Positive Body Image: Developing Understanding and Practical Strategies

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EMBodiED RESEARCH

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Body Image

- Multidimensional concept related to experience of one's body
  - Thoughts, beliefs, self-evaluation; emotions; actions, physical competence; behaviours;

- Body image is an individual's subjective evaluation of their physical self and appearance (Harrison & Heffner, 2011)
  - Females: Focus on perceived weight and shape
  - Males: Focus on muscularity, leanness, height

Body Image Continuum

Body satisfaction → Moderate body dissatisfaction → Severe body dissatisfaction/ Clinical disorder

- Positive body image
  - includes the notions of body satisfaction, body enjoyment and body acceptance (flaws and all);
- Body dissatisfaction
  - Negative evaluation of the body (loathing, disgust, disparagement, hatred).

Why Worry about Body Image?

- 34% of 5-year old girls report moderate dietary restraint (Damiano, Paxton et al, 2015)
- 48-58 % of 8- to 11-year-old girls and 30-44 % of 8- to 11-year-old boys "think a lot about being thinner" (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003)
- Mission Australia Survey (2016) – 22,000 15- to 19-year-olds
  - Girls – 41.4% Extremely (18.0%) or Very Concerned about their body image
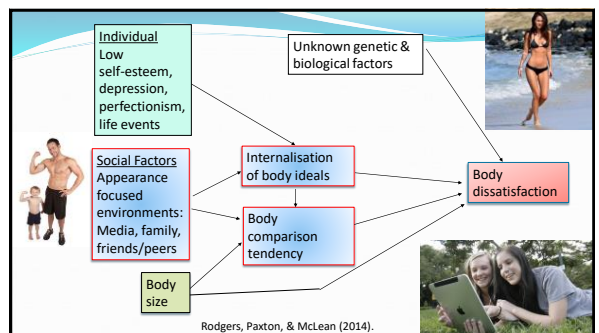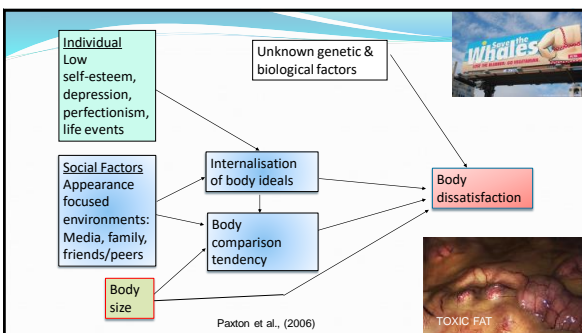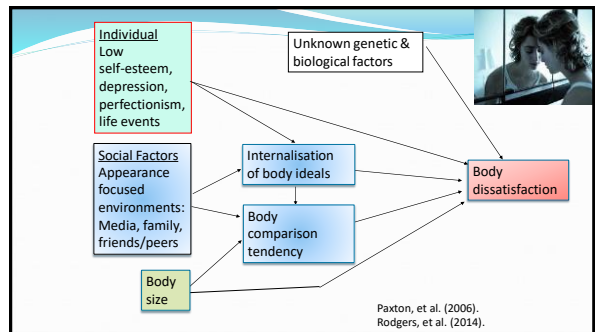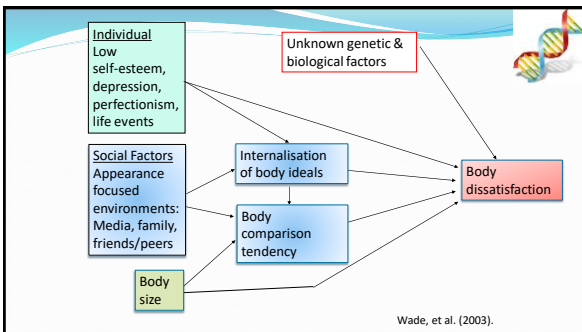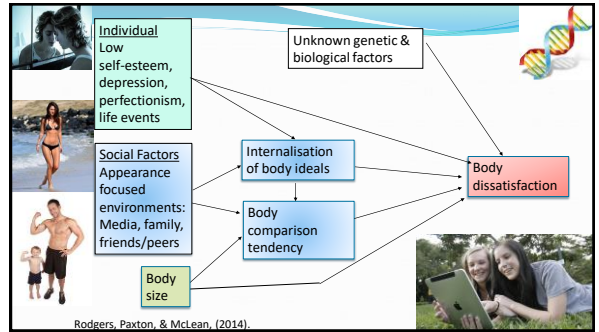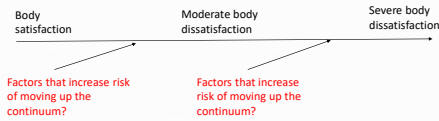 - Boys – 17.0% Extremely (6.1%) or Very Concerned about their body image

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Why Worry?

- Source of distress, reduced quality of life (Mond et al., 2013)
- Body dissatisfaction a risk factor for:
  - Low self-esteem and depression (Paxton, et al., 2006)
  - Lower physical activity, increased smoking and sexual risk taking (Kaufman & Augustson, 2008; Neumark-Sztainer, Paxton et al., 2006; Schooler et al., 2012)
  - Extreme weight loss or weight/muscle gain measures, binge eating (Neumark-Sztainer, Paxton, et al., 2006; Pope, et al., 2012)
  - Overweight and obesity (Haines, et al., 2010)
  - Onset of clinical eating disorders (Stice, 2011).
    - Devastating and extended mental illness, elevated mortality (Fichter & Quadflieg, 2015)

Why Worry?

- Lifetime prevalence (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2016)
  - Females – Clinical eating disorders = 6.7% (1.9% AN, 2.4% BN, 2.4% BED and other eating disorders)
  - Males – Clinical eating disorders = 1.9% (.2% AN, .9% BN, .7% BED and other eating disorders)

- In Australian adults aged 45-54 years
  - extreme weight loss behaviours: regular purging (28.6%), and strict dieting or fasting (21.4%) (Hay et al., 2008)

Targets for Maintenance of Positive Body Image

- An etiological or risk factor approach to prevention assumes that if you reduce the presence of important causal risk factors then you will reduce the likelihood of the development of the problem = prevention

Body satisfaction — Moderate body dissatisfaction — Severe body dissatisfaction

Factors that increase risk of moving up the continuum?

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Individual Low self-esteem, depression, perfectionism, life events

Unknown genetic & biological factors

Social Factors Appearance focused environments: Media, family, friends/peers

Internalisation of body ideals

Body comparison tendency

Body size

Body dissatisfaction

Rodgers, Paxton, & McLean, (2014).

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Paxton et al., (2006)

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Prevention Approaches

- Change the environment – media, peer and family environments

- Change the way we cope with our environment

Media Exposure and Body Image

- Media establish appearance norms
- In young girls:
  - In 5-8 year old girls - greater exposure to appearance focused media predicts the development of lower body satisfaction a year later (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006)
  - In 5-year-old girls - greater media exposure is related to a greater intention to diet (Damiano et al., 2015)
- In adolescents:
  - Exposure to idealised media images increases body dissatisfaction in females (Hausenblas et al., 2013)
  - Exposure to men's magazines a unique predictor of drive for thinness and drive for muscularity in boys (Slater & Tiggemann, 2014)

What Can Counter the Influence of Media?

- Media literacy - critical thinking and evaluation skills that facilitate independent judgements about media;
- Does media literacy reduce vulnerability to negative media influence?

Support for Protective Role of Media Literacy

- The most effective prevention interventions for body dissatisfaction in early adolescence include media literacy components (e.g., Bird, Halliwell, Diedrichs & Harcourt, 2013; Dunstan, Paxton & McLean, 2016; Richardson & Paxton, 201o; Wilksch & Wade, 2011);

Media Literacy and Exposure to Thin Ideal Media

- Experimental research into protective role of media literacy
  - Adolescent girls with high media literacy are less likely to be negatively affected by exposure to idealised media images (McLean, Paxton, & Wertheim, 2016).

Peers

- Adolescent girls' friendships groups share similar levels of body dissatisfaction and dieting (Paxton et al., 1999);
- Peers may have influence through different routes:
  - having shared group norms that emphasise conformity to appearance ideals – communicated through appearance conversations and teasing (Paxton & McLean, 2015);
  - providing an environment in which appearance focused attitudes and behaviours may be modelled (Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2013).

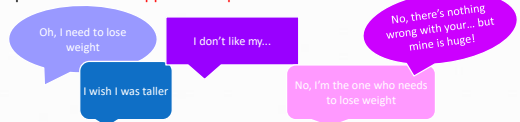## Peers

- Prospective research shows that peer body image attitudes predict individual body image in child and adolescent samples (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Helfert & Warschburger, 2011; Eisenberg & Neumark-Sztainer, 2010; Paxton et al., 2006)
- Teasing from peers and others predicts increases in body size and disordered eating as well as low self-esteem (Puhl et al., 2017).

Prevention and the Peer Environment

- Positive outcomes from school-based interventions that incorporate activities that address peer interactions (Atkinson et al., 2016; Dunstan et al., 2016; Ross, Paxton & Rodgers, 2013);
- Activities which challenge peer group norms, appearance conversations and teasing and "fat talk". Develop alternatives using role play
- Explore valued non-appearance qualities in friends and self.

Oh, I need to lose weight

I don't like my...

No, there's nothing wrong with your... but mine is huge!

I wish I was taller

No, I'm the one who needs to lose weight

Social Media

- Social media – a new media and peer environment;
- Highly interactive and visual environment, in which appearance is often central and there are many opportunities for appearance comparison, appearance conversations but also, positive self-presentation and the creation and editing of content (Frisén, Berne & Lunde, 2013).
- In 2013, of 13- to 15-year-old girls, 75% had a Facebook page and spent an average of 1.5 hrs there daily (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013).

Social Media and Body Image

- Social media users have significantly greater body dissatisfaction than non-users (e.g., Tiggemann & Slater, 2013)
- Using Facebook involving photo-based activities is related to internalising appearance ideals and body dissatisfaction (Meier & Gray, 2014)
- Manipulating images for social media and photo investment (concern and effort in selecting and sharing photos) are related to body dissatisfaction, over-evaluation of weight and shape and dietary restraint (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim & Masters, 2015)

Social Media Literacy

- Social media literacy - being empowered with the knowledge and skills to analyse, evaluate, produce and participate in social media.
- Includes understanding and critical analysis of the commercial and peer engagement contexts of social media.

Is Social Media Literacy a Protective Factor?

- Experimental research – our research shows that commercial social media literacy is a protective factor in young adult women but not men (Tamplin, Mclean & Paxton, under review)
- Pilot intervention study with grade 7 girls (McLean, Wertheim, Masters & Paxton, 2017)
  - Successfully improved body esteem, dietary restraint and media literacy

Lesson topic	Teaching activities
1. Advertising - motives and consequences for social media posting.	Exploring advertising postings on social media; Small group activity - create advertisement to sell a product or improve health.
2. Effects of social media viewing: manipulation of images, reduction of appearance comparison.	Explore realism - view and critique favourite celebrity sites and friend and peer postings; Create social media posts using different online self-presentation styles.
3. Understanding and coping with friend feedback, cybercitizenship.	Find social media images with positive and negative feedback and explore associated emotions, possible motives for negative feedback. Create non-appearance focused representative profile pictures.

Spot the difference!

- How do ads directed to girls differ from ads directed to boys?

Photo Posting and Comments

## Representative profile picture

Instructions:

1. Create a list of six personal qualities (values, abilities, talents, virtues, characteristics) that reflect you and your personality/interests
2. Choose (from the ones you collected) or create a representative profile picture that is a true reflection of your qualities

3. Present your picture to the class

Social Media Literacy – Pilot Intervention

- Post-intervention: experimental compared to control group had:
  - reduced overvaluation weight and shape
  - reduced internalisation of media ideals
  - reduced appearance conversations
  - reduced dietary restraint and increased social media literacy.

Family Environments

- Positive environments
  - Ones in which children feel accepted for non-appearance qualities
  - Ones which focus on health not weight loss in relation to food and physical activities
  - Ones in which children feel they can speak openly about their feelings
  - Ones in which there is no weight bias
- Negative environments
  - Ones in which there is appearance teasing
  - Ones in which a parent models body dissatisfaction
  - Ones in which children are encouraged to diet

Rodgers, Paxton, & McLean, (2014).
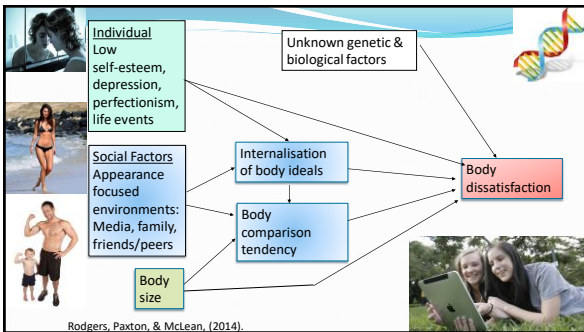
Weight Bias and Stigma

- Ubiquitous
- Negative impact on those who experience it in many ways, including body image, self-esteem and mood
- "A little bit of body dissatisfaction" in larger people is not "a good thing" –body dissatisfaction associated with less physical activity and more unhealthy weight loss behaviours.
- Weight teasing
- Experience of weight bias associated with reduced quality of life (Latner et al 2014)

Create a Weight-Bias Free Environment

- Be aware of your own weight-bias
- Be aware that your language can influence those around you
- Create an environment in which people of all shapes and sizes are treated with respect and accepted
- Try to avoid endorsing unrealistic body shapes
- Don't make comments about other people's weight and shape (or your own)
- Talk about eating and physical activity in terms of health not weight

Strategies to Build Positive Body Image

- Teach media literacy skills related to digital manipulation of images and unreal world media presents, skill to critically analyse;
- Challenge "fat talk" in families, peer groups and schools;
- Ensure children are rewarded for personal qualities not appearance;
- Emphasise appreciation of functional aspects of the body
- Challenge weight stigma – never be part of it or accept it in your environment

School-Based Resources

- Media Smart (Wilksch et al., 2008; Wilksch & Wade, 2009) – media stereotypes, advertising, pressure from media, family, friend, peer comments and teasing, consumer activism.
  - Available from Flinders University webpage
- Happy Being Me (Dunstan, Paxton & McLean, 2016; Richardson & Paxton, 2010; Bird et al., 2013) – appearance ideals, peers and appearance teasing, friends and appearance conversations, body comparisons, challenging media ideals.
  - Available from Susan Paxton: susan.paxton@latrobe.edu.au

Thank You

- For further information:
  susan.paxton@latrobe.edu.au

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