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*...the idea of perfection is ridiculous but somehow
there is the ideology of perfect skin... A*
qualitative investigation of the meaning of perfect
skin for those with and without a visible
difference

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ABSTRACT

Amy Lloyd-Houldey: ...*the idea of perfection is ridiculous but somehow there is the ideology of perfect skin...* A qualitative investigation of the meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference.
(Under the direction of Dr. Jess Prior)

This qualitative study explored the meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference. Facebook focus groups were used to collect primary data, using snowballing and opportunistic sampling methods. A heterogeneous sample of participants were recruited to ensure maximum variation (Patton, 2015), allowing the researcher to identify the most important themes across a diverse group. Participants were divided into a visible difference group (participants with skin conditions; aged 21-54; 9 women, 3 men) and a non-visible difference group (those without skin conditions; aged 18-33; 9 women, 3 men). Once ethical approval was granted, the data was collected, and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Four superordinate themes were identified for discussion; *The importance of blending in not standing out; The appearance of the skin is the responsibility of the individual; The ideology of perfect skin; The changing importance of the skin across the lifespan*. Most interesting, was the level of agreement across both groups. Future research should aim to further explore the lived experience, and stigma surrounding the skin, by including participants with an invisible difference. As well as the impact social media has on the perception of the skin.

Keywords: visible difference, skin, perfect, stigma, lived experience, thematic analysis

K1552555

To my husband who has supported me in more ways than I can ever describe.
Thank you for being you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Skin conditions (a term used for this study so as to include both genetic conditions, like port wine stains, as well as those acquired through disease such as psoriasis) are very common (Thompson, 2005). Skin conditions, such as acne, eczema, and scarring, are often visible to others. Visible skin markings, are highly stigmatised within society, resulting in negative social and emotional experiences for those with skin conditions (Walker, 2005).

The following sections will discuss the key points from the visible difference literature, including an analysis of the meaning and importance of the skin across a range of cultures (Nadelson, 1978), and its role within society (Frith, 2014). Stigma surrounding visible skin conditions will be discussed, including the reaction of others, and the negative psychological implications of this (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). An overview of the qualitative studies in this area will follow, and the insight these studies provide by positioning the participant – as the expert – at the centre of the research. Finally, the implications of living in today's visual society, with its pressure for visual perfection, will be discussed, before providing an overview and the aims of the current study.

The Meaning and Importance of the Skin

The skin is the largest organ in the human body, and plays an important social role; it is the border between the outside world and the inner self; the first sense of being, and

facilitates the initial feelings of gratification and pain (Nadelson, 1978). The skin exposes inner feelings outwards in the form of blushing, perspiring, losing colour (Nadelson, 1978), often in an uncontrollable way. The skin is able to communicate interpersonal information.

The skin's role can be observed across geographical as well as cultural borders. Turner (2012) described how the Amazonian Kayapo people use the skin as a canvas, and by painting the body, growing hair and using adornments, the skin communicates social standing within the community, as well as beauty and wealth. Skin modifications are used to mark childhood, puberty, parenthood, and old age (Turner, 2012). Skin adornments in western cultures – make-up, piercings, tattoos – act as a way of positioning individuals within society (Frith, 2014). For example, in the west, an individual's economic status, and even personal values are judged by their presentation (Frith, 2014). Frith (2014) described how western media use appearance narratives, to cast judgement on certain groups within society. For example, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are often described as overweight or unattractive, reinforcing the stigmatising view within society that those individuals are lazy and undeserving (Frith, 2014). Therefore, the skin is key to an individual's identity (Egan, Harcourt & Rumsey, 2011; Ginsburg, 1996; Turner, 2012; Nadelson, 1978).

Stigma and Skin Conditions

The importance society places on the appearance of the skin, and particularly the face, is not a new phenomenon. In Greek civilisation, the face was a symbol of an

individual's character (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Judgement encompassing the skin sits at the heart of the stigma experienced by those with a visible skin condition, as it outwardly marks and discredits the individual. Goffman (1963) argued that *normals* (those accepted by society) find it difficult to interact with stigmatised individuals. He proposed this was due to the abnormality of the interaction which left *normals* not knowing how to conduct themselves. Goffman (1963) argued that *normals* may also make character judgements about the stigmatised individual (Goffman, 1963). The stigmatised individual, is also likely to be acutely aware of their behaviour for fear of anything negative being attributed to their visible difference (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, a stigmatised individual is consistently judged more harshly because they do not meet the lowest bar of acceptability dictated by society (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005).

Goffman (1963) described three types of stigma: first, stigma surrounding physical disability, the second is associated with character flaws and linked to deviant behaviour, and the third relating to an individual's ethnicity or religion. The word stigma originated from the Greeks, and was a physical mark placed on the body to indicate to the rest of society that there was something bad or morally deviant about the individual (Goffman, 1963). Most importantly, stigma can only occur within a societal context, as it must be a shared view held by both the stigmatised and the stigmatising individual. An individual cannot be stigmatised if they themselves do not feel judged.

Different types of stigma elicit different reactions from society. Stigmas perceived to be controllable, such as deviant behaviour, are judged to be the fault of the individual,

and assessed as a character flaw. These stigmas (depression, addiction, poverty) are often met with anger rather than pity (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988).

Stigma surrounding visible skin conditions will now be considered in more detail. In their review of the literature surrounding the perceived cause and effect of acne in adolescents (317 male and female participants), aged 14-16 years (some who identified as having acne and others who did not), Hedden, Davidson and Smith (2008) found that the majority of those interviewed believed the main causes of acne to be cleanliness and diet (this included the views of individuals who had acne). Genetics and hormones were not perceived as being major causes. These findings indicate that skin conditions are thought to be controllable, and therefore the fault of the individual. This is also highlighted in Larsen, Patterson and Markham's (2014) interview study (10 male and female participants), aged 20-50 years (including individuals with and without tattoos), which examined the stigma surrounding tattoos. Again, the skin was seen to be the responsibility of the individual, and therefore any *difference*, particularly out of choice, was received negatively. Hedden et al.'s (2008) paper also highlighted the stigma felt by those with a visible difference. Results indicated that those with acne also felt that their skin condition was their fault (Walker & Papadopoulos, 2005).

Kent (2005) attempted to explain why skin conditions are stigmatising. First, he described the visible difference as taking over the identity of the individual. For example, if an individual has acne, their skin condition is often seen before any other part of them is considered, and a negative judgement is quickly made. Kent (2005) continued to discuss

the different forms of stigma those with a visible difference face, including rejection in an outward display of *enacted stigma*, as well as *vicarious stigmatisation*, whereby an individual is witness to another person being stigmatised (Kent, 2005). A stigmatising act can be anything from staring and avoidance, through to directive questioning and comments. Kent (2005) proposed that a visible difference of the skin is stigmatising due to society's lack of understanding as to why skin conditions occur. Kent (2005) continued, that society has filled the knowledge gap with blame and judgement, building a dominant view that the skin is the responsibility of the individual, and if one is not able to conform to an acceptable standard, it is their fault. Finally, Kent (2005) discussed the idea that there might be an evolutionary angle to the stigma surrounding the skin. Prior to medical knowledge, any type of difference would have been perceived as dangerous, and would have been avoided due to self-preservation. This feeds into the commonly held view that skin conditions are contagious or dirty, perhaps another learnt behaviour from the past, whereby any difference needed to be avoided in order to protect oneself from risk of disease (Kent, 2005).

The skin is the boundary between the inner self and the outer world (Nadelson, 1978). Therefore, as *different* skin is perceived as being *dirty* (Hedden et al., 2008), *dirt* on the skin has engrained social meaning, as it is viewed as *dirt* from the inside showing itself on the outside of the body. From a young age, *dirt* from within (faeces) is met with disgust. Therefore, *dirt* has moral implications relating to bad, evil or wrong, whereas clean is perceived as good, unsullied or pure (Nadelson, 1978).

What fuels the stigma surrounding *different* skin is that *difference* of the skin is perceived as *dirt* and seen to be contagious by *normals* (Goffman, 1963). The individual with the skin condition is pressurised to become *normal* or *clean* again. This pressure is not only felt by the individual, but also by their close friends and family (Nadelson, 1978). In Ginsburg's (1996) review of patients' notes who had been admitted to hospital with a non-contagious skin condition, patients described the most stigmatising aspect of their condition, as being the fear of contagion expressed by others. This was echoed in Magin, Adams, Heading, Pond and Smith's (2008), interview study which reported the experiences of 62 male and female participants, 13-73 years, who had been diagnosed with acne, psoriasis or atopic eczema. Participants felt isolated due to others' fears of contamination, not just from society, but also from health care professionals (Magin et al., 2008).

Stigma can result in damaging psychosocial effects which will now be discussed. Hrehorów et al.'s (2012) study of 102 male and female participants, 16-82 years, who had been diagnosed with psoriasis, explored their experiences of stigmatisation. They found that participants felt stigmatised due to being stared at. Staring at another can indicate feelings of disgust, but also fascination, the desire to know why someone looks *different* (Walker & Papadopoulos, 2005). Therefore, disgust, coupled with intrigue, can lead to questioning from *normals* (Goffman, 1963).

If an individual looks *different*, there is a societal expectation that the individual should disclose the reason for their difference (Walker & Papadopoulos, 2005), and this expectation can have a negative impact on romantic relationships. Magin et al., (2010)

found that for the majority (62 participants diagnosed with either psoriasis, atopic eczema or acne), being naked in front of someone for the first time triggered anxiety. Individuals felt they needed to disclose their skin condition before entering into a sexual relationship, which became a barrier (Magin et al., 2010). Hrehorów et al.'s (2012) study also supported this. They found that even if psoriasis was on a non-visible part of the body, participants still felt stigmatised. Hrehorów et al. (2012) hypothesised this was because it would still have to be disclosed, particularly with sexual partners, potentially leading to increased anxiety around the appropriate time to do this.

The Experience of Living with a Visible Difference

Some conditions are instantly visible such as paraplegia, however, some are non-visible like diabetes, and others are both visible and non-visible such as Parkinson's disease (Joachim & Acorn, 1999). This can impact how one experiences stigma, and also how an individual discusses their condition. For example, someone with a visible condition is likely to be discredited by society almost instantly, however, an individual with a non-visible condition may be able to hide or disguise the condition in order to appear *normal* (Joachim & Acorn, 1999). However, concealing the visible difference can cause heightened levels of stress and anxiety for the individual, as they can become concerned with being *found out* (Joachim & Acorn, 1999). In their meta-analysis of qualitative research, combined with a review of the quantitative literature on coping with having a chronic illness or condition, Joachim and Acorn (1999) developed a theoretical framework to explain how individuals cope with stigma surrounding their condition, and disclosure.

They found that individuals with a visible condition have fewer options in how they manage the stigma surrounding their *difference*, they were either automatically discredited, or they were forced to hide their condition if possible (Joachim & Acorn, 1999). As a result, individuals with a visible difference are more likely to experience increased levels of stigma and/or greater anxiety related to covering their skin, for fear of their condition being discovered (Joachim & Acorn, 1999).

Historically, quantitative methods have been used to investigate visible differences. However, these studies predominantly described the experience of the health/social worker rather than the individual with the skin condition (Joachim & Acorn, 1999). Therefore, if one wishes to explore the meaning of living with a visible difference of the skin, from the perspective of the individual experiencing it, qualitative methods ensure that the participant is at the centre of the research, positioned as the expert regarding their condition (Magin, 2013; Magin, Pond, Smith, Watson, & Goode, 2011). Due to the subjective nature of the skin, viewing the participant as the expert is vital (Egan et al., 2011).

Shame and guilt are common themes discussed in the visible difference literature (Bogart, 2014; Ginsburg, 1996; Hrehorów et al., 2012; Wahl et al., 2002). In an interview study of 22 male and female patients hospitalised with psoriasis, Wahl et al. (2002) quoted one patient's feelings of worthlessness, *The disease brings defeat after defeat. I am ashamed of being different, of never being adequate.* (p. 257). Here, the word *defeat* suggests she has been destroyed by a victorious enemy. Comments such as this illuminate

the frustration surrounding visible differences, which is why qualitative rather than quantitative methods provide a deeper understanding of this kind of phenomenon.

The skin plays a vital role in identity formation, however, what is widely documented in the literature, is that individuals with a visible difference feel that their identity is out of their control (Howarth, 2002; Koo, 1995; Magin, et al., 2010; Nadelson, 1978; Wahl et al., 2002). When the skin is *imperfect* it is often perceived as separate from the self (Nadelson, 1978), rather than being an aid in forming a positive identity. The skin itself is in control, dictating the individual's appearance and their mood. For example, Wahl et al. (2002) identified the theme, *staying on an even keel* (p. 256), where the individual had to delicately balance aspects of their life in order to minimise the impact on their skin. Participants described how they longed to be free, and not to be constrained by their skin.

Furthermore, a qualitative study by Fox, Rumsey and Morris (2007), captured the experiences of young people (11-18 years) who had severe skin conditions. The theme, *it and me* (p. 135), described participants' sense of losing control, and being a victim to their skin's erratic behaviour. Murray and Rhodes (2005) also referred to the defencelessness felt by participants in relation to the skin, leaving individuals with acne feeling hopeless and out of control of their own bodies.

Finally, comparisons to an earlier self, before the individual had the skin condition, is a theme discussed in the literature (Murray & Rhodes, 2005; Prior & Khadaroo, 2015),

and highlighted in Prior and Khadaroo's (2015) study. In their interview study (11 male and female participants aged 18-22 years), they found evidence of participants looking back at pictures of themselves before they had acne. However, this strategy often brought with it sadness and shame that they no longer had *good* skin (Prior & Khadaroo, 2015).

In an attempt to combat the negative impact a skin condition can have on identity and psychological wellbeing, individuals with *different* skin often adopt coping strategies. These range from concealment, over compensation, seeking the support of friends and family, to putting others down (Bogart, 2014; Egan et al., 2011; Griffiths et al., 2012; Koo, 1995; Murray & Rhodes, 2005; Prior & Khadaroo, 2015). Some of these coping strategies have greater psychological benefits than others.

The Meaning of Perfect Skin

In today's visual world, saturated with images of perfection, it could be argued that there is now more pressure than ever for the skin to look a certain way, fuelling the *narcissistic longing for perfection* (Ginsburg, 1996, p. 480). The media plays an important role in constructing beauty and acceptance in the eyes of mainstream society, and has different implications for men and women, as well as for individuals of different ages (Egan et al., 2011; Griffiths, Williamson, & Rumsey, 2012; Heason & Kent, 2001; Hrehorów et al., 2012; Magin, Adams, Heading & Pond, 2010, 2011). However, there has been limited research on the meaning of perfect skin for men and women.

Overview of the Current Study

Many quantitative studies have investigated the negative impact a visible difference can have on an individual's sense of self, as well as their ability to socialise and develop intimate relationships (Hrehorów et al., 2012). Semi-structured interview studies have added a deeper insight into the stigma surrounding visible differences, and the debilitating affects this can have on individual's lives due to loss of control, isolation, and anxiety (Bogart, 2014; Egan et al., 2011; Griffiths et al., 2012; Koo, 1995; Murray & Rhodes, 2005; Prior & Khadaroo, 2015).

However, to fully explore stigma, and the lived experience of those who have a visible difference, it is critical to understand the meaning of the skin within the context of society, something that to the researcher's knowledge has not yet been explored. Therefore, the current study will explore the meaning of perfect skin for those who do not have a visible difference, as well as those who self-identify as having a visible difference. By attempting to understand both the *in-group* (those who do not have a visible difference of the skin) and *out-group* (individuals who self-identify as having a visible difference of the skin) context within which the stigma occurs (Larsen et al., 2014), it is hoped that the current study will add further understanding to the meaning of the skin within contemporary society.

In the current study, four focus groups were conducted with adults who self-identified as having a clear complexion, and those with a visible difference of the skin,

including those with a range of visible skin conditions (birthmark, scarring, acne, psoriasis, for example). The aim of this qualitative study was to understand the meaning of perfect skin for those who self-identified as having a visible difference, and those who did not, and to shed light on the shared meaning of the skin within a heterogeneous sample of participants. Qualitative methods were adopted in order to fully explore the meaning of the skin and appearance from the perspective of the participant (Magin, 2013; Magin, Pond, Smith, Watson & Goode, 2011).

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

A heterogeneous sample of 24 participants were recruited for this study to ensure maximum variation (Patton, 2015), enabling the researcher to identify themes that were relevant across a diverse group, and therefore most important (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria were that participants needed to be 18 years or older, and individuals were advised not to participate if they were currently receiving counselling for any issues regarding their appearance. Participants were divided into two groups, those who self-identified as having a visible difference of the skin (referred to from this point as the visible difference group), and those who self-identified as not having a visible difference of the skin (referred to from this point as the non-visible difference group).

There were a total of 12 participants (9 females, 3 males), aged 21-54 years ($M = 30.5$) in the visible difference group. Their visible differences ranged from freckles and scarring through to pigmentation and albinism. Full participant information and pseudonyms are illustrated in Table 1.

Participants were recruited for the study using snowballing and opportunistic sampling methods. This included advertising the study through Kingston University's Sona system, a website used by Kingston University to recruit participants in exchange for course credits. The researcher also approached friends and family, and posted a request on Facebook asking individuals to come forward if they would like to participate.

Table 1
Visible difference group participant details

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Visible Difference	Ethnicity
Kim	21	Female	Freckles, redness and acne scarring	Korean
Samantha	24	Female	Chicken pox, scars and birthmark	White English
Cheryl	21	Female	Albinism	White English
Dima	35	Female	Acne scarring	Seychelloise
Yalika	22	Female	Acne	Bangladeshi
Oscar	31	Male	Psoriasis and also allergies to certain food types which cause rashes	White British
Ray	36	Male	Becker's Nevus	White English
Naomi	31	Female	Caesarean section, noticeable sag of the skin above the scar	White English
Lucy	31	Female	No pigmentation on an area on the right side of the face	White New Zealander
Jackie	28	Female	Rosacea	White English
Delilah	54	Female	Previously suffered with eczema	Australian
Tony	32	Male	Unknown – not diagnosed	White English

Twelve individuals (9 females, 3 males), aged 18-33 years ($M = 26.33$) participated in the non-visible difference group. Full participant information and pseudonyms are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Non-visible difference group participant details

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Eva	33	Female	White Australian
Tom	26	Male	African
Jack	30	Male	White English
Anna	30	Female	White British
Sasha	29	Female	White British
Fiona	31	Female	White English
May	18	Female	Pakistani
Betty	31	Female	White English
Ona	23	Female	African
Dawn	22	Female	African
Robin	23	Male	White English
Hannah	20	Female	Pakistani

Materials

Focus groups were chosen for this study as they offered the opportunity to collect rich and dynamic data driven from participants' interactions with one another (Egan et al., 2011), as well as between the researcher and participant, facilitating interesting and nuanced data. Research also suggests that those with a visible difference often find it supportive to interact with other individuals who have similar experiences (Egan et al.,

2011; Fox et al., 2007). A focus group schedule was developed by two researchers and their supervisor. This included 19 open ended questions, focusing on five topics that were developed after reviewing the existing literature. Focus group questions can be found in Appendix A.

Four online focus groups were conducted, two with the visible difference participants, and two with the non-visible difference participants, using loosely structured interview questions. Online rather than face-to-face focus groups were chosen, as previous appearance research suggested that some individuals with skin conditions do not feel comfortable participating in face-to-face studies due to the visibility of their condition (Fox et al., 2007; Murray & Rhodes, 2005).

Facebook was selected as the platform to host the focus groups as it is a social media channel most people are familiar with, it was free to use, and it encouraged a diverse participant sample due to its global reach (the current study involved participants living in Britain, Australia and New Zealand; Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2015). Another benefit was that by becoming Facebook *friends* prior to the focus group, the researcher was able to establish a rapport with participants. (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2015). This enabled the researcher to connect with participants, encouraging open and honest conversation.

Once a participant had expressed an interest in participating in the study, the researcher agreed a convenient time with each of the participants, either via email or

Facebook *messenger*. Once the time was agreed by participants, the researcher created a Facebook *chat* and invited each participant to join it at the agreed date and time.

Procedure

Participants expressed their interest in the study by emailing the researchers, sending them a Facebook message, or via Kingston University's online Sona website. After initial contact, the researcher would ask them to confirm whether they had a visible difference of the skin, so they could be assigned to the appropriate focus group. If the researcher was not already Facebook *friends* with the participant, she would ask the participant to send her a *friend request*, she accepted the *friend request*, and invited the participant to join the Facebook *chat* with the other focus group participants. The researcher typed the agreed date and time into the Facebook *chat* ensuring participants joined at the agreed time so the focus group could take place in real time.

Prior to the focus group, the researcher shared a link in the Facebook *chat* to an online demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B), participant information sheet (see Appendix C), online consent form (see Appendix D), focus group ground rules (see Appendix E), and focus group questions. Sharing the questions before the focus group gave participants the opportunity to ask questions or to withdraw from the study (none of the participants withdrew).

Each of the focus groups lasted 90-minutes. The second and third focus groups involved visible difference participants. As well as participating in the online Facebook *chat*, the two researchers were also in contact over the phone. This enabled the researchers to have a private conversation alongside the public one happening in the Facebook *chat*. The researchers discussed who should lead certain sections, and the phrasing of questions. When running the final focus group, the researchers decided to adapt their approach, and instead of each leading a separate section, both simultaneously questioned participants. They decided to do this based on their experience of running the previous focus groups, and felt it would enable the conversation to flow more easily, which it did.

Finally, an online debrief form (see Appendix F) was shared in the Facebook *chat*. This included advice on where to go if participants required further support. After the focus group, the researcher *defriended* any participants that she had become *friends* with for the purpose of the study. This protected the privacy of both the researcher and the participant.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to explore the data. This method was chosen due to its agility, as well as its ability to produce a powerful and comprehensive, yet intricate account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis methodology identifies themes in the data, allowing the researcher to interpret those themes, and shed light on the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure an in-depth analysis was conducted, the researcher followed the six phases outlined by Braun

and Clarke (2006), including: an initial familiarisation phase where the researcher read and re-read the data corpus. Second, the researcher generated initial thematic codes using a line-by-line approach, ensuring that all of the data were given equal attention. Potential themes were then identified from the coding, and these themes were reviewed based on their relevance to the research question, as well as their robustness by testing against Patton's (1990) concept of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Phase five involved the researcher naming and defining each of the themes that would be discussed in the thesis, and finally, the themes were written up, including key data extracts that would bring the essence of the theme to life for the reader.

Thematic analysis does not dictate a theoretical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This ensures flexibility, but means that the researcher must be clear on their epistemological position prior to data analysis. Due to the nature of the research question, the researcher adopted a critical realist position (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2007). This stance put the participants at the centre of the research, as the experts, in order to understand their realities (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2007). However, due to the critical stance of the researcher's position, the analysis used both a semantic and latent analysis of the data, as it was accepted that although the participants' own experiences were understood as a true representation of their reality, it was assumed that these realities were also shaped by participants' physical and social experiences dependent upon their gender, social class, ethnicity and age, for example (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2007). Finally, an inductive rather than deductive approach was taken, ensuring a bottom-up analysis of the data rather than one driven by a theoretical framework. It is important to mention that the researcher had

immersed herself in the relevant literature prior to the data collection and analysis phases of the project. Therefore, the literature, as well as the researchers own experiences and views, also played a role in shaping the data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

An ethics form was submitted for approval by a member of academic staff in the psychology department and ethical clearance was granted by Kingston University before the research project begun. Two types of data were captured. The first were the verbatim, real time, typed exchanges between participants and the moderator during the Facebook focus group. The second was a copy of the Facebook interactions pasted into a Microsoft Word file. These data were anonymised, with identifying information removed, and a pseudonym used for each participant. As the Facebook exchanges were typed quickly by participants, there were some obvious spelling errors and missed words in the data. These were corrected to make the data as coherent as possible for the reader, for example, the misspelling of judgement was corrected. All other text was presented as it was originally typed by the participant, including slang words, for example, *defs* was kept as an abbreviation of definitely, and the use of 2 instead of to (full transcripts of the data can be found in Appendix H). All data were kept on a password protected laptop.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed seven superordinate themes across the data corpus. Four of the superordinate themes were selected for in-depth discussion, due to their relevance to the research question, and their ability to add new insight to the existing literature. The four superordinate themes were; *The importance of blending in not standing out*; *The appearance of the skin is the responsibility of the individual*; *The ideology of perfect skin*; *The changing importance of the skin across the lifespan*. An overview of the themes is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Overview of the coding themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
The importance of blending in not standing out	The desire to look normal Covering up visible differences Hiding from view
The appearance of the skin is the responsibility of the individual	The skin reflects the lifestyle choices of an individual The skin defines who a person is
The ideology of perfect skin	The existence of perfect skin The influences of society on the skin Life is different for those who have perfect skin The impact of social media on the skin
The changing importance of the skin across the lifespan	The social clock Fear of ageing Learning to accept oneself with age
Control (visible difference group)	The skin is in control Regaining control of the skin Acceptance of the skin
Reactions from others (visible difference group)	Unwanted advice Specialists do not understand Questions and comments from others Feeling accepted by others
The desire to do the right thing (non-visible difference group)	

The four superordinate themes outlined above were prioritised as they were relevant to both groups of participants. Patton (2015) refers to this as *maximum variation sampling*, themes that are relevant to a diverse (heterogeneous) sample of participants and cut across the data corpus, are likely to be of particularly importance in building an understanding of the phenomena from many different angles. The four themes will be explored in more detail below.

The Importance of Blending in not Standing Out

This superordinate theme focused on participants' desire to look normal. Both groups felt that if their skin looked normal, they could blend in and not be noticed. Three subordinate themes were also identified which were; *The desire to look normal*; *Covering up visible differences*; *Hiding from view*.

The desire to look normal.

This subordinate theme concerned both groups of participants and centred around a fear of the skin looking different. If the skin looked different, participants felt they were at risk of attracting negative attention, being stared at, or receiving unwanted comments:

And someone mentioned it [having a spot when you don't usually have one].
It will leave you feeling paranoid. Just because someone has noticed it.
(Ona, non-visible difference group, p. 94, 421-422)

Ona's fear that someone might notice a blemish on her skin can be ascribed to her fear of enacted and felt stigma (Goffman, 1963; Gray, 2002). Enacted stigma refers to explicit displays of prejudice or dismissal by *normals* (those without a stigmatised identity; Goffman, 1963) towards someone with a stigmatised identity. Felt stigma on the other hand, is when a stigmatised individual feels discredited or not accepted by *normals* (Goffman, 1963), without an overt act of prejudice having taken place. Ona's fear of enacted stigma is that someone might comment on her skin if she had a blemish, and her *paranoia* is based on her fear of felt stigma, believing that she would be dismissed by others if her skin had a blemish.

Ray also described his experiences of enacted and felt stigma due to his visible difference:

Use to shave 4 times a day just to look normal and was bullied because of it
(freak', 'two face' etc). I don't keep any pictures from before I was thirty.
Was not a happy time. (Ray, visible difference group, p. 109, 909-910)

Standing out had resulted in Ray being bullied throughout his teenage years, and so for him, not attracting attention was the most important aspect of his appearance. Ray did

not want to look better than people around him, he just wanted to look the same as them, potentially indicating his feelings of inferiority, for example,

Why would a women want to be with someone so physically different to other people when there are thousands of other potential partners. People want normal! (Ray, p. 113, 1023-1024)

The longing to blend in was a running theme for Ray, for example, *Don't you feel at times that you want to be like everybody else?* (Ray, p. 107, 834). Although Ray appeared to be have become happier with his appearance, his comments continuously strayed back to his feelings of inadequacy, due to his visible difference of the skin, for example, *...why would they date someone like me when they could go out with someone who has normal skin* (Ray, p. 112, 996-997). Feelings of inadequacy due to having a visible difference of the skin is a prominent thread throughout the literature, particularly when the individual feels that they have lost control of the skin due to their condition (Wahl et al., 2002).

Covering up visible differences.

This subordinate theme described the concealment strategies adopted by both groups to cover up their imperfections. Individuals felt they had to look a certain way before they could present themselves to the outside world:

...I try and cover up my red cheeks with make-up and I definitely feel I look better when they're less obvious, so I must care about whether it's visible to others. (Jackie, visible difference group, p. 106, 785-786)

Jackie had Rosacea, a skin condition that causes reddening. Concealing the skin in order to cover-up imperfections is a well-documented theme in the literature (Fox et al., 2007; Griffiths et al., 2010; Prior & Khadaroo, 2015). In Prior and Khadaroo's (2015) qualitative study of 11 participants with mild to moderate acne, both female and male participants described using concealment strategies, such as make-up, to improve their appearance. In contrast to this, make-up was an extremely controversial area for men in this study:

I used make-up! My mum and sister would go on at me and I put cover up on once and went to the pub and someone said are you wearing make-up [how did that make you feel?] mortified in a word'. (Tony, visible difference group, p. 113, 1037-1042)

Tony's use of the word *mortified* potentially indicates that he felt more stigmatised by the make-up, than the skin condition. A similar theme was discussed by Frith and Gleeson (2004) in a qualitative study of 75 men. They identified a theme called *men should not care how they look*, which suggested that a typical, heterosexual, male identity, is incompatible with being perceived to care about one's appearance. Frith and Gleeson (2004) explained this as being an attempt by men to prove their masculinity and

heterosexuality by distancing themselves from other less desirable identities such as female or homosexual. This conflict between wearing make-up to conceal the skin, or not concealing imperfections, was also expressed by Oscar:

When I have a rash on the side of my face I try to cover it up with make-up. But as a male that makes me feel pretty self-conscious - I'm worried that people will realise that I'm wearing make-up. (Oscar, visible difference group, p. 126, 1468-1471)

The stigma surrounding men wearing make-up was also evident amongst the non-visible difference male participants. Three male participants stated that they would not consider wearing make-up to improve the appearance of their skin:

...don't think that men in make-up is normalised yet. Noel Fielding or Tim Minchin going for a look is very different from men using to cover up their insecurities. (Jack, non-visible difference group, p. 91, 326-327)

Above, Jack is perhaps indicating that in order to conform to the dominant, heterosexual, male identity, men should not have insecurities, and if they do, they should not be displayed to the world by wearing make-up. Jack perhaps feels that by men wearing make-up, they are showing signs of weakness, and this is unacceptable. This echoes Firth and Gleeson's (2004) research, suggesting that men must prove their masculinity within society by conforming to a stereotypical heterosexual identity.

In contrast to the stigma men felt about using make-up, many of the women in both groups described make-up as enabling them to present a positive identity:

I can't see me being happy going to work (in particular) without make-up on, so I do think I will keep up the routine in the long term. (Jackie, visible difference group, p. 112, 1000-1001)

Jackie spoke at length about using her make-up routine to present a certain image of herself at work. Jackie felt that her red cheeks not only made her look different, but also made her look younger, which she described as being a problem at work. Jackie used make-up to create a look she felt was presentable and mature, and one which would perhaps grant her more respect. Using make-up to camouflage visible differences of the skin, in an attempt to make it look *normal*, is widely discussed in the literature. In their book on the *psychology of appearance*, Rumsey and Harcourt (2005) explained some of the negative psychological consequences of relying on make-up as a camouflaging strategy. First, they argued that by covering visible differences, individuals are reinforcing society's standardised ideal of appearance, rather than embracing diversity (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Rumsey and Harcourt (2005) also suggested that because some individuals feel they need to apply make-up to look *normal*, they can become consumed with their appearance, resulting in being classified as vain, a trait that is frowned upon by society (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005).

However, in some cases, relying on make-up, made individuals feel that they could not be seen without a made-up face, as their skin was not acceptable, for example, *I don't leave the house without makeup on* (Delilah, visible difference group, p. 117, 1174). Other participants described how there were only certain contexts in which they were free to be without make-up:

...means that I don't often show my un-made up face to the world. But it doesn't affect my relationships with my close friends or boyfriend - they've all seen my bare face and I don't feel self-conscious around them. (Jackie, visible difference group, p. 111, 947-948)

Jackie is affirming the private and personal nature of the skin, and appeared to use make-up as a form of armour to protect herself when leaving the safe space of her home to enter the world where she knew she would be judged.

As discussed above, concealing the skin by using make-up enabled some participants to feel more confident. However, the act of covering up the skin also brought with it frustration. Participants described their annoyance when make-up was applied but did not achieve the desired look. Samantha's frustration was particularly evident when she described her friends' comments about how best to cover her scars:

...but they don't see me behind the scenes as it were, trying to cover it all up.

Maybe they don't realise how much I'm trying to make it look better.

(Samantha, visible difference group, p. 128, 1511-1513)

It is evident that Samantha feels she is doing everything she can to make her skin look *normal*, but her efforts go unnoticed.

Over reliance on make-up can also leave individuals feeling that they have lost who they really are (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). This was illustrated by Betty who described feeling as if she was living a lie, as she would only allow herself to be seen wearing make-up. By consistently covering her skin, Betty felt she was unable to be herself, resulting in nobody really knowing her. Make-up had created a psychological barrier between who Betty felt she was and how she presented herself to others. The weight that Betty felt when wearing make-up was captured in her comment, *I love days when I don't need to put make-up on but they are few and far between!* (Betty, non-visible difference group, p. 85, 105-106).

Hiding from view.

This subordinate theme was only applicable to some participants in the visible difference group, and described how sometimes they did not want to not be seen. Wanting to hide from view, occurred when their concealment strategies failed to work, or the

individual felt their skin was looking particularly bad. Most evident, was that participants felt their skin had taken over, resulting in their desire to hide from view, for example, *When it's not looking very good, I just don't really want to be seen.* (Oscar, visible difference group, p. 122, 1337-1338).

This was also illustrated by Yalika:

Some days if my skin is having a bad day and i want to go out so i apply makeup. if the makeup doesnt sit well, then i will just forget about going out but some days i dont care and try to make it work there are good and bad days. (Yalika, visible difference group, p. 125, 1416-1418).

In tales such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frankenstein's Monster* and *Phantom of the Opera*, a visible difference leads to the individual hiding from view, and through this isolation, they change in their character and become evil. Many societies also portray any *bad* character, as being unattractive or disfigured, reinforcing the view that being unattractive communicates something negative about a person's character (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2014). Ugliness and evil have been associated with one another since Greek civilisation (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2014), and this is still evident today, whereby all things *good* are portrayed as being attractive, whereas evil, unhappiness and loneliness are often played out by ugly beings or creatures in films such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Dracula* (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2014). There is also a sense that if one were to present themselves to

the world when they looked unacceptable, they would become an object of scrutiny. To avoid this, and to preserve the self, individuals feel it is safer to hide.

The Appearance of the Skin is the Responsibility of the Individual

This superordinate theme was relevant to both groups and highlighted participants' view that the appearance of the skin was the responsibility of the individual. Two subordinate themes were also identified which were, *the skin reflects the lifestyle choices of an individual*, and, *the skin defines who a person is*.

The skin reflects the lifestyle choices of an individual.

This subordinate theme was discussed across both groups and encapsulated participants' feelings about controllability and choice leading to judgement and blame, for example,

I think people do think it's my fault. For example I feel that I can't really go out and be seen to be eating greasy, unhealthy food because I think people are thinking 'maybe you should put down that burger'! or even worse I am putting them off their food. (Dima, visible difference group, p. 123, 1349-1351)

The felt stigma (Goffman, 1963; Gray, 2002) embodying feelings of blame and guilt are clearly evidenced in Dima's comment above.

Weiner, Perry and Magnusson's (1988) attribution theory, explains the stigma felt by those who have a visible difference of the skin. In two experimental studies, male and female participants assigned blame to individuals with a range of stigmatising conditions (including AIDS, Alzheimer's disease etc.; Weiner et al., 1988). The aim was to measure the relationship between perceived controllability, and stability, of stigmatised conditions, and the emotional reaction they received from others. They found that stigmas perceived to be permanent, such as physical disabilities, were received with more pity, as they were not perceived to be the fault of the individual. However, those who suffered mental health problems, were perceived as being in control of their condition, and therefore at fault. These individuals were often met with more hostile responses and rejection from society. Weiner et al. (1988) suggested this reaction was due to society's desire to attribute cause and effect to something abnormal in order to try and make sense of the world.

The changeable nature of many skin conditions also heightens the stigma surrounding them, as people search for one attributing element, when in fact it is more complex. This is illustrated by May:

I think that it does and it doesn't [matter what the skin looks like]. so, if you have scars I don't think then it matters but if you have spots and that, then it

does because you're not used to it and you expect people to judge you. (May, non-visible difference group, p. 82, 22-23)

May's association between acne and judgement, may be linked to participants' views that cleanliness and lifestyle choices are often attributed to its cause. Alderman (1989) referred to these as *acne myths*, the common view that bad eating habits and poor cleanliness are the causes of acne. This view was highlighted by Anna, *I think bad hygiene does have an impact yes, I only break out if my diet is bad etc.* (Anna, non-visible difference group, p. 93, 381).

The lack of understanding surrounding the causes of acne, and its perceived controllability, is supported in Hedden et al.'s (2008) literature review. They concluded that most teenagers believed acne was caused by bad hygiene, diet and lack of water intake, rather than hormones and genetics. Hedden et al. (2008) argued that this assumed causality was not built on fact, but instead on an entrenched stigma within many societies.

For some participants, blame and responsibility surrounding the skin resulted in feelings of stigmatisation, even in situations where they had reached out for professional help:

When my eczema was at its worst and my skin was paper thin and splitting.... my doctor told me it was a reflection of how I was feeling about

myself. I was so angry that I changed doctors. 10 years on I think he was right. (Delilah, visible difference group, p. 111, 975-977)

As Delilah's skin condition improved, she viewed the skin as being the responsibility of the individual. Delilah now felt that she was the cause of her eczema, and believed anyone could improve the appearance of their skin, she even criticises her partner for his bad choices:

No I'm not judged on the food I eat... if anything I'm a bit critical of what other people eat... e.g.... my partner Gary doesn't care about what his skin looks like! I ignore it but underneath it bothers me that he doesn't wear sunblock when out in the sun and he eats a lot (in my opinion not his) of sweets. (Delilah, visible difference group, p. 109, 894-897)

Instead of remembering back to when she felt judged by the doctor, Delilah criticises her partner for not taking care of himself.

There were some attempts from participants in both groups to rationalise the causes of skin conditions by acknowledging other factors, however, frequently personal controllability still played a part:

I do think lifestyle choices play a role. The amount of people that find it hard to drink a sufficient amount of water daily is scary. It isn't always the case

but lifestyle choices play a role. Not THE role. (Tom, non-visible difference group, p. 93, 387-389)

Other causes participants tried to attribute to skin conditions were vaguer, and there was still a feeling from some of the non-visible difference group that skin conditions were contagious, for example,

Even if I knew it wasn't contagious [someone's flaky skin touching me] I think I would feel it was anyway, and so that's why I wouldn't like it. (Robin, non-visible difference group, p. 102, 654-655)

In his comment, Robin openly acknowledged his fear of catching something from an individual with a skin condition was irrational, but that he felt it nonetheless.

The skin defines who a person is.

This subordinate theme points to the importance participants placed on the appearance of the skin. Although the theme was only relevant to two visible difference participants, it was included due to its relevance to the research question. Participants felt that the skin defined who they were:

...people get categorised by their skin type like dry, sensitive, oily, combination...etc you could say it defines you in a way. (Kim, visible difference group, p. 124, 1383-1385)

Kim felt that the labelling of skin products was society's way of categorising an individual, and that this led to a lack of control in deciding her own identity. The skin taking over one's identity were a theme in Magin et al.'s (2010) study. Participants with skin disorders such as eczema felt that they had become their condition (Magin et al., 2010).

Samantha also expressed her feelings of being defined by her skin in the eyes of others:

I don't feel that it [skin] is a representation of my character but I think other people might do. (Samantha, visible difference group, p. 123, 1361-1362)

Samantha, who had a birthmark on her neck, described feeling particularly conscious of her skin as she was worried that people would think it was a love bite, for example,

[How does it make you feel when people are looking at you?] very self conscious! as I said earlier, my birth mark is on my neck and friends have

joked that it looks like a love bite so I'm worried people will get the wrong impression of me. (Samantha, visible difference group, p. 128, 1532-1533)

Samantha's fears are perhaps also communicating her own negative opinions about *those kind of people*, as she is also expressing how she relies on the skin to communicate certain things about a person's character.

The Ideology of Perfect Skin

This superordinate theme addressed the complex contradictions and expectations participants felt were placed on them by society regarding the appearance of the skin. There were four subordinate themes which were, *the existence of perfect skin*, *the influences of society on the skin*, *life is different for those who have perfect skin*, and, *the impact of social media on the skin*.

The existence of perfect skin.

This theme highlighted the acceptance amongst participants that perfect skin does not exist, and that more importantly, perfection is subjective. Participants felt there should be no standard of perfection to be aimed for, for example, *Something could be perfect for me and not for someone else* (Hannah, non-visible difference group, p. 103 700). This was also illustrated by Samantha:

No one has the same skin so the idea of perfection is ridiculous but somehow there is the ideology of perfect skin. (Samantha, visible difference group, p. 131, 1626-1628)

Participants felt the word *perfect* was an inaccurate description of the skin. Samantha described everyone's skin as being different, however, she also acknowledged the *ideology of perfect skin*, or a set of ideas that form the notion of perfect skin within society. This was also highlighted by Hannah,

I feel deep down everyone knows that there is no such thing as perfect skin even though the media still portrays in that way. (Hannah, non-visible difference group, p. 104, 733-734)

Hannah is exposing the myth of perfect skin, the idea that people outwardly live life accepting the idea of perfect skin, but know in reality it is a lie. However, even though most participants dismissed the existence of perfect skin, they often still felt the need to improve the appearance of their skin:

[Do you think perfect skin exists?] Only when it's been airbrushed so in reality no but there's always a sense of people striving to have nicer skin than they do. (Cheryl, visible difference group, p. 131, 1620-1621)

Cheryl shunned the idea of perfect skin, but she still felt it was normal for people to want to make their skin look better. Participants generally accepted that they should endeavour to achieve better skin, even if they felt that the media images of perfection were false. This was illustrated by Yalika who described herself as not wanting to give up on her quest to improve her skin,

I think so [everyone is striving for perfection] because there are many influences and it makes us want to continue and not give up to find a way to have "perfect" skin. (Yalika, visible difference group, p. 132, 1649-1650)

Participants felt that part of making the skin look better was to invest time and money in its appearance, for example, *...I'm in my fifties and have always purchased the best products I can afford at the time* (Delilah, visible difference group, p. 1031). Oscar also described how he felt he invested time and money in his skin, *As a man I feel like I probably do invest a lot more time and effort than most of my male friends* (Oscar, visible difference group, p. 123, 1377).

Dittmar, Long and Bond (2007), investigated the link between the purchasing of products and participants' desire to create an idealised identity. In the first part of their quantitative study, they asked 110 male and female participants to complete a questionnaire that assessed their motivations for purchasing products. The results supported their hypothesis that *emotional enhancement*, and *identity gains* (Dittmar et al., 2007, p. 344)

were the motivators for buying behaviours. They then asked participants about their online purchasing behaviour in order to assess whether it was compulsive (Dittmar et al., 2007). They concluded, that the relationship between materialistic ideals and obsessive purchasing was facilitated by participants' desire to improve themselves by procuring specific products (Dittmar et al., 2007). Participants in the current study were all socialised in cultures that place value on material things. Therefore, feeling that one should invest time and money in the appearance of the skin, is perhaps linked to a cultural pressure to self-improve, by purchasing certain skin products.

Participants who did not invest much time or money in their skin described feeling guilty for not making enough effort:

I do not spend very much time at all on my skin...sometimes I feel I should do more but most of the time it's not on my radar as very important. (Sasha, non-visible difference group, p. 84, 83-84)

The influences of society on the skin.

This subordinate theme was a view expressed by all participants. They described feeling pressured by the media, such as advertising, and also celebrity images of perfection, that their skin to look a certain way. For example,

Think it is definitely portrayed by the media that we should strive to have perfect skin as it's suppose to be "more attractive" obv. (Kim, visible difference group, p. 120, 1281-1282)

Ray also described how he felt *bombarded* on a daily basis by society's ideals of attractiveness:

Partly the influence of society as we are constantly bombarded everyday of what is deemed 'attractive' and that is partly good skin among many things. (Ray, visible difference group, p. 106, 780-781)

Other participants felt that images of perfection made them feel inferior:

I think adverts make this worse as everyone has very even skin with no shading etc. (Fiona, non-visible difference group, p. 85, 103-104)

Due to constant exposure to images of perfection, participants felt that their skin should look better. This discontent with one's appearance has been described by Rumsey and Harcourt (2005) as having become a normalised state within contemporary societies due to the increasing expectations of perfection surrounding the appearance of the skin. Beauty has been held in high regard throughout history, however, Rumsey and Harcourt (2005) explained that this heightened level of dissatisfaction across both sexes may be

linked to the current value placed on the body in terms of curating an individual's identity and self-worth.

Striving for a superlative goal was described by Hannah, *All idealise the perfect skin TV shows models etc* (Hannah, p. 104, 715). Hannah is perhaps alluding to her own feelings of inferiority, when comparing herself to celebrities who have achieved the unattainable goal of perfection. Idealising celebrities left participants from both groups feeling that nobody was satisfied with their skin:

With influences from everywhere some may feel like they want to have that perfect skin even if they are totally fine. (Yalika, visible difference group, p. 121, 1283-1284)

Being overly critical of oneself even after receiving positive comments from friends was evident in Ona's comment:

People always tell me my skin is really nice but then I always know it's not because I feel as though I have dark circles. (Ona, non-visible difference group, p. 94, 407-408)

Other participants described how they felt society had an overwhelming influence on people's perceptions of their skin. This was discussed by Lucy,

I think everyone is influenced by society's views even when we try not to be, it just depends on how much you let it affect/influence you. (Lucy, visible difference group, p. 106, 802-803)

Some participants felt that even though society could play a large role in shaping how one felt about their skin, it was perhaps weak or shallow to allow that to happen. This was illustrated by Tom,

I really do think all these make skin products companies make it skin an importance to make money and so many people fall for it. (Tom, non-visible difference group, p. 88, 230-231)

Tom described how the imperative of profit making by skin companies was acting as a trap for gullible or naïve people. As a result, Tom perhaps felt more superior, as he could see through the manipulation. Like Lucy, Tom felt that individuals had a choice as to how much they allowed society to influence their feelings about their skin.

There is much research to suggest that the increasing levels of sexualised and unrealistic body images individuals are exposed to, does impact how one feels about their appearance. In an interview study involving 26 male and female participants who had a combination of skin conditions including acne, eczema or psoriasis, Magin et al. (2011) found that media images of perfect skin had very damaging psychological effects on female participants as they felt they would never be good enough. However, male participants

were not impacted in this way. This perhaps goes some way to explaining why Tom felt less influenced by the media, because of his gender, for example, ...*I just don't feel under pressure to have perfect skin as it is called* (Tom, non-visible difference group, p. 91, 329-330).

Life is different for those who have perfect skin.

This subordinate theme discussed how the majority of participants from both groups felt that life was harder for individuals whose skin was different. This was described by Cheryl,

In general I think people with more desirable complexions have it easier yes.
(Cheryl, visible difference group, p. 132, 1642)

A number of participants from the visible difference group felt that some individuals were undeserving of their good skin. This was discussed by Yalika,

Having acne does make me anxious sometimes as people around me have good skin even though they don't have a skincare routine. (Yalika, visible difference group, p. 126, 1456-1457)

As visible difference participants felt that life was easier for people with *good* skin, a lot of them talked about the sacrifices they made, or would make, in order to improve the appearance of their skin:

I dont know what I would sacrifice but I would sacrifice something yes..to have what's seen as better skin. (Cheryl, visible difference group, p. 134, 1727-1728)

In contrast to this, making a sacrifice was not something that the majority of the non-visible difference participants felt was necessary, perhaps as they did not place as much importance on the appearance of their skin, because it was not problematic for them, for example, *No I wouldn't give up something to have perfect skin* (May, p. 94, 426).

When asked what impact participants felt having a visible difference would have on a person's life, negative experiences were the only ones considered, for example, *For people with very visible differences, life could be pretty horrendous, either personal perception, or through being treated differently* (Jack, non-visible difference group, p. 92, 366-367).

Kent (2005) described how some individuals with a visible difference of the skin develop anxiety disorders or shy away from social situations due to the stigma surrounding their condition. Therefore, there appears to be a self-fulfilling prophecy that individuals are

treated differently, and as a result exhibit behaviour that distances them further from society.

The impact of social media on the skin.

This subordinate theme described the view held by participants from both groups that social media influenced how participants felt about their skin. However, there were contrasting views as to whether it was empowering, or problematic.

Some participants, such as Cheryl, embraced social media and used it as a tool to enhance her appearance,

Social media is a good way of making yourself feel better i agree..just stick a filter on it and you can hide all manner of sins. (Cheryl, visible difference participant, p. 134, 1703-1704)

However, other participants described social media as fuelling their feelings of imperfection:

Because you see people on social media with flawless skin, so they expect normal people to have perfect skin as well, which is not actually the case most of the time. (May, non-visible difference group, p. 83, 37-38)

Other participants accepted seeing celebrities with perfect skin, as they knew the image was enhanced, and therefore it did not represent reality, for example, *I take comfort in knowing that it isn't reality [images of people on social media]* (Dima, visible difference group, p. 133, 1697).

It was agreed that social media predominantly focused on appearance:

I think it is harder online though, you end up sacrificing other parts of yourself for a great picture so how can you really tell if you like someone.
(Samantha, visible difference group, p. 134, 1720-1721)

Samantha felt that when trying to attract potential partners in the online world, one had to prioritise their appearance over everything else. As a result, she admitted feeling that it was an unsatisfactory way to meet people as it did not embrace the person as a whole.

The online world allows individuals freedom to shape a more desirable identity. Turkle (1996) called this *distributed identities* (p. 158), the notion that online, one is able to craft numerous identities. What Turkle described fits with some participants' views of Facebook (Cheryl's for example), however, it does not explain Samantha's feelings of disempowerment, whereby, Facebook does not allow her to fully communicate who she is. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) performed a content analysis of over 60 male and female Facebook profiles and found Facebook content to be very different from anonymous

online forums. They described identity construction on Facebook as being *show rather than tell* (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1816), a carefully crafted image of the self in an authentic way. Managing identity in this way is not an easy task and is perhaps why some participants found the online world stressful rather than empowering.

The Changing Importance of the Skin across the Lifespan

This superordinate theme was raised by participants across both groups and described their feelings surrounding the importance of their skin across the lifespan. From this, three subordinate themes were identified; *The social clock*, *fear of ageing*, and, *learning to accept oneself with age*.

The social clock.

This subordinate theme was only relevant to a number of participants in the visible difference group. It described participants' feelings of frustration and embarrassment that they were experiencing changes in their skin, at the wrong time in life. Both Kim and Dima had already experienced acne as teenagers, which they felt was more acceptable, but were then living through it again as adults:

I think it's more common when ur in ur teens but still as distressing. Then when you get to being an adult, it's seen more as a permanent thing? that is hard to get rid of (Kim, visible difference group, p. 128, 1508-1509)

Kim felt that adult acne was more *permanent*, potentially due to it being at an unexpected time in life, and therefore making it harder for her to rationalise.

Dima also described how she felt having adult acne was more stigmatising:

Yes! I had bad skin as a teen which was awful, face, back etc, but its acceptable because your a teen, (even though it was awful)! Then I had clear skin for many years and I now have adult acne which I feel is worse. Because you are not really supposed to have bad skin when you are older. (Dima, visible difference group, p. 128, 1522-1525)

Both Kim and Dima felt that as adults, experiencing acne was out of the ordinary, and potentially why they felt it was more stigmatising.

In contrast, Oscar and Yalika, both had clear skin when they were teenagers which left them feeling confused about why their skin had become more problematic with age, for example, *My skin seems to get worse as I pick up more allergies. So it does seem like i'm experiencing this the wrong way round* (Oscar, visible difference group, p. 128, 1538-

1539). Yalika also described how she was struggling to understand why the acne had occurred at this point in her life:

Yes because when i was a teen i had a clear complexion and now i have acne, i want to change it asap. (Yalika, visible difference group, p. 128, 1530-1531)

Prior and Khadaroo (2015) highlighted, *comparisons to an earlier self*, in their interview study with 11 male and female participants who had acne. Some participants used this strategy as a way of making themselves feel better by looking back at pictures when their skin had been worse. Other participants however, compared themselves to an earlier self when their skin had been clear, which resulted in feelings of distress, as Yalika described above.

Fear of ageing.

This subordinate theme was most relevant to non-visible difference participants and described their fears of the skin ageing. Both male and female participants spoke of being more concerned about their skin as they noticed the signs of ageing. This was a relevant point across a heterogeneous sample that varied in age from 18-33 years. For example,

I'm more bothered by my skin now, I had no issues when I was younger but noticing more differences now, especially when I am dehydrated etc. Assuming that will only get worse the more it ages... (Anna, non-visible difference group, p. 88, 219-221)

This was also echoed by Betty,

I have increased the amount of effort I put in to cleaning and using creams as getting worried about lines! (Betty, non-visible difference group, p. 84, 74-75)

Male participants also expressed their concerns, for example, *Defo worried about sun damage and keeping youthful skin.* (Jack, non-visible difference group, p. 84, 85).

In a quantitative study, Öberg and Tornstam's (1999) surveyed 2,002 Swedish participants (a representative sample of the Swedish population in terms of age and gender), in order to understand how the consumerisation of the body, and the youthful ideal surrounding it, had impacted men and women across the lifespan. Öberg and Tornstam (1999) hypothesised that the fear of ageing was linked to the high value society now placed on the body. For example, as the body can now be modified to achieve status or fame, the body becomes the self, rather than one's character, beliefs or values. Öberg and Tornstam (1999) described the uncontrollable nature of the ageing process as leading to feelings of bodily disloyalty. Individuals who are usually able to construct their identity and their self

through the body, become powerless when ageing takes over, which ultimately becomes a sign of weakness (Öberg & Tornstam, 1999).

In contrast to this, Dima, a participant in the visible difference group, who described feeling marginalised due to her acne, was not afraid of ageing:

I don't mind aging so much, but im more concerned with the acne and scars
(Dima, visible difference group, p. 131, 1636-1637)

Dima had already experienced stigmatisation due to the appearance of her skin. As a result, she maybe felt more prepared for the ageing process and therefore less fearful of it compared to the non-visible difference participants.

Learning to accept oneself with age.

This subordinate theme described how the majority of participants from both groups felt they would become less conscious about the appearance of their skin as they entered old age. Participants distinguished between dealing with the shock and uncontrollable nature of the initial signs of ageing, and how they would feel about their skin in old age. Participants hoped to be more accepting of who they were, and as a result, be less influenced by societal pressures:

...I may be more aware of wrinkles etc. as I get older and being treated in a different way based on my appearance. But I also feel that the older I get, the more confident in myself I feel and the less I feel the judgement of others. (Sasha, non-visible difference group, p. 88, 213-216)

Sasha felt she would become more confident as she got older, a point discussed in Öberg and Tornstam's (1999) study. Contradictory to their hypothesis, when comparing how men and women viewed their bodies across the lifespan, Öberg and Tornstam (1999), found that the women who participated in their study became more accepting of themselves. Their quantitative study (2,002 male and female Swedish participants), found that older women (75-85 years) were just as content with their bodies as their male equivalents. This was in contrast to participants they surveyed between the ages of 20-24 years. In this age group, men were found to be significantly more content with their bodies than women.

Visible difference participants also described becoming more accepting of their appearance as they got older:

For me it's become less important the older I have got. And I think maturity and confidence comes in that. As I said previously my priorities are completely different to what they were in my twenties. (Lucy, visible difference group, p. 112, 986-988)

Öberg and Tornstam (1999) suggested that individuals become more accepting of themselves with age as they become more enriched by life experiences. As one experiences more, it is possible that there is less reliance on the appearance of the body to shape one's identity.

In contrast to the findings of Öberg and Tornstam's (1999) study, male participants across both groups also expressed the view that they had either become more accepting of their skin with age, or that they expected to:

[Will you continue to feel more self-conscious about your skin as you get older?] No I think as well that the peak time for caring is teenage years/twenties and then it will decline (Robin, non-visible difference group, p. 99, 579-580)

Robin's comment can possibly be explained, as there is now far more pressure on men to look good, and perhaps the gender gap in appearance expectations is closing, leading both men and women to feel highly concerned about their appearance in their younger years but leading to self-acceptance with age.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current research, the methodological approach, key findings, limitations, and directions for future research will now be discussed. The aim of this study was to explore, *the meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference*. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) enabled the researcher to access the participants' world, positioning them as the expert. This epistemological position is important when exploring a phenomenon as subjective as the meaning of perfect skin (Egan et al., 2011).

Research on appearance has predominantly focused on those with a visible difference of the skin. However, the current study looked at the meaning of perfect skin within the context of *in-group* (non-visible difference participants) and *out-group* (visible difference participants; Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2015), aiming to provide additional insight to the current literature by understanding the shared meaning of perfect skin across a heterogeneous, maximum variation sample (Patton, 2015).

Seven superordinate themes were identified across the data corpus, four of which were selected for in-depth analysis and discussion due to their significance across both groups of participants, as well as their relevance to the research question. The four themes discussed were; *The importance of blending in not standing out, the appearance of the skin is the responsibility of the individual, the ideology of perfect skin, and, the changing importance of the skin across the lifespan*.

Participants across both groups felt the appearance of the skin was important, and any difference of the skin would be received negatively by society. Participants wanted their skin to look *normal*, so that they would meet society's basic level of acceptance (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Therefore, perfect skin, meant skin that looked *normal*. By achieving *normal* skin, participants felt they would be accepted within society, and with acceptance, they would have more control in shaping their identity, instead of having a stigmatised identity dictated to them (Kent, 2005).

All participants felt an innate desire to *take care* of their skin. Even participants in the non-visible difference group who did not place as much importance on their skin, described their daily skin routine. Across both groups, participants discussed investing time and money in their skin, reinforcing the value they placed on its appearance. Participants described the skin as a central element in the formation of one's identity, in that it communicates the practice of *taking care* of oneself, and therefore one's acceptability.

The appearance of the skin was perceived as being the responsibility of the individual, meaning *bad* skin was interpreted as *bad* character (Fox et al., 2007). However, this led to participants from both groups feeling judged, leading to blame (Weiner et al., 1988). Visible difference participants felt judged for failing to meet an acceptable standard, and non-visible difference participants described feeling guilty for not investing enough time or effort in their skin.

The ideology of perfect skin, encompassed the complex matrix of contradictions and expectations participants felt society placed on the skin. Participants from both groups described the *ideology of perfect skin* as the outward acceptance of the idea of perfect skin, with an internal, deeper understanding that perfection is a lie. This gave some participants comfort, however, others felt that the falsehood of perfect skin was difficult to realise because of their increasing exposure to images of perfection via social media. For some, social media was empowering, by use of filters to hide imperfections, but for others, it was a constant source of anxiety. This was particularly apparent when participants described seeing images of their friends with perfect skin. Participants could rationalise celebrity images of perfection, but found it more challenging to see images of people they knew with perfect skin. This led participants to feel that they should be able to achieve perfect skin, or at least better skin, which in return resulted in constant dissatisfaction with oneself. In sum, the meaning of perfect skin can be described as suffocating. Participants knew in reality it did not exist, and yet they still felt they were expected to achieve it, or at the least strive for it.

The last theme described how participants imagined they would feel about their skin as they moved into old age. Most interesting, was that regardless of the value participants placed on their skin, all (aged 18-54 years) felt that they would become less concerned about the appearance of their skin as they moved into old age. They hoped that perfect skin would become meaningless and irrelevant. This was fuelled by participants' innate belief that as they grew older, they would become more self-assured, and confident with who they

were as people, eventually relying less on their physical appearance, and more on their internal self to shape their identity (Öberg & Tornstam, 1999).

To conclude, the meaning of perfect skin is complex and personal. Perfect skin is about striving to blend in, and to be accepted, communicating a positive self-identity. When the skin is different, it causes anxiety and stress, but one cannot openly place too much value and importance on the appearance of the skin, as this would be vain (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). However, one must also be seen to invest and take care of the skin. In light of this, as a society, we should aim to critique impulse judgements. Stigma surrounding the skin is caused by those who do not question their feelings of disgust or blame. By asking questions, rather than relying upon learnt responses developed through an animalistic fear of difference, society can realise how fictional stigmatising views are. Stigma may have played a role in previous times, to preserve and protect (Kent, 2005) but it certainly has no helpful place in contemporary society.

In light of the current study, psychological appearance interventions should focus on gender, social media and age. First, it is important that psychologists and health practitioners acknowledge that men also suffer from appearance anxiety. However, different strategies and approaches need to be adopted in helping men discuss these issues, and deal with them in a way they feel comfortable with, due to differing societal gender norms. Secondly, social media use is continuing to grow, and it is vital that schools have the capabilities to educate and discuss the use of social media by provide young people with the resources to recognise and deal with potential anxiety in a healthy way. Finally, it

is clear that younger people are generally more dissatisfied with their appearance, so interventions should consider peer support networks, whereby young people offer counsel to other young people, by discussing their own experiences and learnings.

Limitations

The current study had a number of limitations. First, online interaction meant that it was sometimes harder for the researcher to understand the full meaning of participants comments, and also to encourage rapport between participants. Also, as participants were able to contribute from any location, it was difficult to guarantee their full attention was given. Some participants did not contribute as much, potentially due to distraction.

Second, a number of participants were friends or family members of the researchers. This enabled the researchers to instantly connect with them during the focus groups, but also meant that when analysing the data, it was impossible for the researchers to completely ignore all previous knowledge of that participant's character.

The focus group context meant that social norming (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius) was evident, particularly in the non-visible difference group. For example, participants would assign the cause of acne to cleanliness, or describe their concerns about the contagious nature of skin conditions, but when asked for clarification from the researcher, would often retract their comment, potentially as they were unable to provide a justified response and then felt that it was not the right thing to say.

Finally, the online typed exchanges, meant that the researcher had to manage each thread of conversation with participants individually, sometimes making it confusing for other participants to follow the conversation. This could have perhaps been negated by opening the Facebook *chat* and holding the focus groups over the period of a week, allowing participants more opportunity to think about their responses and engage more with others, although this may not have generated as much momentum and rich data as was achieved. See Appendix G for a detailed reflexivity section.

Future Directions

Future research should further explore felt and enacted stigma, but also include participants with a hidden difference of the skin, to understand if there are related themes across an even more heterogeneous sample.

With the increase in social media, it is also important to further explore the impact of social media on appearance, an area not overly explored. It is also important to investigate the impact of social media on the feelings of self amongst a male and female sample. As was evident in the current study, there are different pressures on men within society, and it is important to understand these in more detail.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions for both Groups

SECTION ONE: THE MEANING OF THE SKIN

1. Does it matter what your skin looks like?
2. Is the appearance of your skin important to you?
 - a. What do you like most about your skin?
 - b. What do you like least about your skin?
3. Is it important to have “perfect” skin?
 - a. Do you invest a lot of time in your skin?
 - b. How important overall, is your skin to how you feel about yourself?
4. What would it mean to you to have “perfect” skin?

SECTION TWO: THE SKIN AND RELATIONSHIPS

5. Can you share an example of a time where someone’s (yours, a friends, someone in a film) skin has had an impact on their life?
 - a. How did this make you/them feel?
6. Does the appearance of the skin impact relationships?
 - a. Does it impact friendships?
 - b. What about intimate relationships?
 - c. Do you think a person with a clear complexion would date someone with a less clear complexion?
 - d. How about work relationships?
 - e. Any other relationships?
7. If someone’s skin is imperfect, does it impact how they are treated?

SECTION THREE: AGE AND GENDER

8. Does the importance of the skin vary depending on what stage of life you’re at?
 - a. Is it just as important when you’re a child to a teenager?
 - b. How important is it at the stage of life you are at now, as a young adult?
9. Do you think your feelings about your skin will change as you get older?
 - a. For example, feelings of self-consciousness?
 - b. The perceptions of others?
 - c. Will there be different pressures?
10. Is a clear complexion different for men and women?
 - a. If so why?

SECTION FOUR: COPING STRATEGIES

11. Do you conceal your skin in any way?
 - a. If so why/when?
12. How do you feel when you see someone who has “imperfect” skin?
 - a. Would you feel comfortable touching them?
 - b. Would you ask them about their skin?
13. Do you think life is different for people who have perfect skin compared to those who have not got “perfect” skin (if it exists)?
 - a. In what way is it different?
 - b. Do you think people’s skin is sometimes seen as a reflection of their personality? and if so why?
 - c. How about people who do not have “perfect” skin?

SECTION FIVE: THE MOTIVATIONS FOR “PERFECT” SKIN

14. Does “perfect” skin exist?
 - a. If yes, who would you describe as having “perfect” skin?
 - b. Is “perfect” skin something you aspire to achieve?
 - c. If no, why is it something that is so important to people?
15. Where does the idea/motivation for perfect skin come from?
16. Does the media play a role in your feelings about your skin and what it should look like?
 - a. What about celebrities?
 - b. Adverts?
17. Do people you know influence how you feel about your skin?
 - a. Your peer group?
 - b. Your family?
 - c. Anyone else?
18. Is there anything you would sacrifice in order to have “perfect” skin?
19. Is there anything else you would like to say that has not been mentioned so far?

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female

How old are you?

If you have a visible difference of the skin, please can you describe what it is?

What is your occupation?

What is your ethnic group?

- White English
- White Welsh
- White Scottish
- White Northern Irish
- White British
- Irish
- Any other White background
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other dual/multiple ethnic background
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
- Arab
- Any other ethnic group

Do you have any religious affiliation and if so what?

- Muslim
- Protestant

K1552555

- An Orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church
- Mormon
- Christian Scientist
- Roman Catholic
- Jewish
- Seventh-Day Adventist
- Something else, please specify

Appendix C

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

Focus group study: The meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference

Amy Lloyd-Houldey and Tayo Oke are both MSc Psychology students and Kingston University, London. They are conducting a research project that is exploring the meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference. Visible differences include anything that an individual is conscious of on their skin, and can range from a skin condition such as facial acne to psoriasis, to having a mole or birthmark.

This is a qualitative study, which means that the researchers want to explore the meaning of the skin and appearance from the perspective of each individual participant by listening to their views and opinions. The researchers would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group that will take place on Facebook. The focus group will take place in a private group in real time, therefore you will be required to join the group at a specific time on a certain day. To take part in the focus group, you will need to accept a friend request from one of the researchers (Amy or Tayo) so they can invite you to attend the private group 'chat'. Please adjust your Facebook privacy settings or create a new Facebook account if you wish to remain completely anonymous. The researchers will 'defriend' you after the focus group has taken place. There will be a maximum of eight people in the focus group including the two researchers. With your permission, the researchers would like to transcribe the discussion that takes place during the focus group to use as the basis for their MSc thesis, and possible publication or teaching purposes in the future. Any identifying information will be removed and pseudonyms will be used in place of your name. It should not be possible to identify any of the participants in the final report.

There are no right or wrong answers, the researchers are interested in your views and opinions. You are free to pause the focus group at any time or chose not to answer any individual questions. The focus group questions, along with some demographic questions about yourself, and focus group ground-rules are listed below for you to review and or/complete. You may decide not to answer any of the questions, or you can request that the researchers rephrase a particular question.

There is a small risk that you may find talking about the skin and appearance upsetting or distressing, if this occurs please tell the researchers straight away by sending them a private Facebook message. You can leave the focus group at any point. Talking about the skin and appearance is quite private and personal, so all of the questions that the researchers plan to ask during the focus group can be viewed below.

Please only participate if you are happy to discuss the skin and appearance with the focus group. Please do not participate if you are currently receiving any counselling or therapy for any issues relating to your appearance. If you would like to withdraw your data from the study after the focus group has taken place, please email the researcher by the 1st June 2016. If you are registered on SONA systems at Kingston University you will receive 90 credits.

If you are happy to proceed, please select "agree" in the consent form below.

Many thanks

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Appendix D

Online Consent Form

Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet of invitation for this study, **the meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference**. I have been informed of the purpose, risks, and benefits of taking part.
- I understand what my involvement will entail and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information obtained will be confidential.
- I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a subject.
- Contact information has been provided should I (a) wish to seek further information from the investigator at any time for purposes of clarification (b) wish to make a complaint.
- I understand that safety procedures for online research have been adhered to

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

- ☐ **Agree**
- ☐ **Disagree**

Appendix E

Facebook Focus Group Ground Rules

It's important that everyone who participates in this research project is treated with respect and courtesy. Therefore, please read through the following ground rules before participating in the focus group. By adhering to these requests, we hope that all participants will enjoy participating and have a positive experience. This is particularly important as talking about the skin and appearance can be a very sensitive topic.

- Please answer each of the focus group questions as honestly as possible
- Please respect other people's views and opinions, even if they are different from your own. It is completely fine to disagree, and we want you to be honest, but please do this in a calm and respectful way
- If you would like to pause the focus group at any point as you are finding the conversation difficult, please post directly into the Facebook chat or private message one of the researchers and the focus group will be paused for five minutes
- If you are finding the conversation difficult or you would like to leave the focus group at any time, please feel free to do so but please private message one of the researchers and let them know you are leaving and if you are prepared to do so, give them a reason. This is so that the researchers can make sure that you are okay
- All contributions during the focus group are valuable for the research project, however, due to the nature of an online focus group, the researchers may not be able to respond to all of the comments made, so please bear this in mind
- As it takes longer to type questions and review responses that are in written form, the researchers may request a five-minute pause during the focus group to review all of the posts
- Please make every effort to join the focus group on time as this will ensure that the conversation is rich and has everyone's input
- The researchers will need to "friend request" you on Facebook so they can invite you to join the private group where the focus group will take place. If you do not feel comfortable with this, please create a new Facebook account specifically for this study (you can use a pseudonym if you wish) or limit the access the researcher/other group members have to your profile
- The researchers will "defriend" all participants after the focus group has taken place – it is then up to you to send a friend request to anybody if you wish to after the study has finished.
- If you have any questions or concerns prior to the focus group, please feel free to contact one of the researchers.

Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix F

Participant Debrief Form

Thank you for your participation today in our study.

We are interested in understanding what perfect skin means to individuals who identify themselves as having a visible difference of the skin, and also individuals who identify themselves as having a clear complexion. This will allow us to understand the different perceptions of 'perfect' skin, from the perspective of different individuals, and how this affects views of the self and interactions with others.

Previous research concentrating on individuals with various skin conditions has shown that visible differences can sometimes impact on self-confidence, relationships and perceived stigma. The use of focus groups will allow us to gain a more detailed and personal understanding on these views, also identifying common themes across the participants.

There are no right or wrong answers. People have different views and experiences about the meaning and importance of the skin, and we were interested in your personal views and opinions. You are able to withdraw from this study by emailing one of the researchers below by 01/06/2016 date. If you have any concerns about appearance, or your skin then one of the charities/organisations below could also help:

Changing Faces is a charity for people who are living with conditions, marks or scars that affect their appearance; the website contains links to many information sheets.

Tel: 0207 391 9270

Website: <https://www.changingfaces.org.uk>

Samaritans (24 hour phone line): 116 123 (UK & ROI)

Skin Awareness is a charity providing awareness and support to people living with skin disorders, providing support links for various skin conditions.

Website: <http://skinawareness.org/skin-help/useful-links/>

This study will be used for the purposes of the MSc theses of the researchers and may also be used for conferences, publications in academic journals or teaching purposes.

Many thanks

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Appendix G

Researcher's Reflexivity

I was initially interested in studying the skin due to my own experience. Since the age of 16, I have experienced Erythrophobia, an irrational fear of blushing, which in turn results in excessive blushing, fuelling the phobia. My experience led me to consider the importance placed on the appearance of the skin within society. Although my skin condition was not permanent, and was only caused by my own psychological fear, it impacted my life in many ways. Therefore, researching the appearance of the skin, and people's experiences of living with a visible difference, also helped me to understand my own fears.

The current study was run in collaboration with myself and another MSc Psychology student. Working in partnership with a woman of colour, with different life experiences, added an additional perspective to the research project. During our regular meetings with our supervisor, we would discuss the relevant literature, and our sometimes differing interpretations helped me, as a researcher, look at the skin, and appearance from varying angles. When deciding on our research question, we both agreed that stigma and judgement surrounding imperfect skin was a prominent theme within the literature, but one that had only been explored in the context of visible difference participants. This led us to our final research question; *What is the meaning of perfect skin for those with and without a visible difference?*.

When facilitating the focus groups, I was always conscious of remaining impartial, but also connecting with the participants, and showing empathy, particularly when some of the visible difference participants described their feelings of inferiority, or the negative reaction they had received from others regarding the appearance of their skin. It was difficult to hear some of the terrible stories that participants shared, and at times left me feeling quite helpless. I wanted to be

able to offer more support and guidance than just a sympathetic ear. This is why I have thought hard about the potential interventions included in the final chapter of my thesis.

When facilitating the visible difference focus groups, I was also conscious that I have clear skin, and that is obvious from my Facebook pictures (that participants would have been able to see). With this in mind, I made every effort to never assume that I understood what someone was trying to say, or how a particular interaction had made someone feel. Instead, I always posed the question, *how did that make you feel?*, ensuring experiences were explained in their words.

Being a woman also influenced my initial perceptions of the research. I have first-hand experience of the pressure society puts on women to look and be a certain way. However, what was very interesting, was the frustration and lack of control men in the visible difference group felt they had to change or conceal their skin. Throughout the research, I began to understand that there is just as much pressure on men, but that this pressure is different, and manifests itself in other ways. I now feel that men particularly, need to be given a safe space to talk with peers about the anxieties they might be feeling surrounding their appearance.

Finally, some of my close friends, my brother, and my husband participated in the research. This meant that I had an instant rapport with those individuals during the focus group, which I believe helped other participants to feel at ease. However, during my analysis, it was very difficult for me not to also consider things that I already knew about that person when reading their comments. I believe that overall this has had a positive impact on my thesis, as it meant that those individuals were comfortable in opening up about very personal issues, setting the tone for the focus group, but is something that will have impacted the project.

Appendix H

Transcribed Focus Group Data

This appendix contains the typed interactions copied and pasted from the live Facebook chat where the four focus groups took place. These data have been anonymised, with identifying information removed, and a pseudonym used for each participant. As the Facebook exchanges were typed quickly by participants, there were some spelling errors and missed words in the data. These have been corrected to make the data as coherent as possible for the reader, but all other information was presented as it was originally typed by the participant.

1 **Focus Group with Non-Visible Difference Participants**

2 Emma: Hi guys, I'm online and ready to type!

3 Tom: Ready when you are

4 Jack: I'm here too

5 Anna: Me too

6 Sasha: Me too

7 Researcher 1: Hi everyone, thanks again for participating in mine and Tayo's study. It's now 7pm
8 so we'll start the focus group. Can everyone that's online just type "hi" into the chat so we can see
9 who is actually here? apart from those who already have

10 Fiona: Hello

11 May: Hi

12 R1: Okay, so Tayo and I are each going to lead different sections of the focus group. Please write as
13 much as you wish in response to our questions, the more information you can give us the better.
14 Also, please feel free to respond to other people's points too but please be respectful of opinions
15 even if they differ from your own.

16 R1: So here goes...Does it matter what your skin looks like?

17 E: In terms of your perception of self?

18 R1: Yes, so do you think it matters what your skin looks like?

19 J: Pretty important

20 Betty: Hi

21 R1: Why is that Jack?

22 M: I think that it does and it doesn't. so, if you have scars I don't think then it matters but if you
23 have spots and that, then it does because you're not used to it and you expect people to judge you

24 E: Yes - I am very conscious of any blemishes, scars and imperfections. It is about presenting a
25 view of myself which

26 R1: Why would people judge you May?

27 E: Develops an instantaneous impression for others

28 T: Well it shouldn't matter what your skin looks like. So my answer would be no. But in the world
29 we live in, I think we've been forced to care how we look. To think certain job roles require you to
30 have a certain look

31 R1: Eva, what do you like most about your skin?

32 S: I agree with Tom I think it matters, but I think that is because society places a value on clear skin

33 A: I agree it's not an issue until something is wrong with your skin, otherwise I don't think I
34 consciously think about it.

35 J: My complexion is pretty clear most of the time. If my skin on day is dry, or I get a spot, or
 36 something changes, then it's frustrating. It's a reduction of what you're used to

37 M: Because you see people on social media with flawless skin, so they expect normal people to
 38 have perfect skin as well, which is not actually the case most of the time

39 E: That most of the time it is even in tone and it can tan (cringe) and that I can largely get away
 40 with not having to do much to it.

41 R1: Does imperfect skin mean you're not "normal"?

42 S: I wouldn't say that, but just that the desire is to have clear skin...its seen as the goal to aim for if
 43 you don't naturally have it

44 M: You're still normal no matter what your skin looks like

45 E: Not, 'not normal', but when it isn't how I want it to be I feel like I am 'below par' and self-
 46 conscious.

47 R1: Thanks Eva. So it's important that you don't need to do much to your skin? Would it make you
 48 feel bad if you did?

49 E: No, I guess I am just lucky (and a bit lazy).

50 R1: Fiona, Betty....is the appearance of your skin important to you?

51 E: I don't think I have ever thought about it as a good or bad thing, but seeing a sibling really
 52 struggle with challenging skins makes me appreciate how impactful it can be to self-confidence.

53 T: From a personal point of view; no. From society's point of view; yes.

54 R1: Thanks Tom. How do you think society makes people feel abnormal if their skin isn't "good"?

55 B: Yeah it is. I struggle without make up and I don't really know why. I have a huge insecurity but
 56 it's not related to having poor skin - although when I do get occasional bad skin I feel pretty running
 57 then too. I find it quite hard to articulate

58 R1: Do people think it's important for them to have perfect skin?

59 T: From social media to the media itself. Social tries to promote clear skin as much possible by
 60 offering filters that's allow our skin to look better than it might do in person.

61 R1: Is social media making people feel worse about their skin - does it have this impact on you?

62 M: It's not something that you would say it a necessity, but for me personally, I would feel a lot
 63 more better if I had perfect skin

64 T: The media promotes skin products and uses Society's role models to attract the audience.

65 R1: How much time per day does everyone spend on their skin?

66 E: I think all media pushes you towards 'perfect skin'. If you are young it's about blemishes if you
 67 are older it's about having younger skin again. You cannot win!

68 M: not really making me feel worse, but it does get you thinking about your skin and the way you
 69 look a lot more. [How much time do you spend on your skin?] not much - only if I need to go out I
 70 will spend around 30 mins on my makeup

71 J: I don't think perfect is important, but certainly imperfections are pretty visible. Ageing early,
 72 birthmarks, spots, etc. Standing out is the issue

73 E: About 20 mins twice a day (not including days when I wear make-up)

74 B: I have increased the amount of effort I put in to cleaning and using creams as getting worried
 75 about lines!

76 R1: How much time do you spend on your skin each day Jack?

77 F: For me I don't really worry too much about my skin. My skin is generally quite clear most of the
 78 time so I guess I am quite lucky but when I do get some spots or it gets dry etc. it doesn't bother me
 79 too much as I know it will go in a few days

80 T: I have 'good' skin. I don't normally break out or get spots. Nor do I have scars or distinctive
 81 features on my face. So media doesn't affect me. But it does because I get annoyed the moment I get
 82 a spot and think about how people might be looking at because of it

83 S: I do not spend very much time at all on my skin...sometimes I feel I should do more but most of
 84 the time it's not on my radar as very important

85 J: 5 mins a day, max. Defo worried about sun damage and keeping youthful skin.

86 R1: Betty, does aging of the skin scare you into devoting more time to it? Jack do you think you
 87 worry equally as much about raging of the skin as you think women do?

88 A: Social media has an overall impact on how I judge myself, so I think that also includes my skin.
 89 The older I get the longer I spend on my skin as I worry more about wrinkles - I also spend more on
 90 the stuff I put on my skin...

91 E: I'm with Betty. I also feel guilty about being a bit laissez-faire about my 'skin care'. I now have
 92 night cream

93 B: Yeah I'd say so. I've also spent lots of money (100's of £s) on treatments for some stuff
 94 On my face. But yeah I use eye creams

95 A: When I say skin, I really mean 'face'

96 T: Eva made a good point about ageing. We overly praise older women who look young for their
 97 age. And it's now something women in particular are afraid to experience in terms of their skin

98 B: And try to make sure I wash face at night with night creams etc. I spend a fair amount of money
 99 on it too

100 R1: So Anna is skin on other parts of your body not as important as the face? Fiona, what about
 101 you? How much time per day on skin?

102 F: For me the tone of my skin is more important I guess as I get dark circle under my eyes and so I
 103 try to cover that with up make-up. I think adverts make this worse as everyone has very even skin
 104 with no shading etc.

105 B: I wear make-up if I think I'm going to see people. I love days when I don't need to put make up
 106 on but they are few and far between!

107 S: I was thinking of face when we say skin too....I think because it is the most visible part of you

108 B: Oh yeah the dark circles and bags - big worry for me

109 A: No I don't think so, I have a scar on my leg which annoys me a bit, but if it was my face I would
 110 have had something done about it... like laser treatment. I think my face is much more important in
 111 terms of its appearance.

112 S: I would agree with Fiona, I haven't suffered much with blemishes but do worry about dark circles
 113 under my eyes making me look tired and older

114 B: Hence the creams also feel like my eye bags give me even worse lines

115 J: I'm not sure about 'worrying', but time spent, almost certainly less than women. I recently did a
 116 load of reading about "Broken" Facial Capillaries, and watched a doc about skin ageing and diet.
 117 But I wouldn't let it encroach on too much of my life

118 E: I think primarily face, but I'm increasingly concerned about skin (tone, dryness) on the rest of my
 119 body - legs, arms anything that is or could be exposed

120 T: Definitely agree there are gender difference in this issue.

121 Researcher 2: Hey guys ...Can you share an example of a time where someone's (yours, a friends,
 122 someone in a film) skin has had an impact on their life?

123 J: Currently focussing on knees and elbows.

124 M: I think my friend once got a pimple few times, which was visible, so she didn't really feel like
 125 going out that much. That's the only thing I can think of right now

126 S: I remember reading a Judy Blume book when I was a teenager with a character in it didn't get a
 127 part time job because of her bad acne and was told to come back when their skin clears up. I think it
 128 was the first time I saw having bad skin as actually being a discrimination of some kind

129 F: Sorry, just finishing from first questions - I don't spend a lot of time on my skin, neither spend a
 130 lot of money

131 R2: May - how do you think that made your friend feel? Why did she not want to go out??

132 B: Yeah me - not something I really want to talk about too much but I could never let ANYONE see
 133 me without make up for a long time. It was really stressful. Not because of bad skin because of not
 134 having totally mark free skin

135 T: My brother recently got chicken pox this year. He is 13 so you can imagine how evident it was
 136 on his skin. My biggest worry was when he returns to school how other students would look at him.
 137 As young as he was, he too hated how he looked and would cry about it.
 138 M: I think she just felt that people were judging her and might think that she's unattractive because
 139 of the pimple.
 140 A: Tayo - my friend has really bad adult acne, she's recently been seeing lots of specialists but I
 141 have heard that its really got her down, she started taking some strong steroid tablets that seemed to
 142 help her face, but had other bad side effects so wasn't worth it.
 143 B: I'm still pretty bad with it - huge insecurity
 144 S: I also have a friend who still has bad acne on her back and it really affects them going to the
 145 beach or on a beach holiday, or wearing certain types of clothes etc.
 146 R2: Betty - how did that make you feel? how did it impact your everyday life? did it impact
 147 friendships? relationships? Tom - what did you think was your brother's main worries for his
 148 visible difference? Would you guys (with a clear complexion) ever date someone with a visible skin
 149 difference or skin condition?
 150 B: Yeah it impacted relationships - huge impact on my happiness. I couldn't relax or feel confident.
 151 Felt like I was living a lie about how I really looked etc. As I've got older I've not got any better
 152 with it but just not got as much energy to care as much
 153 T: There were days he would he looked like a monster. He didn't want to leave the house
 154 M: Tayo - Honestly speaking, I have been with someone before that had pimples.. In the back of my
 155 mind I would say no but at the actual situation, I don't really think about skin imperfections
 156 E: I don't have an issue dating someone with a skin condition, but I do think in those initial
 157 moments of meeting it is something your brain registers. It's COMPLETELY irrational, because I
 158 also feel (as someone with a newly acquired facial scar) that the analysis is happening in reverse.
 159 T: He was also worried himself that people would judge back at school
 160 S: I would definitely like to think I would but I never have done, so that could indicate that I am
 161 subconsciously not attracted to people with a skin difference
 162 R2: Do you think a person with a visible difference would think they could date somebody like
 163 you?? with a clear complexion and without a visible difference
 164 if someone's skin is imperfect, do you think it has an impact on how they are treated? for example,
 165 in school, work or at social events?
 166 A: I would like to think I would date someone with a visible skin difference...

167 T: I think it would be very difficult for them. They are already thinking about the pressures of
 168 society. They will also feel that people are shallow and 'would not bring themselves' to date
 169 someone with a visible difference

170 M: Tayo - I haven't actually experienced that situation, but I think that thought might occur in their
 171 head

172 S: Definitely in school...you would like to think that as we become adults we are mature enough to
 173 not outcast someone because of a skin difference but I would say it still would happen in some
 174 workplaces

175 J: I think unpicking how attractive someone is from their skin is a really tough thing to do. For me a
 176 person's skin is really important. Admittedly, completely irrational, and prejudicial, but it's perhaps
 177 much the same as extremes of body weight or height putting you off.

178 B: Find those q's quite hard to answer because I don't think, for me, anything would ever solely
 179 come down to someone's skin. It's about the whole person how you feel about them it's a tricky
 180 thing to think about in isolation

181 E: I think there is a lot of self-selection out of those situations - be that imperfect skin, body type,
 182 height.

183 B: Agree with Jack on the extreme bit

184 A: I agree with Sara, it would have been harder when we were younger, differences like that
 185 seemed so much more important?

186 T: Betty as much as I agree with you, physical attraction comes first so you can understand why
 187 people with visible differences might think otherwise

188 R2: Why would you compare it to body weight and type?

189 F: I have dated someone in the past who had fairly bad acne who sought medical help and was
 190 taking steroids tablets for it. He still felt very conscious of his skin and what other people would
 191 think of it. If someone has been badly treated for it or not I think they are still aware that they could
 192 be

193 T: I have a friend with acne but I honestly think he is so confident in the person he is, he doesn't see
 194 his acne as a barrier in any aspect of his life

195 R2: Fiona - did it bother you that he had acne? did it affect your relationship in any way?

196 J: I suppose there are norms and personal boundaries to what people find attractive. I think the skin
 197 is less of a factor than a weight or height, but it's also very complex.

198 E: It's a first impression and the visual sense is still very powerful. Particularly if you don't yet have
 199 any relationship (platonic or otherwise) with a person. I think it's very primal - is this person 'one of
 200 my tribe/ safe/ healthy/ a known quantity'

201 R1: Do you think your skin will be as important to you when you're older as it is now?

202 E: As I get older it's getting more important.

203 R1: Has your skin become more important as a young adult to when you were in your early teens?

204 M: From what I've heard, its actually more important once you're older because it starts getting

205 wrinkly, but you learn to accept it

206 F: It didn't affect our relationship. Although he did hide it from me at the start that he was taking

207 tablets for it. Sometimes it was also a bit difficult for me to fully understand his position when he

208 would worry about it

209 J: I think there will be a point when I'm not that fussed. No doubt there will be more pressing health

210 issues along soon. Sorry for the morbid thought...

211 R1: Do you feel your skin is becoming a problem as you age when it wasn't before?

212 B: Yes!!! Defs

213 S: Yes and no. I may be more aware of wrinkles etc. as I get older and being treated in a different

214 way based on my appearance. But I also feel that the older I get, the more confident in myself I feel

215 and the less I feel the judgement of others. I know that my grandmother couldn't care less about her

216 skin now.

217 B: The lines!!

218 J: Yes. I'm more conscious than 10 years ago.

219 A: I'm more bothered by my skin now, I had no issues when I was younger but noticing more

220 differences now, especially when I am dehydrated etc. Assuming that will only get worse the more

221 it ages...

222 T: The importance of one's skin is down to their circumstances. For example a model will find their

223 skin condition paramount for the rest of their life really. For others not so much. Personally, my

224 skin doesn't need much attention. But I honestly don't think the skin needs as much attention as

225 society makes out

226 E: I feel like I need to do more to make me appear less like my age, to manage it in line with my

227 lifestyle and to pretend I don't care about wrinkles

228 F: Yes, I feel similar to Anna

229 R1: Why do you not want your skin to look old?

230 T: I really do think all these make skin products companies make it skin an importance to make

231 money and so many people fall for it

232 M: You just look more fresh and healthy with younger skin

233 F: But I'm not that worried - (I don't spend a lot of money on high end products)

234 A: I don't want to look old... in general

235 R1: Why Anna? Do you think people will pay more attention to the appearance of your skin as you
236 get older, or less?

237 S: Yes, agree with Anna. Noticing your first eye wrinkle is a lot like spotting your first grey
238 hair...aside from all media making us feel that being ever youthful is important it also makes you
239 aware of your mortality noticing signs of aging

240 J: I think we naturally preserve what we have. That could be our physical mobility, or brain power.
241 There is something else with the skin though. I think there has always been a fight with ageing.

242 E: I feel like lots of value is places on youth, especially as a woman. 'Men age like fine wine,
243 women become vinegar' - a beautician actually said that to me once. I'm more confident about what
244 I can't change, but want to remain confident with what I have worked hard to like.

245 M: I think less because when you're older, they know that your skin will get wrinkly. But when
246 you're young, you're expected to take more care of your skin and the way you look

247 R1: So May, if people will pay less attention to your skin as you get older, does it mean you need to
248 devote less time to it, that it doesn't need to look as perfect?

249 A: I don't think people want to look older as we'd all like to stay looking young and fresh, hard to
250 know why but I agree with Jack I think its inherent preservation

251 S: I don't really believe high end products work. I think aging of the skin is mainly linked to your
252 lifestyle....not getting enough sleep, eating junk food, drinking lots of alcohol so in that respect I
253 think it is scrutinised more as you get old as it can feel indicative of how 'well' you're living/treating
254 yourself

255 A: ...Saying that I would rather 'grow old gracefully' than have surgery or anything extreme

256 M: I guess so, I don't think I would spend as much time wearing makeup, and focus more on it
257 looking natural but healthy

258 R1: Sasha, do you think bad skin as you get older enables people to pass a judgement on your
259 lifestyle choices?

260 A: Yes I also agree with Sasha younger looking skin is a great sign of being healthy and looking
261 after yourself too

262 S: Sometimes....there's always been comments of broken veined faces being linked to drinking too
263 much or someone with permanent bags under their eyes being told they are working or partying too
264 hard

265 R1: Is a clear complexion/good skin different for men and women? If so, why?

266 B: What do you mean amz?

267 J: More time, or more youth is also one of the few things that people can't buy, so maintaining it is a
268 big thing. I think it's the media, and also cosmetic industry, but I think that it's no coincidence that

269 religions have encompassed afterlives and reincarnation, long before the media existed, so there is
 270 something significant about youth and how we are wired up

271 R1: So do you expect men to have better skin than women or vice versa? Is it more important for
 272 one over the other?

273 F: I don't really want to feel like I am getting old so seeing wrinkles is reminding myself that I am I
 274 guess. I think this is what I am worried about more rather than what other people think when they
 275 see wrinkles on me. (This may change as I get older though)

276 M: I think so, because I think the way society looks is, that girls get judged on a lot about the way
 277 they look, especially their face

278 R1: Do you think pressure is increasing for men and there is now more expectation for them to look
 279 just as perfect as women? What about male makeup? Any views from the men? Would/have you
 280 used it? Why

281 S: Yes I would agree with May...I think there is more pressure on women to look 'perfect' generally
 282 including having perfect skin

283 E: I feel like women still have more pressure than men to be attractive and youthful. But this is
 284 changing - and quickly

285 R1: Why do you think this is changing Eva? What makes you say that?

286 A: I don't notice men's general skin as much as women, I also have this weird idea that they age
 287 better...?

288 E: I think cosmetic and pharma companies have identified a gap in the market and we are
 289 increasingly a visual culture where we curate an image of ourselves.

290 M: Yeah Anna, I think the same thing

291 R1: So does the pressure for women to have good skin come from other women or men too?

292 S: I think there is still a stigma around men wearing makeup although it is definitely becoming less
 293 taboo...but it could be harder for men as they still have the pressure of having perfect skin but are
 294 also judged for wanting to cover up bad skin

295 A: Not sure why... I think guys looks fine with a few wrinkles etc. less so for women. Maybe
 296 because of the media, more used to seeing older men than women.

297 M: I think the pressure comes from both men and women

298 B: Agree with you Anna

299 J: Defo more pressure on women, but I think it's important to separate society and media. I think
 300 people/society are becoming pretty open minded when it comes to physical difference, while the
 301 fashion industry are capitalizing on it

302 B: For some reason men wear it well - the signs of ageing

303 R1: Jack, would you consider using cover-up/foundation on your face at any point?

304 J: No

305 R1: And the same Q for Tom...

306 Why Jack?

307 T: Never

308 R2: How do feel when you see someone with "imperfect" skin?

309 Would you ever ask them about their skin? Would you feel uncomfortable touching them?

310 M: I would actually feel weird asking them about their skin because I wouldn't want to make them

311 feel insecure

312 R2: May -would you feel uncomfortable touching a person with imperfect skin?

313 E: I would never ever ask someone about their skin. Unless I knew them very, very, very well. Even

314 then it would only be in an extreme case. I agree I wouldn't want to draw further attention to

315 something they are obviously already aware of.

316 S: I wouldn't want to bring the subject up in case it felt like I was judging, but I wouldn't shy away

317 from it if they brought it up themselves. I would still feel fine touching them though i.e. shaking

318 hands a hug

319 B: If they brought it up I would ask them but not out of the blue dependant on how well I know

320 them.

321 S: I had a school friend with scars on her face from a fire. I never asked her about it and it took 3

322 years into our friendship for her to mention it to me.

323 R2: If it was a serious skin condition like psoriasis for example, would you still be comfortable

324 touching them?

325 J: I don't like makeup on women (many people I know look better without it), and don't think that

326 men in make-up is normalised yet. Noel Fielding or Tim Minchin going for a look is very different

327 from men using to cover up their insecurities

328 M: Tayo- Not really, but if it's on the hands and arms then I might hesitate

329 T: In reference to make up for men, I just don't feel under pressure to have perfect skin as it is

330 called. I don't think skin needs to be perfect. But media has a way of making people feel like their

331 good enough. Take make up for example, women and men alike get colours that don't even match

332 their natural skin tone.

333 R2: Sasha - why would you say it took as long into your friendship to ask what had happened?

334 J: Agree with Tom. There is just so little pressure

335 S: I think because I could tell they were scars from an accident rather than natural, I didn't really

336 want to bring up something traumatic unless she wanted to talk about it herself

337 R2: Any other comments on touching someone with a serious skin condition? for example, with
 338 psoriasis, the skin may actually get on to you...

339 M: I don't have a problem with touching some with psoriasis because my dad has that so I already
 340 know that it won't affect me

341 T: I don't think you need to ask what and why it's there. That's already showing it had a certain
 342 importance to you when making a judgment. What is wrong with just talking to someone who has a
 343 scar or their face without shifting attention to the scar. They will feel so good when they have
 344 conversations without being asked of their scar or mark or whatever it is

345 A: Unless something looked painful (for them), I would still be fine hugging, shaking hands etc.

346 B: I get eczema on my legs and arms occasionally not too severe but I wouldn't say I'd shy away
 347 from touching anyone unless it looked sore for them for me to touch. I had eczema break out all
 348 over my face once due to stress. I couldn't put make up on and it was traumatic but because I know
 349 what it's like I wouldn't shy away from it

350 R2: Do you think life is different for people who have perfect skin compared to those who have not
 351 got "perfect" skin (if it exists)?

352 M: Not really

353 B: I do.

354 J: I do, too

355 B: I know how stressful it can be and how much it can weigh on your mind make things harder for
 356 you etc. comfort levels

357 A: depends how much it bothers them personally...

358 F: I wouldn't want a person with a skin condition to feel uncomfortable when being touched so this
 359 would be on my mind (so I would be conscious of me not showing any awkwardness) but otherwise
 360 I would be OK touching

361 M: Well, it depends on exactly what the skin condition is, if it's something like psoriasis, then yeah,
 362 but not if it's thinks like getting spots or having small scar

363 R2: All - why?

364 E: Me too - I think if you feel like your skin isn't perfect, or if you have obvious imperfections' you
 365 modify behaviours and on some level it impacts you. Even for a short while.

366 J: For people with very visible differences, life could be pretty horrendous, either personal
 367 perception, or through being treated differently

368 B: Yep agree with joe and Emma

369 T: It's only different if it bothers them that much. There's always going to be inconsiderate people
 370 who make comments but that shouldn't stop them living life normal. It is easy for me to say but if
 371 they allow it to linger their mind it will be different. It is all about mind set

372 S: Yes I would agree with Jack...I wouldn't say the life of someone with 'perfect' skin versus
 373 someone with 'average skin' to be that different. But if you have a very visible difference you could
 374 feel quite ostracised

375 R2: Do you think that acne or pimples are a result of bad eating habits or bad hygiene?

376 T: That really is where we need the media to promote self-esteem for individuals in such situations.
 377 Take Katie Piper for example. Acid victim turned model of fashion brand

378 J: I'm thinking of people with port wine stains, burns, scars, etc. It sounds like most of us here are
 379 pretty self-conscious about our lesser afflictions, and we've probably never been stared at, or been
 380 refused a date on account of our skin.

381 A: I think bad hygiene does have an impact yes, I only break out if my diet is bad etc.

382 J: I think there are people who have bad skin for the reasons mentioned, and also people who cannot
 383 control it

384 B: Tayo - to your question - no. I know that can be a cause yes definitely but I know that people
 385 with severe acne it's not always because of diet etc.

386 E: I think it can be a mix - hormones, stress, diet, lifestyle factors, genetics

387 T: I do think lifestyle choices play a role. The amount of people that find it hard to drink a sufficient
 388 amount of water daily is scary. It isn't always the case but lifestyle choices play a role. Not THE
 389 role

390 R1: Do you think perfect skin exists?

391 A: Yes agree with Betty though, I would never assume any bad skin issues are because of hygiene
 392 etc.

393 T: It doesn't have to exist

394 R1: Do you think it does though Tom? Can you think of someone with perfect skin?

395 A: I don't think it does... no one can have sustainable 'perfect' skin, everyone has issues here and
 396 there

397 R1: Is having perfect skin something that you aspire to achieve?

398 S: I know people with clear, 'desirable' skin but whether that is seen as 'perfect'.... perfect is quite a
 399 high bar to achieve

400 Ona: I don't think there is such thing as 'perfect skin'. I think everyone's perception of perfect skin is
 401 different

402 F: I notice differences in my skin when eating really healthy so I think diet and lifestyle does make
 403 a difference but obviously there are a lot of conditions that can't be controlled by diet
 404 M: I would love to have perfect skin but it's not something that I think that needs to happen
 405 That might because my skin isn't that bad
 406 R1: If perfect skin doesn't exist then why is it so important to people?
 407 O: People always tell me my skin is really nice but then I always no it's not because I feel as though
 408 I have dark circles
 409 T: It is important to people who believe it is something they need to achieve
 410 O: Yes I agree with Tom. But then
 411 R1: Do people you know influence how you feel about your skin? Can you think of a comment that
 412 a friend, family member or someone at work made about your skin that made you feel good or bad?
 413 S: I think it's more important to people to achieve 'perfect' skin if they feel they have had 'bad' skin
 414 in the past
 415 O: I think it is very possible for people around you to influence how you feel about your skin.
 416 Because one comment can make you feel a way
 417 R1: Is there anything that any of you would sacrifice in order to have perfect skin?
 418 O: For example if you don't usually get spots and you eventually get one
 419 T: It's funny how were having a conversation about skin and I completely forgot how I got a burn
 420 mark on my hand
 421 O: And someone mentioned it [having a spot when you don't usually have one]. It will leave you
 422 feeling paranoid. Just because someone has noticed it
 423 F: Who defines the perfect skin?! I don't believe there is the perfect skin. Some cosmetics can
 424 improve our skin and how we look but I think the media and cosmetic companies contribute to how
 425 we feel about our skin
 426 M: No I wouldn't give up something to have perfect skin
 427 O: I wouldn't sacrifice anything because I feel comfortable with how I look. It may not be the
 428 clearest. But I am still comfortable
 429 S: I wouldn't sacrifice anything...it doesn't feel important enough to me
 430 O: Obviously I think it is important for you to look after your skin
 431 T: It is noticeable. Not as much as it was when I burned it. But at the same time it didn't matter it
 432 was there. It doesn't define my being. And no I can never sacrifice something for perfect skin.
 433 A: I would pay money to have better skin, like having facials etc, but wouldn't see that as sacrificing
 434 anything.
 435 O: But to make it mission to get perfect skin

436 J: I think 'perfect skin' has a lot to do with context. I would never complain about my skin in front
 437 of someone who had visible skin problems. I think people around us can make us feel more or less
 438 concerned about all the things we are self-conscious of. Same goes for careers, body weight, or
 439 whatever

440 R1: Thank you so much everyone for all your comments. We're nearly at the end of the focus group.
 441 Is there anything else that anyone would like to say that they haven't mentioned yet?

442 O: I agree

443 B: I would really like to change something about my face so badly I don't know what I would
 444 sacrifice but I just wish it was different - on my skin.

445 R1: What would you want to change Betty?

446 B: Rather not detail it but it bothers me everyday

447 R1: Okay thank you all again so much. We really appreciate your contributions

448 R2: Thank you everyone for your comments! We really appreciate it all! [smile emoticon]

449 R1: If there's anything else you think of in the next couple of days that you would like to add then
 450 please feel free to post it into the group. Thanks so much and enjoy the rest of your evenings!!

451 R2: Enjoy your evening guys!

452 F: OK. Sorry, I was a bit slow at responding to some questions so I may add a few things if I missed
 453 some points

454 R1: Hi everyone, thanks again for participating in this study. It's now 7pm so I'll start the focus
 455 group. Can everyone who's online type "hi" into the chat so I can see who is actually
 456 here?

457 R2: Hello everyone!

458 Dawn: Hi

459 Robin: Hello

460 Hannah: Hi

461 R1: My fellow researcher Tayo and I will lead different sections of the focus group. Please write as
 462 much as you wish in response to the questions, the more information you can give the better. Also,
 463 please feel free to respond to other people's points too but please be respectful of opinions even if
 464 they differ from your own.

465 R2: Does it matter what your skin looks like?

466 D: To me, it matters. I feel more confident if I have what is considered to be good skin

467 R: To some extent - I moisturise my face daily as I sometimes have dry skin

468 T: Dawn - why would that make you feel more confident?

469 H: I think it depends on the person and how they feel most comfortable

470 R2: Hannah - what about for you personally (if you don't mind answering). Robin - why do you

471 moisture daily? How do you feel when you moisturise your skin?

472 D: I've never experienced skin problems such as spots, acne etc. but have friends that have had

473 problematic skin and I've noticed that it's been a big insecurity for them. I would feel self-

474 conscious

475 R: I moisturise because of the dry skin, if I didn't have that then I don't think I would

476 H: Yes I like to take good care of my skin and try to keep it clear

477 R2: All - is the appearance of skin important to you?

478 R: I also moisturise my hands as it feels uncomfortable when they're dry

479 D: I agree with Hannah, because I've never had major problems with my skin I sometimes take it

480 for granted but I love the idea of having clear, glowing skin so do all I can to have this

481 H: Yes it's important to me because I feel more confident as a person if my skin is clear

482 R2: Is it more important how the skin all over your body looks? Or would you say the skin on your

483 face is more important?

484 D: All over my body, but obviously the face is what people see first

485 H: I'd say my face is more important to me because that's most visible

486 R: probably skin on the face. If I had a spot on my face I'd feel much more conscious about that

487 than if it were on my leg for example

488 R2: What do you like most about your skin? Face and body...

489 R: It seems to be clear most of the time

490 D: My skin is smooth and clear, I've never had eczema, acne etc.

491 H: I like the fact that I don't have sensitive skin and I never get breakouts or acne

492 R2: Is there anything you don't like about your skin?

493 R: As I've said I can get dry skin on my face and hands. The skin on my hands cracks easily when

494 it's cold

495 H: I have dry skin which I don't like

496 D: sometimes I think my complexion on my face can look 'dull' so use products to enhance a

497 glow

498 R2: Dawn - why is the glow important?

499 D: I'm of a dark complexion, so I think it looks nice as opposed to dull - dull seems as if my skin is
500 dry

501 R2: All - do you think it is important to have perfect skin?

502 R: Not important no. I would rather have perfect skin but it's not something I would say is
503 important

504 D: I wouldn't say important as not everybody can have 'perfect' skin but if you are lucky enough to
505 have perfect skin then that is beneficial

506 H: I think that perfect can be defined different for each person however regarding myself I like to
507 have clear skin but it's not really important for me to have perfect skin all the time

508 R2: Robin - why would you say it's important?

509 R: I said I didn't think it was

510 R2: All - Do you invest a lot of time in your skin?

511 H: No not really I just use a cleanser every day in the morning

512 D: I just have a skincare regime and do an occasional facial so moderate time

513 R2: How important overall, is your skin to how you feel about yourself?

514 R: No probably a couple of minutes each day

515 D: to me it's important because if I had an imperfection it would make me feel
516 conscious

517 R: I would say not very important because I stop thinking about anything to do with my skin as
518 soon as I've moisturized. When I have had trouble with my skin, a spot or something, it hasn't
519 affected how I feel about myself

520 H: If I have clear skin I feel more confident as I said before but If I've had a breakout I'd feel more
521 conscious in public especially

522 D: I feel the same as Hannah

523 R1: Why do you both feel that clear skin makes you more confident - is the reaction you get from
524 others or something else?

525 D: Both the reaction I get from others and knowing what is considered to be good skin

526 H: Because I feel if you have acne or a breakout people tend to stare where as if you were to have
527 clear skin it's the opposite

528 R1: Do you think people see you in a more positive light if you have good skin and if so
529 why?

530 H: No not really

531 R: I think in terms of a first impression it could affect how somebody sees you, but other than that

532 no

533 D: I wouldn't say more positive as skin appearance doesn't equate to a person's

534 character

535 R1: Does the appearance of the skin impact relationships such as friendships and intimate

536 relationships?

537 R: I would guess and hope no, but I couldn't say in terms of myself though, no

538 D: Not really

539 H: No I don't think it should impact friendships or relationships

540 R1: Do you think a person with a clear complexion would date someone with a less clear

541 complexion?

542 R: yes

543 H: Yes. Because they take into account their personality as well as their looks

544 R1: Would skin be something you would notice on someone you were romantically interested

545 in?

546 R: Yes

547 H: Yes

548 D: I've seen it before, it depends on a person's ability to look past appearance. Yes I would notice

549 their skin

550 H: Yes I agree with Dawn

551 R1: So skin would be something you would notice but it wouldn't be a problem if a person's skin

552 was "not good", for example they had acne or eczema?

553 H: Yes

554 D: Yes exactly

555 R: No it wouldn't be a problem

556 R2: Does the importance of the skin vary depending on what stage of life you're at?

557 R: Probably yes, because I didn't give a seconds thought to my skin when I was young, but I do

558 now

559 R2: Robin - why do you think that has changed as you've got older?

560 H: Yes I think as you get older you want to take care of it more because now I worry more about
 561 my skin compared to when I was younger

562 D: Sorry I missed the question can you repeat it

563 R2: Hannah - why do you think about it more now?

564 R: I think people in general aren't particularly self-conscious when they're young and that's
 565 something that develops as you get older

566 R2: Dawn - Does the importance of the skin vary depending on what stage of life you're
 567 at?

568 D: Definitely I think when you're in your early twenties or teenage years you are more conscious of
 569 the appearance of your skin

570 H: Because I'm getting older and if I don't take care of it now it can affect me when I'm
 571 older

572 R2: Robin - do you reckon it has anything to do with feeling attractive as one gets
 573 older?

574 R: Partly, and because you've grown used to cultural norms which places a lot of emphasis on
 575 looking good

576 D: I think as you get older you become more secure in yourself and look past certain skin
 577 issues

578 R2: Will you continue to feel more self-conscious about your skin as you get older?

579 R: No I think as well that the peak time for caring is teenage years/ twenties and then it will
 580 decline

581 R2: Dawn - why do you feel that one becomes more secure as they get older?

582 D: When you become older, you have children normally and I think after bringing another life into
 583 the world you become focused on them and teaching them about self-love and self-acceptance. You
 584 have to be in that position yourself in order to teach them that

585 R2: Do you think there are different pressures about appearance as one gets older? In comparison to
 586 teenage or adolescent years

587 D: You see beyond spots or acne or imperfections as there is so much more important things to
 588 focus on however you may still feel insecure, everybody is different

589 H: Yes definitely

590 D: Yes I believe so

591 R: Yes because I think in teenage years people tend to be more judgmental, whereas that goes as
 592 you get older

593 R2: Hannah - why?

594 D: There is pressure to look young and keep everything 'tight' as you age hence why a lot of people
 595 opt for cosmetic surgery

596 H: Because then you start to think about other skin imperfections such as wrinkles and so on and
 597 keeping a youthful appearance

598 R2: All - Is a clear complexion different for men and women?

599 H: Yes I think so maybe

600 R2: Is the importance of a clear complexion different for men and women?

601 H: I think women are more concerned with facial appearance

602 D: I think women care more but there are men that take pride in their personal
 603 appearance

604 H: Yes I agree with Dawn

605 R: I don't know

606 R2: Hannah - Why do you think they more concerned about their facial appearance? Dawn -
 607 Why?

608 H: One reason could be social media

609 D: Definitely social media

610 H: Advertisements and everything focus on skin and makeup

611 D: And also society puts pressure on

612 R2: Do you think there is a difference in whether facial appearance is more important than the
 613 appearance of the rest of the body for males and females?

614 H: So I think there more pressure on women

615 D: Women to look 'perfect' I think it depends on the age

616 R: I don't think there is a difference

617 D: With the younger generation, they are obsessed with their bodies i.e. bigger breasts/bums,
 618 tanning etc.

619 H: Yes For females it has expanded to other parts of the body

620 R1: Do you conceal your skin in any way? If so why/when?

621 H: Yes

622 D: I don't conceal my skin or wear foundation
623 H: I use concealer to cover my blemishes. When I need to
624 R1: Is that because you feel totally comfortable with your skin as it is Dawn?
625 R: No
626 R1: Would you ever consider concealing your skin in any way Robin?
627 R: I don't think so no
628 R1: Hannah - how would it make you feel if you were unable to conceal your skin when you want
629 to? Why is that Robin?
630 H: I'd feel more conscious about my face
631 R: I don't see the need to, and if something did 'happen' to my skin then I would like to think I
632 wouldn't mind it being exposed
633 R1: Would you feel less able to interact with people Hannah?
634 H: Um not really
635 R1: How do you feel when you see someone who has "imperfect" skin?
636 D: I feel no way..I think they're quite brave actually
637 R: Don't think I feel anything in particular
638 D: People may have birthmarks, burns, acne
639 R1: Would you feel comfortable touching them for example if they had severe psoriasis for
640 example?
641 H: I feel the same towards any person. No I mean yes. Sorry I misread the question
642 R1: Would you mind if their flaky skin was to touch you or get onto you in any way?
643 R: I think I probably would yes
644 H: Um maybe
645 D: Yes I would
646 H: But I don't think I would put myself in that position
647 R1: Why is that - what would it make you feel? Why wouldn't you put yourself in that position
648 Hannah?
649 H: I'd feel irritated
650 D: A bit ill
651 R1: Is that because you would see it as their fault? Would you be worried about
652 dirt/contagion?

653 D: No I just don't like dealing with those things

654 R: Even if I knew it wasn't contagious I think I would feel it was anyway, and so that's why I

655 wouldn't like it and no I wouldn't see it as their fault

656 H: I mean like I wouldn't be that close to people anyways if they had flaky skin or not

657 you

658 R: I would rather be completely fine with it, but I know I probably wouldn't be

659 R1: What do you mean by 'those things' Debra?

660 D: Such as someone talking and they spit on me by accident or if flaky skin gets onto

661 me

662 R1: Hannah - so you wouldn't get yourself into a situation where touching a person with flakey skin

663 was an option? What about it if was someone you knew really well Dawn? Would it bother you as

664 much then?

665 H: Yes I think

666 R1: If you met someone who's skin was different in some way, would you ask them about

667 it?

668 D: Yes lool [sic laugh out loud] it would still bother me

669 H: No not really. If I became friends with them then yes

670 R: No I wouldn't

671 R1: Why is that Robin?

672 D: Same if we become friends then yes its intrusive to ask them just meeting and it may be a

673 sensitive topic

674 H: Yes I agree

675 R: Because then it tells that person that you've noticed whatever it is, and they may not be

676 comfortable with that

677 R1: Do you think life is different for people who have perfect skin compared to those who have not

678 got "perfect" skin (if it exists)? In what way is it different?

679 H: Yes

680 R: I'm not sure it'd be a complete guess

681 D: Yes

682 R1: In what way would it be different Hannah?

683 D: For some people their skin is a real issue for them

684 R1: How would that make their life different Dawn?

685 H: I think it's different because it probably effects their confidence

686 D: They may not want to socialise with people, have lower self-esteem than those without skin

687 imperfections

688 R1: You think people's skin is sometimes seen as a reflection of their personality? and if so

689 why?

690 H: No I don't think so

691 D: Not at all

692 R: No

693 R2: So do you think "perfect skin" exists?

694 R: No

695 H: No

696 R: Just as a perfect personality or a perfect body doesn't exist

697 H: It's different for everyone and what they feel comfortable with

698 D: I think someone's skin can be very good but can still have tiny imperfections such as toning, the

699 odd pimple

700 H: Something could be perfect for me and not for someone else

701 R1: Why do you think that is something that is so important to people?

702 H: Because I think everyone judges people

703 R: It's something that a person will immediately notice. I think it's comparable to the importance

704 some people place on what they wear

705 H: From their face

706 D: Because of the pressures of society and what is seen as beautiful

707 H: Whether they are aware or not

708 R: Yeah we probably all make unconscious judgments

709 R2: Okay so where do you the idea/motivation for perfect skin come from?

710 H: Definitely the media

711 D: The media

712 H: Magazines and TV

713 R2: How do they?

714 R: It probably varies throughout different cultures, but yeah media

715 H: All idealise the perfect skin TV shows models etc.

716 R: They make out their product will bring you perfect skin so they can increase sales

717 H: Advertisements for products

718 R: Making people feel inadequate and so then buying their product

719 H: Yeah

720 R2: Do you think celebrities contribute to this as well? if so, how?

721 R: Definitely

722 H: Yes They do

723 D: Yes because they are all airbrushed

724 H: Because of magazines covers

725 R: Because they're often advertising the products

726 H: They are endorsed by the brand And are promoting their products and concepts

727 R: And the advert suggests that such and such a celebrity has the perfect skin, use this product to

728 have skin like theirs

729 R2: Why do we believe that then if you don't believe perfect skin exists?

730 H: To be honest I don't really believe it

731 R: Believe what sorry?

732 R2: Hannah- have you ever believed it?

733 H: I feel deep down everyone knows that there is no such thing as perfect skin even though the

734 media still portrays in that way

735 D: I agree

736 H: Yes maybe at some point in my teenage years

737 R2: Robin - believed the concept of perfect skin? or that you can achieve it because someone else

738 has? Is there anything you would sacrifice in order to have "perfect" skin?

739 D: No

740 R: I think that most people probably feel they can make their skin 'better' if they use a certain

741 product. I don't think anyone feels there is such a thing as perfect skin

742 H: No

743 R: No

744 R2: Is there anything else you would like to say that has not been mentioned so far?

745 R: Don't think so

746 H: No
747 D: No
748 R2: Okay great! Thank you soo much for participating guys! We really appreciate you all taking
749 your time too!
750 D: Thank you
751 R1: Thanks so much everyone, we really appreciate all of your comments. If there's anything else
752 you think of over the next couple of days that you would like to add, please feel free to post it in
753 this group. I've also attached the debrief form for you to read. Thanks again!
754 H: Thanks
755 D: It was an interesting topic
756 H: Yes
757 **Focus group with visible difference participants.**
758 Researcher 1: Hi everyone, thanks again for participating in this study. It's now 8.30pm so I'll start
759 the focus group. Can everyone who's online type "hi" into the chat so I can see who is actually
760 here?
761 Lucy: Hi
762 Delilah: Hi
763 Ray: Hi
764 Jackie: Hi Amy
765 R1: That's great, hi everyone. My fellow researcher Tayo and I will lead different sections of the
766 focus group. Please write as much as you wish in response to the questions, the more information
767 you can give the better. Also, please feel free to respond to other people's points too but please be
768 respectful of opinions even if they differ from your own.
769 Researcher 2: Does it matter what your skin looks like?
770 D: Absolutely it does
771 R: It shouldn't do but it does
772 R2: Delilah and Ray - why does it matter?
773 L: I think it depends on the severity of the issue
774 J: I think it does, but the extent to how much it matters (to you) depends on what's different/how
775 severe you think the issue with it is. I agree with you Lucy - some things you can overlook/deal
776 with more easily than others
777 D: For me... if my skin looks and feels good then I feel good about myself
778 R2: All - Does it depend on whether it is visible to others?

779 Naomi: Hi

780 R: Partly the influence of society as we are constantly bombarded everyday of what is deemed

781 'attractive' and that is partly good skin among many things

782 R1: Hi Naomi, thanks for joining :)

783 R2: Do you judge your attractiveness on what the society view it as?

784 J: Hi Tayo - I think so. For instance, I try and cover up my red cheeks with make up and I definitely

785 feel I look better when they're less obvious, so I must care about whether it's visible to others

786 R1: Delilah - what does your skin looking good mean? How would it look if it was looking good?

787 D: Yes it does...I love it when people comment on how good my skin looks (and it does happen)

788 L: Yes I think it does depend on its visibility. With giving birth 5 months ago, there's plenty I'm

789 glad the world can't see

790 R: I would like to think i'm not bothered or influenced by society but of course I am

791 J: I think I view my attractiveness based on my own feelings of how I should look, but I guess those

792 are shaped by society

793 N: Just want to say if I miss a few questions I apologise now I have a very distraught 3 month old

794 this eve... who keeps waking up my 3 year old! X Will try and keep up as best as I can tho! X

795 D: I have had eczema - all over my face and body to the point the skin cracked and weeped. It was

796 painful and to me looked ugly. I have managed to deal with eczema and am fortunate that my skin

797 wasn't damaged. I have soft skin now

798 R1: Jackie - why do you want to cover up your cheeks if they are looking red? That's okay

799 Naomi....just do what you can ☺

800 Tom: After years of it you switch off. Of course it affects you but you end up cut off to it unless you

801 regain control of it.

802 L: I think everyone is influenced by society's views even when we try not to be, it just depends on

803 how much you let it affect/influence you.

804 R2: Lucy - Does it matter in regards to people who are close to you? Naomi - aww that is okay ☺ x

805 D: I don't think society makes too much difference for me - it's about how I feel about myself

806 R1: Tony - what does regaining control mean?

807 J: Because they're in sharp contrast to the rest of my face, which is very pale! So I try and even out

808 my skin tone - I think I just look a bit odd with these constantly bright red cheeks

809 N: I agree with Lucy in that it depends whether it can be covered up. I am very lucky that mine can..

810 but it bothers me immensely to the point I don't even want to get naked in front of my own husband

811 recently ☹ x

812 R1: Jackie - do you think people will make a judgement on you because of it?

813 T: I don't think it matters with people that are close to you. Because they see you for you. At 30 I
 814 went off meat and cured it. This gave me control and I realised how much
 815 R2: Is it important to have "perfect" skin?
 816 J: I think I look much younger when I've not covered up with make-up - I think this would affect
 817 how people (especially at work) would view me. I also (recently actually) have started going in to
 818 work early and putting my make up on when I get there, and I feel like I've had a few people staring
 819 at me/looking at me as if I look odd, so I guess I do feel like people judge me!
 820 D: Depends on how you define "perfect skin"
 821 R1: Tony - how did it make you feel when you were out of control of your skin and you didn't know
 822 what was causing any issues that you might have had?
 823 R: It also depends on what type of imperfect skin you have. For example, you may consider a mole
 824 imperfect skin but it is relatively common so society (i.e other people) are likely to not pay that
 825 much attention to it. If on the other hand, you have a condition or abnormality which is rare,
 826 therefore uncommon, society pays much attention.
 827 J: I don't think it's important to have perfect skin, just skin that you are OK with - whatever that
 828 looks like
 829 R2: Delilah - What does perfect skin mean to you?
 830 D: I agree with Jackie
 831 L: Mine is a patch of skin on my cheek where there is no pigmentation. It can be cover but I have
 832 never been that bothered. I've had plenty people ask about but I've not had anyone make issue of it
 833 and people close to me and me included tend to forget it's there.
 834 R: Don't you feel at times that you want to be like everybody else?
 835 R1: Jackie - So does the makeup give you confidence to present yourself to the world in a way that
 836 you would like people to see you? Ray - what does being like everyone else mean?
 837 J: Amy - yes definitely. I feel that it gives me confidence. Along with what I wear (I'm very short so
 838 always wear heels at work; I was told when I was starting out in my career that the fact that I looked
 839 young would affect my career, so I always dress quite formally)
 840 D: Perfect skin to me is my skin without the eczema. I manage how I look... e.g. I have a scar over
 841 my right eye which I don't like and always try to be photographed from my left side.
 842 R2: Lucy - why would you say it doesn't bother you as much?
 843 R: Amy - I would say 'normal' and the same as the majority of people
 844 L: I don't think there would be too many people out there that could claim 'perfect skin'. I think
 845 everyone would have something they can identify. Visible to others or not. So I don't think it's
 846 important to have perfect skin.

847 R1: Jackie - do you think this would be different if you were a man? Ray - could you describe what
 848 'normal' skin looks like?
 849 T: I didn't realise till I had control but it was a big issue
 850 R: Lucy - I think it depends on the uniqueness of the difference in skin
 851 T: It's such a drag all the time. But it runs in background after ten years
 852 J: Amy - good question - I think the clothes/presentation issue would be less of a problem, yes. As
 853 men often dress in a more uniform way and so there wouldn't need to be so much consideration of
 854 what you wear/how you look (I say that just from my own assumptions!)
 855 R2: All - Do you invest a lot of time in your skin?
 856 J: Yes - and a lot of money!
 857 R1: Tony - would you mind describing how you felt your skin was different and what you mean by
 858 it running in the background? Does it still impact the way you feel about yourself or the way you
 859 behave?
 860 N: Yes! I have spent lots! X
 861 D: I hear you Jackie! Me too
 862 R: Amy - It's a long story and just my point of view
 863 D: I use good quality skin products and it does help. I have a healthy diet and lots of water which
 864 definitely helps more
 865 T: I went to private doctor. 260 quid for 15 mins. Prescribed me drugs said diet made no difference
 866 L: I think because it's never been highlighted as an 'issue or problem' growing up. It's always been
 867 that way and I've just accepted it as it is. There is literally nothing I could do about it as well, other
 868 than covering it up. With other skin conditions you can treat it and would expect to see an
 869 improvement and that's not that case with mine
 870 T: That's when I knew he was a prick and I stopped eating meat
 871 J: Lucy - I feel the same - that my skin issue (although relatively minor in the grand scheme) has
 872 never really been diagnosed, nothing seems to make it any different (except when I'm really ill and
 873 then I look like a ghost), so I have no choice but to cover it up
 874 L: I really don't invest much in my skin and even less with a baby now. My priorities have changed
 875 dramatically. Mummy always comes second now. It's a treat to wear makeup haha [sic laughing]
 876 D: My experience is that diet does make a difference for many skin conditions
 877 R1: Lucy and Jackie - have either of you ever gone to see someone professional about your skin or
 878 not felt the need?
 879 L: Nope never and not felt the need. I look at mine like a birth mark really

880 J: I did when I was in my early teens - but that was mainly to do with a skin sensitivity that made
 881 my skin come out in blisters when I was out in the sun. I was told the thing with my face is
 882 something called Rosacea, but never given any idea of how to treat it. I haven't gone back since then
 883 as it's something I can easily cover up with make up

884 R1: Jackie - did it make you feel better that it was diagnosed as something?

885 R: I did see a specialist around the age of 20 who was useless and ended up having 3 years of laser
 886 surgery on my face to minimise the problem

887 R2: Tony and Delilah - Do you think that others judge you on your skin due to diet? For example,
 888 being judged on having a skin condition due to the food you eat?

889 J: Not particularly! I don't think knowing the name of it made me feel any better about it - still felt
 890 that I needed to try and cover it up

891 R1: Ray - did that experience have a big impact on how you felt about yourself, fitting in, being
 892 "normal" if you like?

893 R2: How important overall, is your skin to how you feel about yourself?

894 D: No I'm not judged on the food I eat... if anything I'm a bit critical of what other people eat...
 895 e.g.... my partner Gary doesn't care about what his skin looks like! I ignore it but underneath it
 896 bothers me that he doesn't wear sunblock when out in the sun and he eats a lot (in my opinion not
 897 his) of sweets. Sugar is one of the worst foods we can eat

898 J: I wouldn't say my skin plays a huge part of how I feel about myself, but I try to make it look
 899 better every day, so it must be quite important!

900 R1: Delilah - is that because of your experience that you worry about him?

901 D: Most likely... and I want him to look his best - I guess because I make an effort to look and feel
 902 the best I can I want him to as well

903 L: As someone mentioned before, if your skins feeling good you feel good. If I've got a bit of a tan
 904 and my skin is clear then you do go out feeling more confident

905 D: I agree with Larissa

906 R1: Delilah - so if you invest in your skin you want to feel that he is doing the same?

907 R: I have a rare condition called Beckers Nevus (darkening on the skin and excessive hair growth)
 908 which is normally found on the back but I have it on one side of my face which started around
 909 sixteen. Use to shave 4 times a day just to look normal and was bullied because of it ('freak', 'two
 910 face' etc). I don't keep any pictures from before i was thirty. Was not a happy time.

911 J: It's interesting you say about being tanned Lucy - maybe I don't feel the same because I don't tan -
 912 my skin always seems to look the same (except when I get sunburnt, and it looks even redder)

913 R: Just wanted to look like everyone else.

914 L: I think a part of it is it makes you feeling heathy with a glow if you have clear lovely skin
 915 R1: Lucy and Delilah - why is it that the skin can have such an impact on the way you feel about
 916 yourself?
 917 D: I'd like him to but its not his thing so I don't make an issue of it.
 918 I've had pain and discomfort and now I don't - that is what makes the difference for me. know if I
 919 don't eat a lot of raw food and drink plenty of water then my skin will reflect that.
 920 R1: Ray - that sounds like a really difficult situation to have to deal with. Do you feel it was made
 921 worse due to your age and stage of life, the fact that it was on your face?
 922 L: I like to look my best and that just doesn't happen all the time. It can be an outward display of
 923 your healthiness, lifestyle as well. If I'm not taking care of myself I get acne. I do think that I
 924 probably notice/ worry about acne and imperfections more than the people I interact with, they
 925 probably don't actually care or notice.
 926 R2: All - Does the appearance of the skin impact relationships and friendships? And intimate
 927 relationships?
 928 R: Certainly. Kids can be cruel and they do not realise the impact they have on people. I couldn't
 929 hide the condition and people had not seen anything like what I had which made people ask, laugh
 930 and point.
 931 N: Yes! Not for my husband but for me... ot has hugely knocked my confidence!
 932 R1: Ray - how did you cope with that at the time?
 933 J: Tayo - not for me, I think it's more to do with the way I feel about myself
 934 R: Became withdrawn at times and had no confidence and that has continued.
 935 D: I don't think so...
 936 R2: Naomi - why would you say it has affected your confidence?
 937 R: It can impact intimate relationships.
 938 R1: Ray - has it made any difference that the skin condition has been dealt with now or do you still
 939 feel "different" in some way?
 940 R2: Jackie - How has it made you feel about yourself?
 941 L: I think it depends on what stage you are at in life. As a teenager I was probably more insecure
 942 about it and conscious so it did affect my confidence with the opposite sex. But married, in my 30's
 943 with a baby it doesn't affect my relationship at all.
 944 R2: Delilah - do you think it affects any relationships at all? Maybe work relationships
 945 R1: Lucy - so do you think it's about how secure you feel in yourself?
 946 L: Absolutely and I think how mature you are at the time

947 J: Mainly that I look a bit odd - nothing major, but means that I don't often show my un-made up
 948 face to the world. But it doesn't affect my relationships with my close friends or boyfriend - they've
 949 all seen my bare face and I don't feel self-conscious around them

950 R: Most of the hair has been removed but it's not perfect and still grows only on one side of my
 951 face. I will probably go back for my laser surgery next year. They can't do anything with the
 952 pigmentation difference. Even though its better, when I look in the mirror I still see it there.

953 N: I just feel that there is no way my husband can actually find my attractive... the scar in itself is
 954 one thing but the skin around it is also horrendous. I feel like j just Wang to cover it up all the time
 955 x

956 R: I still feel like it impacts my relationships.

957 R1: Naomi - do you feel different that you did before because of the skin and if so in what way? Is
 958 it just about feeling attractive or something more?

959 Ray - in what way does it impact your relationships?

960 R2: Jackie - what would you say the difference is between it not having an effect on the
 961 relationships between your boyfriend and close friends and maybe its effect on other relationships?

962 D: Not for me... If anything I think I sympathise with someone with a skin condition. Most people
 963 try all sorts of things to have what they perceive as perfect skin and can spend a fortune on creams,
 964 visits to doctors etc. to have what they consider nice skin.

965 R: Lack of confidence as never had any sort of serious relationship. The women never say it's a
 966 problem but you always think it might be.

967 T: A hilarious question the specialist asked me was does it affect you in meetings. I thought piss off

968 J: Tayo - for me I do think it will have a bearing on work relationships - I think perhaps I will look
 969 less professional if I'm not made up? But I don't think it affects my close personal relationships
 970 because by the time you've got to the stage of friendship/relationship with someone, they know you
 971 well

972 R1: Is the appearance of your skin more important or less important to you in the stage of life you're
 973 in now compared to before? If so why?

974 Tony - can you describe what made you feel so annoyed about that comment?

975 D: When my eczema was at its worst and my skin was paper thin and splitting.... my doctor told me
 976 it was a reflection of how I was feeling about myself. I was so angry that I changed doctors. 10
 977 years on I think he was right

978 R: Just reminded me, when I saw a specialist and he joked that I could save time by only shaving
 979 half my face, I told him to piss off.

980 J: Amy - I feel like it has less of a personal impact on me now (compared to when I was in my
 981 teens); but paradoxically I spend a LOT more time and money on my skin now - I guess because
 982 my lifestyle is different and I have more disposable income. I definitely feel like the products I use
 983 now make my skin look a lot better

984 R1: Delilah - can you explain in a little more detail? What annoyed you so much about his comment
 985 and why do you now feel he was right?

986 L: For me it's become less important the older I have got. And I think maturity and confidence
 987 comes in that. As I said previously my priorities are completely different to what they were in my
 988 twenties. My family tend to come first and I put my needs last.

989 R: I think it is easier to deal with if you're in a committed relationship than single

990 R1: Jo - so you worry about it less but want to invest more? Do you think that will always be the
 991 case? Ray - is that because you feel like then you are fully accepted by someone?

992 L: I agree with Jackie completely.

993 R2: Lucy - is that because you're a mum? or because you are older?

994 R: Partly yes and when you trying to date etc. You know it is eventually going to come up in
 995 conversation. You also trying to put across a good impression and you ask yourself, why would
 996 they date someone like me when they could go out with someone who has normal skin

997 J: Amy - yes, I don't think I care as much about it anymore - I agree with Larissa that as I've got
 998 older, more confident and more at ease with myself as a person I care less about my skin. But yes I
 999 invest a lot more in it. I'm always looking for a better face cream, or make up remover, or make up
 1000 combination. I can't see me being happy going to work (in particular) without make up on, so I do
 1001 think I will keep up the routine in the long term

1002 R1: Do you think your priorities around your skin will change as you get older? If so, how and
 1003 why?

1004 R: Not someone so different to everyone else

1005 L: For me it's because I like to have really natural products with no fragrances etc added and they
 1006 tend to be more expensive. I have an allergy to perfume so have to be careful what I use.

1007 R2: Ray - why do you think they would prefer someone with normal skin?

1008 D: I was living in NZ and wanted to move to Australia... the timing wasn't right to do that. I was
 1009 under a lot of financial stress which didn't help either. I made the best of the situation and had good
 1010 friends around me. My skin was soooo painful... I would scratch all through the night and wake up
 1011 to blood all over my sheets and in a lot of pain... it was all over my body. the only thing that
 1012 relieved it was steroids and my doctor wouldn't let me stay on the dosage that kept the pain at a
 1013 level I could deal with. Then one day I made the decision to move to Australia... I found a job here

1014 in no time and had 3 weeks to pack up and move. I came here and within two months the eczema
 1015 was gone and I have never looked back... health wise and financially

1016 R1: Jackie - would you still prioritise spending money on skin products if you couldn't afford them
 1017 as easily? Would you sacrifice other things for example?

1018 J: My priorities have changed over time - in my teens I was mainly bothered about covering up the
 1019 red cheeks, now I want to try and make my skin's condition better - as well as cover it up - but I
 1020 invest in more pricey products because they're better for my skin

1021 L: I think they will. Youth will fade and I will probably try wrinkle creams etc.

1022 R: Why would a woman want to be with someone so physically different to other people when there
 1023 are thousands of other potential partners. People want normal!

1024 J: Amy - good question, I guess it would depend on what I had to sacrifice! I think I would probably
 1025 try and maintain the spend on the make-up and buy cheaper moisturisers/toners etc. (god that makes
 1026 me sound really image-obsessed/self-absorbed).

1027 R2: All - Is what your skin looks like different for men and women? If so, why?

1028 R1: Wow - thanks for sharing that Delilah. So you felt that the change of your skin had to come
 1029 from within yourself? More of a psychological thing rather than a physical problem?

1030 Jackie - not at all! Thanks for sharing :)

1031 D: Jackie... I'm in my fifties and have always purchased the best products I can afford at the time.

1032 R1: Ray - as a man did you ever wish that you could use tactics like women such as using make-up?
 1033 Did you ever use anything to try and cover up your skin?

1034 R: More pressure on women to have good skin than men but it's still there for men

1035 J: Thanks Delilah ☺

1036 R1: Why do you think there's more pressure on women Ray?

1037 T: I used make-up! My mum and sister would go on at me and I put cover up on once and went to
 1038 the pub and someone said are you wearing make up

1039 D: Amy... yes I do and I have a totally different perspective of myself now as a result.

1040 R: Of course Amy but because of the affected area and have growth I couldn't but I explored it

1041 R1: How did that make you feel Tony?

1042 T: Mortified. In a word

1043 R1: Is that due to the skin or because you felt the power to change it came from within yourself
 1044 Delilah?

1045 R: More advertising is targeted at women

1046 L: I think men have it a bit harder than women if they have a visible skin problem. There are so
 1047 many products marketed to women to cover up and disguise things but for most men they aren't

1048 going to slap on some makeup so it's more exposed. But I also think women put more pressure on
 1049 themselves to look perfect

1050 R1: Because you were a man Tony? Can you explain a little more?

1051 T: And I said no and carried on with my pint. I know the person and they are frank and not mean
 1052 but at the time was so insecure about it couldn't handle it

1053 J: I don't personally feel that I'm impacted massively by advertising/media punting out ideas of skin
 1054 perfection - it's generally been that I want to feel happy with my skin

1055 R: I disagree there, I know plenty of men who use skin products and cover ups

1056 R1: Tony - so did you feel it was actually harder for you to deal with because you are a man and not
 1057 able to cover up your skin in a socially acceptable way as women are?

1058 T: 100%. It was very embarrassing and I felt at the time completely emasculating

1059 R1: Tony and Ray - as men who have said they have had issues with their skin, does it make you
 1060 look at potential partners differently? For example, would you be more accepting of someone who
 1061 had a skin condition or would it still be something that would bother you? I'm talking about intimate
 1062 relationships

1063 R1: The same question to the ladies too...

1064 R: It is awful and I actually feel ashamed saying it but if a potential partner had a very unique skin
 1065 condition it would make me think twice. Maybe because I know the emotional baggage which could
 1066 potentially come with it.

1067 D: It's all relative... If I feel good then my skin looks good! Sounds odd but it really does work that
 1068 way for me. Moving to Australia was a big deal (at the time) and I had a lot of people judging me
 1069 saying I was going through a mid-life crisis. I'm happier here... I have a wonderful lifestyle, great
 1070 job, good friends and I'm a lot happier here than I was. I'm quite sure that has impacted on how my
 1071 skin looks.

1072 R1: Delilah - so is it about taking back control, a little bit like Tony was saying earlier? Feeling you
 1073 are in control rather than your skin?

1074 D: Yes

1075 R1: Thanks for being honest Ray. Can you explain a little bit more about what you mean by the
 1076 emotional baggage?

1077 R: Again from personal experience, depression, insecurities etc.

1078 R: Ray - would you also feel judged again by society if your partner had a skin condition? Would
 1079 that be something that would also play on your mind?

1080 J: I think it would depend on how severe it was - I certainly don't think I'd be put off by a minor
 1081 skin condition/difference/birth mark/scar etc; but I think some things might be hard to look past in

1082 the beginning. I don't think something major/severe would put me off getting to know someone -
 1083 then you make a decision about whether you're attracted to them based on them as a person, as well
 1084 as how they look.

1085 R2: All - How do you feel when you see someone with imperfect skin? Do you feel uncomfortable
 1086 touching them? Do you ever ask them about their skin condition?

1087 L: I think it would really depend on how the potential partner dealt with it and felt about it, not the
 1088 physical appearance of it. If they were really affected by it and perhaps avoided socially etc. it
 1089 would make me think twice about having a relationship with them.

1090 D: I agree with Jackie

1091 R1: So it would be more about their character rather than appearance?

1092 R1: Would you feel nervous about introducing them to people you knew if they looked different in
 1093 any way?

1094 L: Amy- yeah if they didn't see it as an issue I wouldn't.

1095 J: I agree with you Lucy - I think I'm more interested in a person's personality traits - ie. confidence
 1096 etc. - and if how they act is affected by their skin condition, perhaps it would affect your feelings
 1097 towards them

1098 D: Good answer Lucy - I think I feel the same

1099 R: Amy - Not really because I'm more protective of other people than myself so I could say 'screw
 1100 society' if my partner was judged. It is more difficult for me to cope with what society says if that
 1101 makes any sense.

1102 R1: Do you think you all feel like that because of your experiences? Do you think other people
 1103 would see the situation in the same way if they had always had "perfect" skin for example?

1104 L: Not nervous about the person I'm introducing maybe nervous about the questions the people I
 1105 was introducing to them might ask. If that makes sense haha [sic laughing]

1106 R1: Yeah, I understand ☺

1107 J: I really don't know many people who think their skin is perfect! Everyone has things they don't
 1108 like - I suppose some things affect people more than others

1109 L: I agree with Jackie.

1110 R: You should never ask someone about their skin condition in front of other people. If you feel the
 1111 need to ask then do it privately and as long as it is said without malice then depending on the
 1112 situation then maybe.

1113 D: I think we're all quite critical of ourselves... and what bothers us might not bother someone else

1114 R: I agree Delilah

1115 J: On the asking people about their skin point - I'd never ask someone about their skin unless they
 1116 were a close friend. I agree with you Delilah too - I probably imagined those people staring at my
 1117 make-up free face on the bus!

1118 R2: All - How do you feel when you see someone with imperfect skin? Do you feel uncomfortable
 1119 touching them? Do you ever ask them about their skin condition?

1120 R: Well I wouldn't go and touch a stranger full stop! ☺

1121 D: I worked in a beauty salon for a while and there was a girl who came in to the salon who had
 1122 severe acne. My first reaction was she came in to the salon seeking help for her acne... she wanted
 1123 her eyebrows shaped! That was when I realised what is important to one person isn't necessarily
 1124 important to someone else

1125 R2: Ray - what if it was a friend or family member?

1126 R1: That's interesting Delilah

1127 L: It would have to be a close friend or family member before I would ask. I don't think I would
 1128 ever touch them unless it was my husband. And that's not due to the skin problem just more
 1129 personal boundaries in general.

1130 J: I don't think I'd be uncomfortable touching them. If I'm being honest, I would probably feel
 1131 something like pity for them if it was something severe (without wanting to sound patronising)

1132 R: In my family there are no taboo topics so sure and close friends maybe depending on the
 1133 situation.

1134 R1: All - have people close to you asked you about your skin? If so how did you react? How did it
 1135 make you feel?

1136 R2: In regards to touching the individual... How would you feel about touching someone who
 1137 suffers from psoriasis (symptoms include flaky skin)

1138 D: I would most likely be inquisitive about the condition so would want to ask questions. Wouldn't
 1139 do it until I felt the person would be comfortable with it. I would want to help - if the person was
 1140 open to it.

1141 L: I have had quite a lot of people ask about mine and it's not ever bothered me or been an issue. I
 1142 always just say it's like what Michael Jackson had but mine didn't spread.

1143 J: People have, I felt a bit embarrassed, but not hurt or upset

1144 R1: Do you think life is different for people who have perfect skin compared to those who have not
 1145 got "perfect" skin (if it exists)?

1146 J: I guess pointing out someone's differences makes you feel a bit uncomfortable/scrutinised

1147 R2: Do you think people's skin is sometimes seen as a reflection of their personality?

1148 R: Most of the time it's just been insults thrown my way but if I'm talking to someone and they
 1149 begin to notice the condition then I normally lash out verbally about anything else. It's a way to
 1150 distract them from my face even if it means getting into an argument. This was when I was in my
 1151 early twenties.

1152 J: I guess people who do have perfect skin spend a lot less time thinking about their skin/working
 1153 on it

1154 L: I wouldn't have an issue hugging/ touching a close friend with skin problems. Us kiwis aren't
 1155 particularly touchy feely haha [sic laughing]

1156 R: I'm more accepting of the situation now although it's still difficult.

1157 R1: Ray - so that was a coping strategy you used? How did it work? Do you feel like it helped you
 1158 feel better about yourself? Was it also about taking back control like others have mentioned?

1159 L: I don't think it's a reflection of their personality at all but it can obviously dramatically affect how
 1160 they interact with others and therefore hide their true personality.

1161 R1: Lucy - can you explain more about what you mean?

1162 J: That's a really good point Larissa, I agree.

1163 R: Yeh it was a coping strategy. Didn't really work but it was the only way I knew how as walking
 1164 away just resulted in being laughed at which is worse. Guess it was a way of taking back control but
 1165 at the time I just wanted a distraction, anything apart from talking about my face.

1166 J: I guess your skin (on your face) is like your shop window - your face to the world - you want it to
 1167 look good. So for me, I'd say it is almost a representation of me - that's perhaps why I feel that work
 1168 people at work would think I would look less professional if I didn't have a properly made up face

1169 L: Someone might be so much more guarded with new people if they have skin problems as it
 1170 might affect their confidence and make them standoffish but that's not a true reflection of their
 1171 personality. So once you get to know them they could be completely difference to that first
 1172 impression

1173 R1: Thanks Jackie - does everyone else agree with that?

1174 D: I don't leave the house without makeup on

1175 R: Yep

1176 R1: Do you think that perfect skin exists?

1177 L: Nope

1178 D: I agree with Jackie too

1179 J: I really don't think so. I don't think I've seen real people in the flesh with perfect skin

1180 R1: If perfect skin doesn't exist, why do you think the skin is so important to people?

1181 D: I don't think there is a perfect skin

1182 R: I would define perfect skin as the absence of unique abnormalities which draw attention
 1183 if I had to define it.

1184 L: I think Jackie put it best about being a shop window

1185 R1: So do you think it does exist Ray?

1186 R: Yes

1187 D: Me too... I agree with Jackie's comments

1188 J: I think mostly you just want to look nice! And if your skin looks strange (to you) then you don't
 1189 look nice, so you don't feel nice

1190 R1: Where does the idea/motivation for perfect skin come from? is it just the media or more
 1191 complex than that?

1192 L: I think everyone has insecurities so if it's not skin it will be something else.

1193 J: Personally I think it's far more complex than that - I don't think I'm striving to look like a photo-
 1194 shopped Beyonce or a model - I'm realistic! I just want to look like the best version of me, which I
 1195 think is something that comes from my own views/values/ideas (which I guess in some ways are
 1196 shaped by media, culture, society - but not massively)

1197 R: Media and I think people when they look at the physical attributes of people, they find anything
 1198 which is out of the ordinary strange and possibly off-putting.

1199 R2: All - Is there anything you would sacrifice in order to have "perfect" skin?

1200 R: Depends what you define as sacrifice

1201 J: I don't think so, because that's not what I'm looking for. That said, I regularly sacrifice time and
 1202 money to pay for stuff to make my skin look better

1203 D: For me perfect skin is about feeling good so the media doesn't affect that.

1204 L: I agree with Jackie, we are influenced by media and marketing to some extent but it does come
 1205 down to our own values and ideas. My family influences me a lot as well and my skin problem
 1206 wasn't ever an issue to them so it hasn't greatly affect me

1207 R2: Ray - maybe anything you may 'give up' or sacrifice more time on?

1208 D: The media influences the makeup I use

1209 R1: In what way Delilah?

1210 J: That's interesting Delilah - in recent years my friends' recommendations have had more influence
 1211 over my purchasing choices than the media

1212 L: I wouldn't sacrifice anything because my skin isn't the only thing I'm unhappy with at times so
 1213 where would it end

1214 R: Hmm well if I could get my condition fixed for say 20k then absolutely.

1215 R1: Do you feel like you are just realistic Lucy? That nobody can be completely perfect?

1216 N: It depends what u mean by sacrifice. Money yes I would....if I could afford surgery then
 1217 absolutely I most definitely would x

1218 R1: So you would sacrifice a large amount of money Ray? Is that because you feel like if your skin
 1219 was different it would massively change your life?

1220 D: I want to create a look that is the current trend... we've gone through the "nude look" with pale
 1221 makeup, mascara and pale lips. Then there's vibrant lips - red lipsticks, eyeshadow trends etc.... it is
 1222 constantly changing. I just like playing with makeup

1223 N: What is Perfect? I know lots of people who I look at and think 'I would Love to look like them' -
 1224 in my eyes those people are perfect. However, those people have their own anxieties and issues with
 1225 the way they look and so I'm not sure anyone is ever 100% happy x

1226 R: Amy - Bear in mind that I also have two other medical conditions to do with appearance
 1227 although these can be covered up or not that noticeable so the skin condition is one part of a bigger
 1228 issue I have about my appearance but yes it would solve one problem.

1229 D: Agree with you Naomi

1230 R1: Thanks everyone for all of your time and comments, we really appreciate it. We appreciate that
 1231 it's sometimes a little hard to add everything you want to say so if there's anything you want to add
 1232 over the next couple of days please just post it in this group. Finally, is there anything else that
 1233 anyone would like to add?

1234 R: No. Thanks for invite.

1235 N: Thank you and apologies again for dipping in and out... KIDS!!!!

1236 R1: No worries at all Naomi ☺ Thanks for fitting us in!! x

1237 D: I want to say thank you to everyone for sharing with me and the wider group.

1238 J: Me too - this was a really interesting chat to be part of

1239 L: I think I am pretty realistic but I classify my skin problem as pretty minimal, not particularly
 1240 serious. If I had a more serious skin condition that affected a greater area my view on the world and
 1241 skin could be quite different

1242 R2: Thank you very much everyone! We really appreciate you all taking your time to participate in
 1243 our focus group ☺

1244 R1: One final thing from me. Here is the debrief form for you to have a quick read over

1245 R1: Thanks so much again for all of your honesty!

1246 L: Not a problem, happy to help.

1247 R: Same here.

1248 T: I would make a conscious effort to look fully beyond it. I do that now in reality. If a girl has bad
 1249 skin I force myself to look at her face as if she had perfect skin

1250 D: Amy... can I fill this in tonight for you and send it - I've got to get ready for work

1251 T: Yes, I feel like I need to read through all that everyone has said and give a proper opinion

1252 R1: Just to clarify, the debrief form is just for you to read through. But if you could all fill in the

1253 consent and demographic form as soon as you can (Delilah tonight is fine) that would be great.

1254 Here's the link again just in case you missed it

1255 R1: Hi everyone, thanks again for participating in this study. It's now 7pm so I'll start the focus

1256 group. Can everyone who's online type "hi" into the chat so I can see who is actually

1257 here?

1258 Yalika: Hi

1259 Samantha: Hi

1260 Cheryl: Hi

1261 Oscar: Hi

1262 Dima: Hi

1263 R1: That's great, hi everyone. Unfortunately, Tayo is unable to make the focus group due to

1264 unforeseen circumstances so it will just be me leading the session. Please write as much as you wish

1265 in response to the questions, the more information you can give the better. Also, please feel free to

1266 respond to other people's points too but please be respectful of opinions even if they differ from

1267 your own.

1268 R1: So here goes...Does it matter what your skin looks like?

1269 S: I think that with the increasing use of filters and things people are starting to care

1270 more

1271 R1: Is that true for you personally Samantha?

1272 C: I think it really does considering the amount of advertisement that goes into having good skin

1273 S: Not for me personally, but I can see why it would add pressure to people

1274 D: What my skin looks like has always been really important to me, even from a very young age.

1275 R1: Why is that Dima?

1276 S: Yeah that is true, lots of air brushing make up products available that I have bought into

1277 Y: Yes because people feel a certain pressure to look good and if their skin is not great, they feel

1278 like they are not perfect and want to change that

1279 O: I agree. I believe it matters a lot, especially in the society we live in today. Appearance is

1280 empathized everywhere in the media.

1281 Kim: Think it is definitely portrayed by the media that we should strive to have perfect skin as it's

1282 supposed to be 'more attractive' obviously for reasons like trying to sell their products

1283 Y: With influences from everywhere some may feel like they want to have that perfect skin even if
 1284 they are totally fine

1285 R1: Do you think the skin is more important than say what you wear?

1286 S: You can always change what you wear, but you can't change your skin

1287 R1: What does perfect skin mean to you Kim?

1288 C: I think it might be an even mix of both...I think you can have nice skin and not desirable
 1289 clothes...but nice clothes and average skin

1290 Y: I agree advertisements are a great influence on people they make you want to buy their products
 1291 because they make you think you need them

1292 D: Hmmm, I'm not sure really... I think its lots of factors... background, circumstance I've always
 1293 been really aware of how I look... for me yes, my skin has always been more important than what I
 1294 wear.

1295 K: But I think there are aspects to good skin that do matter because sometimes your skin can change
 1296 from your own health. Like for girls during your period you can get oily spotty dry skin

1297 O: For me it is more important. If I'm going out and potentially and haven't made much of an effort,
 1298 but my skin is looking okay and clear that day, I'm less bothered or conscious about my
 1299 appearance.

1300 K: Skin definitely does give a confidence boost and there a quite a lot of guys that say bad skin turn
 1301 them off but same goes for girls to guys I suppose

1302 S: Your face is the first thing people look at so it is important that it looks good, it makes you feel
 1303 more confident

1304 C: To be fair I care more if my skin looks good than about what I'm wearing

1305 R1: Do you feel you are judged more by others if your skin is not great?

1306 Y: I agree with you Samantha, first thing people look at is your skin and it's to do with your
 1307 confidence as welll

1308 S: Unfortunately, I do think people judge you on what your skin looks like. not everyone, but
 1309 some

1310 D: I've had acne, so I know it's not true but I feel like if you have bad skin its somehow dirty. I
 1311 don't want to offend anyone, like say I've had acne

1312 K: I agree, if I was wearing not so good clothes but had good skin it, it would be better than wearing
 1313 a really nice outfit but not so good skin

1314 C: I agree with Kim

1315 D: There is something 'unclean' about it

1316 R1: Is that something you have felt from other people Dima when you have had acne?

1317 O: I agree!

1318 Y: Yes I do, atm [sic at the moment] I have acne whereas before I did not and people would say

1319 wow u have great skin and it made me feel good. but now with acne I don't like it, people say u

1320 need to fix it, it doesn't look good, take care of it

1321 S: Yeah I agree with you there, even though acne is completely normal

1322 R1: Do you think people see it as being your fault Yalika? Or anyone else

1323 K: Agreed. when my periods coming my skin has outbursts and people always comment that I have

1324 a pimple or what not

1325 D: Not really, I think I've been lucky. It's something I'm very concerned about. It prevents me from

1326 interacting with other people. Which is quite hard for me anyways as I am quite introverted

1327 R1: Were those people your friends and family Kim? How did that make you feel?

1328 Y: Acne so many people have it and yet every day I feel we are judged for not taking care of

1329 ourselves or are ugly because of it. But I don't think anything of it. Yes I do think people think it's

1330 my fault

1331 C: It seems like when somethings 'wrong' with your skin in the eyes of other people..its your job to

1332 fix it even when you cant

1333 Y: But there is nothing I can do other than have a good skincare routine to keep it

1334 healthy

1335 R1: How have you experienced that Cheryl?

1336 O: I don't think I feel judged as such, but I do feel embarrassed and am worried that people will be

1337 looking at an area of my skin which is not looking so good at the time. When it's not looking very

1338 good, I just don't really want to be seen.

1339 Y: Exactly Cheryl I agree with you

1340 S: That's really true, I have really oily skin and I'm very conscious of it and I know people are

1341 thinking, why can't she sort that out?!

1342 K: With family its more of concern in their tone like you should take care of it don't touch it it'll

1343 scar etc. but with friends its more of a laugh like of you have a pimple haha [sic laughing] I mean

1344 it's okay when you know it's just temporary but I used to have acne when I was at high school and I

1345 felt much more conscious about it so now I don't ever comment on someone's skin unless it's a

1346 compliment

1347 C: Because I'm so pale I wear a fair bit of foundation...because people always say how bright my
 1348 skin is...so in that sense they feel it's my job to do something about it

1349 D: I think people do think it's my fault. For example I feel that can't really go out and be seen to be
 1350 eating greasy, unhealthy food because I think people are thinking 'maybe you should put down that
 1351 burger'! or even worse I am putting them off their food

1352 K: Yeh I agree with Dima, even when I get a spot I start thinking what have I eaten lately etc.

1353 R: So do people feel their skin is a representation of their character? Therefore if it's bad then there
 1354 is a judgement from others on why that's the case?

1355 C: It's horrible that people have to feel like that Dima

1356 Y: I can go days without wearing makeup or some days when I feel like my skin is really looking
 1357 bad I will wear a lot of makeup to cover it up and makes me feel better but then I think I shouldn't
 1358 do that my skin needs a rest from it

1359 C: I don't feel that someone can be judged personality wise because of their skin..but I think others
 1360 do use skin as a way to judge people yeh

1361 S: I don't feel that it is a representation of my character but I think other people might
 1362 do

1363 R1: If you don't why do you think other people might Samantha? Do you all invest a lot of time in
 1364 your skin?

1365 O: I'm aware that sub consciously people judge people on their skin as have seen tests/examples on
 1366 TV where people judge people, whether they know they are or not!

1367 Y: Same, I feel like people sometimes base personality on people skin. If it's got blemishes or acne
 1368 people think you don't know how to take care of yourself

1369 S: It's probably me just thinking it, but when I'm conscious of my skin I feel like its highlighted on
 1370 me and that other people are even more aware of it I have a very good skin care routine that I stick
 1371 to daily but obviously skin has a mind of its own sometimes and depending what time of the month it
 1372 is

1373 C: The most time invest on my skin is applying and reapplying foundation

1374 Y: I do have a skincare routine but I don't do it every day but I don't feel guilty if I miss a
 1375 day

1376 R1: How do you deal with that Yalika?

1377 O: As a man I feel like I probably do invest a lot more time and effort than most of my male friends.
 1378 It's annoying as there is always a lot of commentary about my skin regime - most male friends say

1379 that what I do doesn't make a difference and that I've made it up in my head what affects my skin in
 1380 bad ways.

1381 K: I think it can't represent someone's character specifically but others may judge which may shape
 1382 someone's character, for example become more conscious, shy, nervous around others lose their
 1383 confidence regarding their skin. Maybe lead to think that they r unattractive or could get worse but I
 1384 suppose people get categorised by their skin type like dry, sensitive, oily, combination...etc. you
 1385 could say it defines you in a way

1386 Y: Sometimes if I miss a day I won't wear makeup the next day or I will just carry out the routine
 1387 the next day like normal

1388 O: What do you mean by a "commentary" Oscar?

1389 Y: I do feel like I have to have a set routine but if a day is missed I don't put myself down about it I
 1390 just say its ok just carry on next day

1391 O: Just general jokes or mocking by friends. I'm quite a confident person generally so it doesn't
 1392 affect me that much. But it can be quite annoying. Foe people to think your making stuff up in your
 1393 head I mean.

1394 S: If it makes you feel better then it's a good thing

1395 R1: Would everyone agree that your skin is very important overall to how you feel about
 1396 yourself?

1397 K: Yes

1398 O: Definitely.

1399 S: Definitely

1400 C: Definitely

1401 Y: Yes

1402 O: It's hard to separate my mood with my skin. If that makes sense

1403 R1: So does it dictate your mood Oscar?

1404 S: Yeah, if my skin isn't feeling great, I generally have a slightly worse day because of how my skin
 1405 is making me feel

1406 D: Thanks Cheryl ☺ I agree with Oscar. People think they have full clearance to talk about your
 1407 face and therefore you, when you haven't even asked for their opinion or advice. They just give it
 1408 freely. Skincare is something personal, but not necessarily private, so when people comment its
 1409 bloody annoying. Its none of their business

1410 O: Definitely. It can dictate how I start the day... if I wake up and I've had a flair up I just have no
 1411 energy to tackle the day ahead.

1412 R1: Do you think people feel they can comment as they think you are doing something wrong, or
 1413 otherwise your skin would be okay?

1414 K: On a 'good skin' day I feel more confident but when it's not I feel a little more conscious to
 1415 others

1416 Y: Some days if my skin is having a bad day and I want to go out so I apply makeup. if the makeup
 1417 doesn't sit well, then I will just forget about going out but some days I don't care and try to make it
 1418 work there are good and bad days

1419 R1: So it directly impacts how you interact with people Kim?

1420 S: People seem to lack empathy, we have all had bad skin days, but some people make you feel
 1421 self-conscious about it

1422 C: I agree with Oscar...feels like what's the point if you're going to feel horrible anyway

1423 K: Not it not asked. I think they should never be rude about it, but if I ask first it's nice to have good
 1424 advice

1425 D: My skin is just another thing for me to have to control. I feel like it's almost separate from me,
 1426 so when it doesn't behave, I get angry, I'm not in control as it were

1427 R1: The skin is in control of you Dima?

1428 O: I completely agree with the control thing. I often feel like I have no control as my is linked to
 1429 food allergies.

1430 R1: People have mentioned how the skin impacts their day. How about relationships with others?
 1431 Does it impact friendships?

1432 C: I'm very self-conscious of mine..so I won't go out with my friends if I'm having a particularly
 1433 bad day or unless I have my foundation on..because I don't want the hassle of comments etc.

1434 R1: What does a bad day look/feel like for you Cheryl?

1435 S: For me, I don't tend to suffer too much with acne, but I have scars from chicken pox and also a
 1436 rather large birth mark on my neck. for the people that have known me for ages it doesn't bother me
 1437 and I don't think about it, but it can make me feel anxious meeting new people

1438 C: It feels like whatever you try and do to cover it up doesn't work...so there's not much point..like
 1439 Oscar mentioned earlier

1440 R1: Do you avoid situations where you may have to meet new people Samantha?

1441 Y: I have very sensitive skin and it's very hard to find products that will work well with my skin.
 1442 Sometimes I'm annoyed when I can't find anything and I feel like today is not my day but I still
 1443 keep trying to find a solution

1444 S: If I can't avoid it then I try and cover my neck up because people tend to assume that it's a love
 1445 bite which can be really embarrassing. It's so hard to avoid situations with meeting new people. As
 1446 I've got older I've learned to deal with it better

1447 R1: How about intimate relationships? Does the appearance of the skin have an impact there?

1448 K: I think it can, I had a friend that had trouble with their skin (acne) and they were very conscious
 1449 about it, if we said let's meet up she use to pull out last minute all the time saying she didn't want to
 1450 go out because of her skin which we understood but sometime she just used it as an excuse to not
 1451 come which started to get annoying

1452 D: Well, I like to be in control of everything, know how something works, why it doesn't. I've
 1453 always taken really good care of my skin, so if my skin breaks out, I feel like I'm not in control,
 1454 really frustrated. You have to wear that failure on your face for the whole world to see.

1455 R1: How do you deal with it now Samantha?

1456 Y: Having acne does make me anxious sometimes as people around me have good skin even though
 1457 they don't have a skincare routine

1458 K: Yes to intimate as if u have bad skin you won't be as confident with your body, not want to show
 1459 your bare skin

1460 C: I agree with Kim there again..it's a really self-conscious thing

1461 R1: So you feel like you have failed in some way Dima when your skin is not how you want it to
 1462 look?

1463 S: I try and see it through my own eyes, would I judge someone for having a birth mark? of course
 1464 not. but maybe that's because I have one? so I know how it would feel. I just try and come across
 1465 very confident so that they don't get a chance to think about my birth mark

1466 R1: Do you think a person with a clear complexion would date someone with a less clear
 1467 complexion?

1468 O: When I have a rash on the side of my face I try to cover it up with make-up. But as a male that
 1469 makes me feel pretty self-conscious - I'm worried that people will realise that I'm wearing make-
 1470 up. Although that shouldn't be a problem it makes me feel uncomfortable as they could say
 1471 something and highlight that you're not conforming to the male masculine normative gender type.

1472 R1: So is that an added anxiety to the skin Oscar?

1473 K: I think if they don't just because of their skin then they need to change their personality before
 1474 trying judge someone for their skin tbh [sic to be honest].

1475 O: yes.. sometimes it's a toss-up between worrying about wearing the make-up and being seen with
 1476 the rash! neither is great.

1477 S: Definitely agree with Kim there

1478 Y: I think they would but I've seen most people be put off by people with not a clear
1479 complexion

1480 O: Its quite sad to hear that is the case.

1481 R1: What do you think is the biggest thing that puts them off Yalika?

1482 S: I think the person in the relationship with clear skin would always be suggesting ways to improve
1483 their partners

1484 D: Yes, I think that maybe I feel like it's a sign of weakness? Or that something is not quite
1485 right?

1486 C: My friends suggest things to help improve the way my skin looks but I don't take it negatively

1487 Y: Maybe because they think that person is ugly or because they don't want to be judged by being
1488 with someone with not clear complexion

1489 R1: Why is that Cheryl?

1490 C: Because they know how self-conscious I am about it and they feel like they're
1491 helping

1492 R1: Do you ever find their comments frustrating?

1493 S: It would be coming from a good place, but people have told me about how to cover my scars
1494 before and clearly I have tried everything. Sometimes it feels like it is bothering them more than its
1495 bothering me

1496 R1: Does the importance of the skin vary depending on what stage of life you're at? That's
1497 interesting Samantha. So you feel that your skin is making other people uncomfortable?

1498 Y: My friends and family are like that as well, giving advice on what to do, sometimes it's annoying
1499 because it makes me feel like I'm not perfect or that I need to fix myself

1500 C: I do find them pretty irritating in all fairness..but as I say they know when they've gone too
1501 far

1502 S: At my age it's really important, because if I was going to an interview I would want to feel I
1503 looked ok as I believe people go of what someone looks like sometimes

1504 O: I do (find it annoying)! Because I feel like I'm trying my best and think about it a lot, adapting
1505 what I'm eating all the time. So I people suggest additional things it just makes me
1506 annoyed.

1507 Y: I agree with Samantha

1508 K: I think it's more common when you are in your teens but still as distressing. Then when you get
 1509 to being an adult, it's seen more as a permanent thing? That is hard to get rid of

1510 R1: Do you vocalise that to them Oscar?

1511 S: I don't think it's making them uncomfortable, but they don't see me behind the scenes as it were,
 1512 trying to cover it all up. maybe they don't realise how much I'm trying to make it look
 1513 better

1514 O: I think sometimes.... or it comes out indirectly when they see that I'm frustrated

1515 R1: Do you think your feelings about your skin will change as you get older? a. For example,
 1516 feelings of self-consciousness? b. The perceptions of others? c. Will there be different
 1517 pressures?

1518 C: I don't think they'll stop in honestly..because my skin will always look the way it does..so I'll
 1519 always be covering up what I don't like about it

1520 S: I know mine are permanent and I know that I will get over it, but it comes back when I see
 1521 random people looking occasionally

1522 D: Yes! I had bad skin as a teen which was awful, face, back etc., but it's acceptable because you're
 1523 a teen, (even though it was awful)! Then I had clear skin for many years and I now have adult acne
 1524 which I feel is worse. Because you are not really supposed to have bad skin when you are older. It's
 1525 embarrassing. It has prevented me from going out and I feel like I've already been through this
 1526 stage of my life.

1527 K: Yes, as a teenager I felt conscious but it was the 'norm' during pubescent times whereas now it's
 1528 not as expected so I feel slightly more conscious.

1529 R1: How does that make you feel Samantha, when you think people are looking at you?

1530 Y: Yes because when I was a teen I had a clear complexion and now I have acne, I want to change
 1531 it asap

1532 S: very self-conscious! As I said earlier, my birth mark is on my neck and friends have joked that it
 1533 looks like a love bite so I'm worried people will get the wrong impression of me

1534 Y: I feel like I want my skin to be as it was before and maybe people will stop judging and giving
 1535 unnecessary advice

1536 R1: So there is more of a judgement on you as an adult Dima? Is that just because you think people
 1537 see it as something you have when you're younger or other things too?

1538 O: My skin seems to get worse as I pick up more allergies. So it does seem like I'm experiencing
 1539 this the wrong way round. However, I would like to become less self-conscious generally when I
 1540 get older. I would see it as a positive step if I cared less.

1541 R1: How does it make you feel to look back to a time when you felt your skin was better Yalika?

1542 C: In an ideal world no one would have to be self-conscious about how they look but the media

1543 doesn't help that at all

1544 R1: Is the media the main reason Cheryl, or anything else?

1545 D: Yes, hopefully I'll become more relaxed about my face as I get older

1546 Y: It makes me feel like, what did I do wrong, and how did my acne just appear, sometimes I can't

1547 explain it, even after visiting my GP I still feel like there is something else I can do to have my skin

1548 as it was before

1549 O: It's weird although the media doesn't help and is pretty horrendous, sometimes I feel like it's my

1550 fault that I care about it... as I'm a bit obsessive generally.

1551 C: I think it's the media more than anything else

1552 R1: So you feel like it's your fault Yalika?

1553 C: It's relentless..products for skin care are always coming out emphasizing people to take better

1554 care of their skin and change it in some ways

1555 S: Yeah the media is a nightmare, every other advert in a magazine is a skin care add. And there are

1556 now creams sporting all different letters of the alphabet cc, bb,...I don't know what I should use!

1557 D: I totally understand Yalika!

1558 R1: Do you feel that you shouldn't care as much as you do Oscar?

1559 Y: I don't think it's my fault but others try to say it is

1560 O: True - it does feel very confusing. yes... I want to care less and be more free when it comes to

1561 my appearance.

1562 R1: So not caring would mean freedom from the skin having as much control over you as you feel it

1563 does?

1564 Y: they say it's because I started wearing makeup and have a different skincare routine

1565 R1: Who is they Yalika?

1566 Y: All that is changed from my teens is that I wear more makeup

1567 K: I think we still do need to be conscious about our skin as it can show us how our body is feeling

1568 such as hormonal levels, or maybe certain parts of our body not functioning to their full. With

1569 makeup I think no make-up isn't always the answer as we need to protect our skin from UV and

1570 skin cancer.

1571 S: ...I have both...just in case

1572 Y: They as in family and some friends

1573 R1: That must be difficult to feel that those closest to you are blaming you in some way for
 1574 something you have no control over...

1575 S: Yeah I think it's always important to be aware of your skin for health reasons

1576 O: That must be very annoying - having people suggest that you have caused it... that's just
 1577 rubbish.

1578 Y: I used to let it get to me but now I just ignore it and do what I feel like I need to do

1579 K: Yup I think we need to take care for personal health issues but not just because of how others
 1580 perceive us.

1581 R1: Is a clear complexion different for men and women?

1582 S: It should just be down to you to decide as it is your skin and no one else's I think it can be, some
 1583 of my male friends grow their facial hair to cover up bad skin

1584 C: I think it's about equal in terms of complexion..there's pressure on men and women to have a
 1585 clear complexion because its seen as more desirable

1586 R1: So they are also conscious of their skin Samantha?

1587 S: Yeah definitely and there are less things marketed for men that could help cover it up so in a way
 1588 it could be worse for them

1589 R1: Is it therefore harder for men as they are less able to cover up with makeup...as Oscar was
 1590 saying?

1591 O: I feel there is less distinction now between who should and should not have good skin between
 1592 males and females... everyone needs to have good skin it seems. But I still think there is different
 1593 expectation in the way the different genders care and look after their skin.

1594 K: I think it can be different for gender, as with males people can say complete clear skin give them
 1595 a 'feminine' look and with some blemishes it can just be a manly thing but with women it is not as
 1596 accepting

1597 Y: It can be but I don't see why it should be different,

1598 R1: So you feel there is less pressure on men Kim?

1599 K: But I'm from Korea and men wearing make-up is much more accepted than in Europe I would
 1600 say so personally, as over here it's usually women's skin that is discussed not so much with men's
 1601 but I

1602 R1: That's interesting Kim...so a man wouldn't be judged for covering up in Korea as Oscar said he
 1603 feels?

1604 S: Some people think a man with laughter lines around their eyes is really attractive, but people
 1605 would comment if it was a woman

1606 K: In Korea it's both
 1607 Y: I feel like these days there are more people wearing makeup whether its men or women and even
 1608 from a young age
 1609 C: I agree with Yalika
 1610 R1: So overall there is more of a need to be "perfect"?
 1611 K: Yep, they have different ranges for men and in general men go to get procedures done for skin
 1612 and cosmetics just as much
 1613 C: There really is
 1614 S: Yeah, and unfortunately it is a 'need'
 1615 D: Yes, I think although its changing, I feel women need to look more perfect
 1616 Y: I was once in a shop and buying some makeup when I saw an 11yr old girl buying mac and it
 1617 surprised me because she already had good skin and didn't need to cover-up. Her gran even said
 1618 you don't need it.
 1619 R1: Do you think perfect skin exists?
 1620 C: Only when it's been airbrushed so in reality no but there's always a sense of people striving to
 1621 have nicer skin than they do
 1622 Y: Anyone can wear makeup if it makes them feel better there should be no restriction who can and
 1623 cant
 1624 O: I suppose perfect skin is when your happy with it. in a way...
 1625 R1: Do you think some people are happy with their skin?
 1626 S: No one has the same skin so the idea of perfection is ridiculous but somehow there is the
 1627 ideology of perfect skin
 1628 R1: Do you think life is different for people who have perfect skin compared to those who have not
 1629 got perfect skin (if it exists)?
 1630 Y: I agree with Oscar when your happy with your skin you feel like it's perfect, but saying perfect
 1631 is annoying to me as we are all different and have different views on how we look and what is the
 1632 norm
 1633 S: My friends who I would say have great skin still aren't happy with it, so it's hard to
 1634 say
 1635 Y: Yes and no because everyone is self-conscious about something with their skin
 1636 D: I think perfect skin exists but that can depend on what the individual thinks is perfect. I don't
 1637 mind aging so much, but I'm more concerned with the acne and scars

1638 R1: So is perfection or better skin something that everyone is striving for? But why if it is
 1639 unattainable?

1640 Y: Same my friends who have a clear complexion think they don't have good skin

1641 K: Baby skin is what perfect skin would be I think

1642 C: In general I think people with more desirable complexions have it easier yes

1643 R1: Why is the Cheryl?

1644 O: I agree! I think they make their way through life and have it easier

1645 C: Because unless they want to..they don't have to spend as long taking care of it..like the routines
 1646 mentioned earlier

1647 R1: What is easier about their life Oscar?

1648 S: I feel that given the option, a majority of people would like clear skin

1649 Y: I think so because there are many influences and it makes us want to continue and not give up to
 1650 find a way to have "perfect" skin

1651 O: I think, sadly, people probably treat people better if they have perfect skin. I don't feel like I do
 1652 that... but I know it is out there in society. Or not 'perfect' but good skin.

1653 S: Yeah I would agree with that

1654 R1: Is that because people see them as "better" people?

1655 Y: I agree with that Oscar

1656 C: I don't think they see that intentionally

1657 S: I think there is a sense of that, but if everyone had perfect skin, then people would find
 1658 something else to judge. It's a vicious cycle

1659 R1: But you think they may unconsciously think that Cheryl?

1660 C: I do yes

1661 D: They are probably most likely to be heard or respected more. I feel like if you have bad skin you
 1662 are more likely to be dismissed.

1663 R1: Why is that Dima? Have you had experience/witnessed this? Where does the idea/motivation
 1664 for "perfect" skin come from? Is it just the media or other things too?

1665 C: I think it's mainly the media..because it's so well emphasized

1666 S: Yeah I'd say media is the biggest influence

1667 Y: I've experienced that. people will always look at my friends with good skin and call them pretty
 1668 and beautiful, while looking at me, they say nothing

1669 D: I'm not sure. It's just a feeling I have.

1670 R1: How about social media? How do people feel about that?

1671 O: You never see people in the media with bad skin.... unless it's a documentary or something
 1672 depicting real life!

1673 Y: Yes media places a big part in the ideal of having perfect skin

1674 R1: That must feel very difficult Yalika. Do you speak to your friends/family about how that makes
 1675 you feel?

1676 C: I think social media does too...amount of likes etc..filters you can use...it matters to people how
 1677 they come across on social media

1678 Y: Not really because I feel like I can deal with it and ignore it, I've got to a place now where I
 1679 don't let it get to me

1680 R1: How does that make you feel Oscar, that you don't see people in the media that have skin you
 1681 can relate to?

1682 S: Social media is tricky because its full of people you know. So when you see people you know
 1683 with great skin it might make you feel worse than if it was a celebrity

1684 D: I don't think my perceptions of perfect skin come from the media necessarily. Although perhaps
 1685 it doesn't help maybe

1686 Y: But there are bad days but I just think I don't need to listen to them I am good as I am and too
 1687 bad if they don't like me

1688 R1: Is that because it feels more attainable if it is a friend Sarah?

1689 O: It is frustrating, because you know it is not representing reality.

1690 R1: Do you think it is easy to make yourself look "perfect" on social media, like using apps such as
 1691 Instagram?

1692 S: Exactly, I know they haven't had anything done surgically, so how come another 'normal' person
 1693 have great skin

1694 R1: Where do you think they come from Dima?

1695 Y: Yes definitely. with all the filters out there and apps to "beautify" it's a way of hiding what you
 1696 don't want people to see and not judge you

1697 D: I take comfort in knowing that it isn't reality. But also my feelings about my skin come from my
 1698 own control issues.

1699 S: So many people put filters on their pictures because it makes them look better. I use a black and
 1700 white filter so you can't see my scars so much so I'm just as bad

1701 R1: Can that be helpful as it can offer some relief at times? If you feel it's a bad day you could
 1702 change a picture and make it look better than you might actually feel?

1703 C: Social media is a good way of making yourself feel better I agree..just stick a filter on it and you
 1704 can hide all manner of sins

1705 S: I think it makes you feel better in the online world

1706 Y: It doesn't help me by doing that, using apps to make me look more "beautiful"

1707 R1: So there is a positive and negative side? How about online dating...has anyone had experience
 1708 in that? How do you go about presenting yourself to someone else in that context?

1709 Y: I don't like the feeling that i am deceiving people with how I look

1710 O: It can be a pick me up if you see a nice pic of yourself on Facebook... but it won't change
 1711 anything if you're looking in the mirror and not like what you see.

1712 S: I've never done online dating, but I have helped friends choose pictures for tinder and there is
 1713 just so much pressure!

1714 R1: Is it harder than face-to-face in many ways then as there are so many options for how you can
 1715 present yourself?

1716 S: You need to say so much in a couple of pictures

1717 C: Presenting yourself on-line is always easier than face to face because you can tweak
 1718 yourself

1719 R1: And everything is focused on looks...more so than in other contexts?

1720 S: I think it is harder online though, you end up sacrificing other parts of yourself for a great picture
 1721 so how can you really tell if you like someone

1722 R1: Can you explain more about what you mean by sacrificing other parts of yourself Samantha?
 1723 There are just two more questions from me...Is there anything you would sacrifice in order to have
 1724 "perfect" skin? or better/good skin

1725 K: I think I go to a specialist pay money

1726 R1: So you would sacrifice money Kim?

1727 C: I don't know what I would sacrifice but I would sacrifice something yes..to have what's seen as
 1728 better skin

1729 O: I feel like I do sacrifice a lot... there are so many things which I used to eat which I now don't to
 1730 try and avoid aggravating my allergies.

1731 D: Money, food, lifestyle

1732 S: So choosing photos for a dating site or other online forums, how can you bring across every
 1733 aspect of your personality in just a handful of photos. you want to look fun, pretty, funny in photos
 1734 but that doesn't tell people that actually you're rally clever or have amazing talents

1735 O: It still doesn't always work.

1736 S: Yeah I'd definitely pay to have good skin

1737 Y: Sacrifice? I'm not sure what I would do but atm [sic at the moment] I am trying to eat healthier

1738 and workout more, there are certain things I love but don't eat or drink anymore

1739 K: Yep money lifestyle food

1740 R1: Do you think there are things you can pay for that would make your skin the way you want it to

1741 look - do you think certain treatments of procedures work?

1742 O: If I knew what I had to do I would definitely do it... knowing that you are doing the right thing

1743 for your skin would relieve a lot of stress.

1744 K: I think lifestyle and food is harder than money Yes

1745 C: I spend a lot of money on foundations and things etc.

1746 K: Dermatologists

1747 S: I wouldn't have any surgery

1748 K: In Korea skin procedures are much cheaper than here having massages or things like IPL laser

1749 treatment etc.

1750 Y: Yes definitely, such as makeup and skin treatments

1751 S: Definitely skin treatments

1752 Y: But I would not pay for professional treatments

1753 S: It's hard to know if the expensive stuff is the same as the cheaper stuff. sometimes you just pay

1754 for the brand

1755 D: Yes, I think there are but you have to do LOTS of research! Even dermatologists don't have all

1756 the answers. It's also unfair that skincare is so expensive. You can't explore all the treatments

1757 unless you have money and or knowledge

1758 R1: Thank you so much everyone for all of your comments and thoughts. That's all of the questions

1759 from me. Is there anything else you would like to say that has not been mentioned so far?

1760 Y: I agree with Dima, money plays a big part in what u can do for your skin and how you can go

1761 about looking after it

1762 C: Thanks Amy!

1763 R1: So that is a barrier for a lot of people right?

1764 Y: Yes in terms of going getting an expensive treatment or seeking advice from a specialist

1765 O: I would agree with that.

1766 Y: Even if it may or may not work, you still want to think it might work on you and want to take the
1767 risk. most people have to save up to get a treatment even knowing not everything will
1768 work

1769 R1: Thanks again everyone. I'm going to post the debrief from in this chat, so please take a few
1770 minutes to read it through. Also, if you haven't already, please could you complete the consent and
1771 demographic info in the link at the top of the chat? Also, if there is anything else you think of that
1772 you would like to add in the next couple of days, feel free to post it into this chat.

1773 S: Thanks Amy that was really interesting

1774 C: Thanks Amy

1775 O: Thanks everyone

1776 Y: Thank you

1777 D: Thanks!

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