

Self-Esteem & Body Image



Body dissatisfaction can lead to lowered self-esteem, depression, anxiety and worries, and can lead men and women to begin using restrictive diets, over-exercise, weight loss products, and even vomiting or drug use to try and feel better about their bodies. These weight loss and body reshaping attempts, combined with other biological or psychological factors, will even lead a subset of people into full-syndrome eating/exercise disorders.

With so many women spending time together in one student organization such as a sorority, one's perceptions about self can both positively and negatively influence one another's body image. Below are some suggestions on how to create a more positive body image. Many of these suggestions can be for individuals, but your chapter can also decide collectively to initiate these activities within your organization.

Do Something: Developing a more positive body image

1. Examine yourself first

Do I Respect My Body?

Self-check: <http://renfrewcenter.com/resources/educational-materials/quizzes/do-i-respect-my-body>

Do you have a healthy relationship with food?

Self-check: <http://renfrewcenter.com/resources/educational-materials/quizzes/do-i-respect-my-body>

Eating Disorder Symptom

Self-check – free and anonymous

<http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/ihuc>

2. Educate Members About "Fat-Talk"

"Fat-talk" is any statement about yourself or someone else that criticizes a body's size, shape, or appearance, equates thinness with health, or connects food intake with the need to exercise in order to lose weight. "Fat-talk" does not have to include the word "fat" to be "fat-talk". Examples of "fat-talk" include: "Look at her muffin top!" "He shouldn't be eating that" "My stomach is so flabby" "I can't believe I ate that; now I have to go to the gym twice this week to work it off"; "My butt is too flat"; "You look great; have you lost weight?" "You look so skinny!"

Did you know?

3-5 minutes of talking negatively about your body is enough to increase your body dissatisfaction.

3. Adjust your mirrors

Try a mirror "diet": <http://www.psychologytoday.com/em/105892>

Decorate with body-positive quotes to challenge negative self-talk. (Pinterest is a great source for these quotes! Check out: <http://pinterest.com/unfcc/eating-disorders-and-body-image/>)

Consider how YOU are contributing to either a positive or negative body image for yourself and for your sisters. As a chapter, do your social function themes support a positive body image? Or do they encourage members to wear outfits that make them feel self-conscious, "on display" or uncomfortable?

Did you Know?

70-80% of college women express a desire to lose weight (although approximately only 25% of them are over-weight by medical standards).

Since 2000, the number of college students dieting, vomiting, or taking laxatives to lose weight has jumped from about **28** to **38%**.

YouTube Videos about "Fat-Talk"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKPaxD61lwo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CuMJybvAh8>

Chapter Education Opportunities for Prevention

Ideas to Help you Create an Educational Program for “Fat-Talk Free Week” or “National Eating Disorder Awareness Month” (February) or prior to Spring Break:

A Day Without Mirrors” or “A Day Without Mirrors and Scales”

The purpose of this event is to raise awareness about how much emphasis we put on our physical appearance or weight as a measure of our beauty and worth. It encourages us to examine more closely our inner strengths and beauties. Sorority members should cover all public mirrors and/or scales with some kind of paper (e.g., wrapping paper, tissue paper, mailing/butcher paper). Then, you have several choices: 1) in very large letters, write on the paper to describe the purpose of this event 2) decorate the paper in some way 3) leave the paper blank and give members markers to write their own positive self-affirmations or things they appreciate about their bodies and why 4) write inspirational quotes on the paper.

Generate a Top 10 Lists of “What Women Should Know About Media and Body Image”

Bring members together and ask them to divide themselves into small groups. Give each small group a poster board, paper and markers. Introduce the topic of body image by defining it, explaining how poor body image originates, media influences on body image and beauty, etc. Ask members to brainstorm in their small groups possible statements to include on their Top 10 List. (Examples might include: “Women shouldn’t participate in “fat talk” with their friends”, “Men can help women feel better about their bodies by not commenting about women’s bodies or clothing”, and “The clothing industry should institute a standard size system so that we all wear the same size, no matter which store we buy clothes at.”) Each small group should list their “Top 10” on the poster board, and the groups should read their lists out loud to the other groups. The posters should then be displayed in a high traffic area for a week or two, in order to create a constant reminder to women about positive body image. This is especially great to do before spring break!

Body Appreciation Cards

Buy LARGE blank note cards (without lines) which will become “Body Appreciation Cards”. Bring the members together as a group, and give them at least two Body Appreciation Cards, plenty of markers, stickers, glitter, etc. Ask members to “write down something you appreciate or like about your body AND WHY you like or appreciate it.” (Examples might be “I like my height because it makes me feel powerful”, “I like my eyes because they remind me of my dad’s eyes”, or “Each of my scars tells a story about me and who I am.”) Members can then read their Cards out loud, being especially sure to say WHY they like their body. (The “why” part of the activity pushes the member to look at her body in terms of its function or value in her life, rather than as an object, decoration, or something to be judged or compared to others, which are what leads to poor body image.) Next, the members or the persons in charge of this event should post all of the Body Appreciation Cards on a large bulletin board or empty wall located in a high traffic area, for an extended amount of time. (It is important for the Body Appreciation Cards to remain posted for more than a few days because this will create a constant, daily reminder to appreciate, rather than denigrate, our bodies. The display will also be a beautiful piece of artwork for your chapter!

Educate members on Body Image:

“America The Beautiful” and “America the Beautiful 2: The Thin Commandments” - <http://americathebeautifuldoc.com/atb.html>

“Miss Representation”- <http://www.missrepresentation.org/#> Beauty Mark - <http://www.beautymarkmovie.com/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=kMS4VJKekW8

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpFBKeuKf7M>

Intervening & Responding to Problems

Definition of Intervention: Paying attention to the warning signs of developing problems and taking immediate action to change the situation when a problem is identified.

While it may seem challenging to assist someone who appears to be struggling with body image, disordered eating or over-exercising, there are options for providing the member with support. We recommend if you have concerns about an individual, always consult with your campus professionals. These include your local counseling center, campus health center, chapter advisor, and fraternity/sorority campus advisor.

Responding to Eating Disorder Concerns in Member Development Committee:

Many Theta collegians and advisors are unsure how to respond in MDC when they are concerned about a member's well-being, especially when concerned about someone who appears to be struggling with their body image/eating disorder.

Before the MDC meeting:

- Contact campus professionals to get guidance on what resources are available at your campus
- Find out if mandatory assessments (professional diagnosis and treatment recommendations only) or mandatory treatment (working toward change) is available at your school
- Decide the best way to approach the member. Typically, in a situation where a member seems to be struggling with body image or disordered eating/over-exercising, your strategy should be planned out in consultation with campus professionals and with the members (close friends) involved. You may want to consider contacting the member's parents to express your concern. If you choose to do this, contact your regional officer first to receive permission and guidance.

During the MDC meeting and/or in private conversation:

- Frame the conversation: "We're concerned and want to help you". Repeat again and again, as needed.
- Your goal: Get member help AND enforce violated policies/rules (if applicable)
- Ask the member for her input

Resources: Where to Go to Get Help

Health Center/Counseling Center: Many campuses offer educational programs for student organizations on topics of body image, nutrition, disordered eating and over-exercise. You can also call or visit these professionals to learn how to best encourage a member to attend counseling if you have concerns about her. You should NEVER diagnose someone with a problem (e.g., "we think you have an eating disorder"), but you can encourage the member to talk to a health care provider about her problems and to seek treatment.

Chapter advisor: Your advisor is there to support you. Don't be afraid to use her as a resource as well. This is especially important if you are concerned about a member's eating habits and/or exercise behaviors, which can be FATAL.

Talk One-to-One is a national hotline staffed by counselors who can provide support and guidance. Call 1-800-756-3124 and identify yourself as a Theta to use this service.

Local counseling center or hospital: There are a number of community practitioners available to provide you with support and guidance.