

## Body Image Is A Complex Topic

One can think of body image and body image dissatisfaction from a variety of perspectives.

### **Distorted view:**

Is one's body actually as one perceives it? Would other people agree with the perception? It is important to be able to discern whether one actually is as one sees him or herself or not. Often the image one perceives can be distorted because of for example, a distorted sense of identity and/or other psychological distortions. Body image distortion is a complex issue and can happen for a variety of reasons but to make it simple, very frequently when a person feels some sense of inadequacy they may project this insecurity on their body and as a result of this projection, may feel inadequate in their body...i.e. too fat or too thin even when they are normal weight and size.

### **Body dissatisfaction due to disrespectful behaviors toward the body:**

In some cases, body image dissatisfaction can occur because people may not be treating their body with respect. For example if a person eats more than they are hungry for on a regular basis, they may be larger than their healthy set point body shape and size. Conversely, if the person is regularly not eating when they are hungry, their body shape and size may be unhealthily small. In both cases, the individual may feel dissatisfied and uncomfortable in their body; however, this can be a helpful dissatisfaction in that it can motivate a person to be more respectful to the body and encourage the person to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. Why should a person who basically deems themselves to be a worthy individual be happy with treating themselves poorly? This feeling shows a basic sense of self worth. I would be more concerned about an individual who is comfortable treating themselves disrespectfully.

### **Body dissatisfaction due to media influence and exposure to global values:**

In a 1998 study by Anne Becker MD, director of the Harvard Eating Disorders Center, researchers interviewed 129 girls between the ages of 15-19. In 1995 before TV was introduced only 3% of girls reported ED behaviors to control weight. In 1998 after TV, 15% reported vomiting to control weight. In 1995, 13% of girls scored high on a test indicating risk for ED's. In 1998, this number increased more than double to 29% of girls. In 1998, 74% of girls reported feeling too big or fat at least sometimes and among those who watched TV 3 nights/week, 50% were more likely than others to see themselves as too fat and 30% more likely to diet, although the more frequent watchers were not overweight. Symptoms of eating disorders among teenage girls have increased 5 fold since the introduction of TV.

### **The Media:**

Body dissatisfaction can be exacerbated by messages given to us repeatedly by the media and advertising. Advertiser's make money from our dissatisfaction with ourselves. For example, commercials might have you believe that if you drink Bud Light you will be happy, beautiful, in love and your life would be perfect like the people we see depicted

laughing and having a great time on the commercials. **Put in SEEDS info** ~ Media hand out sheet

### **Body Image Dissatisfaction due to unreal standards and lies:**

We are shown images of 'perfect' bodies and some of those images are not even of real people for example, (Julia Robert's Pretty Woman) Barbie and GI Joe's~  
If Barbie were life-size, she would be 5'9" and weigh 110 lbs. Her measurements would be 39-18-33 and she would not menstruate. If GI Joe Extreme were life size, he would have a 55 inch chest and 27 inch bicep. His bicep would be as big as his waist and bigger than most competition body builders.

### **Body Image Dissatisfaction and the Beauty Myth and more lies:**

The beauty myth would have us believe that there is such a thing as an ideal beauty/body and that this ideal has remained a constant truth through out time. A brief review of fashions and body ideals from the 1890's when the bustle was 'in' to the flapper era of the 1920's when girls strapped down their breasts to appear almost like a small boy to the 1950's and Marylyn Munroe's voluptuous curves and large breasts were the envy of every woman to the 1960's when very thin, emaciated Twiggy was our ideal to the 'fit but no fat' ideal of today will prove that there has been no constant truth to beauty rather a shifting ideal that changes so if you happen to fit one ideal, you won't fit the others.

### **Body dissatisfaction due to competition and comparison:**

Often an individual, male or female, may be normal in body shape and size but due to excessive comparison to others and competition to achieve some 'perfect' body ideal the individual may think the other person has, that individual can become dissatisfied with their normal body. Perhaps an individual's genetic predisposition for a particular body shape and size does not seem as good as their friend's body shape and size thus they may feel dissatisfied with a perfectly normal body.

### **Drive to be Thin:**

- **42% of 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> graders want to be thinner. (Collins, 1991)**
- 80% of 10-year-olds have expressed fears of becoming fat. (Mellin et al, 1991)
- 91% of women on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting. (Kurth et al., 1995)
- Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women (Smolak, 1996)
- In a survey of college students, 26% of men and 48% of women described themselves as overweight. Women dieted to lose the weight whereas men usually exercised

### **What Can Eating and Body Image Concerns Look Like in Men?**

- In a 2003 survey conducted at UMCP 1 in 2 men indicated that they sometimes or frequently engage in dieting, eating special foods, or taking nutritional supplements specifically to improve their appearance.
- 2 in 5 men indicated feeling upset or depressed by their appearance
- 2 in 5 men indicated that they spend 60-120 minutes each day on physical activities to improve their body appearance and 1 in 10 men said they spent more 120 minutes on these activities

- 1 in 6 men indicated that sometimes their appearance related concerns or activities undermined their social relationships

### **Body image dissatisfaction can lead to eating disorders**

Often whether a person is dissatisfied with their body due to a distorted view or whether the dissatisfaction is due to actually being other than the set point healthy body shape and size for that particular individual or whether it be due to the fact that a person's biological predisposition for healthy body shape and size does not fit the narrow view of acceptability in our culture, eating behaviors will often be impacted by the dissatisfaction. Often dieting will occur to try to cope with the dissatisfaction. In 35% cases, the dieting becomes pathological eating or an eating disorder

### **kNOw Dieting:**

Americans spend more than \$40 billion each year on dieting and diet-related products, yet the obesity epidemic is growing... does dieting work ?? (Smolak, 1996)

This is more than the U.S. government spends on education! What are our priorities?? Is the money on dieting a waste??

The diet industry makes so much money in part because they make promises they can not keep and do not inform us of the negative consequences of dieting...

Negative Consequences of Dieting

95% of all dieters regain their lost weight in 1-5 years. (Grodstein, 1996) Weight gained back is all fat, but you lost lean muscle mass and fat.

Dieting forces the body into starvation mode, which slows the metabolism. Your metabolism is how your body burns calories, so dieting makes you fight your body's natural ability.

Bingeing is the body's natural response to dieting/restricting.

More Negative Consequences

Women need between 18%-22% of their weight to be body fat in order to menstruate. When there is not enough body fat, women suffer from Amenorrhea (inability to menstruate).

■ Early osteoporosis occurs when your body does not secrete hormones that keep your bones strong.

■ There can be damage to your reproductive cycle.

Thinning hair

Depression

Irritability

Sexual disinterest

Restricted brain function

**TIRED OF DIETING?? TRY LIVING!!**

What is Normal Eating?

Normal Eating Is...

■ Being able to eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full.

■Using moderate selectivity when choosing foods to get the right nutrition, but not being so restrictive that you miss out on pleasurable foods like the occasional ice cream or cookies.

■Letting yourself eat sometimes because you are happy, sad, or bored, but generally not letting emotions rule what you eat.

■Knowing that it's okay to over eat at times, such as special occasions, holidays, and birthdays, and under eat *at times* because maybe you were too busy and in a rush to class.

■Trusting your body to make up its place as only one important area of your life. Your hunger varies in response to your emotions, your schedule, your hunger, proximity to food, exercise, and hormones.

**What can you do to make peace with your body?**

## **10 “Will-Powers” for Improving Body Image**

1. Twice a day, everyday, **I WILL** ask myself: “Am I benefiting from focusing on what I believe are the flaws in my body weight or shape?”

10. **I WILL** treat my body with respect and kindness. I will feed it, keep it active, and listen to its needs. I will remember that my body is the vehicle that will carry me to my dreams!

9. **I WILL** surround myself with people and things that make me feel good about myself and my abilities. When I am around people and things that support me and make me feel good, I will be less likely to base my self-esteem on the way my body looks.

8. **I WILL** practice taking people seriously for what they say, feel, and do. Not for how slender, or “well put together” they appear.

7. **I WILL** list 5-10 good qualities that I have, such as understanding, intelligence, or creativity. I will repeat these to myself whenever I start to feel bad about my body.

6. **I WILL** refuse to wear clothes that are uncomfortable or that I do not like but wear simply because they divert attention from my weight or shape. I will wear clothes that are comfortable and that make me feel comfortable in my body.

5. **I WILL** participate in activities that I enjoy, even if they call attention to my weight and shape. I will constantly remind myself that I deserve to do things I enjoy, like dancing, swimming, etc., no matter what my shape or size is!

4. **I WILL** exercise for the joy of feeling my body move and grow stronger. I will not exercise simply to lose weight, purge fat from my body, or to “makeup” for calories I have eaten.

3. **I WILL** spend less and less time in front of mirrors—especially when they are making me feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about my body.

2. **I WILL** think of three reasons why it is ridiculous for me to believe that thinner people are happier or “better.” I will repeat these reasons to myself whenever I feel the urge to compare my

body shape to someone.

## **I will choose to take care of myself and my body!**

References:

Freedman, R., *Body Love*. NY: Harper & Row, 1988.

Levine, M.P., & Hill, L., *5 Day Lesson Plan on Eating Disorders*. Columbus, OH: National Eating Disorders Association, 1991.

Maine, M., *Father Hunger*. Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, 1991.

Rodin, J., *Body Traps*. NY: William Morrow, 1992.

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### Publications

1. [Body Image \(Copyright © EDRIC\)](http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm) - This on-line publication provides information about what body image is and how you can improve your body image.

[http://www.edreferral.com/body\\_image.htm](http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm)

2. [Body Image \(Copyright © NEDA\)](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=286&Profile_ID=41157) - This on-line publication explains what body image is and what the differences are between a positive and a negative body image.

[http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage\\_ID=286&Profile\\_ID=41157](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=286&Profile_ID=41157)

3. [Love Your Body Day \(Copyright © National Organization for Women \(NOW\) Foundation\)](http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/index.html) - Do you love what you see when you look in the mirror? This web site will teach you how to see the truth in media campaigns that make us feel bad about our bodies. It will teach you to love your body, and how to spread the word to others that they should love their bodies too!

<http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/index.html>

4. [Ten "Will-Powers" for Improving Body Image \(Copyright © NEDA\)](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=286&Profile_ID=41159) - This publication gives ten steps you can take every day to help you feel better about your body.

[http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage\\_ID=286&Profile\\_ID=41159](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=286&Profile_ID=41159)

5. [The Media, Body Image, and Eating Disorders \(Copyright © NEDA\)](#) - This on-line publication provides some basic facts about the influence of the media on our lives and body image