

THE  
**FEMALE  
LEAD**

“Would you be  
happier without  
**social media** in  
your life?”

Educational charity,  
**The Female Lead**  
releases new insight  
into social media  
**attitudes amongst  
women**

Data from **76,000**  
women on their  
social media  
opinions



**DISRUPT  
YOUR  
FEED**

2022 research

Educational charity, **The Female Lead** releases new insight into social media attitudes amongst women and launches a new campaign to foster 'healthier' social media use in response to its poll.

This poll reveals that 6 in 10 people globally believe that their lives would be better if social media didn't exist \*.

Building on its academic work with **Cambridge University Psychologist**, around teen mental health in 2019/20, The Female Lead has polled its **7 million followers** in 2022.

We have learned that most women are both aware and concerned about the impact of social media on their well-being and self-esteem.

78%

"of people believe that social media has negatively affected the way they view their bodies"

75%

"of people worry that social media has a negative impact on their mental health"

59%

"of people believe that their life would be better if social media didn't exist"

D.Y.F

Key findings include:

## Summary

The Female Lead's ground-breaking Disrupt Your Feed research as early as 2019 has proven that social media can be a source of inspiration and career motivation. But working with a **University of Cambridge Psychologist**, we also discovered that to achieve this, we must all learn to take the lead in our own social media feeds. Put simply, we must ensure **we self-serve a balanced and healthy social diet**.

\* POLL OF 76,000 SURVEYED BY THE FEMALE LEAD IN FEBRUARY 2022

# Disrupt Your Feed

Edwina Dunn, **Founder of The Female Lead** said:



The problem is we know that social media can **be bad for our health.**

A lot has been said about how **toxic social media** is and that teens must be protected from the onslaught of social media platforms.

What is more surprising is that **women, not just teens**, really do **fear** and suffer the **negative impacts of social media use.**

## So why don't we just stop using social media?

We may know that social media can be bad for us and yet, we keep coming back for more. We remain hooked on this content. Why? Well, to mention just a few of its benefits - its free, influential, connecting, entertaining and informative. Surely this suggests that there is value and enjoyment here too.

## So why are we not defending the positives? Why are we not maximising the benefits that social media offers?

We believe that there is much to be gained from social media but we do need new guidelines on how to use it so that we keep a healthy and happy balance. Our research shows that the best and simplest way to achieve this is if we each learn to take control of our social media feed.

We currently allow the platforms to manage our feeds and so we 'get what we're given'. Many of us consume a loop of airbrushed entertainment that makes us all feel 'less', constantly comparing ourselves with people and stories that are neither real nor uplifting.

## CAN SOCIAL MEDIA BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

The Female Lead's **2019 Disrupt Your Feed** project:

In 2019, The Female Lead and Psychologist, **Dr Terri Apter**, launched findings from the Disrupt Your Feed - a major academic study that permanently shifted the conversation around teens, social media and mental health.

The Female Lead previous campaigns have had a reach of **20 million people** and **330 million impressions**. Read the executive summary here.

Disrupt Your Feed revealed that changing or 'disrupting' the homogeneity of what teens consume on social media via the introduction of new, diverse female role models into the social media feeds of girls aged **14 to 18 yrs** - rather than just restricting social media usage - lead to many positive outcomes.

The study concluded that a causal relationship exists between following **positive female role models** on **social media** and having higher, focused personal and career aspirations, and having more positive social media habits overall, in relation to their self-esteem.

The joint research venture encompassed large-scale data analysis of hundreds of thousands of social accounts by Starcount, alongside **a year-long qualitative study in five UK schools**.

Alongside the research reveal, The Female Lead launched a Disrupt Your Feed Social Media Pledge to an audience of over **6m users** to **promote healthier, more positive social media use**.

The pledge reached **20 million users** on Twitter with **330 million impressions**. The research findings featured in the Daily Express, Daily Mail, Telegraph, Radio 4's Woman's Hour, BBC 5 live, BBC Radio London as well as being featured speaker platform for Edwina Dunn and Dr Terri Apter at Davos 2020.



## ACTION AND INTERVENTION

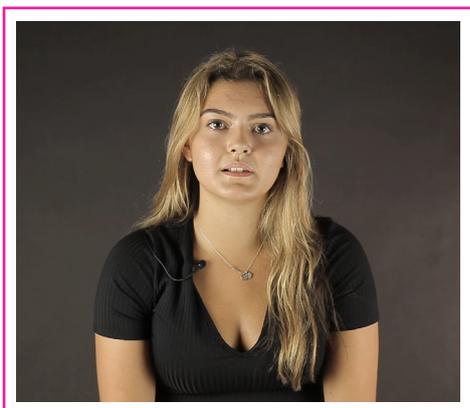
The Female Lead is committed to improving the social and cultural environments for teen girls, and this of course includes social media.

Rather than just wait for more effective regulations from government or for social media companies to take charge and “clean up their act”, it now embarks on a new project to increase the range of tools available to teens themselves as they navigate their social media worlds.

Disrupt Your Feed 2022 now moves to help in a practical sense. We want to show how parents, teachers and teen girls can be guided to resist the negative pull of social media and instead benefit from its riches.

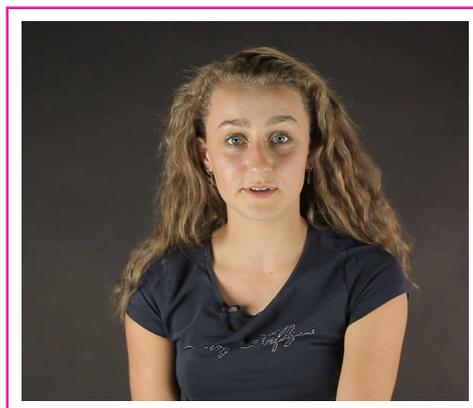
Every one of us can change what and who we listen to and access a diverse range of inspirational women across a variety of career paths. Social media is a rich and powerful resource that helps us to find and follow who inspires us.

We can learn of their successes, failures and something of their shared wisdom. In the past, this was hidden away, but the more we search for stories of women, the quicker we will change the balance of the search engines that today show us row upon row of male leaders and CEO's.



“My social media now has given me much more self-belief”

— **Leila Symonds,**  
Study Participant



“I don't have to be hourglass and be a make-up artist or a model. I can be successful and independent. It's no longer just about what I look like but actually about what I think, which is definitely more important”

— **Sophia Harley,** Study Participant

## Background to Teen focused Academic Research

Dr Terri Apter, Cambridge Psychologist says with creative prompts or interventions, teen girls can be agents of their own resilience.

Experiences of lockdown initially transformed interest in teens' use of social media from focus on its harms to its capacity for positive connections and remission of isolation.

Nevertheless, reports on teens and social media continue to highlight "harms" and "vulnerabilities", and the flurry of interest in social media as a benefit during lockdown has rapidly faded from view.

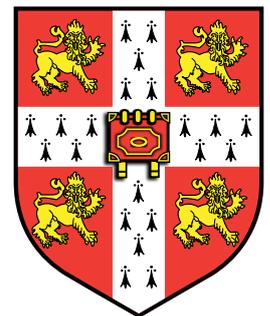
In fact, debates over the impact of social media on teens - and on teen girls in particular - are growing increasingly heated, with platforms such as Instagram repeatedly described as "toxic". They are blamed for teen girls' vulnerability to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Neutralising this toxicity is seen as the job of companies that run and manage social media platforms. At the same time, it is argued that such companies lack incentive to take necessary actions.

Their aim is to increase time spent on these platforms, and they develop ever more sophisticated algorithms to shape each person's individual "feed", regardless of the health of that diet. Instead, platforms are seen to develop subversive techniques that activate the trigger-happy reward circuitry of the teen brain, and lead them towards shallowness, lowered self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

However, our work shows us that with creative prompts or interventions, teen girls can be agents of their own resilience.

While some high-quality research is being done on psychological inoculation against "fake news" – most studies focus on the correlation between teens' mood and their time spent on social media use, and therefore many parents try to restrict teens' time use.



# Disrupt Your Feed

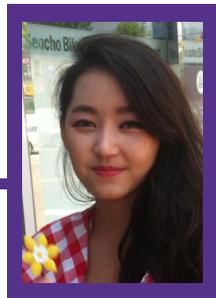
This ever-growing list of women is free to follow.

We have made their voices and stories clearer and bolder by shining a light on them. All their work is **FREE** to access. You can find it on our website, and it features inspiring voices including:

**Abigail Harrison** - aspiring astronaut and co-founder of The Mars Generation inspiring girls to get involved with the US space program (astronautabbyofficial)



**Yeonmi Park** – author and human rights activist who defected from North Korea in 2007 (yeonmi\_park)



**Ocean Ramsey** - shark conservationist, biologist, research diver & professional PADI scuba instructor (oceanramsey)



**Gloria Steinem** - acclaimed journalist, trailblazing feminist, and one of the most visible, passionate leaders and spokeswomen of the women's rights movement in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (gloriasteinem)



**Adwoa Aboah** - model, activist, ambassador for diversity in fashion with the British Fashion Council and Founder of young women's organisation Gurls Talk (adwoaaboah)



Because we know . . .

**“You Can't Be What You Can't See”**

# Disrupt Your Feed

## TAKE THE PLEDGE: DISRUPT YOUR FEED

Our new Social Media Pledge has been shared with an audience of over **7 million followers**.

The Pledge promotes healthier and more positive social media use.

We are asking our followers to improve their social media health and pay that forward to their networks.



**DISRUPT  
YOUR  
FEED**

# Pledge to

- Disrupt Your Feed***  
Follow people who make you feel empowered
- Never Compare Yourself***  
Always ask, is it true, filtered or fake?
- Be Conscious***  
of your scrolling & how it makes you feel
- Be Open***  
to different views, stories & cultures
- Comment Kind***  
because we rise by lifting others

**#DisruptYourFeed**  
The Female Lead

# Disrupt Your Feed

## THE POWER OF INFLUENCERS

Helping us to reach the maximum audience, we are working with an extraordinary network of powerful women & influencers including:

**Tiffany Aliche, Daisy Buchanan, Laura Bates, Catherine Mayer, Margaret Cho and Nadia Murad.**



thebudgetnista

Follow



3,650 posts 535k followers 6,243 follow

Tiffany Aliche

\$ Educator/ NYT Bestseller: Get Good with Money/



nadia\_murad

Follow



78 posts 380k followers 104 following

Nadia Murad

Advocate for gender equality & survivors of sexual violence, Nobel Peace Laureate, founder of @nadiainitiative, author of the memoir "The Last Girl".

## The impact of this intervention

### Sue Hannam

Head teacher &  
Educational broadcaster  
BBC and Sky News



“We are facing a **national epidemic of young people** struggling with poor mental health. The world has placed unconscionable pressures on our youngsters, some, like the pandemic, are out of their control, and others, crawl into their lives insidiously via the **pressures of social media** and could be avoided. **Disrupt your feed.**”

You wouldn't invite into your life someone who made you feel bad and did you harm, but an **unhealthy relationship with social media** is doing just that. Disrupt your feed.

Women have not fought for centuries to gain status and increasing equality and respect, to be represented by headline articles comparing who wears what swimwear.

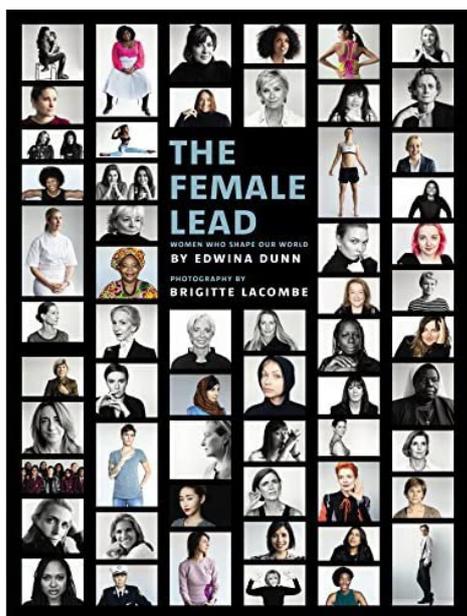
Let's hear it for those **who have fought adversity** and won, shown compassion in a challenging world, acted selflessly and embodied kindness.

Let's focus on these and other humanitarians whose presence in our social media feed can **really make a difference.**”

## About The Female Lead

The Female Lead is an educational charity founded by data science entrepreneur, Edwina Dunn OBE in 2015. The charity is dedicated to both improving the visibility of positive female role models and identifying the factors that continue to limit women's progress, choices and fulfilment.

The Female Lead shares stories of women who have found diverse paths to fulfilment and achievement, amplifying their voices in order to stimulate change and improve economic outcomes. Through research, analysing data and by listening to thousands of women across the whole spectrum of their educational and working lives, The Female Lead's mission is to build a substantive evidence-base to drive action that delivers real progress towards gender parity.



[Click to order your book](#)



[Click to order your book](#)

Donating **thousands** of copies of **The Female Lead books**, films and teaching resources to schools, colleges and universities in the UK and US

An active online and social hub with **7 million+ global followers**, amplifying women's stories. An ongoing programme of research and data analysis to develop evidence based interventions and tangible action. A website dedicated to creating and curating free content tailored to individual women's needs and ambitions.

A Female Lead Society programme active in **over 1000 schools** providing free content to student-led groups every term. An outreach programme to affect change with business, opinion formers and at grassroots.



## Edwina Dunn OBE

One of the most successful leaders and data entrepreneurs, with a career of delivering transformational business change. She founded The Female Lead charity in order to celebrate the achievements and diversity of women; using data to understand the challenges women face.

Her mission is to listen to women and respond with helpful interventions in order that business and government can develop new models and policies for the workplace and beyond.

In 2019 Edwina received an OBE for her services to data and business in the UK. She is Interim Chair of the Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation and a Board Member of the Geospatial Commission.



## Dr. Terri Apter

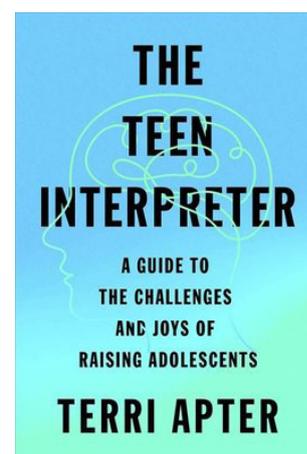
A psychologist, writer and Fellow Emerita of Newnham College Cambridge. She has done a wide range of research on the hidden patterns of women's decision-making throughout their lives and the maze of challenges women confront in their careers.

Her book *Altered Loves: mothers and daughters during adolescence* was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year and *The Confident Child* was awarded the Delta Kappa Gamma International Educator's Prize.

She presented her work on young people's aspirations to the UK Treasury. Terri Apter's new book: **The Teen Interpreter: a guide to the joys and challenges of raising adolescents**, will be published in the UK in May (and in the US in March).

Dr Apter led The Female Lead's research into teen girls and social media for the Disrupt Your Feed campaign, and again joined forces with The Female Lead for the Women at Work Project.

Order yours here



# Disrupt Your Feed

## Contact us

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## Our socials

Please see below for our socials and website:

[www.thefemalelead.com](http://www.thefemalelead.com)

