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.

2000s
The tone
Visible abs and spray tans ruled the naughties.
Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears (below) vied for the awards during this decade.

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.
• 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\textsuperscript{15}

• 80% of young teenage girls report fears of becoming fat\textsuperscript{11}

• 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\textsuperscript{10}
STATISTICS ON BODY IMAGE

• 23% of American women reported frequent body checking and 11% reported body image avoidance\textsuperscript{14}

• 9% of male adults report frequent “body checking” and 5% body avoidance

• 25% of male adolescents/children in the United States reported concerns about musculature 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
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
STRATEGIES TO CHANGE SOCIAL MEDIA HABITS TO IMPROVE BODY IMAGE

• Unfollow individuals whose posts 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!