For the Body Images Project

Discussing Body Images With This Generation’s Youth

Tag Words: Body Image; Youth

Authors: Sorie Bayou, Michael Coburn, Stephanie Martin, Damaso Munoz, Pat Nemorin, Krupa Patel and Kathleen Richards with Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D.

Summary

The following information was gathered collaboratively as a group as research for our topic. Our topic is about learning to accept a diversity of body images. We seek to avoid the everyday binary thinking of “fat” and “thin.” As our research shows, media influences play a role in how young boys and girls perceive themselves and how they develop their self confidence. Research also shows that not only is obesity a problem, but anorexia nervosa is an increasing problem, especially in younger women. Since we can show that obesity and anorexia are both problematic for society, we want to get at the root of the problem and show individuals at a young age that they should accept people for who they are, and love themselves as well. Additionally, we encourage positive habits in eating and exercise.
The Issue: Body Image

Anorexia
Anorexia puts you at risk for the following illnesses: heart problems, osteoporosis, mental health issues, and death. Approximately 1 in 10 women afflicted with anorexia will die of starvation, cardiac arrest, or other medical complications, making its death rate among the highest for a psychiatric disease. (This information is from [www.emedtv.com](http://www.emedtv.com))

Potential Health Complications:
(The following information is from University of Maryland Medical Center)
Potential health complications for anorexia are damage to vital organs, irregularity in menstrual periods, brittle nails and hair, swollen joints, reduced muscle mass, light-headedness, irregular heart rhythms, and many more.

*Anorexia can be associated with other psychiatric illnesses:* Clinical depression, anxiety, personality disorder, substance abuse disorder, risk for suicide, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obesity

Health Risks:
(The following information is from the Center for Disease Control)
The following illnesses are associated with obesity: coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancers, hypertension, stroke, and many more.

Psychosocial Complications:
(The following information is from Stanford University Hospital)
“In a culture where often the ideal of physical attractiveness is to be overly thin, people who are overweight or obese frequently suffer disadvantages. Overweight and obese persons are often blamed for their condition and may be considered to be lazy or weak-willed. It is not uncommon for overweight or obese conditions to result in persons having lower incomes or having fewer or no romantic relationships. Disapproval of overweight persons expressed by some individuals may progress to bias, discrimination, and even torment.”

What is considered a healthy body weight?
(The following information was obtained from Health Check Systems. These are the ideal weights according to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company tables - 1983)

Weight Chart for Women
Weight in pounds, based on ages 25-59 with the lowest mortality rate
(indoor clothing weighing 3 pounds and shoes with 1" heels)
Click here to calculate frame size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Small Frame</th>
<th>Medium Frame</th>
<th>Large Frame</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4'10&quot;</td>
<td>102-111</td>
<td>109-121</td>
<td>118-131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4'11&quot;</td>
<td>103-113</td>
<td>111-123</td>
<td>120-134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5'0&quot;</td>
<td>104-115</td>
<td>113-126</td>
<td>122-137</td>
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<td>Height</td>
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<td>106-118</td>
<td>115-129</td>
<td>125-140</td>
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<td>5'2&quot;</td>
<td>108-121</td>
<td>118-132</td>
<td>128-143</td>
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<td>5'3&quot;</td>
<td>111-124</td>
<td>121-135</td>
<td>131-147</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'4&quot;</td>
<td>114-127</td>
<td>124-138</td>
<td>134-151</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'5&quot;</td>
<td>117-130</td>
<td>127-141</td>
<td>137-155</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'6&quot;</td>
<td>120-133</td>
<td>130-144</td>
<td>140-159</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'7&quot;</td>
<td>123-136</td>
<td>133-147</td>
<td>143-163</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'8&quot;</td>
<td>126-139</td>
<td>136-150</td>
<td>146-167</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'9&quot;</td>
<td>129-142</td>
<td>139-153</td>
<td>149-170</td>
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<td>5'10&quot;</td>
<td>132-145</td>
<td>142-156</td>
<td>152-173</td>
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<tr>
<td>5'11&quot;</td>
<td>135-148</td>
<td>145-159</td>
<td>155-176</td>
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<tr>
<td>6'0&quot;</td>
<td>138-151</td>
<td>148-162</td>
<td>158-179</td>
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<td>6'1&quot;</td>
<td>141-154</td>
<td>151-163</td>
<td>165-184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6'2&quot;</td>
<td>144-157</td>
<td>154-166</td>
<td>168-182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weight Chart for Men**

Weight in pounds, based on ages 25-59 with the lowest mortality rate (indoor clothing weighing 5 pounds and shoes with 1" heels)

Click here to calculate frame size
Calculating Your Frame Size

Following is the method the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company used to calculate frame size:
1. Extend your arm in front of your body bending your elbow at a ninety degree angle to your body so that your forearm is parallel to your body.
2. Keep your fingers straight and turn the inside of your wrist towards your body.
3. Place your thumb and index finger on the two prominent bones on either side of your elbow, then measure the distance between the bones with a tape measure or calipers.
4. Compare to the chart below. The chart lists elbow measurements for a medium frame - if your elbow measurement for that particular height is less than the number of inches listed, you are a small frame - if your elbow measurement for that particular height is more than the number of inches listed, you are a large frame.

### Elbow Measurements for Medium Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Elbow Measurement</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Elbow Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5'2&quot; - 5'3&quot;</td>
<td>2-1/2&quot; to 2-7/8&quot;</td>
<td>4'10&quot; - 4'11&quot;</td>
<td>2-1/4&quot; to 2-1/2&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5'4&quot; - 5'7&quot;</td>
<td>2-5/8&quot; to 2-7/8&quot;</td>
<td>5'0&quot; - 5'3&quot;</td>
<td>2-1/4&quot; to 2-1/2&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5'8&quot; - 5'11&quot;</td>
<td>2-3/4&quot; to 3&quot;</td>
<td>5'4&quot; - 5'7&quot;</td>
<td>2-3/8&quot; to 2-5/8&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6'0&quot; - 6'3&quot;</td>
<td>2-3/4&quot; to 3-1/8&quot;</td>
<td>5'8&quot; - 5'11&quot;</td>
<td>2-3/8&quot; to 2-5/8&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6'4&quot;</td>
<td>2-7/8&quot; to 3-1/4&quot;</td>
<td>6'0&quot;</td>
<td>2-1/2&quot; to 2-3/4&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Media Influences on Women and Children Regarding Weight

“Body Image, Media, and Eating Disorders” by Jennifer L. Derenne, M.D. and Eugene V. Beresin, M.D. Printed in the Rutgers University Academic Psychiatry Journal:
- “According to the American Obesity Association, 65% of adults and 30% of children are overweight, and 30% of adults and 15% of children meet the criteria for obesity.”
- Also a rise in eating disorders: “There is a significant dichotomy between society’s idealized rail-thin figure and the more typical American body. The reasons for this are complex and likely involve the interplay of media pressure to be thin, family eating and exercise patterns, and a relative surplus of non-nutritious food.”
- “Although it is tempting to blame today’s media for perpetuating and glorifying unrealistic standards of physical beauty, the truth is far more complicated… dominant political climate and cultural ideals always have shaped the public’s perception of the ideal female body type… today’s culture is unique in that the media is a far more powerful presence than ever before.”
• The doctors then go on to summarize the ways in which women have compromised their bodies historically in order to abide by standard norms of beauty. They also summarize how significant periods of history have influenced what women are expected to behave like and look like – for example, WWI called for women to be strong and independent in order to keep up industrial positions while men were away, yet when men returned, women were expected to return to skirts and home life.

• Authors note a famous study done in Fiji about media and eating disorders: “No discussion of body image and the media would be complete without referencing Becker’s landmark study comparing rates of eating disorders before and after the arrival of television in Fiji in 1995. Ethnic Fijians have traditionally encouraged healthy appetites and have preferred a more rotund body type, which signified wealth and the ability to care for one’s family. Strong cultural identity is thought to be protective against eating disorders; there was only one case of anorexia nervosa reported on the island prior to 1995. However, in 1998, rates of dieting skyrocketed from 0 to 69%, and young people routinely cited the appearance of the attractive actors on shows like "Beverly Hills 90210" and "Melrose Place" as the inspiration for their weight loss. For the first time, inhabitants of the island began to exhibit disordered eating.”

• “As highlighted in a recent Newsweek article, classic eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are being diagnosed at younger ages (some as young as eight or nine), and with higher frequency.”

**Media's Effect On Girls: Body Image And Gender Identity**
(The following information is from the National Institute on Media and the Family)

**Did you know?**
During childhood, adolescence, media exposure is part of a constellation of sociocultural factors that promote a thinness schema for girls and the muscularity schema for boys (Harrison & Hefner, 2006; Smolak & Levine, 1996; Thompson et al., 1999).

A child's body image develops as the result of many influences:

• A newborn begins immediately to explore what her body feels like and can do. This process continues her whole life.

• A child's body image is influenced by how people around her react to her body and how she looks.

• A pre-adolescent becomes increasingly aware of what society's standards are for the "ideal body."

**Media's Effect on Body Image**
The popular media (television, movies, magazines, etc.) have, since World War II, increasingly held up a thinner and thinner body (and now ever more physically fit) image as the ideal for women. The ideal man is also presented as trim, but muscular.

• Rumble, Cash, and Nashville (2000; cited in Klein & Shiffman, 2006) found that the schematic association of attractiveness and thinness with goodness was present in over 100 female characters appearing in 23 Walt Disney animated films (cel cartoons) produced over a 60-year period.
• Fouts and Burggraf (1999, 2000) observed that thin female characters in television situation comedies were more likely than heavier female characters to be praised by male characters, and less likely to be insulted by male characters in ways deliberately tied to evocation of “canned” and supportive audience laughter.

• Since the 1980s magazines have increasingly depicted the male body in a state of objectified undress, such that a significant focus for the camera and viewer is raw, exposed (“chiseled” or “ripped”) muscularity (Halliwell, Dittmar, & Orsborn, 2007; Pope et al., 2000).

• Field et al. (1999) reported that the majority of nearly 550 working class adolescent girls were dissatisfied with their weight and shape. Almost 70% of the sample stated that pictures in magazines influence their conception of the “perfect” body shape, and over 45% indicated that those images motivated them to lose weight. Further, adolescent girls who were more frequent readers of women’s magazines were more likely to report being influenced to think about the perfect body, to be dissatisfied with their own body, to want to lose weight, and to diet.

• Teen-age girls who viewed commercials depicting women who modeled the unrealistically thin-ideal type of beauty caused adolescent girls to feel less confident, more angry and more dissatisfied with their weight and appearance (Hargreaves, 2002).

• In a study on fifth graders, 10 year old girls and boys told researchers they were dissatisfied with their own bodies after watching a music video by Britney Spears or a clip from the TV show "Friends" (Mundell, 2002).

Body image and adults:
(The following information is from the Social Issues Research Centre online)

• Thanks to the media, we have become accustomed to extremely rigid and uniform standards of beauty.

• TV, billboards, magazines etc mean that we see 'beautiful people' all the time, more often than members of our own family, making exceptional good looks seem real, normal and attainable.

• Standards of beauty have in fact become harder and harder to attain, particularly for women. The current media ideal of thinness for women is achievable by less than 5% of the female population.

• All research to date on body image shows that women are much more critical of their appearance than men – much less likely to admire what they see in the mirror. Up to 8 out of 10 women will be dissatisfied with their reflection, and more than half may see a distorted image.

• Men looking in the mirror are more likely to be either pleased with what they see or indifferent. Research shows that men generally have a much more positive body-image than women – if anything, they may tend to over-estimate their attractiveness. Some men looking in the mirror may literally not see the flaws in their appearance.

• Why are women so much more self-critical than men? Because women are judged on their appearance more than men, and standards of female beauty are considerably higher and more inflexible.
**Body image and children:**
Female dissatisfaction with appearance – poor body-image – begins at a very early age. Human infants begin to recognize themselves in mirrors at about two years old. Female humans begin to dislike what they see only a few years later. The latest surveys show very young girls are going on diets because they think they are fat and unattractive. In one American survey, 81% of ten-year-old girls had already dieted at least once. A recent Swedish study found that 25% of 7 year old girls had dieted to lose weight – they were already suffering from 'body-image distortion', estimating themselves to be larger than they really were. Similar studies in Japan have found that 41% of elementary school girls (some as young as 6) thought they were too fat. Even normal-weight and underweight girls want to lose weight.

Boys were found to be significantly less critical of their appearance: in one study, normal-weight girls expressed considerably more worries about their looks than obese boys.

**Body image for adolescents:**
Boys do go through a short phase of relative dissatisfaction with their appearance in early adolescence, but the physical changes associated with puberty soon bring them closer to the masculine ideal – i.e. they get taller, broader in the shoulders, more muscular etc.

For girls, however, puberty only makes things worse. The normal physical changes – increase in weight and body fat, particularly on the hips and thighs, take them further from the cultural ideal of unnatural slimness. A Harvard University study showed that up to two thirds of underweight 12-year-old girls considered themselves to be too fat. By 13, at least 50% of girls are significantly unhappy about their appearance. By 14, focused, specific dissatisfactions have intensified, particularly concerning hips and thighs. By 17, only 3 out of 10 girls have not been on a diet – up to 8 out of 10 will be unhappy with what they see in the mirror.

**TV & Magazines:**
People's reactions to their reflection in the mirror may depend on recent exposure to idealised images of physical attractiveness. Experiments have shown that people become significantly more dissatisfied with their own appearance after being shown TV ads featuring exceptionally slim and beautiful people. Control groups shown non-appearance-related ads do not change their rating of their own attractiveness. Although many TV programmes feature attractive people, ads tend to use the most idealised images, so people who've been watching a lot of ITV and C4 are likely to feel less positive about their image in the mirror. Programmes such as 'Baywatch' are also likely to induce a sense of dissatisfaction.

The same applies to reading fashion magazines. Recent experiments have shown that exposure to magazine photographs of super-thin models produces depression, stress, guilt, shame, insecurity, body-dissatisfaction and increased endorsement of the thin-ideal stereotype. Magazines like Vogue and Elle are banned in many eating-disorder clinics, because of their known negative effect on patients' body-image.

**The Service Project: Body Images Project**

Our goal in this project is to gauge how young individuals interpret body images, as early as 6th grade. We assert that children are brought up to favor a thinner, more muscular body and, furthermore, these children are encouraged to believe in stereotypes about people who appear to be overweight. This belief encourages bullying and, in later years, influences the likelihood of
eating disorders and depression. Children who poke fun at those who are overweight or too thin are overlooking all of the implications of that person’s weight – perhaps the child is genetically predisposed to being heavier or thinner, and despite eating habits and exercise, that child is still going to grow up to be a size 14 or 16 (or the opposite). We believe that this society is over-obsessed with being thin, and we propose that we should learn to accept all individuals on the basis that we do not know their personal struggles. We do, however, encourage positive habits in eating and in exercise – without condemning those who do not fit the image of “thin.” We seek to conduct our research and reach-out to younger individuals through a simple “Body Image Exercise.” We outline the exercise below:

- Looking at images, reacting to them.
- Discussing the four categories: Bullying, Self-Confidence, Diet & Exercise and Steroids.
- Encouraging class discussion and group work while discussing these four issues.
- Encouraging positive eating habits by providing a light healthy snack (trail mix and raisinettes).

Power Point & Method: Attached to this CD is the Power Point presentation that we used with a group of 6th graders in the Princeton, NJ area. To describe our routine, we arrived around 8am and prepped to do the power point presentation for the students. In order to encourage student participation, we planned to split the class into four groups so that each group could focus on one of the four categories listed above. Each group was provided with a large sheet of white paper and a marker. Upon getting into groups, the students were expected to come up with four ideas about their category – the ideas could be reactions to the category, feelings about it, or facts.

De-Briefing: The students were very responsive and seemed to already know quite a bit about the topics we discussed. They were all eager to be involved and participated willingly. Upon the completion of our exercise, the teacher of the class asked us questions about college, and we had a short discussion about what our groups’ major studies were and what we plan to do in the future. Fortunately, our group is dominated by athletes and the students were very interested to hear about basketball on the collegiate level. Overall, the project was a great success and we all gained very much from doing it. We think that the 6th graders gained a lot from it, as well.