Body Image: Don’t Let “Ideal” Get in the Way of Real Health
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BIOGRAPHY:

Dr. Andrea Garber is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Adolescent Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). She is a nutritionist, with a PhD in Human and Clinical Nutrition from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Registered Dietitian (RD) from UCSF. She is the Chief Nutritionist for the UCSF Eating Disorders Program and Childhood Obesity (“WATCH”) Program. Dr. Garber is a theme leader for nutrition in the School of Medicine curriculum at UCSF and she teaches two courses in the graduate Public Health Nutrition Program at UCB. Her research focuses on obesity and eating disorders. She is currently the Principal Investigator on a study of adolescents with anorexia nervosa and has studied California’s menu labeling legislation in fast food restaurants. In the community, Dr. Garber has been a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Childhood Obesity Task Force, co-Chair of the Mayor’s Shape Up initiative, and an invited participant to Governor Schwarzenegger’s California Obesity Summit.

Selected Publications:


Body Image –
Don’t let “Ideal” Get in the Way of Real Health
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Today
• Defining body image—the evolution of thin
• How the thin ideal is perpetuated
• Does thin really mean healthy?
• Refocusing on health

Body Image
• Coined 1935, Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder,
• Perception: How do I look?
  – How one believes he/she is perceived by others and/or compares to societal standards
  – Beauty, sexual attractiveness
  – A component of self-esteem
The Ideal

- Society has long revered the human body
- However, the image of beauty is constantly changing

Pre-Civil War

- The “Wasted” Look
- Small, thin female form, corsetted waist
- Wasting associated tuberculosis made abnormal thinness popular in women’s magazines

American Beauty, Lois Banner, 1984
http://www.bryanmarcel.com/evolution-body-image-clipper-twiggy

1865-1890’s

- full-figured woman came back into style

The Gibson Girl, 1900’s

- A stronger, more independent woman emerging in 20th century society
- The “S-curve”
- Charles Gibson sketches appeared in weekly magazines for 30 yrs
The Roaring 20’s

- “Flappers”, short skirts, bobbed hair, and rebellious spirit.
- Rejected any semblance of fertility and reproductive health
- 1921: first Miss America contest, bust/waste increased
- “Plump” briefly back in style during depression

Fitness Craze 1980’s

- Brief fitness craze popularized “healthy” looking models, such as Cindy Crawford
- Fashions were less restrictive and accommodated activity

1921

- First Miss America contest
- Bust/waste ratio increased
- “Plump” briefly back in style during depression

Twiggy, 1960’s

- British model named the “face of 1966” by London’s Daily Express.
- 5 ft. 6 in, 110 pounds, measurements 31-22-32
- Believed to have set the stage for the current thin ideal
Heroine Chic 1990's

- Characterized by pale skin, dark circles, emaciated features, androgyny.
- Backlash against vibrant look of models in 1980's?
What is Today’s Ideal?

• Too soon to say
• “Superwoman” (1980’s): master of career and home
• Thinness represents power, self-control and status
• Exacerbated by “obesity epidemic”

Thin-Ideal Internalization

• Belief that thinness will bring success, acceptance and beauty
• Ultimately leads to disappointment and negative body-image
  – In adolescence, risk factor for eating disorders, other risky behaviors
  – In women, depression, anxiety, product consumption!

Dissatisfied? Buy our product!

“Society says that women must be beautiful to be worthy, and then sets unattainable standard of beauty, such that women are willing to sacrifice their health in trying to achieve the unachievable.”

How Media Use Undermines Good Nutrition and Body Image

The Teen Media Diet

8 to 18 yr-olds

- Spend 6-7 hrs media per day
- Get 8 ½ hrs of content (multi-tasking)
- 2/3 have own TV in bedroom
- Older teens: more music and magazines, less TV

Kaiser Family Foundation, "Kids & Media @ The New Millennium," 39. see www.kff.org/content/1999/1535/
Selling Food

- **Ads**: 40,000 per year, mostly for food:
  - 32% candy, 31% cereal, 9% fast food
  [Kaiser Family Foundation, Feb 2004]
- **Product placement**: 3-5 refs to food or snacks per 30 min prime time programming (e.g. Coke on American Idol)
  - 60% beverages, 72% snacks, 44% sweets
- **Cross-promotions**: using popular characters to sell products

Cross-Promotions

- Teen see/hear 400-600 ads/day on average
- More than half emphasize appearance
- 69% of girls say magazine models influence their idea of the “perfect body”
- The ultimate paradox: simultaneous promotion of junk food and obsession with thinness

It works! Teens spent over $200 billion in 2011
The Effects

The Influence of Media on Adolescent Health
Which Risky Health Behaviors are Promoted by Media?

- Sex and Sexuality
- Violence and Aggression
- Alcohol and Tobacco
- Poor body image

Media Effects: Direct & Indirect

- Violence
  - Direct: violent behavior, e.g. gang depictions reenacted
  - Indirect: suppressed fear may lead to aggression
- Nutrition
  - Direct: eating fast food (as advertised) leads to obesity
  - Indirect: poor body image and anxiety as girls (and women) are increasingly sexualized [2007, American Psychological Assn]

Media Effect on Body Image

- Internalization of the thin ideal increases risk for eating disorders
- Growing Up Today study: > 6000 girls and 5000 boys (kids of Nurse's health study)
- In those trying to emulate the “look” of media characters:
  - Significantly more weight concerns
  - More binge behavior (in girls)


TV Contributes to Weight Gain

- TV time linearly related to overweight
- Weak association with physical activity
- Less TV time attenuates weight gain in randomized controlled trial [Robinson, 1999]
Screen Time Disourages Nutrition & Activity

- Less activity
- Lowering metabolic rate below resting
- Dieting/disordered eating
- Consuming advertised/promoted foods
- Snacking while watching
  - Those who watch more TV eat more fast food, less fruit/veg, drink more soda

Kaiser Family Foundation Issue Brief, “The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity,” Feb 2004

Weight Gain Damages Body Esteen

- Low self-esteem in obese adolescents largely due to poor body image
- When control for body image, overweight girls do not differ from their normal weight counterparts with respect to certain psychosocial factors
  - e.g. achievement in school


Is Thin Really Healthy?

NYT Sept 17, 2012

In ‘Obesity Paradox,’ Thinner May Mean Sicker

A few years ago, Mercedes Carnethon, a biostatistician at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University, found herself pondering a conundrum: Obesity is the primary risk factor for Type 2 diabetes, yet sizable numbers of normal-weight people also develop the disease. Why?

In research conducted to answer that question, Dr. Carnethon discovered something even more puzzling: Diabetic patients of normal weight are twice as likely to die as those who are overweight or obese. That finding makes diabetes the latest example of a medical phenomenon that mystifies scientists. They call it the obesity paradox.

The Obesity Paradox

- Patients with chronic disease (e.g., diabetes) who are overweight or obese live LONGER than similar patients of normal weight
- Could fat be protective?
- Is there a better marker of health?

Fitness May Matters More than Fatness

Fat Can be Protective

Study Design

- Aerobics Center Longitudinal Study
- 80,000 participants, followed 1970-2005
- Clinical exams: history & physical, clinical tests, body composition, EBT and CRF
- Mortality surveillance to 2003, more than 4000 deaths
- Mail-back surveys for case finding and monitoring habits and other characteristics
Age-Adjusted Death Rates by Fitness and BMI Categories

* Results held adjusted for health status, smoking, glucose, cholesterol, & BP


Caveats

- The “Arnold effect”: muscle mass contributes to high BMI in fit men
- More smokers in the low fit/low BMI group
- Although adjusted for health status, chronic disease confounded results

RR for All-cause and CVD Mortality in Fit and Unfit ACLS Men by Body Fat Categories

*adjusted for age, exam year, smoking, alcohol, & parental history

Lee CD, Blair SN, & Jackson AS. AJCN 1999; 69:373-80

Attributable Fractions of Health Outcomes For Low Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Other Predictors, ACLS

- the estimated number of deaths due to a specific characteristic
- Based on strength of association and prevalence of the condition
**Attributable Fractions for All-Cause Mortality**

**Conclusion**
- Thinness does not equal health and longevity
- Fitness may be a more important determinant of health
- Public health, clinical care and personal focus needs to shift from weight to (include) health and activity

**How to we improve our collective body image?**

**Deflate the Ideal**

*Reduce pressure to be thin by deflating the ideal*
1. Counteract the social forces
   - Media, parents, peers
2. Cultivate Protective Skills
3. Shift focus from thinness to health

Counteract the Social Forces

- Take personal responsibility
  - e.g. Monitor waiting room reading material
- Teach/practice critical consumerism
- Provide perspective

Cultivate Protective Skills

- Coping, problem solving, decision making
- Assertiveness
- Communication
- Stress management
- Mindfulness

Resources

- Anti-diets:
  - The Solution, Laurel Mellin
  - Intuitive Eating, Ellen Tribole
- Positive Body Image
  - http://thebodypositive.org/

Shifting the Focus to Health

Self-care (nutrition, family planning) is predicated upon a good self-image

1. Set nutrition and activity (not weight) goals
2. Empower: do away with images, monitor self-talk
3. Promote body esteem, value what your body can do (not how it looks)