

body image



CONCEPTS:

Body image involves individual perceptions about one's own body. During adolescence, the media can have a powerful impact on the body image of youth. It is important for youth to realize there is no one ideal body weight, shape, or size, and that we are all unique.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will learn there is no ideal body size, shape, or weight that individuals should strive to achieve by participating in a values clarification exercise.
- Students will understand the impact advertising has on the way we view our bodies by analyzing magazine advertisements.
- Students will apply and demonstrate their knowledge about the relationship between advertising and body image by writing post cards addressing these issues in reference to popular magazine ads.

MATERIALS:

ACTIVITY 1: Self Perception

- Scratch paper—one piece per student
- Writing utensil

ACTIVITY 2: Body Image Survey

- *Body Image Survey* student handout
- *Agree, Disagree, Don't Know* signs
- Tape

ACTIVITY 3: Tell Them What You Think!

- Magazines popular to teens
- *Body Image Magazine Activity* student handout
- Pens and/or pencils

TEACHER PREPARATION:

Use the *Body Image* PowerPoint or prepare overheads of PowerPoint. Copy the *Agree, Disagree* and *Don't Know* signs and post them in different areas of the classroom. Copy *Body Image Survey, Tell Them What You Think*, and *Body Image Magazine Activity* student handouts for each student. Collect several different current magazines aimed at youth, enough for one magazine per every four students.

ESTIMATED TIME:

50 minutes

INTRODUCTORY SET:

Most people have a different concept of what body image means. What is body image? Body image involves individual perceptions about one's own body. Where do we get our ideas about appearance and self-image? What are some factors that influence our body image (media, culture, friends, parents, etc.)?

ACTIVITY 1: SELF PERCEPTION

1. Show and discuss student objectives.
2. Have each student take out a scratch piece of paper and a writing utensil.
3. Have students put the tip of their writing utensil in the middle of the paper, close their eyes and look up.
4. With their eyes closed have them follow the prompts below:
 - Draw your head at the top of the paper
 - Now add your neck and body under your head
 - To your body add your arms and hands
 - Then add your legs and feet
 - When you are done with the body move to the features
 - First draw your hair
 - Then add your ears, eyes, mouth and nose
 - Finally put your signature at the bottom of the picture
5. Allow students a few minutes to show their drawings to those around them.
6. Use the following questions to lead a quick discussion:
 - Do the self-portraits look like the image we see in the mirror?
 - Does our mental image accurately reflect our physical image?
 - What influences the way we see ourselves?

ACTIVITY 2: BODY IMAGE SURVEY

1. Distribute *Body Image* survey to all students.
2. Instruct students not to put names on the surveys, that the information will remain confidential.
3. Tape the *Agree*, *Disagree*, and *Don't Know* signs up around the classroom.
4. When students are finished, collect the surveys, shuffle, and redistribute them (so students do not receive their own survey).
5. Read each question and ask students to go stand by the corresponding sign, based on the answers of the survey they received (agree, disagree, don't know).
6. After each question ask volunteers to share their thoughts. What do students think about the responses to each question? Ask students to speculate why someone may have answered that way.

Discussion Points for Activity 2

1. Most people could look like models in magazines.

Agree

Disagree

Don't Know

Discussion Points:

- The majority of models in magazines are airbrushed to get rid of "imperfections" and to look more appealing.
- The current media ideal of thinness for women is achievable by less than 5% of the female population.

2. All thin people are healthy and in good shape.

Agree

Disagree

Don't Know

Discussion Points:

- For some reason, we tend to think of the word "healthy" as meaning being thin in this context. Make sure to challenge students on this concept and point out that we first need to define what "healthy" means to them.

3. All overweight people eat too much food and do not exercise.

Agree

Disagree

Don't Know

Discussion Points:

- We are all born with a predetermined body shape. A good comparison is that society seems to be accepting of variances in height. Why don't we accept variances in weight? Many factors influence our body types, most importantly our genetics.

4. There is not one body size, shape, or weight that people should try to look like; we all have our own unique bodies.

Agree

Disagree

Don't Know

Discussion Points:

- Again, we are all born with a predetermined body shape. Only 10% of the population has the body type to look like the models in magazines.
- There are many contributing factors to the way our bodies look, the most important one being genetics.
- In order to maintain a healthy weight for each individual, it is important to get plenty of exercise (at least 30 minutes per day) and eat a variety of foods (including at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruits per day).
- Youth today, especially girls are bombarded by conflicting advertising messages. On one hand, they are targeted to buy junk food and fast food in magazines and on television, and on the other, the same ads use waif like pencil thin models to sell their products. This is becoming a potential danger for many young women (and men). Girls aren't the only ones affected by this. Advertisers are sending the message that to be a "real man" guys must have huge muscles, a "six pack" abdomen and very little body fat. This can be a hard look to achieve for many men and boys. Problems surface when excessive exercise and other extreme measures are used (steroid use).
- The National Eating Disorders Association estimates that 81% of 10 year-olds are afraid of being fat and between 5–10 million girls and women and 1 million boys and men are struggling with eating disorders including anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder, or borderline conditions.
- Recent experiments have shown that exposure to magazine photographs of super-thin models produces depression, stress, guilt, shame, insecurity, body-dissatisfaction and increased endorsement of the thin-ideal stereotype. Magazines like Vogue and Elle are banned in many eating-disorder clinics, because of their known negative effect on patients' body image.

ACTIVITY 3: TELL THEM WHAT YOU THINK!

1. Ask students if they read magazines. Which ones? What do they think of the models in the magazines?
2. Divide students into groups. Distribute popular magazines to each group, along with the *Body Image Magazine Activity* student handout.
3. Have students complete the *Body Image Magazine Activity* student handout front page. After the front page is complete have students write postcards to the editors of these magazines by completing the back page—*Tell Them What You Think*. Students should use the questions on the sheet to help guide their writing.

Conclusion:

Ask students to share with the class which advertisement(s) they found offending, and what their postcards say. How does this activity make them feel about the influence the media has on the body image of youth? Ask students if they found any positive images in the magazine.