

# Session 5: "Creating a Body Positive College Campus: Counseling Strategies for Change"



# Creating a Body Positive College Campus

## *Counseling Strategies for Change*

Cheryl Donnelly, LMSW

*Mental Health Counselor*



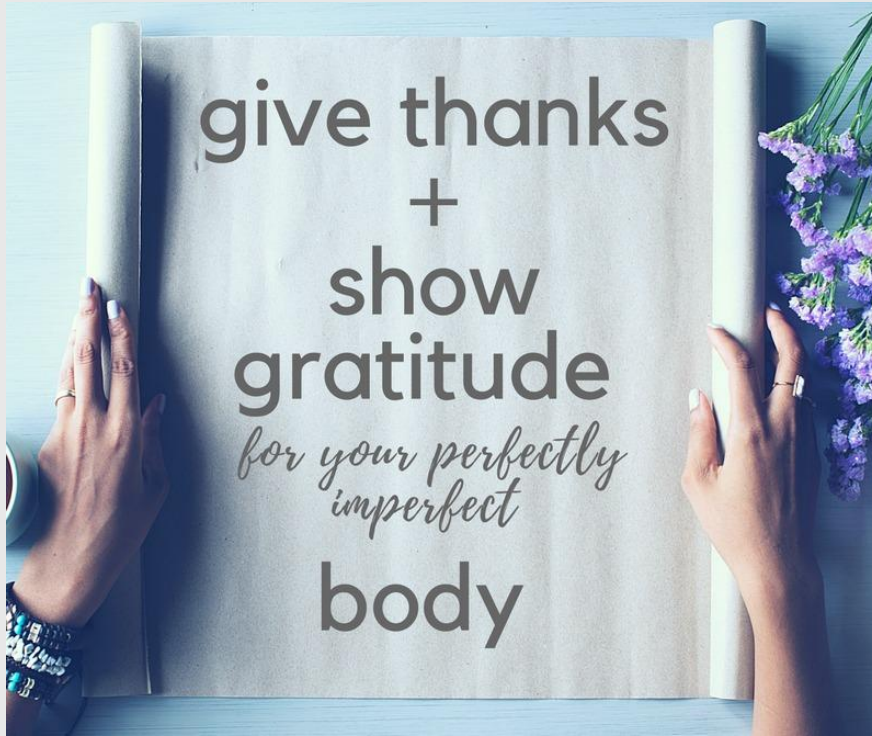
Stony Brook University

# Welcome and Introductions

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the psychological and academic impacts of body dissatisfaction and weight stigma on college students.
2. Describe evidence-based approaches to promoting body positivity in a campus counseling setting.
3. Apply counseling and outreach strategies that support body acceptance and reduce appearance-based bias.
4. Adapt and implement elements of a body image workshop used at Stony Brook University for their own campus populations.

# Ice Breaker



# What is Body Image?

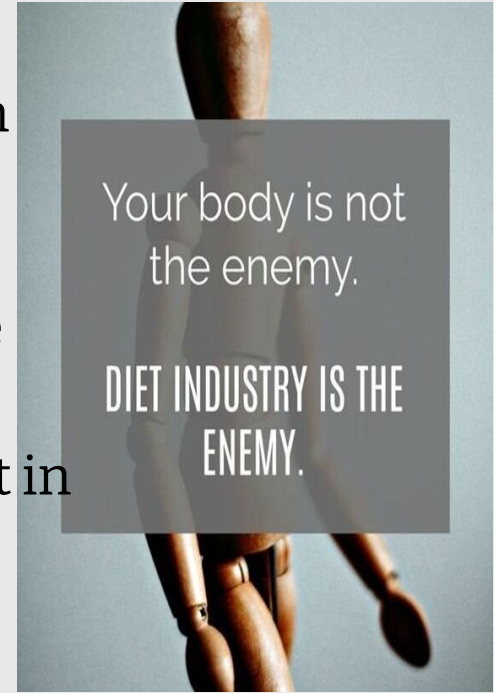
- Body Image is the mental representation of one's own body (Schilder, 1981)
- What you believe about your own appearance (including your memories, assumptions and generalizations).
- How you feel about your body, including your height, shape and weight. In recent years, the body positive movement continued to evolve and expand its scope. It has become more intersectional, recognizing that body image issues are not limited to one gender, race, or body size.
- How you sense and control your body as you move. This includes how you feel *in* your body, not just how you feel about your body.

**31%**  
**OF ADOLESCENTS DO**  
**NOT ENGAGE IN**  
**CLASSROOM DEBATE**  
**FOR FEAR OF**  
**DRAWING ATTENTION**  
**TO HOW THEY LOOK.<sup>1</sup>**



# Research

- Diet culture is a \$73 billion-dollar industry.
- 12 to 25 percent of college women will struggle with an eating disorder (ED), although many will never seek treatment.
- 40 percent of incoming freshman will already have some sort of struggle with disordered eating.
- 91 percent of college females will diet at some point in their college career.
- Significantly higher rates of ED in transgender students and students that identify as LGBTQ+.



# LET'S TALK LGBTQ+...

BODY IMAGE & EATING DISORDERS.

Pride Month 2025

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## THIS ISN'T JUST ABOUT VANITY..

LGBTQ+ FOLKS ARE MORE LIKELY TO STRUGGLE WITH BODY IMAGE AND EATING DISORDERS.

WHY? BECAUSE MANY GREW UP FEELING:

- ❌ DIFFERENT
- ❌ UNSEEN
- ❌ WRONG IN THEIR BODIES
- ❌ PRESSURED TO "PERFORM" A VERSION OF THEMSELVES

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**LGBTQ+ YOUTH ARE MORE THAN TWICE AS  
LIKELY TO DEVELOP AN EATING DISORDER THAN  
THEIR CISGENDER, HETEROSEXUAL PEERS.**

**EATING DISORDERS DON'T DISCRIMINATE  
EDS AREN'T JUST A "STRAIGHT, WHITE, TEEN  
GIRL" THING.**

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## **GENDER, IDENTITY & BODY IMAGE**

**FOR SOME, THE BODY NEVER FELT LIKE HOME.**

- ★ **DYSPHORIA**
- ★ **PUBERTY TRAUMA**
- ★ **PRESSURES TO LOOK "MASC" / "FEMME" /  
"THIN" / "CIS"**

**BODY IMAGE IS OFTEN ABOUT SAFETY, NOT  
AESTHETICS.**

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# Body Image and the College Student



# Perception Reality

A study of more than 11,000 students found that students who saw themselves as overweight (regardless of actual weight) had lower academic performance than those who did not.

# A Timeline of the Body Positivity Movement

1960's

## Origins

The movement emerges as the Fat Acceptance Movement led by fat, queer Black women.

1990's

## Feminist Influence

Media and advertising begin addressing body image struggles.

2000's

## Social Media

Platforms amplify its reach using hashtags like #bodypositive, #effyourbeautystandards, #Plusisequal

Recent Years

## Evolution and Expansion

The movement broadens beyond body size to include age, ability, ethnicity and diverse identities.

# Steps For Improving Body Image for College Students

- Unfollow accounts on social media that trigger negative body image thoughts and feelings.
- Identify and challenge negative body talk.
- Surround yourself with body-positive people.
- Set positive, health-focused goals rather than weight-related goals.
- Identify both physical and non-physical aspects of yourself that you appreciate.
- Wear clothing that you feel comfortable in.
- Engage in basic self-care such as getting adequate sleep and eating regularly.

# The Counselor's Role: Fostering Body Positivity

- Establish a Safe, Non-Judgmental Space- Create a therapeutic environment where all bodies are respected, regardless of size, ability, race, or gender. Encourage open discussion about body image struggles, eating habits, and internalized biases.
- Incorporate Body-Positive Frameworks-Use Health at Every Size (HAES) principles to shift focus from weight loss to holistic well-being. Challenge fat-phobia, diet culture, and societal beauty standards during sessions.
- Cognitive Behavioral Approaches- Help students recognize and reframe negative self talk and distorted beliefs about bodies. Encourage self compassion and mindfulness-based practices for body awareness.
- Trauma Informed Care- Understand how trauma, including bullying and medical trauma, can affect body image. Validate students lived experiences and work with them on rebuilding a safe relationship with their body.
- Affirm Intersectional Identities- Recognize how race, gender identity, disability and sexual orientation intersect with body image. Support students in navigating cultural norms and expectations that shape self perception.

# Outreach and Community Engagement: Promoting Campus-Wide Body Positivity

- Workshops and Psychoeducational Programs- Host events on topics such as: 'Unpacking Diet Culture', 'Body Image in the Age of Social Media', 'Loving Your Body Through Stress and Change', Collaborate with student organizations to tailor content.
- Awareness Campaigns- Promote Body Positivity Week or Eating Disorders Awareness Month with posters, events and social media challenges. Use inclusive imagery and language in campaign materials to reflect body diversity.
- Peer Led Support Groups- Train student leaders to facilitate body-positive discussion groups or support circles. Provide ongoing consultation and supervision for peer facilitators.
- Partnerships with Campus Departments- Work with fitness centers, dining services, health services and nutritional counselors to promote intuitive eating, offer fitness classes (yoga for all bodies), train staff on body neutral and anti-stigma communication.
- Social Media and Digital Outreach- Share body-positive content, affirmations, and resources via counseling center accounts. Offer webinars or short videos on body image resilience and media literacy.

# How Faculty and Staff Can Help

- Promote unfollowing accounts on social media that trigger negative body image thoughts and feelings.
- Focus compliments on the student's performance or personality traits and avoid compliments related to their appearance.
- Avoid use of negative body talk or diet talk in the classroom, offices and counseling center.
- Encourage students to engage in basic self-care such as getting adequate sleep or eating regularly.



# Body Image Workshop Key Concepts

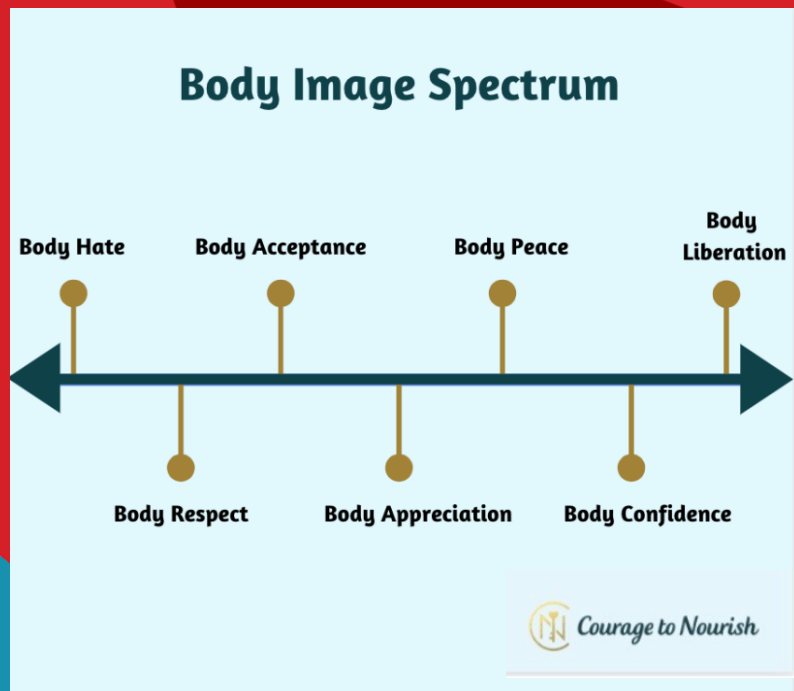


# Create a Safe Container

The opening of the workshop sets the stage for the entire experience. If participants do not feel safe, they will not be willing to be vulnerable.

- Create a BRAVE space
- Set Community Agreements- Introduce key concepts such as confidentiality, non-judgment, respect, boundaries
- Offer Tools- (Ground, Breathe, Orient)
- Possibly consider an Ice Breaker activity

# Body Image Spectrum



We don't always fully love or completely hate our bodies—our feelings can shift across a broad spectrum, even throughout a single day. If you're dealing with body image struggles, it's unrealistic to expect a quick leap from self-hatred to self-love. Reaching a healthier mindset takes time, inner work, and consistent, intentional effort.

**Body Respect:** Body respect is the first step to stop hating your body. In body respect, you'll begin being kinder to your body and give it the nourishment and self care it deserves. You don't have to love your body or like how your body looks in order to respect it. How have you shown your body respect recently?

**Body Acceptance:** To me, body acceptance is getting to a place where you understand the attempt to change your body may result in using disordered eating or exercise behaviors. This doesn't mean you like your body, or even are accepting of how it looks, but feeling more ready to move on from wanting to change it. This is not "giving up" or "failing!" In fact, it's quite the opposite. You are beginning to see you have a life and worth outside of your body's looks.

**Body Appreciation:** In this stage, you begin to appreciate what your body can do for you. You begin to see your body has worth outside of what it looks like. Yes, you can appreciate the physical things your body does. For example, your heart beats and your arms hug. But, it's important to appreciate what your body does on a bigger scale. Allowing you to be present in your life and with people you love.

**Body Peace:** Aah body peace. Here, you may begin to feel okay with your body and even start to become at peace/okay with what it looks like. But, you know your body doesn't define your worth. You might not feel totally confident in your body, but you've accepted the fact, and are at peace with the fact, you can't change it.

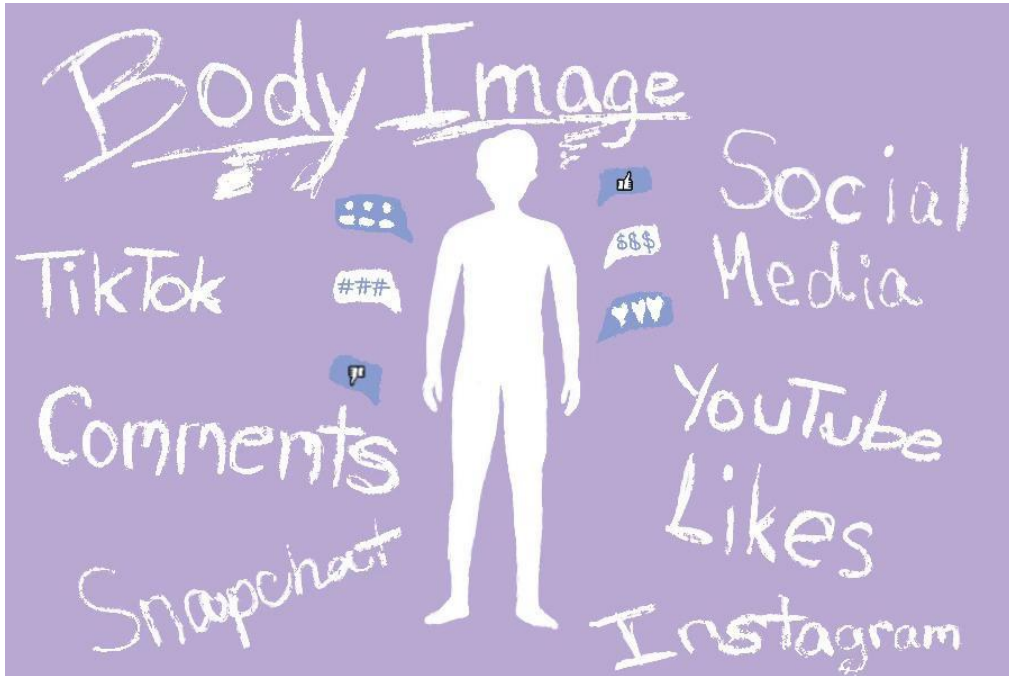
**Body Confidence:** Many of us want to change our bodies in order to feel more confident. Well, the good news is you don't have to change how your body looks in order to become more confident in yourself. As you start to intentionally challenge negative body image thoughts, you'll begin to notice an increase in confidence. In this stage, you might notice confidence is somewhat based on how you think you look from one minute to the next, but you're slowly starting to find being social and fun isn't based on looks. You'll also find you're spending more time with people you love, spending less time thinking of your body and wearing clothes you like and feel comfortable in.

**Body Liberation:** Body liberation! Body liberation is finally breaking free from society's body image standards. You are fully aware that your body doesn't define your worth and you fully accept that. Sure, you may not totally love the way you look all the time, but it doesn't matter. What your body looks like won't prevent you from engaging in your life, finding love, a dream job, clothes shopping, traveling....etc. You can appreciate all the little things your body does for you. Judgments about your body or other people's body's may pop into your mind, but they are often ignored or easily reframed.

# Media Literacy

The purpose of this section is to bring awareness to students that the media they are exposed to are representing a false image and lifestyle. By talking about media literacy, participants can distinguish that images are preying on our insecurities, the “thin ideal” is unachievable and healthy individuals look different from one another.





 Real women. Real beauty





# Body Shaming Discussion



“Children don’t choose the shape or size of their bodies. When kids judge each other kids we call it bullying. When adults do it we call it health”

Jessica Setnick, Founder, International Federation of Eating Disorders

# Grounding Exercise



Embodied experiences, such as grounding exercises or mindful movement allows the student to be able to have a different experience of their bodies. They focus on how their bodies feel, versus the typical emphasis on how their bodies look.



# Intuitive Eating Exercise

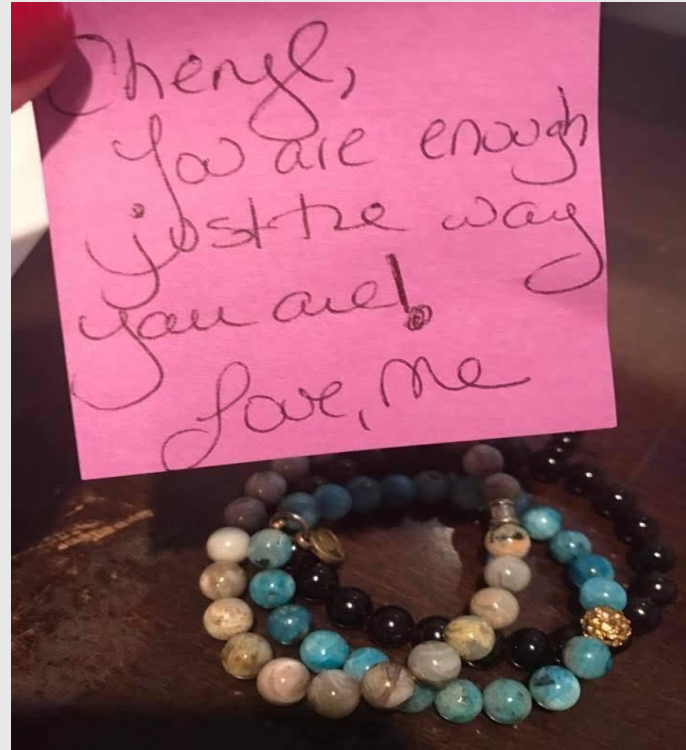
- Cultivating a healthy relationship with food, mind, and body—it's about self-care and body appreciation, regardless of size.
- Process of honoring your health by paying attention to the messages of your body and meeting your physical and emotional needs.
- YOU are the expert of your own body; only YOU know how hungry you are and what food or meal will satisfy you.
- Trust your body's ability to tell you what it needs; attune to hunger/fullness cues.



# Develop your own personal affirmation

What do you need  
to hear to remind  
yourself.....

YOU Are Worthy?



# Discussion

*How do we get students engaged in this work?*

*Final thoughts, questions, comments.....*

# Additional Resources

To learn more about how to dismantle your own internalized body hatred, we encourage you to seek out work by Sonya Renee Taylor, Jess Baker, Alok V. Menon, Ragen Chastain, the Association for Size Diversity and Health, and so many others.

Cheryl Donnelly, LMSW  
cheryl.donnelly@stonybrook.edu

