, just never appealed to me. With snowboarding, it's a good day if you come home with a smile on your face.

Did you have any role models that looked like you growing up?

There weren't many black role models within skateboarding or snowboarding. We used to always get our media from the States, and there were never any people of color represented. But the media wasn't really representative of what we knew. At the time, even though skateboarding wasn't very multicultural, it was very accepting. It didn't matter

how good you were or where you were from. The fact that you were a skateboarder, in the late '80s at a time when no one was skateboarding, was enough. Snowboarding was the same, which is why I found it to be such a great community.

You went on to become co-host of Channel 4's Board Stupid, a show that cracked open snowboard culture for the masses. What made it such a hit?

Our aim was to open up the sport and culture of snowboarding to as wide a community as we possibly could. It was very different than any other sports series on TV at that time.

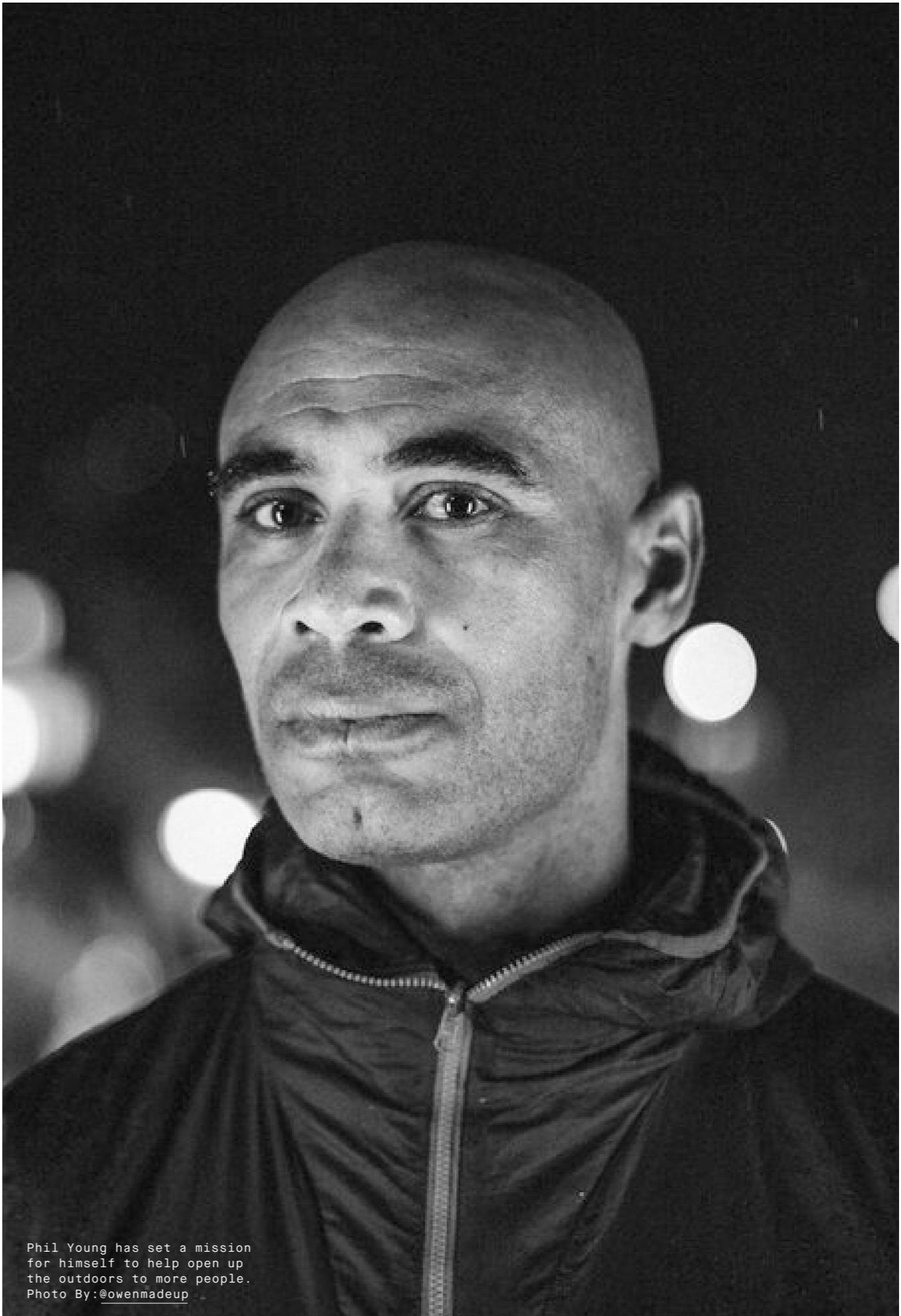
We brought a lot of bands and musicians from urban culture music to the mountains so that they could check them out and share the experience with others. As a result, you did see a spike in people of color going to the mountains while the show was on air. So I know that we inspired a generation of snowboarders and skiers to get involved.

In your view, have we made progress on representation in outdoor sports since Board Stupid aired in the '90s?

I think we're still just at the start of this journey, because we are still so behind in Europe. Up till a few years ago, it wasn't even a conversation people were having. Now people and brands are slowly starting to have these conversations. But we're still at that stage where if you see an ad with a black person in a technical outdoor jacket, he's in front of a graffiti wall.

To move forward, what's the biggest barrier we need to solve?

I'm a firm believer that advertising and marketing tells you who you are, what you are, and what you should be doing. If you're told that you play football and you wear Adidas sneakers, that's what you're going to do. You're going to do that until someone tells you otherwise because it's very difficult to break out of that mold. But this really isn't something





A new generation, lead by influencers like @rongriswell, are showing just how diverse the outdoors are becoming.
Photo By: @cliford.mervil

outdoor communities consider at all. They say, 'Oh, well there's nothing stopping people from going climbing, snowboarding or hiking.' They don't realize that people need to be shown they are allowed to be in these spaces, and not just in the clothes.

It sounds like outdoor communities are underestimating how hard it can be to find your place in sports like climbing, hiking and snowboarding.

Definitely. A lot of outdoor cultures have a certain expectation that you know exactly what you're supposed to do. But when you're talking about skiing, mountain biking or cycling, the know-how and vernacular is alien for a lot of people. So I think the industry has a lot of work to do in order to introduce people from all different ability levels into the culture.

It's important to realize that it's not just a race thing, it's about ability. It's about how the whole aesthetic of the outdoors needs to be reviewed, because right now it's excluding too many people and is based too heavily on performance and elitism.

Do you see a drive by younger generations to make the outdoor space more inclusive?

Absolutely. What's starting to happen now is that people are sidestepping what the industry's doing and saying, 'You know what, we're gonna do this on our terms now.' Today everyone has all they need in the palm of their hand. People are setting up their own communities and they're bypassing the traditional outdoor community.

Just because a group of people said there's one way to do something doesn't mean it's the 'right' way. People have to be able to own sports on their own terms. That's what

is going to happen in Europe, people will be redefining what the outdoors looks like.

Where do you hope to see the outdoor space evolve in the next 5-10 years?

I think normalization, to be honest. For the outdoors to be considered an accepted option for people of color, and that the outdoor community actually puts these people up as leaders and figures.

"As soon as you have people that you can stick up on your wall, you've got kids that are going to want to pursue that path for the rest of their life."

I'd like to think that young kids could look to snowboarders like Zeb Powell and think, 'wow that's so cool, I want to be like him. I want to stick him up on my wall.'

You need people like that. As soon as you have people that you can stick up on your wall, you've got kids that are going to want to pursue that path for the rest of their life.

Introduction
How A New Wave Of Communities
Are Helping Us Feel Less Lost

By The Numbers
A Closer Look At The New Places
Communities Are Sprouting Up

Interview One
Sweating the Spiritual With Soulcycle

Interview Two
Modern Movements With Patagonia



Extinction Rebellion Protest.
Photo by @thelightscaper

How The Search For Community And Meaning Is Taking Us To New Places

The dramatic decline in church attendance over the last half century has left a community void across Europe. People still want to be connected to something bigger than their immediate friendship circles. They still want rituals to help them reset, and they still want spaces that offer solace in their dark moments.

Gradually, a range of secular alternatives have begun to emerge and fill that void. The modern fitness movement is spreading fast by offering life affirming philosophies and intimate shared experiences. A network of new community activities and meetup groups are spreading and volunteering initiatives are seeing a steady increase across Europe.

In a fraught political era, we've also seen a rise in youth activism and wave of new global movements like *Extinction Rebellion* and *Fridays for the Future*.

While these movements have been born to create meaningful change in society, they have also found new ways to organize themselves into communities that create personal meaning in people's lives.

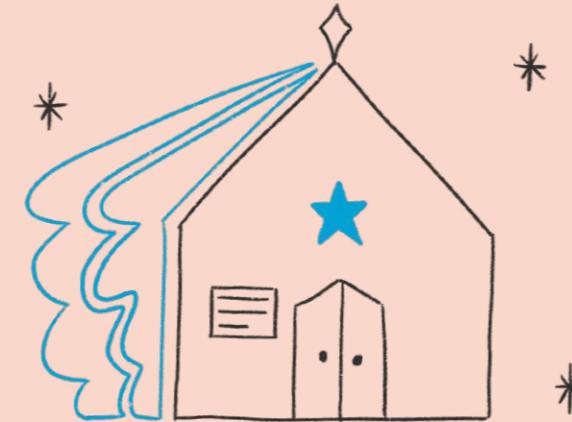
These new communities are obviously vastly different in kind, but they all have clear philosophies that bind their members together. They all offer ways for people to be part of something bigger than themselves, and they all allow people to come together in person and online.

At its best this new world can allow anyone with internet connection to find their people and their purpose; wherever they live and however old they are. However, many people today still report a sense of feeling lost. Can these movements fill the void for everyone?

The New Churches

By The Numbers

Community and where we are looking for it is changing. Rather than church, many people are turning to places like fitness classes or social movements to find a sense of belonging.



65%

The percentage of Gen Z who have never been to church, apart from for weddings and funerals.

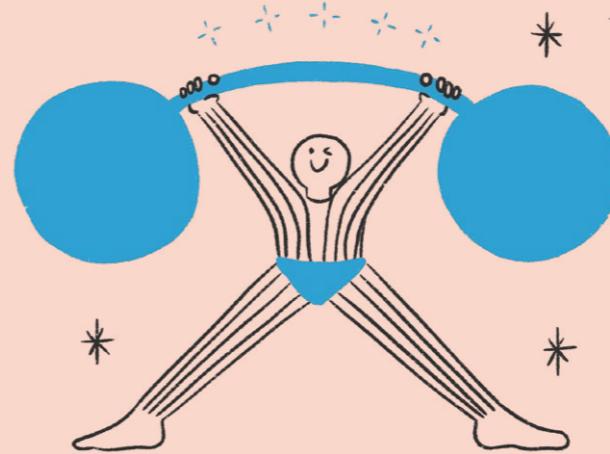
U.K. Com Res 2018



20%

The percentage of kids who have been to a protest before the age of 10.

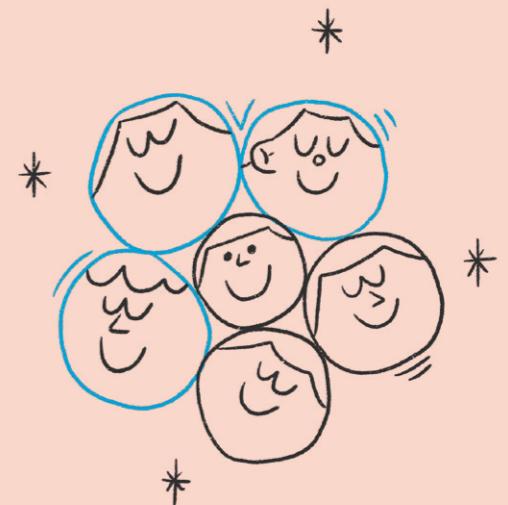
Beano for Brands, 2019



70%

The average annual growth of CrossFit since 2005.

Rally Fitness 2018



75%

The percentage of Gen Z and millennials who say they are actively trying to understand the meaning of life.

The Atkin Future Report 2018

Sweating The Spiritual

We spoke with *Rowen Aida*, an instructor at Soulcycle, to learn about the euphoria of group fitness, why tears are always welcome in her classes, and why people keep crediting her for changing their lives.





Companies like Rocycle and Soulcycle are creating tight knit communities. [@rocyclestudios](#) captured by [@bytessletort](#)

Rowen Adia rose to local fame as one of Rocycle's most popular cycling instructors in Amsterdam, before moving to London in 2019 to become one of Soulcycle's first European instructors. Rowen has seen first-hand the power of building community through fitness, and is a firm believer in its power to build people up. She also hosts a Podcast called Soul Seekers which aims to bring the mindset of group fitness out of the classroom and into your ears. Follow Rowen and her fitness journey on her Instagram [@rowenaida](#)

Rowen, people swear by the spirituality of group classes like Soulcycle and Rocycle. What is it about the environment that makes people feel so spiritual?

The studio itself is dark. It has candles, the music is blasting. It's a spiritual feeling to be in a room with 60 people, 60 bikes, pitch dark, with candles. People feel the freedom to cry, to scream, to vibe.

It creates a really powerful environment and gives you a different mindset. You feel proud, motivated and accepted; like a part of something bigger. After class you feel euphoric too. You have so many endorphins pumping through your body, and you're so open-hearted and open-minded.

It sounds like the spirituality lies in the sense of community it creates.

Yes! Boutiques breed this feeling of community. That you're doing this together and that you have each other's back; you're never alone.

People want to feel part of something bigger. A lot of athletes or people who practice sports a lot might have that feeling already, but I think 90% of people who come out to group classes are searching for something more. They don't want to be lost in a gym where they're anonymous, where they're just one of the thousands of people who come during the day. When you walk into a boutique they know your shoe size and your

name. People start to love it because they are appreciated and because they are part of a group.

What have been the most meaningful moments for you, as an instructor?

Last summer I had my 1,000th ride and Rocycle arranged for all the riders to leave a card or a note in a box. It took me months to get through those cards. I get goosebumps when I think about it.

“Someone shared that they quit their job and bettered their life because of things I said.”

Some anonymous, some with names, all thanking me for changing their lives and their perspective on themselves. Someone shared that they quit their job and bettered their life because of things I said. Someone else said that they broke off a relationship after years of doubt and finally felt free.

I also once had one man in Amsterdam who used to ride with me at least 3 times a week. He came up to me one day and said, 'I lost my wife from cancer a year ago, and this year your classes have been my therapy.' He told me that everything I said in class felt like I said it to him. That was really special too.

Last year you underwent intensive training to become an instructor at SoulCycle. I'm sure that training wasn't just about how to ride a stationary bike. Can you tell us more about what goes into becoming an instructor?

No no, not at all. It's so true, it's more about the spiritual side of working out. It's almost like



Rowen partners with Group
Exercise Revolution (GXR)
for live events.

“To me, acceptance, open-heartedness and open-mindedness is what defines spirituality.”

the concept is explained, and at the end of the explanation it's like, 'oh and it's on a bike'.

During the training you learn about the many different aspects of how to build community. We ask ourselves, how can we bring light into people's days? How do we give them self-esteem? How do we give them courage? How do we give them the freedom to feel and to let go?

What does spirituality mean to you?

To me, acceptance, open-heartedness and open-mindedness is what defines spirituality. It's accepting everything the way it is. Accepting where you stand, who you are, and opening your heart and mind to that. The second that I block that, or I get frustrated, or I'm in a rush, that's where I lose my entire connection or flow.

How has being an instructor in the SoulCycle and Rocycle community impacted your spirituality?

That is such an interesting question. It really has been the craziest guidance for me, because everyday I remind myself to not lose my connection. The funny thing is that since I'm teaching, it's not like I don't get negative feelings. I can be jealous, I can be angry. But the fact that I just reminded someone else in a room to let those things go makes me handle it differently. It's almost a responsibility I have to take.

Where do you see fitness classes evolving in the next 5 years?

We've been focusing for so long on looks. It's been such a big hype. You know, burn calories, lose weight, look good. I hope that the concepts that are still obsessed with muscles and look of the body find a better way of inspiring people to take their classes.



Modern Movements

We sat down with *Alex Weller*, Patagonia's European Marketing Director, to discuss the power of Patagonia's mission, why people are looking for community in new places, and how the next generation of activists are forming a whole new type of community.



Alex Weller oversees the marketing strategy for Patagonia throughout Europe. Based at Patagonia's European Headquarters in Amsterdam, Alex is responsible for amplifying the company's mission and building communities through outdoor sport and environmental activism. Alex is himself a passionate snowboarder and cyclist. Follow Alex and his outdoor adventures on his Instagram [@alex_weller](https://www.instagram.com/alex_weller).

“Extinction Rebellion is one idea co-owned by whoever wants to own it.”

For those of us who aren't familiar with Patagonia and its mission as a brand, what does the Patagonia community look like?

As far as the community that we represent is concerned, we have a pretty broad church. You've got surfers, skiers, snowboarders, climbers, trail runners, mountain bikers, and within all those sport cultures you have many different tribes. Then you have the added dimension of our mission, our reason for being a company. Which is ultimately to use this platform as a tool for good, a beacon for hope and change, and a way of mobilizing people in defence of the planet. The community that we've galvanized around the brand has always been, at its core, an environmentally conscious customer.

Why do you think more and more people are looking to brands to create community, rather than other traditional spaces?

In relation to the environmental movement, the things that people care about and worry about are not being heard or acted upon. Governments, for example, are doing very little. This creates the conditions for everyday citizens to look for new beacons of hope in new places that they can trust and believe in. I think that's part of the reason why Patagonia seems to be resonating so much right

now. We haven't dramatically changed the way that we think about things. We've become better at doing these things at scale, but in essence, it's the same stuff we've been doing for 30+ years.

For Patagonia, what goes into building meaningful community?

We believe that our community shares our values and will sometimes look to us for guidance. But you can't do the hard work of building real community just by writing messages and paying to disseminate those messages through the media. That's sort of no longer effective.

You have to offer a real world connection and be able to stand physically in front of your community so that they can believe in you. For that to have a brand level impact, you have to do a lot of it. I mean really a lot. This year alone we've done about 900 events in Europe. And these aren't big events where we've got thousands of people in one place at one time. You're talking about 50, 100, 200 people.

As the climate crisis continues to gain more urgent recognition globally, how has that impacted both Patagonia's environmental community and beyond?

For a long time people have, on a personal level, carried the guilt and burden of the environmental crisis on their shoulders because that's what the system told them to do. You know, 'it's your problem, so you should consume less and change your lifestyle.'

The major pivot that's happening now is the growth of Friday's for the Future, Extinction Rebellion and so forth. This is the kind of 'coming out' of the most important idea that we've seen in the environmental movement yet: the push back on the blame narrative, and a movement from the personal responsibility guilt myth to mass mobilization.



Groups like Extinction Rebellion represent a new kind of environmental movement. Photo by The Lightscaper.



“The previous set of rules that bound us to be quite dutiful consumers, voters and workers, are now being tested, weakened and questioned on every level.”

How is this new generation of activists and organizers doing things differently than their predecessors?

You know, I think if you look at Extinction Rebellion or Fridays for Future, the reason that they have scaled their stories so quickly and successfully is because they live within a totally decentralized digital landscape.

What Extinction Rebellion are doing isn't radically new. Civil disobedience has been around for forever. But what they did work out from the beginning is how to decentralize ownership. Extinction Rebellion is one idea co-owned by whoever wants to own it. That's the difference between new movements compared to older ones like Greenpeace.

Do you see the shifts happening now in how young activists are mobilizing as a sign of a bigger series of societal changes to come?

This is the new reality. Hierarchical ideas of leadership will not work for this kind of community and this very young, very passionate group, born into the environmental crisis and fully embedded digitally.

The previous set of rules that bound us to be quite dutiful consumers, voters and workers, are now being tested, weakened and questioned on every level. They don't work anymore, and they don't make as much sense anymore. So we're starting to see change, and that change will accelerate. But we don't know yet where that change will take us.

Members of the community enjoying a screening of Patagonia's climbing film Rotpunkt in Innsbruck, Austria.

Introduction
How Social Media Is Creating
A Space To Finally Be Ourselves

By The Numbers
A Closer Look At The Ways People
Are Redefining Self-Expression

Interview One
The Imperfect Power Of Labels With A
Non-Binary Model, Activist & Writer

Interview Two
Finding Your People With The
Co-Founder Of Amaliah



How Social Media Is Creating A Space To Finally Be Ourselves

Social media often gets a bad rap. It's where we're at our 'fakest', where we compare ourselves to others, where we get into pointless debates and where we are antagonized by trolls. That can all be true, but social media is also something else: a gift to anyone trying to figure out who the hell they are. And at the end of the day, isn't that all of us?

With social media we're no longer limited to digging through our brother's record collection, or desperately watching late night TV to find signs of others we can identify with. Everything from the New York Drag scene to the exploding world of K-Pop is now at our fingertips.

We get to bathe ourselves in the richness of it all and, most importantly, try things out with less push-back than in the real world. Walking down to the local pub in a whole new look can

be a terrifying experience, but online we get to experiment and reinvent ourselves almost at will.

This safe space to explore isn't just about finding new types of fashion to wear or new musicians to admire. For many people this is the only way of discovering there are others sharing their same experiences. It becomes a chance for people to be themselves and break free of the confines of the world they are immediately surrounded by.

Social media has created a more open world of identity, one where we all get to explore who we are. Often we're finding our 'true selves' aren't just one thing and that there's no need to box ourselves into a corner with outdated labels.

The Safe Space

By The Numbers

Social media is helping people explore who they are and become more open-minded. It's where they feel most authentic and free to be themselves.



64%

The percentage of Gen Z who says social media makes them feel more authentic, rather than more fake (33%).

Pew Research Center 2018



78%

The percentage of Gen Z who feel their generation is more open-minded than previous ones.

PSFK x Suzy Report 2019

62%

The percentage of Gen Z who feels more comfortable expressing their true selves online, rather than in person.

Identity Shifters RPA Report 2018



70%

The percentage of teenagers who say social media helps them be more in touch with their friends.

Pew Research Center 2018

The Imperfect Power Of Labels

We sat down with *Jamie Windust*, a non-binary model, writer and speaker, to discuss how social media helped them find their identity, the limits and power of labels, and why the key to acceptance is more empathy.



Jamie Windust is an award-winning editor and writer, as well as a public speaker, model and the founder of FRUITCAKE magazine. Through all these touch points, Jamie is engaging with online and offline communities to breakdown societal barriers and shed light on the unsettling reality non-binary and trans people are still facing in society today. To learn more, follow Jamie on Instagram @jamiewindust.

“The way I found more language around non-binaryism and genderism was through social media.”

Jamie, when did you first feel a sense that you wanted to push back on society’s constraints and explore who you are?

If you think about school, you’re in a uniform the first 15-16 years of your life, so you don’t necessarily always have time to explore fashion. That ability to explore for me once I finished was kind of the first step into realizing that I felt more comfortable presenting more femininely than I had prior.

What was that period of time like for you? Did you have a way to express how you felt?

The way I found more language around non-binaryism and genderism was through social media. It wasn’t until about 18 that through it I found the people, the language, and was able to explore it and adopt that language and identity.

People often write-off social media as being a superficial space, but it sounds like that’s not the case for you?

No, I think one of the best messages that I’ve gotten was from someone who was from my hometown in Dorset, which is a very rural town. It was from a dad, and he was basically saying that both of his children

were non-binary and that they were very thankful that I was doing what I was doing. He was very happy because he felt like he could learn from me, and that it then helped his relationship with his children.

Do you have to deal with a lot of haters online? How do you cope with them?

It’s really bizarre. I very rarely receive online abuse, and if I do, what tends to happen is that it’s very concentrated and it’s for a very short amount of time. In contrast, when I’ve got makeup and I’m presenting in a femme way in public, the reaction is like 99% negative. That’s why I value social media so much, because it’s like the other side of the coin.

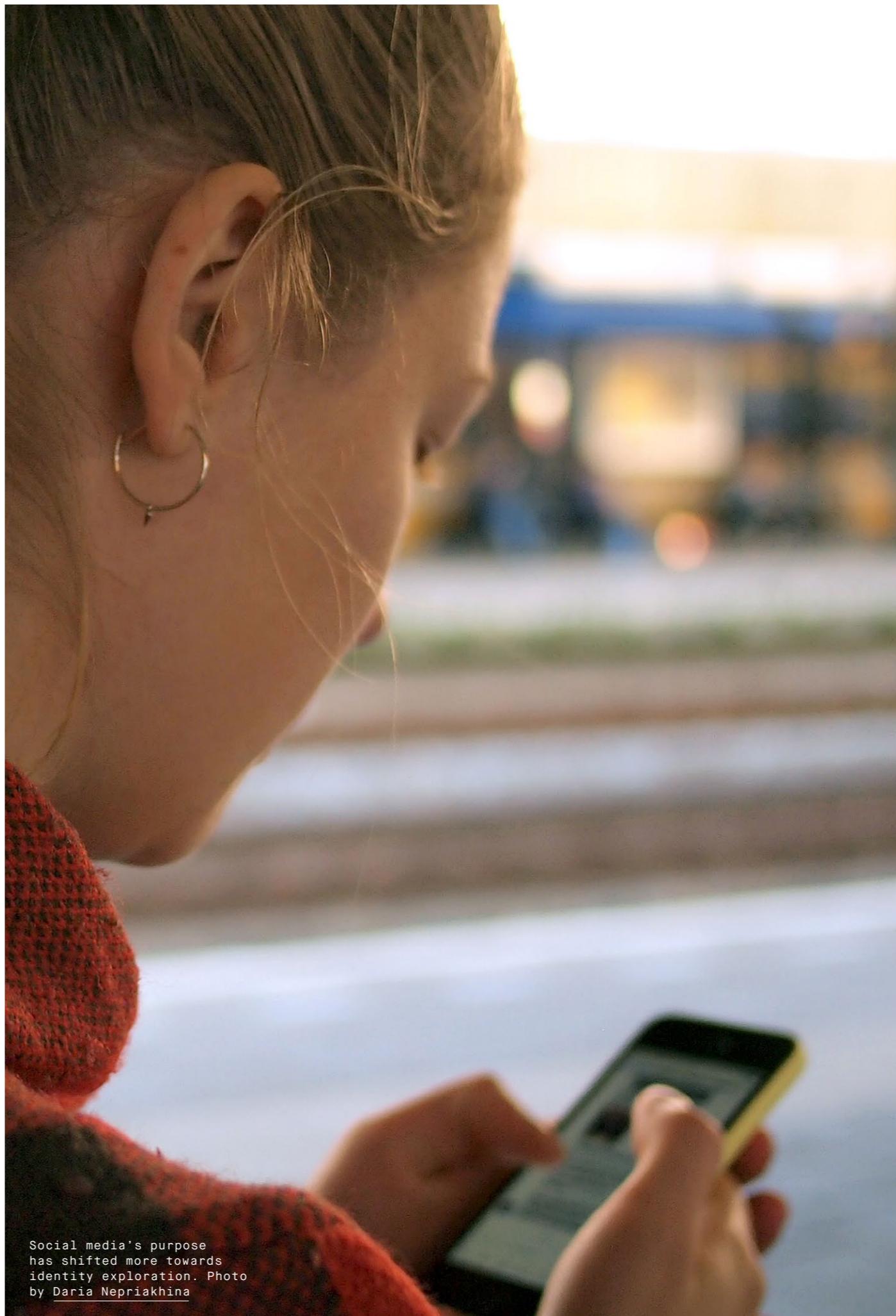
You do a lot of public speaking and events around the UK and Europe. Are those conversations different from the ones you’re having online?

So sometimes when I go and do these talks and the topics of these conversations are fairly palatable, because I’m talking to a new audience, I can find it quite frustrating because I feel like these aren’t the conversations that we need to be having right now. We are just kind of like, ‘this is what trans is’ and ‘this is what non-binary is’. But sometimes it’s important to just say what’s really happening right now.

We are in a situation where there’s an obnoxious amount of transphobic press every single day. There’s a new alliance that’s just been formed called the LBG Alliance, that are basically trying to remove the T. So that’s been getting a lot of press, and it’s very difficult for trans people at the moment.

Let’s talk about labels. How is the non-binary label different from those that have come before it?

The counter argument to being non-binary is, ‘How can you label something that is essentially about taking away labels?’ But sometimes it’s about the intention and the context of that label. The label itself isn’t necessarily bad. For example, if you look at society’s labels, those are often labels that are placed upon people and then



Social media’s purpose has shifted more towards identity exploration. Photo by Daria Nepriakhina



Jamie Windust uses their Instagram, [@jamiewindust](https://www.instagram.com/jamiewindust), as a platform to discuss LGBTQIA+ rights and visibility.

create stereotypes and expectations. Whereas, the non-binary label flips that and allows us to identify ourselves and create a community. It's not a label that's given to us, and then loaded with lots of expectations. It's actually a label that frees us from the labels we've been given previously.

What do you think the future holds? Will labels ever lose their meaning?

So I personally like the label 'non-binary', because it gives you a community. However, I do also think that the non-binary label is only necessary because people can't fathom the notion of living label-free. You have to kind of appease people slightly by giving them a label so that they can at least know who you are and what you are. It's like an evolution. I think that labels will continue to merge and change. Which is quite exciting actually, because it means that in future generations the language will continue to evolve.

You express optimism for future generations. What do you think is the key to getting more acceptance of different identities today?

Empathy. It's the most important thing. People definitely rely on the trope of, 'this is new. I have no idea what it means.' But it's not new, it's just new to you. They need to come, de-center themselves from the conversation, take their fragility away and actually listen and take what we are saying as lived experience.

A lot of people today want to educate themselves for performative reasons, to make themselves look better. When I've worked with brands before and I've done talks, sometimes it's very obvious that they are just doing it because they want to appear that they are woke.

We've seen a lot of brands engage with the LGBTQIA+ community poorly. In your view, how can they do better?

Yeah it's frustrating. What I've started to do is make sure that the brands that I'm working with

are either donating to charity or matching my fee to a charity, employing non-binary or trans people on set and briefing everyone about pronouns.

I work really hard to make sure that it's accessible, but it's difficult. Marginalized identities working with brands is only ever going to continue. But brands aren't reaching out to anyone from the

“People definitely rely on the trope of, ‘this is new. I have no idea what it means,’ but it’s not new, it’s just new to you.”

community until they want to put them in the ad. I would rather be reached out to to chat about how behind the scenes can be better and how the structure of brand campaigns can be better, rather than trying to change the system as the face of it.

Finding Your People

We spoke with *Nafisa Bakkar*, the co-founder of Amaliah, an online platform dedicated to representing Muslim women. We discussed the challenges of navigating Muslim identity today and how social media is helping make the journey easier.



Nafisa Bakkar is the co-founder and CEO of Amaliah, an online platform dedicated to creating a space for Muslim women to amplify their voice. So far, Amaliah has amassed a community of over 300 contributors who are writing for the platform. Last year, the company launched their agency Amaliah Insights, with the hope that by working with marketing agencies and brands they can have a bigger cultural impact. You can follow Nafisa on her Twitter handle [@Nafisa_Bakkar](#) and Amaliah on their Instagram handle [@amaliah_com](#).

As a Muslim, what impact did growing up in the post 9/11 era have on your sense of identity?

I was always very aware of my faith growing up as a teenager in the post 9/11 era. I think it was a real marker for a lot of Muslims when it came to how they saw themselves in the world.

For me, it happened while I was still in primary school. At the time I didn't really understand the significance of it. It took getting a lot older to really realize how big that moment was, the way the media works and how Muslims are seen by the world. That's when I understood the rising climate of Islamophobia and what it meant for Muslim identity.

Did you find that the rising climate of Islamophobia brought you closer to your faith, or pushed you away?

When I was younger I did feel a sense of friction between Islam and my life. I remember very vividly being in high school and getting into debates about Islam with my peers. Even though at the time I didn't have that much knowledge of the faith, I felt very strongly that I needed to stick up for my religion.

It wasn't until later in my 20s during university where I started really questioning it in the sense of, 'Okay, if I'm meant to be Muslim, what does that look like in practice?' That's when I realized that what I wanted for myself and my life, fell in line with what Islam was as a framework. It was very much like a path to self-discovery.

Did you have people to share this period of self-discovery with, or were you navigating it on your own?

I was very much having this dialogue internally. It wasn't really something that I was talking to people about. Growing up, I didn't really have that many Muslim friends. I was always searching for sisterhood, because it's a really big concept within Islam. But I always felt like this observer. Seeing other people have that sense of sisterhood, but feeling like it was out of reach for me. I definitely feel like social media helped me find incredible people and build a sense of community.

There is a common trope that social media makes us lonelier, but it sounds like it helped you build genuine connections?

I've benefited so much, in particular from the community of Muslim Twitter. I honestly feel like the community that is Muslim Twitter is a very real community, and I feel a lot of solidarity with them for that reason. We're like a dysfunctional family where we argue about things, but in times where we really need to come together we do that too.

You started the online media platform, Amaliah, to build a support system for Muslim women around the world. What has the experience of creating it been like for you?

Growing up and constantly feeling like I was chasing this sense of sisterhood, I now feel like I've been love-bombed by it through Amaliah. I feel so privileged to know so many Muslim women who are just so incredible in many different facets of their lives.

What is the type of feedback you've been getting from readers?

Our feedback has been quite overwhelmingly of love and positivity. We get a lot of messages saying things like, 'this might be strange, but the reason I felt like I was able to do X is because of Amaliah and the confidence it's given me in my identity.'

"Growing up, I didn't really have that many Muslim friends. I was always searching for sisterhood."



Nafisa with her sister Selina. They co-founded Amaliah together in 2016.

“Exploring different types of people is what ultimately helps us understand who we are and who we can be.”

A lot of people have also mentioned that Amaliah has helped them understand that there are other people who have similar lived experiences and are bound by many similar values.

What are some of the ways you are helping young Muslim girls strengthen their sense of identity through Amaliah?

One of the really cool things we are doing right now is having Muslim woman from different parts of the world takeover our Instagram story on a bi-weekly basis, to show us a day in their life. These are women living everywhere from South Africa, to Malaysia, to France and the US. It really gives us a chance to expand our own biases when it comes to what it means to be a Muslim women. It's very easy to take on the narratives that are given to us through mainstream media, and so it's an

incredibly powerful thing to see all these different Muslim women living their different lives. Exploring different types of people is what ultimately helps us understand who we are and who we can be.

What kind of impact do you hope to see Amaliah leave on young female Muslims in the generations to come?

Confidence. I want to help them find a sense of confidence in their identity and how they go through the world. It takes a toll when you view your Muslim identity as a marker that holds you back in the world, rather than one that moves you forward. I feel like Islam is a religion that safeguards your soul, and I want people to get rid of the feeling that being Muslim is not compatible with them living their best life.



Amaliah is helping Muslim women around the world find confidence in their identity.

Thank You To All Our Contributors

SCOTT VALDEZ

Scott Valdez founded VIDA Select, a 'done-for-you' online dating & profile writing service, in 2009. Three years before Tinder came out and right as the online dating scene was first beginning to take off.

KRISTINA BAPTISTE

Kristina Baptiste first tried Bumble BFF (Bumble For Friends) when she moved to Austin, Texas, in 2014. The process of making friends in a new city was more difficult than Kristina anticipated.

ZOË LIGON

A self-taught sex educator and the owner of Spectrum Boutique, a sex-positive online store for people of all identities and curiosities.

LAUREEN HD

A self-taught sex educator with a YouTube channel that aims to destigmatize and demystify what it is like to live with herpes. She has helped thousands navigate their own diagnoses, and is helping to fill the STI education gap that exists today.

PETER DEVITO

Peter has already had his work featured in prominent publications such as Vogue, I-D, The New York Times and Harper's Bazaar. Peter's work aims to challenge prevalent stigmas around beauty in the fashion industry.

PHIL YOUNG

The former co-host of the wildly popular series *Board Stupid* on Channel 4, and the current director of outdoor lifestyle agency Mighty Mighty.

UDAY KAPUR

Co-founder of Azadi Records, an independent New Delhi-based record label, in 2017. Azadi Records is making waves in the music scene for its dedication to platforming voices that were previously ignored by the mainstream.

ROWEN ADIA

One of Rocycle's most popular cycling instructors in Amsterdam. Rowen has seen first-hand the power of building community through fitness, and is a firm believer in its power to build people up.

ALEX WELLER

Patagonia's European Marketing Director, responsible for amplifying the company's mission and building communities through outdoor sport and environmental activism.

JAMIE WINDUST

An award-winning editor and writer as well as a public speaker, model and the founder of FRUITCAKE magazine.

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