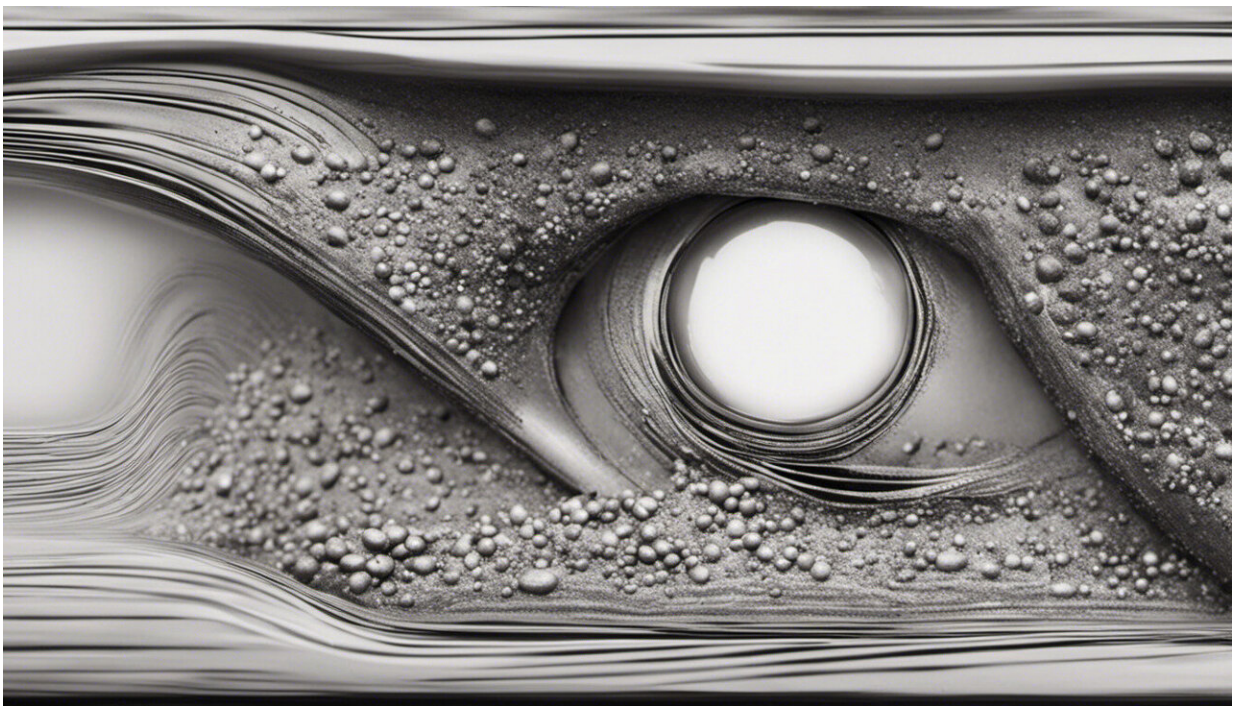


'It felt like how I looked was part of the decoration': How getting wed affects women's body image

May 17 2023, by Alison Owen and Jennifer Taylor



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Weddings are supposed to be joyful, but this joy can be accompanied by a lot of stress. Alongside choosing the menu, flowers and decorations and sorting the table plan, [body image](#)—how we think and feel about the way we look—can cause worries, too.

We could not identify any previous research that had formally looked at how brides in the UK felt about their [body image](#). To address this, and fill the gap in our knowledge, [our research](#) explored how brides felt about their body image in the run-up to their wedding. We focused in particular on any appearance concerns that they had and how these made them feel—from the planning stage right up to the big day itself.

One hundred and thirty-four women took part in either an [interview or an online survey](#). They were a mix of women planning their weddings and those who had been married in the past three years. Many women experienced feelings of pressure and expectation to look a certain way on their wedding day.

They felt that this pressure came from various sources, including family and friends. They told us that others' perceptions of how they looked affected their own feelings, both on the wedding day and afterwards. One said, "If you know other people think you look nice then you have more confidence."

Another told us: "I didn't want to feel ashamed of my appearance. I knew there would be a lot of attention and comments on it. Didn't want to feel like I'd let people down...there were lots of questions about my appearance and dresses mainly from other women. It felt like how I looked was part of the 'decoration' in the same way the table settings and order of service was."

Many of the women we spoke to felt the need to adhere to these pressures through fear of judgment and the expectation that all brides should look beautiful.

Looking back

The knowledge that wedding photographs and videos would provide

permanent visual evidence of how they looked added to body image pressures. One said, "I wanted to look back at the photographs and feel 100% comfortable with what I saw. "

The pressure felt by the women we spoke to also stemmed from the bridal industry, which perpetuates norms and assumptions about how brides should look. One woman, for example, talked about a bad experience she had in a bridalwear shop: "I felt the ladies in the dress shop were quite judgmental, saying I needed to eat better and basically lose weight, so I felt very negative towards me."

Nearly 70% of the women we spoke to who were planning their weddings intended to lose weight in preparation for their wedding day. The pressure to lose weight had a significant effect on their feelings and emotions. One said, "I'm really worried that preparing my weight for my wedding will re-trigger my anorexia and I don't think people talk about the unnecessary [pressure](#) for brides and grooms to lose weight."

Some of the women reported going to extreme measures to achieve their weight-loss goals, including surgery. One had a [gastric band](#) fitted in the run-up to the wedding: this is a band around the stomach that limits its expansion, leading to feeling full sooner. Another had a [tummy tuck](#) —[cosmetic surgery](#) to improve the shape of the stomach area.

Among the women we spoke to who were already married, only 27% had reached the weight they wanted to for their wedding. One said, "I was distressed when I realized I wouldn't achieve this weight. I then felt fine approaching the day itself. However, I felt embarrassed after seeing photos of me and regretted getting married at my [weight](#)."

Our findings back up what other researchers have found in countries outside of the UK, such as in [Australia](#) and the [US](#). This research has drawn attention to the powerful pressures related to wedding appearance

and the expectation of how [women](#) should look when getting married.

If you are getting married, then it is completely natural for you to want to look your best, but prioritize your own well-being, too.

If one of your friends or [family members](#) is getting married, or if you work in the wedding industry, be conscious of what you are saying to the brides in your life. Make sure you are not inadvertently adding any pressures or expectations to them by commenting on their appearance during what can already be a stressful time. Focus on the joy and connection that is the real heart of a [wedding](#).

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