Media Standards and Practices: Considerations for Body Image, Weight Stigma, and Eating Disorders

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Goals of this Presentation

1. Review factors that influence body image and weight and shape concerns.

2. Suggest criteria for positive body image media standards and practices.
Our work focuses on identifying and modifying risk factors for weight and shape concerns to improve body image and reduce the onset of eating disorders.
Our work has focused mostly on women, ages 10-30.

We have been able to identify the students at highest risk for eating disorders and to reduce the onset of eating disorders with internet-based interventions.
Why is Body Image Important?

1. Poor body image and weight and shape concerns are common and lead to low self-esteem and depression.

2. Weight and shape concerns and negative body image lead to eating disorders.

3. Eating disorders are common and disabling problems.

4. Emphasizing the “thin-model” ideal may increase rather than decrease obesity.
Why is Body Image Important?

1. Poor body image and weight and shape concerns are common and lead to low self-esteem and depression.
   - Almost half of high school students (44%) were trying to lose weight in a 2009 CDC survey.
   - Within one month, 1 in 10 high school students will fast for 24 hours or more to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight (15% of females and 7% of males).
   - 1 in 5 women ages 12 to 30 have body image or eating problems that cause serious suffering and distress.

(Cash, 2002; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Levine & Smolak, 2006; Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Eisenberg, 2006; Stice, Hayward, Cameron, Killen, & Taylor, 2000)
Why is Body Image Important?

2. Weight and shape concerns and negative body image, representing “internalization of the thin-body ideal,” lead to eating disorders.

(Hawkins et al. 2004; Stice, 1997; Stice & Whitenton, 2002)
Why is Body Image Important?

3. Eating disorders are common and disabling problems.
   – Lifetime prevalence of full-syndrome eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder):
     • 5.9% women
     • 2.8% men
   – Peak age at onset is 16-20 years of age
   – Full syndrome eating disorders: 2%-4% of college aged women
   – Partial syndrome eating disorders 10%-30% of college aged women
   – Are associated with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, self-mutilation, low self-esteem
Prevalence of Low Risk, High Risk, Subclinical-Clinical Eating Disorders in a University Population

- Low Risk: 45-50%
- Some Risk: 25-30%
- High Risk: 10-15%
- Clinical: 2-4%
- Very High Risk: 10-15%

From:
- Taylor et al, 2006b
- Jacobi et al, submitted
- Drewnowski et al., 1994
Why is Body Image Important?

4. Emphasizing the “thin-model” ideal may increase rather than decrease obesity.
   – Desire to live up to the thin ideal often leads to weight gain, misery, and unhealthy weight loss behaviors.

(Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006)
Body Image and Males

• A “lean and muscular” body image ideal

• Eating disorders and body image problems are becoming more common in males.

• 1 in 10 eating disorder patients are men, though the true number is probably higher.

• 25% of college males fast for 8 hours or more at least once a month to influence their shape or weight.

(Lavendar, De Young, & Anderson, 2010)
What Do We Know About Body Image?

1. Body image and weight and shape concerns are acquired at an early age.
2. Body image and weight and shape concerns are influenced by a variety of factors.
3. Once acquired, hard to change.
1. Body image and weight and shape concerns are acquired at an early age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children (under age 12)</th>
<th>Adolescents (ages 12-24)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body dissatisfaction occurs in 5 year-olds exposed to images of Barbie dolls.</td>
<td>40-70% of girls are dissatisfied with 2 or more aspects of their body.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Among 8-year-olds, 27% of boys and 39% of girls have concerns about fatness.</td>
<td>Negative body image in late adolescence is predictive of eating disorders and depression.</td>
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(Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Dittmar, Ive, & Halliwell, 2006; Jacobi, Agras, & Hammer, 2001; Jacobi, Schmitz, & Agras, 2008; Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp, 2008)
What Do We Know About Body Image?

2. Different factors influence body image.

(Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Haines et al., 2010; Jacobi et al., 2001; Jacobi et al., 2008; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006; The McKnight Investigators, 2003)
What Do We Know About Body Image?

3. Once acquired, hard to change.
   - In a study of over 2500 middle and high school students, weight and shape concerns changed very little for most of the students after five years.

(Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Paxton, 2006)
Impact of Media on Women’s Body Image

“In America the ‘standard’ is thinness. I don't understand why the media portrays that. What the media shows is unrealistic, but it still gets to us. Nobody wants it to affect us, but it does.”

- discussion board post from Student Bodies, eating disorder prevention program

Body image and weight and shape concerns are strongly influenced by the media and internalized as the thin ideal for women.

(Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2007; Derenne & Beresin, 2006; Dittmar, 2009; Field et al., 1999; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996; van den Berg, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Haines, 2007)
Impact of Media on Women’s Body Image

• Viewing thin models immediately increases body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness in women.

• Women with more TV exposure have higher levels of thin ideal internalization, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating.

• Media exposure during childhood predicts increases in negative body image and body dissatisfaction later on.

(Bell, Lawton, & Dittmar, 2007; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Tucci & Peters, 2008)
The Thin Body Ideal: Media Images
While 5% of women are underweight in reality, nearly 1 in 3 women on TV are underweight.

(Greenberg et al., 2003)
The NIH and the WHO consider a BMI of less than 18.5 to be underweight and unhealthy.

*(National Institutes of Health; WHO Expert Committee, 1995)*
The fashion industry has started making changes based on world health standards.

– The Spanish Association of Fashion Designers banned models with a BMI of less than 18.

– Italy’s fashion capital, Milan, requires models to have a BMI of at least 18.5.

(Associated Press, 2006; Duff, 2006)
Media Impacts on Men’s Body Image

- Similarly, body image and weight and shape concerns are strongly influenced by media and internalized as the lean and muscular ideal for men.
- Boys exposed to magazines have been found to use illegal and/or unhealthy muscle building substances to increase muscle size.

(Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008; Blond, 2008; Field et al., 2005)
The Lean and Muscular Body Ideal: Media Images
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Weight Stigma

• Animated cartoon shows
  – Overweight characters are 3x more likely to have unattractive features than normal-weight characters.
  – Unattractive characters (usually overweight) are more likely to be bad or unintelligent characters.

(Ata & Thompson, 2010)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Weight Stigma

• Child sitcoms
  – Overweight children are more likely to have no friends.
  – This genre has better representation of overweight characters than cartoons or adult sitcoms.

(Ata & Thompson, 2010)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Weight Stigma

- Primetime TV
  - Overweight characters have fewer interactions with friends or romantic partners.
  - Females are ridiculed for being overweight; males are ridiculed for being overweight or underweight.
  - Overweight female characters receive more negative comments than normal-weight female characters, and the negative comments are reinforced by the audience laugh track.

(Ata & Thompson, 2010)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Early Sexualization

• Children/adolescents learn to view the body (theirs and others) as an object to be sexualized and sexually desired.

• Adult sexuality is imposed on children.

• Leads to body shame, humiliation, low self-esteem, and depression

(American Psychological Association, 2007; Grabe et al., 2007; Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Eating Weight Criticism

• Shaming people’s eating habits increases eating disorder risk and has no impact on weight loss maintenance.
• Weight related teasing from family, friends, coaches, teachers has similar negative effects.
• Modeling weight related teasing in the media is likely to have a similar effect.

(Eisenberg & Neumark-Sztainer, 2008; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Sweetingham & Waller, 2008; Taylor et al., 2006a)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Diet Culture

• Dieting is a temporary change in eating habits (e.g., restricting calories or cutting out food groups) in order to lose weight.
  – Diets are not lifestyle changes and would not be healthy to maintain permanently.

• Why is dieting bad?
  – Only 5% of dieters keep off the weight they lose.
  – Dieting predicts weight gain.
  – Diets are one of the most powerful triggers of disordered eating.

(Grodstein et al., 1996; Jacobi et al., 2004; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2007)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Diet Culture

• What is “diet culture?”
  – Dieting seen as normal: 91% of college freshman women have dieted.
  – Comments often reinforce the desire to diet: “I can’t eat that, the [insert event] is coming up!”

(Kurth, Krahn, Nairn, & Drewnowski, 1995)
Associated Issues Relevant to Media: Fat Talk

• What is “fat talk?”
  – Conversation that reinforces the thin ideal
  – “Do I look fat in this?” “I need to lose 10 pounds.” “You look great! Have you lost weight?”

• Creates an environment where there is a distaste for body fat and a value of thinness

• Fat talk increases body dissatisfaction.

(Stice, Maxfield, & Wells, 2003)
How Media Standards and Practices Can:

1. Reduce internalization of the thin body ideal and muscular ideal
2. Promote a healthy body image and healthy weight regulation practices
## The Body Image Standards and Practices Checklist

**DO...**

- Represent all types of shapes, weights, physical appearances, and features
- **Show realistic body proportions in animated characters** (avoid highly stylized bodies that exaggerate thinness or muscularity)
- **Promote healthy weight regulation practices** (show characters eating healthy and exercising for health reasons rather than for weight or shape reasons)
- **Require actors and actresses to have a BMI of 18.5 or above** (applies to adults and post-pubescent adolescents)
### The Body Image Standards and Practices Checklist

**DON’T...**

- **Body type-cast** (associating one type of body with one type of character)

- **Stigmatize overweight characters** (making overweight characters less attractive, having fewer friends, being lazy or less intelligent, or less romantic than other characters)

- **Sexualize children or young adolescent bodies** (e.g., putting kids/adolescents in skimpy wardrobe choices, sexualized body positions, sexual camera shots or angles, or associating sexiness with success)

- **Normalize dieting and/or fat talk** (e.g., having characters temporarily change their eating habits to lose weight, comment on the need to lose weight, comment on their body shape or others’ bodies, or complimenting weight loss or body shape)
Comments? Questions?