

Body Image and Beauty Standards



MDAM
MOOD DISORDERS
ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA
WESTMAN

Helping People Help Themselves

Compiled by
2023 Green Team

Body image refers to our feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes about our physical appearance. Body image can be influenced by many factors, such as family, friends, colleagues, peers, powers of authority, the media, personal experiences, and much more (MentalHealthUK, n.d.).

Body image can be seen as both positive and negative. When you have a positive body image, you may find that you feel comfortable and confident in your body, including all aspects of your physical appearance. You also may find yourself acknowledging that the way you look has basically nothing to do with your character and/or values as a person. You will find that the more positive you are about your body image, the less likely you are to be comparing yourself to others and spending less time preoccupied with your physical features (Woodbury, 2021).

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Negative body image consists of feeling self-conscious, anxious, and/or shameful about your physical appearance. Opposed to being happy and satisfied with your body, you may be pre-occupied and dissatisfied with the body's appearance, which may include its weight, shape and other characteristics. These concerns can create and facilitate distorted perceptions of your physical appearance, leading you to compare yourself to others (Woodbury, 2021).

What are Beauty Standards?

Beauty standards refer to the set of cultural expectations that dictate what is considered aesthetically pleasing. It is important to understand that beauty standards are arbitrary and typically vary between cultures and over time. These beauty standards create a strong pressure to pursue and maintain appearance ideals. Historically, beauty standards have been highly influenced by Western ideals, but they have begun to communicate something completely unreachable (Bradley University, n.d).

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You can see unrealistic beauty standards being thrown at us in many ways, including through advertising, social media, celebrities, parents, friends, and others in your life. These influences may try to communicate that you need to look a certain way in order to be considered beautiful by society (Bradley University, n.d).

Encouraging Positive Body Image

Encouraging positive body image, as opposed to negative body image, can be difficult. You may wish to begin by paying attention to non-appearance-based aspects of your body, such as functionality and what makes you unique. In doing this, you might find it easier to appreciate what you have and all that your magnificent body does for you. Recognizing where feelings of shame may come from can be very helpful in trying to eliminate negative body image. You may also find it helpful to surround yourself with people who like you for who you are, not what you look like. This can also include encouraging yourself and others to eliminate negative body image talk (Woodbury, n.d).

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Encouraging Positive Body Image

You may also consider unfollowing people on social media who promote unrealistic body ideals and/ or cause thoughts of body shaming. These people may be damaging your self-esteem in every post you see.

Wearing comfortable clothes, along with eating and exercising in a way that promotes health and strength as opposed to achieving a size or type could be incredibly helpful in promoting positive body image as well.

(MentalHealthUK, n.d)

Why is it Important?

A large majority of us will experience a negative thought or feeling towards our body at some point in our lives, but if these feelings are prolonged, they can cause serious damage to our mental health and overall well-being (Rodgers, et al., 2023).

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Some impacts of negative body image may cause or contribute to:

- Anxiety
- Deliberate self-injury/harm
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Negative ideas surrounding identity
- Isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Mood disorders
- Shame
- Suicidal thoughts
- Self-hatred
- Other medical conditions and problems

(Foy, 2022)

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Although body image concerns and beauty standards typically affect women more, anyone can have these feelings of negative body image and social pressures, regardless of gender, sex, race, age, or religion. There are also strong connections between body image and mental health. Therefore, having a positive relationship with your body is crucial for mental wellness.

(Foy, 2022)

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