

# Body Image & Bullying

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# Body Image

- Body Image is, simply, how one perceives his or her body and appearance.
- Body image often reflects much deeper issues of how one perceives *SELF*.
- Body image encompasses how one thinks about his or her body, one's perception of attractiveness, and often even acceptance.

# Body Image

- Developing throughout the lifecycle, body image is greatly impacted during adolescence. Personal identity is shaped during this time, which makes adolescents vulnerable to others' reactions as they define themselves.
- Idealized body images are constantly presented in the media and have a strong impact on how adolescents relate to their physical and psychological environments.

(Leone et al, 2011)

# Body Image

- Increased levels of body image dissatisfaction in children and adolescents have been found to be strongly related to low self-esteem, depression, restrictive and other forms of unhealthy eating, and exercise addiction.

(Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)

- Pressure to conform to socially idealized standards of beauty often drives adolescents to alter their physical appearance, some with long-term consequences.
- Several predisposing factors (self-esteem, internalization of teasing) affect body image and subsequent negative health behaviors.

(Leone et al, 2011)

# Body Image

- One study indicated that adolescents were dissatisfied with their current bodies: males were concerned with increasing their upper body, whereas females wanted to decrease the overall size of their body.
- Females displayed more high-risk eating behaviors – which were associated with more psychosocial risk factors – than males.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

# Culture/Media Influence

- What is perceived to be unattractive is stigmatized in our culture.
- Attractive individuals are considered to be more competent, especially socially competent, though research does not support this.
- The human body is a visible construct, and the more the body weight deviates from the perceived societal ideals of attractiveness, the greater the degree of stigmatization.
- In short, stigmatization is based on cultural stereotypes of obesity and thinness and, in particular, on perceived notions of physical attractiveness.

(Swami et al, 2008)

# Culture/Media Influence

- 69% reported that images of females displayed in magazines influence their perceptions of the ideal body figure, and 47% reported that the images evoked in them a desire to diet and lose weight.
- Simply watching TV has been associated with increased desire among preadolescent girls to have a thin body when they mature, and also with increased disordered eating over time.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

# Culture/Media Influence

- Teasing and reading fitness magazines was found to contribute to body dissatisfaction in both females and males.
- Boys and girls may read fitness magazines with hopes of achieving an ideal body. However, reading these magazines often has the opposite effect on adolescents who have vulnerable body image, causing them to become more dissatisfied.
- Our culture has adopted an attitude of '*normative discontent*', meaning that it is normal to not like one's own body.

(Schuster, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2013)



# Culture/Media Influence

- A 1996 study found that 50% of commercials targeted toward women contained messages about physical attractiveness, whereas few targeted men.
- This has dramatically changed with advertisements targeting men to buy products and services previously aimed at women (e.g., NutriSystem for Men™).
- Advertisements now promote standards of attractiveness for men and solutions for those who are currently “failing” to meet such standards

(Schuster, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2013)

# Culture/Media Influence

- Most adolescents are exposed to mass media
- However, not all adolescents who differ from the cultural appearance ideals develop body-related concerns. Thus, other factors are likely to contribute to adolescents' increased vulnerability.
- It may be that messages communicated by the media only become problematic when they are reinforced by more immediate sociocultural agents such as parents and peers.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

# Friends & Family

- Relationships with parents that are more conflict-ridden and less warm and supportive are predictive of increased dieting and lower body image
- Girls with eating disorders report feeling more criticized, less accepted, and less close to their parents than non-eating disordered participants.
- Conflict and lack of closeness within the mother-daughter relationship, in particular, relate to increases in female adolescents' weight concerns from age 11-18.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

## Friends & Family (continued)

- The link between mother-son relationships and weight concerns is less prevalent in the research literature.
- Emotional support from family – particularly in the form of positive feedback and encouragement – may serve to buffer some of the more negative sociocultural influences, and help adolescents develop and maintain a positive body image over time.
- Females who have healthy relationships with both mother and father report fewer weight and eating concerns.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

## Friends & Family (continued)

- Lower peer acceptance, perceived social support, and friendship intimacy have been found to predict poor body image in adolescent females. (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)
- Friends' social support and acceptance may help adolescents rise above sociocultural pressures and feel more positively about their bodies by fostering resilience. (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

## Friends & Family (continued)

- Appearance-related teasing and criticism by family and friends increase adolescents' feelings of body dissatisfaction by reinforcing the society's ideals.
- Friends are most prevalently reported as the perpetrators of teasing (62%), closely followed by family members, especially brothers. (Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)
- Such teasing creates higher levels of social comparison, internalization of the sociocultural ideal of thinness, restrictive and bulimic eating behaviors, depression, and lower self-esteem.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

# Bullying/Teasing ... A Definition

- Teasing is usually a negative experience in which the teaser is directly and negatively criticizing some aspect of an individual's appearance. (Schuster, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2013)
- Bullying is often defined as unprovoked aggressive behavior repeatedly carried out against victims who are unable to defend themselves. Bullying can take many forms:

(Good, McIntosh, Gietz, 2011)

- Physical aggression
- Threats
- Insults
- Spreading rumors
- Social exclusion
- Mocking victim's culture, disability, or sexual orientation

# Three Categories of Teasing

- Hurtful: acts of physical aggression such as pinching and pulling away one's chair
  - Quite prominent in earlier school age years, representing 40% of all teasing during this age
  - Declined by grade 3 and remained low – only about 10% of all teasing in older child/adolescent groups

(Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)



# Three Categories of Teasing

- Mean: calling others aversive names
  - Typically associated with actual physical attributes
  - Less prevalent in earlier years but increased as hurtful teasing declined in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
  - Peaked at 40% in 6<sup>th</sup> grade children
  - Decreased by adolescence – by 8<sup>th</sup> grade, was only slightly more prevalent than hurtful teasing.
  - By 11<sup>th</sup> grade, represented 20% of all teasing

(Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)

# Three Categories of Teasing

- Symbolic: teasing associated with playful games, abstract thought processes, physical gestures, and mockery
  - Ranged from nonthreatening games associated with development and playfulness through to derisive actions and words associated with put-downs, rejection, and humiliation
  - Relatively common in middle childhood
  - Increased dramatically from 6<sup>th</sup> grade into adolescence
  - By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, represented 70% of all teasing
  - By 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 80% of all teasing
  - Most commonly associated with aspects of the target's appearance, such as weight.

(Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)

# Prevalence & Stats

- 61% of respondents revealed that they witnessed bullying one or more times per day, a substantial increase from the 37% reported in 2001 (Good, McIntosh, & Geitz, 2011)
- 38% reported observing weight-based teasing “often” or “very often.” More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of students observed weight-based victimization at least “sometimes.”
- Participants perceived that being overweight is a primary reason that peers are victimized at school.
- Negative stereotypes toward overweight peers begins early in childhood, and by adolescence weight-based victimization is common. Overweight and obese adolescents are more likely to be victims of teasing and bullying than average weight peers. (Puhl, Luedicke, & Heuer, 2011)

# Prevalence & Stats

- Research suggests that one third of girls and one fourth of boys report weight-based teasing from peers, but prevalence rates increase to approximately 60% among the heaviest students.
- Approximately 41% of students identified being overweight as the primary reason for being victimized, followed by sexual orientation (38%), intelligence/ability at school (10%), race/ethnicity (6%), physical disability (3%), religion (1%), and low family income (1%).
- Research indicated overweight and obese students being ignored or avoided (76%), being teased in the cafeteria (71%), being excluded from social activities at school (67%), and being the target of negative rumors (68%). (Puhl, Luedicke, & Heuer, 2011)

# Prevalence & Stats

- Facial characteristics (41%) and weight (31%) – most frequently cited
- Teasing was found to be a major factor in subsequent negative body image attitudes.
- Sizeable portion of children who do not physically fit within normal weight limits are subject to being teased, and report higher levels of body image dissatisfaction.

(Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)

# Effects of Teasing on Body Image and Self Image – *from the literature....*

- Negative comments and social comparisons of weight and size contribute significantly to negative body image and eating disturbance (Thompson & Heinberg, 1993)
- Males are affected by negative, appearance-related teasing similarly to females. “Men who reported receiving negative commentary were likely to experience eating pathology and body dissatisfaction and report more dieting behaviors” (Schuster, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2013)
- Comments about appearance are prevalent in society
- 44% of women and 35% of men reported that comments made about their appearance helped to shape their body image when they were younger. (Schuster, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2013)

# Effects of Teasing on Body Image and Self Image – *from the literature....*

- Researchers have shown weight-based stigmatization to be powerful, pervasive, and difficult to change. (Swami, et al, 2008)
- Targets of bullying may suffer greatly in terms of their social and emotional well-being, become anxious and depressed, isolate themselves from peer groups, and avoid school for fear of being bullied. (Good, McIntosh, Gietz, 2011)
- Bullying behaviors have strong relationships with social maladjustment and negative health behaviors. (Leone, et al, 2011)

# Effects of Teasing on Body Image and Self Image – *from the literature....*

- While adolescents' experiences of being teased about their weight by their friends was recognized as a form of taunting, the adolescents frequently took these taunts as reflecting truth about themselves.
- While some say teasing is part of normal developmental behavior, it is also a strongly identified component within victimization and bullying processes. (Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)
- Body Dysmorphic Disorder: Risk factors include childhood adversity, such as teasing or bullying (about either appearance or competence), poor peer relationships, social isolation, and lack of support in the family. (Veale, 2004)



# Teasing Recall

- Retrospective accounts of appearance-related teasing in childhood is strongly associated with current negative body image and negative affect in adulthood.
- Remembrance of teasing in childhood is a significant predictor of consequent eating pathology in older adolescent and adult women.
- Teasing's actual presence may be suggestive of the beginnings of long-term developmental issues in relation to health and well-being. (Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)

# Results of Bullying

- Being bullied is a significant predictor of lower quality of life, higher levels of health problems, and poorer emotional and school adjustment than children who were not bullied. (Haraldstad et al, 2011)
- Teasing and the level of obesity in childhood predicts levels of weight and appearance dissatisfaction in adolescents and adults. (Kostanski & Eleonora, 2007)

# Effects of Body Image on Bullying

- We've looked at how bullying affects body image.
- How does body image affect bullying?
- One study found a strong relationship between 1) adolescents who were obese and reported negative affect and 2) the likelihood of being a bully
- Body image dissatisfaction appears to contribute to bullying behaviors in adolescents, although specific causes were not determined in this study.
- Boys were less likely to ignore teasing, less likely to report teasing, and often react with violence or adopt bullying behaviors.

(Leone et al, 2011).

# Primary Prevention

- Develop new programs that help prevent body dissatisfaction based on known risk factors (Leone et al, 2011)
  - Self-Affirmation
  - Education
  - Health Educator Weight Bias
- Create a culture of honor
  - Positively stated school expectations (Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011)
  - Using positive language regarding expectations and honor regularly during the school day

## Primary Prevention: *Self-Affirmation*

- A 2012 study in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* confirmed that self-affirmation reduces body dissatisfaction by basing self-esteem on things other than body weight and shape.
- Affirmed girls showed significantly greater body satisfaction and perceived significantly less threat from having to rate their body shape and weight compared with an equivalently active control group.
- Effects were due both to increases in self-esteem and shifts away from using body shape and weight as a source of self-esteem.

(Armitage, 2012)

## Primary Prevention: *Self-Affirmation*

- People raised in Western culture that emphasizes thinness are at risk of developing eating- and body-related problems and it is therefore important to see whether body satisfaction can be boosted on a broader level as opposed to restricting such interventions to clinical/therapy populations.
- Brief self-affirmation can be conveyed on a large scale and is effective in bolstering people's self-image.
- Self-affirmation: encouraged participants to elaborate on their past acts of kindness

(Armitage, 2012)

## Primary Prevention: *Self-Affirmation*

- Affirmation can lead people to separate disliked aspects of self from self-worth
- Affirming the value of kindness seemed to switch the source of girls' self-esteem away from appearance.
- This study showed that self-affirmation had a significant effect on girls' body satisfaction. It also showed that affirmed girls derived less of their self-esteem from body shape and weight and more from their competence in other areas of their life.

(Armitage, 2012)

# Primary Prevention: *Education*

- Body image is usually only addressed in health education courses, such as human sexuality or sex education.
- Researchers suggest including discussion of body image and the role it plays in many other aspects of an adolescent's life, in the same way that other issues are often addressed such as drug use, violence and aggression, bullying, and many other “non-sexuality” topics.



## Primary Prevention: *Educator Weight Bias*

## *Health*

- With increasing implementation of school-based programs to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors and prevent obesity in youth, it will be critical to ensure that these programs do not impose further stigmatization on overweight and obese students who are already vulnerable to victimization from peers.
- Addressing weight bias in school-based health interventions is key.

# Primary Prevention: *Educator Weight Bias*

## *Health*

- Focus on improved health rather than messages that emphasize “thinness” or obtaining an ideal weight, which can perpetuate weight-based stereotypes and teasing. (Puhl, Luedicke, & Heuer, 2011)
- Focusing on positive body image is more effective than focusing on wt. loss/BMI. (Haraldstad et al, 2011)

# Primary Prevention: *Culture of Honor*

- Instead of focusing on the problem, bask in the solution
  - Culture of acceptance, honor or self and others
- Genuine interest in students as individuals
- Positive role models
- Character-development studies presented positively
  - Positively stated school expectations (Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011)
  - Using positive language regarding expectations and honor regularly during the school day
- Celebration of Diversity/Uniqueness
- Teach all students the skills needed to meet their social needs without bullying (Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011)

# Secondary Prevention: *Own Perspective*

*Your*

- Redefine beauty and what is considered attractive
  - How do you define beauty/attractive?
  - Is your definition big enough to include you?
- Honor your body as the instrument of your soul
- What are the most common things you say to yourself about your body? Where did these thoughts come from?
- Who in your life had a positive impact on you in childhood or adolescence? Who do you look up to now?
- Who in your life has made you feel beautiful?

# Secondary Prevention

- Programs that reduce adolescents' perceptions of appearance-related pressure from family and friends
  - key for enhancing body image
  - key for decreasing links between low self-esteem and negative eating behaviors and weight-related perceptions.

(Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007)

- What is a healthy body image?
  - “A woman with a healthy body image respects her body, takes care of her body, and keeps her body in perspective.” – Dr. Deborah Newman
- Screening measures that identify adolescents that may be at risk for body image dissatisfaction (Leone et al, 2011)

## Secondary Prevention: *Intelligence*

## *Emotional*

- Children, especially boys, are culturally encouraged to suppress emotions
  - Programming geared toward enhancing emotional intelligence – enhance interpersonal communication.
  - Change culture of school: encourage all students to use “I feel” statements vs. other terms and nonverbal forms of communication (ie, aggression).
- Need to develop programs that help adolescents handle interpersonal social stressors, such as parent, sibling, and peer criticism.
- Health-appropriate coping strategies, such as resiliency-based training programs and curricula

(Leone et al, 2011)

## Secondary Prevention: *A Plan*

- Teaching students specific skills and a plan when faced with a bully is more likely to decrease incidences of bullying than policies solely targeted at punishing bullies.
- Teach appropriate responses to bullying for would-be victims, bystanders, and educators

(Good, McIntosh, Gietz, 2011)

# Secondary Prevention: *A Plan*

- Three-Step response to bully behavior: Stop, Walk, and Talk
- STOP: School-wide “stop signal”
  - Students use signal when experiencing or witnessing bullying behavior.
  - Students are taught that if someone shows the stop signal, they need to stop what they are doing, take a deep breath, count to three, then go on with their day

(Good, McIntosh, Gietz, 2011)



# Secondary Prevention: *A Plan*

- **WALK:**
  - If the problem continues after using the stop symbol, students are taught to walk away from the problem.
  - Walking away from the bullying behavior removes reinforcement that the bully may be seeking (he/she is not getting the desired response; s/he does not have bystanders encouraging the bullying behavior)
- **TALK:**
  - When the stop signal and walking away have proven ineffective, students should talk to an adult.
  - Differentiate between “talking” and “tattling” in an attempt to solve the problem.

(Good, McIntosh, Gietz, 2011)

## Secondary Prevention: *A Plan*

- The talk technique is the last of the three steps because the goal is not to report as many bullies as possible to adults, but rather to give students skills they can use to end bullying on their own.

(Good, McIntosh, Gietz, 2011)

# Tertiary Prevention

- Help school health professionals and educators create gender-specific programming in curricula or adopt existing models pertaining to this issue.

(Leone et al, 2011)

- Many schools have quality bullying prevention programs in place; therefore, understanding how adolescent males might be affected in terms of their sensitivity to body image issues, as with teasing and criticism, can help tailor gender-specific planning and outcomes. (Leone et al, 2011)

# Tertiary Prevention

- Set firm limits on unacceptable behavior
- Ensure consistency in addressing unacceptable behavior
- Victim's assistance and rights