

Female Adolescents and Body Image

Patricia Roland

Memories of a time with two friends and one of their mothers, the day was to be fun with a 45 minute ride to the mall with giggles and laughter. Upon arrival at the mall the mother asked us to stay with her until we learned the lay out of the mall. The shopping started in a clothing store. The mother beckoned us back to her and looked at one of the three giggling girls and stated “you are built with broad shoulders, like my son, could you try on this suit and let me see what it looks like”. Keep in mind that she was 15 years old and the thought of having a body like a boy ruined her day. This was the day she had been so looking forward to, shopping with the girls at the big mall. Instead it was a day that her two friends laughed at her as she put on the suit for the mother. This turned out to be a day she will never forget.

Life has its ups and downs, but when you are an adolescent the ride could be compared to a wild roller coaster ride. Adolescents are balancing pressure from their friends and family with a body that is changing due to hormonal development. Just when youth think they have something figured out, something new starts to happen either for them or for a friend. Hair starts to grow, pimples appear on the face, and tingling happens when seeing the opposite sex. Many times youth don’t understand what is happening to them.

In my search for a definition of body image I came across an article called “Body Image, Acculturation, and Substance Abuse among Boys and Girls in the Southwest” (Nieri, Kulis, Keith, & Hurdle, 2011), it gave the following definition: “the cumulative set of images, fantasies, and meanings about the body, its parts and functions,”. Body image is an integral part of self-image and forms the basis of self-representation (Nieri, Kulis, Keith, & Hurdle, 2011).

Body image is affected by many things. People can blame the media for portraying young girls in a stereotypical way of being thin and beautiful, but most young girls are affected predominately by their “mothers and female friend” (Ferguson, Munoz, Contreras, & Velasquez, 2011). The comments that are said to a young adolescent during their roller coaster teenage years can tear apart their body image.

Youth need to be able to have open communication with a person that is trusted to give them accurate information. Parents need to make sure they communicate and listen to their child. Parents cannot control what their child’s friends say, but they can control what they say. Keeping the lines of communication open with a child will be helpful when they go through tough times. Positive communication needs to be practiced by the people that influence youth the most. Seeking to clarify that all bodies are different and people need to seek to be healthy.

According to an article titled “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Peer Competition, Television Influences, and Body Image Dissatisfaction” (Ferguson, Munoz, Contreras, & Velasquez, 2011), people want to blame peer competition, television and their influences with body image dissatisfaction. When a youth had a Body Mass Index (BMI) that was seen to be in the healthy range they appeared to have a positive self-image. Adolescent youth were aware that BMI being in a healthy range was good, but if youth were out of the healthy range they had dissatisfaction with their bodies.

I appreciated this source as it showed that youth saw the importance of being healthy. Seeking to know their BMI and knowing the healthy range is a healthy way of thinking about their body. In talking to some 4-H youth, ages 13-18 years of age, I told them about the article mentioned above. They told me that they visit a website called BodyBuilding.com. It was a

good source of information on how to take care of your body. One of the youth went over to my laptop and brought up a link that told young men about the proper way to get started in weight lifting. It was interesting to see that the youth knew the importance of this website and how it has benefit for them.

Body image in adolescence can be a hard topic to discuss, but it is a worthwhile topic to have a conversation about with youth. They need to find reliable sources for information and they need to see health as the number one concern for the body. Their body is going to be with them for their whole life and it will go through many changes. Helping youth to have a positive body image is Important for their emotional success in life.

Works Cited

- Clark, S. (2009, November 24). *Six Safe & Effective Muscle-Building Tips That Every Teen Should Know!* Retrieved from <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/6-teen-muscle-building-tips.htm>
- Ferguson, C. J., Munoz, M. E., Contreras, S., & Velasquez, K. (2011). *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Peer Competition, Television Influences, and Body Image Dissatisfaction*. Retrieved from <http://www.tamtu.edu/~cferguson/Mirror.pdf>
- Nieri, T., Kulis, S., Keith, V. M., & Hurdle, D. (2011, February 23). *Body Image, Acculturation, and Substance Abuse Among Boys and Girls in the Southwest*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3043457/>