

Further Wellness Issues for Higher Education

How to Promote
Student Health During
and After College

Edited by David S. Anderson

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Preface

The final words of the Preface of *Wellness Issues for Higher Education: A Guide for Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals* said it all: “I think our opportunity, indeed our challenge, is best summed up by the campus motto inscribed at the entrance of Radford University’s Hurlburt Student Center: ‘Investing in Lifetimes’” (Anderson, 2016, p. xiii). That was the emphasis of that volume, which addressed 12 specific wellness issues. This complementary volume, *Further Wellness Issues for Higher Education: How to Promote Student Health During and After College*, builds upon the insights and suggestions offered there. As a companion resource, this volume continues with the “investing” issue and moves more directly into the “lifetimes” aspect of the motto identified earlier.

Further Wellness Issues for Higher Education also continues a major theme identified with the first volume: praxis. A major emphasis with these volumes is to combine theory and practice. Each identified topic incorporates empirical research that is grounded and current; it includes guiding theories and conceptual frameworks used by specialists in those areas. Beyond that, it builds upon this foundation to promote sound and reasonable applications; the recommendations and approaches are practical for those in various roles on or surrounding the campus, all of which are appropriate for campus life today.

The audience of these volumes involves anyone in a leadership role, or seeking to provide leadership, on the campuses. Leadership can be instituted by those in higher-level positions on the campus; it can also be done by individuals in more entry-level, grassroots or extended roles (such as community members, alumni or parents). Regardless of whether the position is one of the job, or due to self-designation, being more informed and empowered will provide the foundation for impact and helpful consequences.

The important element in this volume is that of applicability. The recommendations and ideas are current and appropriate. They are reasonable and achievable. Further, they are important for not just sustaining or “making do,” but in fact enhancing students’ lives during and following their years in college. Ways of organizing and orchestrating campus efforts are a major aspect of this volume, with the final chapter highlighting strategies for making a difference for our students.

Body Image

Supporting Healthy Behaviors on College Campuses

NICOLE TAYLOR AND MIMI NICTER

Introduction

Studies of body image have been numerous over the past three decades with researchers investigating the meaning and lived experience of this concept in a variety of social contexts. Researchers typically define body image as how individuals see themselves when they look in the mirror or when they picture themselves in their mind's eye. Body image is not a singular construct but rather a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that includes perceptual, attitudinal, affective and cultural components (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002). As a result, research on body image has focused on a wide range of topics including weight concerns, feelings about one's body shape, body esteem, body schema, weight dissatisfaction and body image disorder, to name but a few (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

While body image is an important construct across the lifespan, it holds particular salience for college students. Being in college, especially for those who live on campus, is a time marked by new freedoms, when one is away from one's family and the watchful eyes of parents. For many young people, this is a time to try on "new selves" and craft new identities. It is an opportunity to experiment with one's physical appearance, to try to change one's body shape and to make food choices that were not possible when one was living at home. On-campus buffets, food courts and vending machines abound with myriad healthy and unhealthy options. Living in a residence hall with roommates and being surrounded by other students on a daily basis provide increased opportunities for comparing one's self to others.

Some years back, psychologist Kim Chernin described a "tyranny of slenderness" that ruled over women in the United States (Chernin, 1981). Indeed, many researchers have discussed how, from an early age, girls learn that having a thin body is linked to attractiveness and femininity. This is reinforced regularly through advertised images in magazines and through television and movies that project an ultra-slender look as desirable and attractive. One's sense of how their body size and shape conforms to culturally idealized notions of beauty is central to an understanding of body image. If one's body shape does not meet the cultural ideal, it can result in dissatisfaction with self ("negative" body image) and may lead to watching what one eats, dieting, guilt around eating and engaging in exercise strategies to change one's body shape.

This chapter reviews and summarizes the relevant literature on body image across a number of domains, including gender, ethnicity, sexuality and physical dis/ability. Further discussed is research on weight gain through the college years, especially the “freshman 15,” how college students talk about body image (e.g., “fat talk”) and the effects of body focused discourse, as well as the impact of social media on body image among college students. The objective is to provide an overview of salient body image–related issues experienced by college students, to suggest future directions for research and to identify interventions that college practitioners—faculty, staff, student affairs professionals and administrators—can implement to support healthy body image in a diverse student population.

Overweight and Obesity on Campus: Brief Overview

Despite cultural preferences for bodies that are thin, lean and fat free, the reality of life on campus reveals a different yet co-existent picture. Young adults (18–35 year olds) are gaining weight faster than their parents, averaging an increase of 30 pounds during this phase of the life course. Between 2004 and 2010, the prevalence of overweight and obesity for females aged 20–39 increased from 52% to 56%, and for males, from 62% to 67% (Gordon-Larsen, The, & Adair, 2010). Note that overweight and obesity are calculated on a person’s body mass index (BMI): A BMI of 25.0 to 29.9 is overweight; a BMI of 30.0 and higher is obese. While much of this weight gain may occur after the college years, it needs to be recognized that eating and exercise behaviors are being shaped during college. Recent survey results from the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) revealed that 23% of college students nationwide were overweight and another 13% were obese (American College Health Association, 2015). Longitudinal NCHA survey data from a large southwestern university showed that weight increases across the years of college were significant: 26% of first-year students were overweight, compared to 40% of fourth-year students (Trainer, Brewis, Williams, & Chavez, 2015). Notably, despite high overweight and obesity rates among college students, pressures to conform to a narrow body image ideal persist.

There are several practical and pressing concerns with regard to body image among college students. Negative body image, or feeling dissatisfaction with one’s body, is a risk factor that may lead to low self-esteem. Overweight and obesity are associated with an elevated risk for several chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer. Thus, the high rates of overweight and obese college students should be of concern to college health professionals as well as other college personnel because overweight young adults may well be overweight or obese for the rest of their lives.

Gender Differences in Body Image

Body image studies have traditionally focused on girls and women. However, as pressures for boys and men to achieve a certain body type have increased in recent years, researchers have begun to explore how males feel about the way they look, how they talk with each other about body image, how they tease each

other about their bodies and the types of behaviors they engage in to achieve the ideal look (e.g., Gill et al., 2005; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Kehler & Atkinson, 2010; Ryan & Morrison, 2009; Taylor, 2011, 2015). Studies of male body image have increased over the past decade, yet it is still a relatively new area of inquiry, and there is a need for ongoing research, particularly among college students.

Historically, studies have found higher rates of body dissatisfaction among college women than among college men, with some reporting that more than 80% of female college students are unhappy with the way their bodies look (Heatherton, Mahamedi, Striepe, Field, & Keel, 1997; Neighbors & Sobal, 2007; Vohs, Heatherton, & Herrin, 2001). In fact, the college years stand out as a heightened time of body dissatisfaction among women. One study found the percentage of women wanting to lose weight dropped from 82% during college to 68% after college. The trend was reversed for men, who reported an increase in body dissatisfaction after college (Heatherton et al., 1997). Researchers theorize that body dissatisfaction may be more intense among college women who reside on campus than for those who commute because living together in such close quarters invites body-related scrutiny, constant comparison and the spread of weight preoccupation (Greenhalgh, 2015; Martin, 2007).

Some recent research suggests that men are catching up with women in feeling unhappy about the way their bodies look (Dakanalis et al., 2015; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Unlike women, who are typically concerned with their weight, men tend to be more concerned with body shape and musculature. One study that examined self-perceived and idealized physical attributes among heterosexual White college men found that up to 91% of those surveyed wanted to be more muscular (Jacobi & Cash, 1994).

For women, the relationship between BMI (body mass index) and negative body image tends to be linear; the higher a woman’s BMI, the worse she feels about the way her body looks (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002). However, among men, the relationship between BMI and negative body image is more complex. For example, results of one study that surveyed a random sample of 188 college men found that underweight, overweight and obese men reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction and greater weight and shape concerns than normal weight men (Watkins, Christie, & Chally, 2008).

Although college men are fast approaching the high levels of body dissatisfaction that women have long experienced, some research suggests that men and women are not yet equal in this regard. For example, one study examining body dissatisfaction among college students during the first three semesters of college found that female students’ overall appearance evaluation started out less positive than male students’ and remained less positive three semesters later despite increases in how they felt about themselves during this time (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2012). The authors suggest that, because women’s bodies are more objectified by society than those of men, women are more self-critical of their bodies, which leads to greater dissatisfaction. This begins in early adolescence and may continue throughout emerging adulthood and beyond.

The work of anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh (2015), who conducted body image research with male and female college students, supports and provides further insight into the trend of increasingly widespread body dissatisfaction among college students. Greenhalgh argues that the current “war on fat” has resulted in heightened anxieties about excess weight that pervade popular and news media and everyday conversation, resulting in a generation of young adults that have become weight-obsessed. Greenhalgh found that college men and women were concerned with body image and were teased for being fat. However, men were less likely to internalize the criticism than women, probably because men tend to be judged based on their accomplishments whereas evaluation of women is typically appearance driven. Also, girls are socialized from a young age to rely heavily on external feedback in developing their sense of self (Nichter, 2000), which sets them up for greater body dissatisfaction in the college years and beyond.

In terms of weight management efforts among college students, one study based on survey data of approximately 38,000 randomly selected college students found that male and female students with inaccurate body weight perception were more likely to engage in unhealthy weight loss strategies than those with accurate body weight perception (Wharton, Adams, & Hampl, 2008). Although weight loss was important to participants in the study, only 38% reported following standard weight loss guidelines, which include a combination of diet and exercise. More women than men were engaged in weight loss efforts even though more men were overweight or obese. Indeed, across the life span, women are far more likely to engage in dieting than men (Nichter, 2000). Negative body image not only leads to low self-esteem and related mental health issues, but it also impacts food-related behaviors and could lead to unhealthy dieting practices. Thus, supporting healthy body image among college students is crucial as it contributes to their overall well-being.

Ethnic Differences

In terms of ethnic identity, research has historically suggested that body-image ideals among African-American and Latina girls and women may be more flexible than those of White women (Parker et al., 1995). African-American women were found to embrace multiple ideas about beauty that do not focus so heavily on aesthetics but rather on how one moves and the importance of “making what you got work for you.” The cultural notion of “looking good” has to do with projecting one’s self image and confidence (having “tude,” or attitude) and was not based on one’s weight (Nichter, 2000; Parker et al., 1995). For example, one study based on analysis of focus-group data found that African-American and Latina college-educated women challenged the mainstream beauty ideal of slenderness by embracing an ethic of self-acceptance and nurturance (Rubin, Fitts, & Becker, 2003).

More recent studies suggest that the slender ideal has begun to influence non-White girls and women who increasingly want to rid their bodies of excess fat and achieve a more toned physique (Bordo, 2013). The integration of a slender

body ideal into non-White culture has led to mixed findings in studies of body image among ethnic minority college students. For example, one study examining body image dissatisfaction of racially salient appearance areas (e.g., hair, lips, eyes, lower body) among approximately 300 White, Black and Latina female college students found that White and Latina women reported more dissatisfaction with their facial features, lips, lower body and overall body than Black women (Warren, 2014). However, Black and Latina women who identified most strongly with their ethnic group reported lower levels of body dissatisfaction on most appearance areas.

Another study found that African-American college women were more concerned with overall appearance than their White counterparts but, at the same time, were less dissatisfied with their bodies (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2012). The authors suggest that African-American women may seem to be more appearance oriented because in African-American culture, one’s appearance serves a dual purpose: It expresses one’s individual identity and at the same time confers an image onto one’s family and community. In a context in which the beauty standards of the larger society are often the antithesis of African-American physical attributes (facial features, body shape, body size and hair), receiving positive feedback about one’s appearance from community members may serve as a protective factor against body dissatisfaction (Nichter, 2000; Parker et al., 1995).

Research based on in-depth interviews with African-American women attending a primarily White college found that women expressed a range of racial identities and varying levels of self-esteem and body satisfaction (Hesse-Biber, Livingston, Ramirez, Barko, & Johnson, 2010). The authors of this study challenge previous research claims that African-American women are insulated from mainstream body image ideals and have more positive body image regardless of weight, arguing instead that ethnic identity emerges through social practice and can vary across contexts (e.g., school, home, church, community). Some of the women in this study identified with White or Black culture while others floated between the two or expressed a more complex self-identity. These findings underscore the need to recognize diverse body image ideologies within ethnic groups based on such factors as influence of college and home communities, one’s peers and family members and socioeconomic status.

Along these lines, anthropologist Stephanie McClure found a range of body image satisfaction among adolescent African-American girls, reporting that their experience with fitness and physicality shaped the way they felt about and presented their bodies (2017). McClure emphasizes the importance of exploring the complex, nuanced ways in which body image can vary within ethnic minority groups. She cautions against viewing race as a monolithic, static explanatory category and promotes an approach to the study of body image within any group that draws on multiple methodologies to understand how individuals’ experiences and identities intersect with the various social contexts in which they operate (McClure, 2012).

Individuals who identify with ethnic minority groups that have traditionally been more accepting of larger body sizes and/or focused less on aesthetics than the

White mainstream culture may struggle more with body image issues as they move from their family and local communities onto a college campus. Efforts to improve body image and health-related behaviors among college students must address the complex ways in which ethnic identity intersects with ideas about body image and other aspects of an individual's identity (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status). Future research should explore body image ideology among other ethnic minorities, including Asian-American students, a notably understudied population.

GLBT Communities

Body image research among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) communities has produced inconsistent findings. Some early studies on lesbian college students and body image found no differences between lesbians and heterosexual women (e.g., Striegel-Moore, Tucker, & Hsu, 1990) while others found lesbians to be more accepting of their bodies than heterosexual women (e.g., Herzog, Newman, Yeh, & Warshaw, 1992). Early studies on gay men and body image found gay men desired a thinner ideal and had more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men (Herzog, Newman, & Warshaw, 1991; Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1989). Yet a more recent study comparing the results of a computerized body image test for 37 gay men and 49 heterosexual men found no difference in body image ideals or body image distortion (Hausmann, Mangweth, Walch, Rupp, & Pope, 2004).

Some research has sought to identify sociocultural factors that might buffer or protect lesbian and bisexual women from the desire to achieve mainstream body ideals. Findings suggest that lesbians who identify as more butch or androgynous by favoring comfortable over fashionable clothing, by dressing for themselves rather than others and by giving up traditional feminine beauty rituals are less preoccupied with body image concerns than heterosexual women (Cogan, 1999; Ludwig & Brownell, 1999). Other research suggests there is a disconnect between values lesbians want to embrace and their actual beliefs and behaviors, providing a glimpse into the complex intersection of body image, sexual orientation and gendered identity. For example, one study comparing lesbian and heterosexual women found that lesbians thought dieting was oppressive; yet approximately half of the lesbians reported having dieted recently. Lesbians were also more critical of feminine beauty norms than heterosexual women, but about half of the lesbians surveyed were dissatisfied with their weight and had low body esteem (Heffernan, 1999).

Qualitative research on GLBT body image can offer additional insights. One study focusing on college-age women explored body image among lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women through in-depth interviews (Leavy & Hastings, 2010). Lesbian and bisexual women expressed greater satisfaction with their bodies when compared to heterosexual women. Among the reasons cited were their feelings of exclusion from dominant feminine culture coupled with feelings of inclusion in GLBT subcultures that provided space for cultivating alternative femininities and exploring a broader range of appearance norms. Bisexual women, however, felt

more pressure to conform to dominant feminine beauty norms when dating men than when dating women, suggesting a need for further research on body image and dating issues.

A noteworthy critique of extant research on this topic is that it tends to focus solely on sexual orientation without taking into account other meaningful aspects of an individual's identity that may impact body image, such as age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. In reality, these multiple aspects of identity intersect in unanticipated and varied ways, depending on social context (e.g., home, community, church). Furthermore, much of the research on body image in GLBT communities uses a comparative framework that emphasizes difference between categories of people (e.g., gay, straight, bisexual) and assumes sameness within categories. GLBT subcultures need further examination to provide a better understanding of variability within GLBT communities. For example, "bears" (gay or bisexual men with heavysset bodies who reject normative masculine appearance ideals) may have more flexible ideas about attractiveness than others in the GLBT community (Morrison & McCutcheon, 2012).

Body image in GLBT communities is an understudied topic overall and especially among college students. In particular, very little research has been done with bisexual men and women, and transgender individuals are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the extant literature. Qualitative studies are needed to tease apart the complex and nuanced relationships between body image, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity that contribute to a person's overall sense of self. Researchers need to talk to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender college students to gain a deeper understanding of their body image-related perspectives and experiences as well as how their ideas about body image are influenced by campus culture and the degree to which they feel supported socially, emotionally and academically in their college environments.

The Physically Disabled

Studies of people with physical disabilities report a range of body image satisfaction within this population. In general, men and women with disabilities tend to internalize negative body image attitudes more so than their non-disabled counterparts (Nosek, Howland, Rintala, Young, & Chanpong, 2001; Romeo, Wamless, & Arenas, 1993; Taleporos & McCabe, 2002; Taub, Fanflik, & McLorg, 2003). One study found that individuals with moderate and severe disabilities expressed greater body image dissatisfaction than those with mild or no disabilities (Taleporos & McCabe, 2005). Another study using in-depth individual interviews found that male and female participants felt increased acceptance of their bodies over time by focusing on their favorable physical attributes, embracing positive feedback and support from loved ones and coming to terms with their physical limitations (Taleporos & McCabe, 2002).

In terms of gender differences, disabled men reportedly express greater dissatisfaction with their lower bodies than women, specifically, loss of musculature in legs and abdominal weight gain (Dewis, 1989; Taleporos & McCabe, 2005). Further,

men's body image satisfaction decreases more than women's with a greater need for assistance (Taleporos & McCabe, 2005). The authors suggest physical disability makes traditional masculine norms of strength, independence and muscularity less attainable, which negatively impacts body image among disabled men.

Research has found participation in sports and physical activity a mediating factor in body image anxiety among men and women with physical disabilities (Blinde & McCallister, 2007; Martin, 2009). Body image anxiety is concern about others devaluing one's body. Fear of being subjected to rude comments or staring may lead people with disabilities to try to hide their disability by covering up with loose-fitting clothing and/or avoiding exercising in public, for example. Studies such as those cited earlier suggest that engaging in physical activity may help people with disabilities see their bodies as a source of strength, thereby reducing body image anxiety. Another study found that among amputees, body image satisfaction increased for participants who were satisfied with the aesthetic and functional aspects of their prosthesis. For women, body image satisfaction was more closely tied to aesthetic aspects of the prosthesis than for men (Murray & Fox, 2002).

Overall, little is known about body image among disabled college students despite the fact that approximately 11% of undergraduate students nationwide report having a physical disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Further, almost all of the current literature on this topic is based on survey research that reveals broad trends but offers little understanding of the everyday lived experience of disabled students. Ethnographic research on college students with physical disabilities could provide important insights into their experiences with the social, academic and physical environment of the campus. This information would, in turn, enable college administrators and practitioners to better support this group.

The Freshman 15

Many students are familiar with the widespread belief that incoming freshman gain about 15 pounds during their first year of college. The phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "freshman 15." In reality, studies cite weight increases among freshmen ranging from approximately 3.5 to 8 pounds with an average gain of about 4 pounds (Crombie, Ilich, Dutton, Panton, & Abood, 2009; Lloyd-Richardson, Bailey, Fava, & Wing, 2009; Vella-Zarb & Elgar, 2009). Very little research has been done examining weight fluctuation trends beyond that first year, though one study found weight gain continued into the sophomore year (Lloyd-Richardson et al., 2009), and others have found gains through the final year of college (Racette, Deusinger, Strube, Highstein, & Deusinger, 2008; Trainer et al., 2015). Weight gain among college students begins during the first semester, suggesting factors associated with the transition into college, such as access to junk food, staying up late and partying, play an important role (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2011; Lloyd-Richardson et al., 2009).

Studies of gender differences in weight gain among college students have produced mixed results. For example, one study found men gained more weight than women during the first semester (Cluskey & Grobe, 2009), but other research has

found no significant gender differences in weight gain during the freshman year (Hoffman, Policastro, Quick, & Lee, 2006; Holm-Denoma, Joiner, Vohs, & Heatherton, 2008). Race and ethnicity do not appear to be a factor in college weight gain; several studies have found no difference between White and ethnic minority students, including Latinos, African-Americans and Asians (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2011; Hoffman et al., 2006).

Weight gain among college freshmen has been attributed to increased stress, changes in physical activity and eating habits, increased consumption of alcohol and living on campus (Economos, Hildebrandt, & Hyatt, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2006; Yoon, Kim, & Lee, 2014). Students in one qualitative study attributed freshman weight gain to availability of unhealthy food on campus and eating for reasons other than hunger, including boredom, stress while studying, alcohol consumption and socializing (Nelson, Kocos, Lytle, & Perry, 2009). Anthropologist Carole Counihan conducted qualitative research with college students and found that many associated food with love and comfort, prompting them to indulge in sweets and other junk foods to deal with emotional stress (Counihan, 1992). Another study found that weight gain was related to increased alcohol consumption among college men and increased workload in college women, highlighting the effects of stress and health-related behaviors on students (Economos et al., 2008). College women who lived on campus were found to consume more calories and mono-saturated fat and drink alcohol more frequently than those who lived off-campus, probably due to college meal plans offering calorie-dense, high-fat foods and increased opportunities to drink alcohol (Yoon et al., 2014). After a long night of drinking alcohol, students are hungry and indulge in foods that are readily available such as pizza or tacos, adding significantly to their caloric intake of the day.

Other reasons for weight gain among college students include negative experiences using campus recreation facilities, inclement weather, difficulty carving out time for exercise, lack of motivation and inadequate social support (Nelson et al., 2009). It is not uncommon for students who are overweight or obese to avoid going to a campus recreation center because of their discomfort with their body or fear of being seen in their exercise clothes. Many students report that the recreation center attracts only those who are already the most fit. One study drawing on in-depth interviews with 15 male and female college students revealed that 6 of the 7 who self-reported larger body size felt uncomfortable using the campus recreation center because they felt like they were being watched and judged by other students. In particular, they felt intimidated by the "male- and mirror-dominated weight room within the recreation center" (Trainer et al., 2015, p. 271). The authors of this study note that previous research suggests a fear of experiencing weight stigma discourages people from exercising. It is clear that making recreation centers feel like safe and welcoming spaces for students of all sizes is an imperative.

On the positive side, living on campus can confer benefits. For example, one study found that students living in residence halls walked more steps per day than their off-campus counterparts and were more likely to use the campus recreational facilities (Yoon et al., 2014). Residential facilities were further from the campus

and classrooms than commuter parking lots, which encouraged more walking among those who lived on campus. Campus exercise facilities and intramural sports activities were also thought to be more accessible for residential students.

College preparedness might impact weight gain among college freshmen as well. One study, conducted among 390 college men and women in the Northeastern U.S. who identified as African American (32%), Latino (27%) and White (41%), found that those who received lower Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were more likely to gain the “freshman 15” (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2011). The authors suggest that students with lower SAT scores may be less academically prepared for college, which can lead to unhealthy eating behaviors related to stress. This study also found that students who gained weight during their first year in college were less involved in campus organizations. Students who participate in campus activities tend to feel a greater sense of community, which may reduce unhealthy eating associated with feelings of isolation (DeNeui, 2003; Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2011). It is clear that weight gain across the college years is connected to food consumption behaviors as well as body image. Additional qualitative research needs to be done exploring these intersections to help college practitioners more effectively support healthy body image-related choices and attitudes among students.

Fat Talk

“Fat talk,” a term coined by anthropologist Mimi Nichter, refers to a social ritual, a way of being among female friends that involves making overt statements like “I’m so fat” to which the culturally appropriate response is “Oh no, you’re not!” Fat talk is an expression of concern about one’s weight but is also an attempt to solicit emotional support and reassurance from friends, demonstrate personal responsibility for one’s body size and call attention to one’s flaws before others do (Nichter, 2000). Fat talk has been framed as a dynamic and collaborative process in which weight and body image issues are negotiated between individuals (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012).

In recent years, psychologists have examined the frequency and effects of fat talk on women’s body image and self-esteem. Research suggests fat talk as conversational banter is pervasive among college women and has become a norm on campus. Indeed, one study found that over 90% of respondents reported engaging in fat talk with their friends (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). What is particularly troubling is that students perceived engagement in fat talk as *more typical* than positive body image talk for average weight and overweight women (Barwick, Bazzini, Martz, Rocheleau, & Curtin, 2012).

Is fat talk “just” a form of everyday women’s speech, or does it have a pernicious effect on women’s sense of self? Some research has concluded that fat talk is a mechanism by which negative feelings about one’s weight can become amplified into broader negative feelings about the self (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012). Indeed, survey research with college women conducted over a 2-week span found that fat talk predicted higher levels of depression and perceived socio-cultural pressures

to be thin (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012). Further, several researchers have concluded that fat talk among college students is associated with body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011; Stice, Maxfield, & Wells, 2003). Although some studies suggest a correlation between fat talk and elevated eating pathology scores (Clarke, Murnen, & Smolak, 2010; Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008), this relationship is complex and influenced by many factors, including social context and motivation (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011; Warren, Holland, Billings, & Parker, 2012). For example, fat talk may be deployed more frequently if one’s peers do it and if one wants to appear similar to their friends in terms of body image concerns. Additionally, complaining about one’s body by saying “I’m so fat” can be used as a means to “level the playing field,” making it clear that one does not feel better about their body than others (Nichter, 2000). In this way, fat talk engenders rapport and bonding in a social group.

Some research has shown that having a strong tendency to draw social comparisons with others directly predicts fat talk among college females (Corning & Gondoli, 2012). These researchers found that, as a woman’s body image concerns increased, her likelihood of engaging in fat talk also increased. While this is perhaps unsurprising, these researchers found that even at low levels of body image concern, fat talk was robust. Sufficient studies with college students across the country have confirmed fat talk as a salient feature in the everyday life of college students.

Intervention Approaches: Fat Talk Free Week

In 2008, a national sorority, Delta Delta Delta (also known as Tri Delta) in collaboration with health researchers, designed and disseminated a social marketing campaign to increase awareness of fat talk and to challenge this normative discourse among women, as well as to change the focus among women from one’s weight to positive health. To date, the program has been implemented in some colleges and universities around the country. During this 7-day campus program, information is provided to students to raise awareness of fat talk and its harmful effects and to promote positive body conversations as an alternative. Students are encouraged to sign an online pledge to end personal engagement with fat talk. There is also a media component entitled “Friends Don’t Let Friends Fat Talk” that is displayed via posters, magnets and social media sites.

To the authors’ knowledge, only one pilot evaluation has been conducted on this campaign (Garnett et al., 2014). Findings collected from a sample of 180 students on two college campuses revealed significant mean decreases in self fat talk, fat talk exposure among peers, comparison to others and body dissatisfaction following this campaign. Notably, at baseline over 50% of participants engaged in fat talk *almost always* or *often* compared to 34% who reported fat talk at follow-up. It should be noted, however, that although these initial results are promising, follow-up was conducted just two weeks after the program concluded. Follow-ups after 3 and 6 months would be valuable to determine effectiveness and to establish the half-life of this social marketing campaign.

Social Media and Body Image

The use of social media is pervasive among young adults with 95% of college students regularly using Facebook and 40% reporting that they check their site in excess of 6 times per day (Perrin, 2015). Facebook is particularly popular among young women, many of whom post “selfies” and images of their week-day and weekend activities, from mundane to risqué. With regard to body image, researchers have found a positive relationship between Facebook usage and body dissatisfaction, postulating that young adult women who are more active on social media have increased opportunity for comparisons with others, which in turn leads to dissatisfaction with self (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Kimbrough, Guadagno, Muscanell, & Dill, 2013). For those college-aged women who engage in more appearance-related comparisons, spending time on Facebook was found to lead to a greater desire to change one’s face, hair and skin-related features (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Facebook and other social media allow individuals to use filters and edit themselves to maximize satisfaction with their projected image before posting. The “edited self,” be this in the form of Facebook posts or “selfies” on sites such as Tumblr, Snapchat or Instagram, is then posted and available to be evaluated and commented upon by others. Research among Australian teens has shown that, in pursuit of “likes,” young people often display specific body parts, with females showing cleavage and males featuring six-pack abs (Albury, 2015).

Monitoring one’s Facebook page for peer responses can be a frustrating and even traumatic experience for women in college. Not getting sufficient “likes” from a posted image of one’s self can negatively affect self-esteem, leaving a young woman to question her attractiveness and overall self-worth. Indeed, experimental research has found that Facebook usage can put women in a more negative mood, perhaps because of increased comparison to others. While negative mood can also occur as a result of viewing the thin-body ideal shown in magazines, it has been suggested that comparing one’s self to peers (as opposed to models) can provoke *more frustration* as a friend’s body type may be seen as more attainable. While quantitative results on this topic have been mixed (Ridolfi et al., 2011), recent qualitative research among college women has found nuanced distinctions in social media viewing (Williamson, 2015). Specifically, “selfies” of friends were easier to dismiss (“Oh she doesn’t really look like that—it’s just a really good picture with good lighting”), whereas an attractive picture of a distant friend or classmate was harder to dismiss and led to heightened self-consciousness and a feeling of inferiority. In a similar vein, research among college students has found that the more friends people include on Facebook whom they do not know personally, the stronger the belief that others had better lives than themselves and that these others were “always happy” (Chou & Edge, 2012).

Some research has shown “fitspiration” images (often “selfies”), defined as images that are taken with the intention of showing off an especially fit or athletic body (particularly showcasing one’s muscles), can foster dissatisfaction and frustration with one’s body, especially among those whose body type does not match

the portrayed ideal. While sometimes well-intended as a source of inspiration for others, these images have been criticized for perpetuating the notion that only one body type is healthy or that body shape should be the key factor in determining self-worth (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

Facebook is the most popular use of media among young women and will probably remain so among college students for some time in the future (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Thus, it is important to recognize that young adults’ digital practices of self-representation may impact body image. Future research is needed to provide a more thorough understanding of how social media is affecting college women and men in relation to body image. Media literacy interventions, which have highlighted the impact of traditional media on young women’s body image, should be enhanced to address the idealized nature of the images and content uploaded to social media. College-aged women and men could benefit from education on the potential impact of social comparisons, “selfies” and surveillance of self and others on their own sense of self.

Conclusion

Research suggests that those who internalize mainstream body image ideals experience the greatest degree of body dissatisfaction (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012; Neighbors & Sobal, 2007). Body ideals are unachievable for the vast majority of young adults, especially in light of the realities of modern college life, which include junk food consumption, increasing anxieties and stress and behaviors associated with partying, such as drinking and smoking. Given the dissonance between idealized images and high rates of overweight and obesity on college campuses, it is not surprising that overweight college students experience the greatest degree of dissatisfaction with their weight and body shape when compared with other students (Neighbors & Sobal, 2007).

With overweight and obesity rates on the rise, college campuses are increasingly diverse in terms of body size and shape as well as other aspects of identity, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity and physical dis/ability. Additional research is needed to better understand how body image intersects with these different aspects of identity among college students. Programs that address body image concerns among particular populations, including ethnic minorities, GLBT students and students with disabilities are also increasingly important. Findings from body image research among college students presented in this chapter underscore the importance of recognizing diversity within and among groups.

Students embody multiple identities, which, together with their life experiences, shape their relationships with their bodies. Identity becomes even more complex at the college level as students experiment with different aspects of themselves. Thus, body image awareness and intervention strategies must both speak to a broad audience and communicate recognition of individual difference. Those who facilitate awareness and intervention strategies need to be trained to address diverse groups of students like the ones highlighted in this chapter. While all of the groups discussed, including men, women, ethnic minorities, LGBT students

and individuals with disabilities, expressed body image concerns, their concerns manifested in different ways.

It is important that college professionals represent the diversity of the student population in intervention activities so that a variety of perspectives are voiced in efforts to promote healthy body image on campus. It is clear that a "one-size-fits-all" approach will not be effective in body image intervention programs. Involving students in the planning of such efforts is a useful strategy for developing programs that are user friendly and appeal to a wide range of students.

Professionals working on college campuses, whether in health services, counseling services, faculty, student affairs, administration or other roles, have an opportunity to frame messages about the importance of physical activity and healthy eating as a way to promote overall health and well-being rather than as a means for students to achieve body image goals. However, promotion of healthy lifestyle choices must also occur within a campus environment that nurtures healthy decision-making by offering mostly healthy foods and beverages and providing opportunities and facilities for students of all sizes to engage in physical activity without feeling scrutinized or criticized.

Media literacy classes that raise awareness about traditional and social media have been shown to be an effective strategy in improving body esteem among college students (Chambers & Alexander, 2007; Irving & Berel, 2001). Specifically, these studies suggest media literacy can result in increased skepticism about media images, reduced beliefs that images of models are real and greater satisfaction with the appearance of one's own body. Chambers and Alexander (2007) found that videos and imagery combined with traditional texts led to greater satisfaction with one's current body than articles alone. Although students who took the short-term media literacy class felt better about their bodies as a result, their body image ideals did not change. The authors concluded that, in order to achieve a change in body image ideology, the result of living in a media saturated environment that promotes a thin body ideal, more extensive media literacy programming would need to be provided.

Counter-messages that challenge dominant narratives are necessary to foster awareness of how powerful the media is in influencing our ideas about gendered body image and social norms, attitudes about fat people, food consumption choices and exercise practices. Media literacy efforts must emphasize health over beauty, encourage students to broaden their ideas about what it means to be attractive and address obesity stigma by showing how fat people are often negatively portrayed in movies and television and emphasizing the importance of treating people of all sizes with respect.

In addition to offering media literacy classes, expanding outreach by providing workshops to organized student groups on campus could be an effective way to reach a broader audience. Additionally, freshmen could be targeted for wellness workshops promoting strategies for healthy eating, regular physical activity and healthy ideas about body image via meetings in residence halls and during freshman orientation when they are captive audience members.

Research shows that even short-term, one-time media literacy classes can help students learn to think more critically about media images. However, changing

body image ideology requires more extensive programming. Finding ways to integrate lessons from media literacy curricula into the day-to-day lives and conversations of young people could contribute to longer-term impacts, such as changing body image ideology. For example, training peer mentors who could lead residence hall discussions and encourage critical thinking about media images and initiate positive body image talk in daily conversation with friends could be an effective strategy for supporting healthy body image among college students. This strategy could also be an effective way to address body image issues among specific groups on campus (e.g., ethnic minorities, LGBT) as students from these different groups could be trained to talk about body image among their peers. It will also be important to evaluate activities and classes designed to promote healthy body image on campus in order to assess how well they are working and find ways to improve programming based on the feedback and needs of students.

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Bridget Guernsey Riordan, Ph.D., Emory University

Bridget Guernsey Riordan is Assistant Vice President for Alumni Relations, Parent and Family Programs in the Division of Campus Life at Emory University. Prior to this position, she served Emory as Dean of Students, Assistant to the Vice President and Director of Student Activities. She received her bachelor's degree from Ball State University. Upon graduation, she worked for Alpha Chi Omega Fraternity as a traveling consultant. She then worked in student affairs at the University of Cincinnati, where she received her master's degree, and the University of Pittsburgh, where she received her doctoral degree. She served as an adjunct faculty member at Georgia State University and received a certificate in higher-education law from the Stetson School of Law. She has served as President of the Association of Fraternity Advisors and has done research on fraternal organizations, alcohol policy development and risk management issues.

Todd S. Rose, Ph.D., George Mason University

Todd Rose is Executive Director of INTO Mason and is a member of the faculty in the Higher Education program at George Mason University. He has over 25 years of experience in higher education at four different institutions. Prior to his career in higher education, he was a commercial lending officer in Nashville, TN. He holds a BBA in Finance (with a minor in Economics) from Southern Methodist University (TX) an M.B.A. from Baldwin-Wallace University (OH) and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Research, focusing on Higher Education from the University of Southern Mississippi (MS).

Nicole Taylor, Ph.D., Texas State University

Nicole Taylor is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology. Prior to this position, she served as Director of Scholar Programs at the School for Advanced Research. She also has experience conducting research and evaluation in the areas of substance abuse, education and poverty, childhood obesity and school climate. Her current research explores contemporary social issues related to education and health, including teasing and bullying in schools, childhood obesity and body image concerns among youth. She is the author of *Schooled on Fat: What Teens Tell Us about Gender, Body Image, and Obesity*.