

Feeling Judged

Researched and written by Ella Sangmyr
Illustrated by Ell Rose

Front cover

Front cover illustration: Mira stands in a school corridor, and her expression shows visible worry or anxiety. One hand rests on her stomach, while the other reaches toward her hair: gestures that suggest discomfort or self-consciousness. Behind her, a small group of peers stand together. They appear to be whispering or looking in her direction, suggesting she may be the subject of their conversation.

Text on the cover:

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Narration: In school, Mira sometimes hears gossip and mean comments about girls, their bodies and how they look. It feels like there are invisible rules she and her friends have to navigate everyday to try to fit in - what to say, how to look, when to laugh.

Panel 1: Mira is seated at a table with two friends, possibly during a break at school. We see her from behind, but her two friends are engaged in conversation: facing each other, mid-conversation.

Friend 1 [speech]: "Did you see what that girl was wearing? So embarrassing, she doesn't have the body for that skirt."

Friend 2 [speech]: "And look at that girl... She really needs to start going to the gym."

Panel 2: Mira is shown in a close-up. Her mouth is slightly open and she's looking upward, as if in worried thought or realisation. Her expression conveys concern.

Mira [thought]: "If that's what they say about those girls, then what are people saying about me behind my back?"

Panel 3: Two boys are sitting or standing together, looking at a phone screen. One is holding the phone, showing the other.

Boy 1: "Look at her! She tries way too hard for attention."

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Narration: Moving through the corridors, Mira feels the atmosphere heavy with judgement.

Panel 1: Mira walks down a school corridor. Her posture is tense, and she looks anxious: her eyes are lowered, and she holds one arm across her stomach. Around her, other students are scattered in small groups. Two people nearby are whispering to each other while glancing in Mira's direction. A few others are looking at her with sideways glances, creating a sense that she is being watched or talked about.

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Narration: Every move comes with the potential for mean looks and whispers. Mira tries to do everything right and look the right way, to avoid the sense of shame, anxiety and loneliness of feeling evaluated and disapproved of.

Panel 1: Mira is shown thinking – her expression is concerned. Around her are multiple thought bubbles that reflect a mix of real and imagined moments of judgement she's witnessed or feared. These scenes show different girls being judged, talked about, or excluded by others. Together, they represent the types of comments and interactions that shape Mira's anxiety about peer surveillance.

[Thought 1 – Visualised scene]: Two friends are looking at a phone. One says: "Why is she wearing her skirt like that?"

[Thought 2 – Visualised scene]: Two girls are whispering to each other. One says: "Her makeup looks so messy."

[Thought 3 – Visualised scene]: Two friends are talking. One says: "Why would she say that? She's so weird!"

[Thought 4 – Visualised scene]: A girl sits in front of her computer screen, looking upset. Her thought bubble reads: "Why don't they like me?"

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Narration: Mira doesn't know how to handle her feelings of stress and worry. She tries to find support from friends and on social media.

Panel 1: Mira is holding her phone and looking at a social media post. The screen shows an image with text that reads: "Love Your Body".

Panel 2: Mira is standing beside a friend, talking to her. There is tension in Mira's expression.

Mira [speech]: "I feel so ugly and insecure about my body today."

Friend [speech]: "Stop it, you're so pretty, I wish I looked like you and had your body."

Narration: She tries to be confident and love herself, but her feelings of insecurity stay, no matter how positive and confident she tries to be.

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Panel 1: A close-up view of the social media post Mira is looking at fills the frame. A woman poses confidently, wearing a pastel blue jumper with the words “Be Confident” printed across the front. The background of the post is also pastel blue, while the text appears in a deeper shade of blue. The image reflects common online messages promoting confidence and self-love.

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Narration: The more Mira thinks about it, she realises it's no wonder it's difficult to feel confident and good about herself. She and her friends are surrounded by messages that set expectations for how a girl should look and act. These feel impossible to ignore.

Panel 1: Mira's hand is shown scrolling on her phone. The screen displays a series of social media posts that read: “GLOW UP”, “What I Eat In A Day”, “#hotgirlsummer”, and “Body Transformation”. The posts suggest the kind of content Mira is surrounded by: messages focused on self-improvement, appearance, and comparison.

Panel 2: Mira's friend speaks to her.

Friend [speech]: “I want to get in shape, do you want to go to the gym later?”

Panel 3: Mira's mum stands in the kitchen, looking at a cake on the counter. Her expression is conflicted.

Mira's mum [speech]: “I can't eat that, I'm on a diet.”

Panel 4: The panel shows a visualisation of food divided into two groups. On one side are foods often labelled as “good” – such as fruits and vegetables. On the other side are foods considered “bad” – including fries, cupcakes, donuts, and pizzas. The image represents how food is often morally categorised and valued in everyday life.

Panel 5: Mira appears overwhelmed. She's shown surrounded by floating images, words and phrases related to bodies, food, and exercise. The image reflects how constant exposure to these ideas creates pressure and confusion about how she should feel, eat, and look.

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Narration: Thinking about all the different factors that impact how she feels and thinks about herself and her body, Mira feels that big changes are needed to make things better for girls.

Panel 1: Mira sits at a table, her head resting in her hands. Her expression is thoughtful, but possibly hopeful.

Mira [thought]: What changes would be needed in school and society to challenge expectations for girls to look, act and be a certain way?

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Narration: What do you think?

Panel 1: A blue notebook with the title “Notes” is pictured, with a pen resting on top. The image invites reflection and encourages the reader to consider their own thoughts, questions, or experiences related to bodies, judgement, and expectations. The page is blank, leaving space for the reader to write, imagine, or respond.

Back cover

Text 1: “This story is based on research data produced with girls in secondary school in the UK and Sweden. It explores how peer relations in school affect how girls feel about themselves and their bodies.”

Text 2: “This project was funded by the South West Doctoral Training Partnership (SWDTP) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).”