Media as a Toxic Mirror: Promoting Positive Self-Image in a Culture of Body Dissatisfaction

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Goals of this Presentation

• Develop an understanding of self-image and body-image in context
• Explore the roles of traditional mass media as well as digital and social media
• Identify ways that various forms of media can act as toxic mirror and impact self-worth
• Learn strategies for intervention and ways to promote a positive self-image
“It’s not what you say out of your mouth that determines your life, it’s what you whisper to yourself that has the most power!”

-Robert Kiyosaki
What is Self-Image?

• The mental picture you form about yourself
• How you think and feel about yourself and is based on appearance, performance and relationships/interactions with others
• How you perceive yourself and directly impacts your outlook on life, level of happiness and fulfillment
What is Self-Image

• Self-image can be very different from how the world sees you

• Self-image begins to develop in early childhood
Unhealthy Self-Image

• Often based on external factors, comparing self to others and trying to live up to other’s expectations

• Focus on flaws and limitations, critical and negative self-talk, judgment of decisions and actions.
  – “What was I thinking?”
  – “That was so stupid”
  – “I can’t believe I just did that”

• This focus can make you feel “less than” and not “enough”
Healthy Self-Image

• Is based on an individual’s personal feelings and perspectives
• When one is longer influenced by societal expectations and is making up their own mind
• Have a more optimistic outlook and higher level of confidence
• Realistic and own one’s shortcomings
• Built upon a high level of self-worth
What is Body Image?

• Body image is how a person sees, feels, and behaves towards one’s body
• Our values and attitudes towards/about our bodies are shaped by the culture and society in which we live, our communities, our families, and our own individual psychological makeup
• Adolescents who are more dissatisfied with their physical appearance are at an increased risk for suffering from depression, eating disorders and low self-esteem
Body Image Development

• Children’s body image develops early alongside physical, cognitive and social growth
• Awareness begins around ages two and three
• Nearly a third of children age five to six choose an ideal body size that is thinner than their current perceived size and are aware of and recommend dieting behaviors for a person who has gained weight
Body Image Development

- Young children learn how to think and feel about their bodies based on modeling those around them.
- Children’s perception of their mother’s body dissatisfaction predicts children’s own dissatisfaction with their bodies.
- Children are being exposed to and engaging with extreme body portrayals in media in forms of toys, dolls, action figures and cartoons.
Body Image Matters

- Body image can have serious implications for people’s emotional and physical well-being
- It is a crucial part of adolescent development
- Body dissatisfaction is linked with eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression
- Body dissatisfaction has the potential to feed into other negative self-appraisals that affect children’s wellness and success
Body Image Matters

- More than half of girls and approximately one-third of boys age 6 to 8 believe their ideal bodies are thinner than their current body
- 80% of 10 year old girls have tried dieting
- 1.3 million adolescent girls in the United States have anorexia
- 20 million women and 10 million men in the United States have eating disorders
Social Comparison Theory

We determine our own social and personal worth based on how we stack up against others.

As a result, we are constantly making self and other evaluations across a variety of domains.

We are basing our self-worth on how we compare to others around us.
The Role of “Traditional” Media

• Traditional mainstream media includes television, movies, music (videos/lyrics), magazines, and advertising

• These contain unrealistic, idealized and stereotypical portrayals of body types

• For girls and women focus is on youth, beauty and thinness (lose, trim, tighten)

• For boys and men focus is on strength (adding inches, bulking, building) and masculinity
The Role of “Traditional” Media

• Kids and teens are comparing themselves to popular images in traditional media and coming up short.

• Filled with illusion and false promises

• Westernized ideal of beauty and the world
  – Differences in products available in United States as compared to Eastern countries
  – Impact of American media on other countries
The Health and Wellness Market

• In 1968, Vogue magazine invented a disease called cellulite
• Is now dominated mostly by beauty and anti-aging product sales $679 billion
• Fitness and mind + body exercise $390 billion
• Health, eating, nutrition and weight loss sales come in third with $277 billion
• This industry is thriving on our sense of body dissatisfaction, negative self-image and chasing illusion that is promised by media sources
“While social media is not the cause of low self-esteem, it has all the right elements to contribute to it. Social media creates an environment where disordered thoughts and behaviors really thrive”

-Claire Mysko
Teens and Screens

• Digital media consumption is now the most time-consuming teen activity
  – They spend an average of 9 hours using digital media
  – 7.5 hours sleeping
  – 6.8 hours on education and learning
  – 0.7 hours engaged in activity and exercise
• They’re spending 300% more time in front of screens as compared to 1995
• 71% of teens use more than one social-networking site (facebook, instagram, snapchat are the top three)
Teens, Screens, and Relationships

• Teens are losing social skills and they are conducting most of their communication through technology
  – 79% prefer texting/instant messaging
  – 72% use social media
  – 64% use email
  – 59% use video chat
  – 52% use video chat through gaming consoles
  – 42% use messaging apps (Kik or WhatsApp)
The Role of Digital and Social Media

• There is a long standing history about how kids comparing themselves to popular images in traditional media

• New studies are determining that the effects of social media are more immediate and impactful on the way kids view themselves

• Social media can be used to build up or break down self-image and most studies find increased dissatisfaction with use of social networking sites
The Role of Digital and Social Media

- Popular websites are impacting adolescent development in realms of relationships and self-esteem

- Social Media relationships are becoming a tool to validate the self rather than to connect to and engage in meaningful relationships with others

- What has been a fun way to share experiences has turned into an obsession about approval
  - 35% of girls are worried about being tagged in a photo they view as unattractive
  - 27% feel stressed about how they look in a posted photo
  - 22% felt bad about themselves if their photos were ignored
Social Media Feedback and Worth

• Deliver the tools that allow teens to earn approval for their appearance and compare themselves to others
  – Facebook- likes, comments, friends, events
  – Instagram- followers, likes, “beauty pageants”
  – Snapchat- how many sent and received chats, viewing and comparing scores with others
  – Hot or Not- lets you rate attractiveness
  – #tbh- to be honest, reinforces appearance
  – “Am I pretty or Ugly” videos on YouTube
Social Media Feedback and Illusion

• “My life doesn’t look that way”
  – You can choose your favorite photo and with the swipe of a finger airbrush, filter, crop and change the way you look
  – Often times people post their celebrations and joys... not their struggles or hardships

• The more time you spend viewing, posting, commenting and comparing yourself to others is found to have increased body-dissatisfaction over time

• Research also states that social media impacts self-image and reception of peer-related feedback equally in boys and girls
Along with the quest for the perfect life, we are seeing the quest for the perfect body. “Fitspiration”, “Fitspo” and “Thinspiration”, “Thinspo”

- Objectifying images of thin/muscular women and messages encouraging diet and exercise for appearance rather than health related reasons.
- Most sites include thematic content about women’s body weight, thinness, food shaming, restriction, stigmatization and objectification.
Defining Positive Body Image

• People with healthy body image understand that
  – Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes
  – You are MORE than your body – people are more than numbers on a scale; every person is a unique individual with talents, skills and abilities
  – No matter your shape or size you are worthy of love and acceptance
  – The amount you weigh and/or having an “ideal” body does not equal happiness, success or wealth
  – Images in media are unrealistic and created to sell products
  – Do not manipulate food/exercise to create the perfect body
  – Focus on function appreciation and function, not appearance
  – Our bodies are precious temples for our souls
Promoting Positive Body Image

• Parental body image has a powerful influence
• Check out your OWN body image issues
• Understand your own attitudes towards food, exercise and your body
  – Are you dissatisfied? Do you vocalize it?
  – Are you always on or going on a diet?
  – Do you express guilt when you eat certain foods?
  – Do you criticize the looks of others?
Promoting Positive Body Image

• Place less emphasis on your child’s appearance and more on their abilities and skills
• Myth-busting the perfect body
  – Encourage your child to think critically about the messages and images they see and hear in media
• Focus on HEALTH
• Help your child to understand body changes
• Find physical activities that fit and they enjoy
• Teach your kids that it is OK to show feelings
Promoting Positive Body Image

• Help your children to move away from competition and comparison with others
• To focus on inner qualities over appearance
• To engage in wholehearted relationships
• To know and believe in their inherent worth and value as a person
• To embrace inner beauty and self-love
Safety and Social Media

• Social media is the main currency of communication today for teens

• It is important to work from a framework of understanding rather than judgment
  – Tap into your reflective listening skills
  – Validate their experiences
Safety and Social Media

• Talk to them!!!
• Open up the lines of communication
  – How does it feel when your post is “liked”? 
  – Why is it important to stay connected online? 
  – How many times a day do you compare yourself? 
  – Have you ever felt worse about yourself after scrolling through a social media site? 
  – Is there anyone you follow for inspiration?
Intervention

• Must recognize cultural values
• Examine media messages that encourage risky behaviors, stereotypes and social ideals
• Promote body acceptance and self-acceptance
• Corporate campaigns aimed at body image
  – Dove Campaign for Real Beauty
  – Nike Real Women
• EmbodyLoveMovement.org
• BeautyRedefined.org
Safety and Social Media

• It is important for you to be aware of what they are doing online
• The key is to stay involved in a way that communicates your respect for their privacy and desire to keep them safe
• Sign up for the same ones and follow them
• Beware of “finsta” and other fake accounts
Safety and Social Media

• Guidelines for Kiddos
  – Be nice
  – Think twice before posting
  – “WWGS?”
  – Privacy Settings
  – If you don’t know them, don’t friend them
Boundaries with Technology

• Be in the KNOW!

• Be the example
  – Set times that are technology free
  – Family time where everyone participates

• Set expectations
  – Technology curfews
  – Monitor cell phones, computers, approve new apps
Fundamental Tasks of a Parent

• Love your child forever
• Keep them safe
• Guide them
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