

# 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

# “Fitspiration”

- 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](http://EmbodyLoveMovement.org)
- [BeautyRedefined.org](http://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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