

# Body Image and Social Media

Presenter: Tierra Major  
Prevention and Outreach Program Coordinator  
UMB Student Counseling Center

# BODY IMAGE AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Body image
  - How we see and think about our bodies
  - Subjective, not objective
  - Can change depending on how we feel
- Negative body image is associated with:
  - Eating disorders or disordered eating (sub-clinical)
  - Anxiety
  - Depression



POLL:

**DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR BODY IMAGE IS  
AFFECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?**

# BODY IMAGE MYTHS

- Less weight = healthier body
  - Most of our weight is biologically determined (set point)
  - BMI is a flawed measure of healthy weight:
    - Research shows higher BMI may not predict health problems
    - BMI based on white-identified standards
- If I look a certain way, I will feel happier/more confident/less insecure
  - Focus on body as the source of happiness is a losing battle
  - Bodies change and are not an “end goal”
  - Focusing on how our bodies look take us out the experience
    - Social media contributes to documenting what we do rather than being present



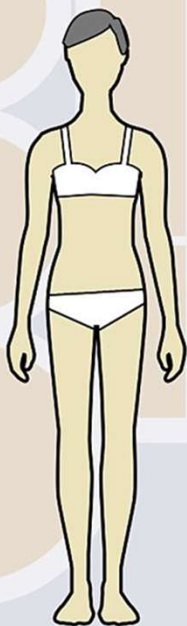
## BODY IMAGE MYTHS

- We can't control what we find attractive
  - Attractiveness is largely influenced by social norms and differs across cultures and generations
- Only a problem in **adolescence**, mostly for people who identify as **women**
  - Impacts all identity and demographic groups; idealized body image varies depending on cultural norms

## 1960s The petite

The swinging sixties saw the introduction of the mini skirt and a much slimmer figure

Supermodels Twiggy (pictured) and Jean Shrimpton popularised the look



© Leo Delauney/MailOnline

## 2000s The tone

Visible abs and spray tans ruled the naughties

Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears (below) vied for the awards during this decade



© Leo Delauney/MailOnline

## 2010s The bootylicious

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook has made celebrities their own paparazzi

Big booties and curvy frames as seen on Kim Kardashian and Nicki Minaj are the most coveted



© Leo Delauney/MailOnline

## STATISTICS ON BODY IMAGE

- No differences in rates of body dissatisfaction between White and African-American adult women
  - around 50% of the women from each group report body dissatisfaction<sup>15</sup>
- 80% of young teenage girls report fears of becoming fat<sup>11</sup>
- 50% of young 13 year old American girls reported being unhappy with their body
  - This number grew to nearly 80% by the time the same group of girls reached 17 years of age<sup>10</sup>

## STATISTICS ON BODY IMAGE

- 23% of American women reported frequent body checking and 11% reported body image avoidance<sup>14</sup>
- 9% of male adults report frequent “body checking” and 5% body avoidance
- 25% of male adolescents/children in the United States reported concerns about muscularity and leanness (2020)



## BODY IMAGE IMPACT ON MEN

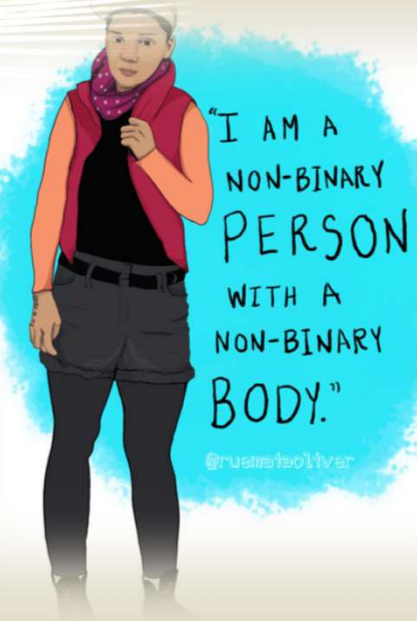


POLL:

**DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR PROFESSION  
CAN IMPACT YOUR BODY IMAGE?**

# BODY IMAGE, RACE, AND GENDER

- Much of attractiveness is largely based in white, heterosexual, non-disabled, cisgender norms
- Negatively impacts BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals



The background of the slide features a faint, light-colored silhouette of a human figure. From the head and torso areas, numerous thin, multi-colored lines radiate outwards, creating a starburst or sunburst effect. The colors of these lines include shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. The overall background is a solid, light beige or tan color.

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTS BODY IMAGE

- More exposure to social media >> more thinking about own body >> more negative thoughts
- Social media is a “toxic mirror” (Rachael Simmons, TIME Magazine, 8/19/2016)
  - Distorts how we view own bodies and bodies of others; expect flawlessness and compare to what we seeing pictures

# INSTAGRAM VS REALITY: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECTS BODY IMAGE





## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER INFLUENCES ON BODY IMAGE

- More “likes” >> self worth depends on external approval
- Anonymous feedback is easier to body shame and use body abusive language, (i.e., fat jokes)

# IMPACT OF BODY POSITIVITY SOCIAL MEDIA

- Among women-identifying individuals, viewing body positivity posts tend to be associated with:
  - More body satisfaction
  - Greater focus on the function and health of their bodies
  - More positive mood



EveryBody



## STRATEGIES TO CHANGE SOCIAL MEDIA HABITS TO IMPROVE BODY IMAGE

- Unfollow individuals whose post are particularly triggering (or mute/hide)
- Follow people with different body shapes and promoters of body inclusivity
- Focus on social media that emphasizes body function rather than appearance
- Change how you talk about other people's bodies both on social media and IRL





## STRATEGIES TO CHANGE SOCIAL MEDIA HABITS TO IMPROVE BODY IMAGE

- Challenge racial/heterosexual/non-disabled/cisgender attractiveness norms
- Question where ideas of what you think is attractive come from-family, friends, peers, dating partners, celebrities/influencers

THANK YOU!