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Meet the “Stressettes”: Young women feeling the pressure to be and have it all

Every generation of young women faces some identity struggles, but a recent study suggests that today’s women are feeling more pressure than ever before to succeed both personally and professionally. According to a recent study conducted in the U.S. and Canada by global market research firm Synovate, a growing number of young women today are in a constant identity struggle to be viewed as both the “hot”, desired girl as well as the successful, independent woman.

Of the 1,000 women aged 16-25 who were surveyed, over 50% indicated that they feel incredible anxiety about their body image as well as what the future holds for them. Feeling stress from trying to be “hot” *and* independent simultaneously, these young women, coined the “Stressettes”, feel immense pressure to live up to their own and society’s perhaps unrealistic standards of who and what they should be.

“Young women today are under an enormous amount of pressure to not only look perfect but to live perfect,” said Ian Pierpoint, Senior Vice President of Synovate’s youth division. “‘Good’ isn’t good enough anymore – they want to perfect every aspect of their lives, from their looks to their relationships to their careers. Nothing less will do.”

Seventy percent of the Stressettes indicated that they are not happy with their body and 38% said that they would get plastic surgery if they had the money. However, 61% said that their biggest fear is not finding a career they love and 69% feel it is important that they make a lot of money when they are older. The need to be attractive through external reinforcement from peers and society is in constant struggle with the need to feel competent and independent through self/internal reinforcement.

Surprisingly, being young doesn’t have the same appeal to these women as it used to. The high levels of stress young women are facing in their twenties is causing the majority of them to actually look forward to their thirties in the hopes that they will have what they want out of life by then.

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This intense need to live a perfect life can also destroy their ability to accept failure.

“This ‘fake it until you make it’ attitude is driving them to operate in survival mode right now,” said Pierpoint. “Admitting angst or defeat is not an option for them.”

Online surveys were conducted via Synovate’s ePanel, which consists of over one million U.S. and 120,000 Canadian households. Additional qualitative research methods (in-home ethnographies and shopping excursion triads) were also used.

About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs over 5,500 staff in 108 cities across 50 countries. More information on Synovate can be found at www.synovate.com and www.synovate.co.za