

STUDENT FAQ'S

Please find below answers to 'Frequently Asked Questions' we receive for Student Assignments. Please also refer to the main page for the 'Student Assignments' for links to other pages within our website (and external) that may be of assistance to your assignment which include where to find relevant statistics, fact sheets and positive body image tips.

We do encourage you to do your research prior to submitting your questions!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is body image?

A: Many people understand body image to be all about the way a person looks, or the perception they have of the way they look. More accurately, body image is 'the perception a person has of their physical self and the **thoughts** and **feelings** they experience as a result of that perception'.

Above all else body image is a feeling state and as a result means that a person can feel positively, negatively or a combination of both about the way their physical appearance. Some days will feel comfortable and positive about our body, other days not so much and that is natural and normal. It is not static and can be influenced by many things and does relate closely to a person's self-esteem.

Q: How do the media play a role in body image, or more specifically negative body image?

A: Unfortunately many of advertisements we are bombarded with in the media present and promote only one body ideal for females and for males. There is no diversity in the imagery that we see and as a result, when our own body doesn't measure up in comparison we are left feeling inadequate and dissatisfied with our own appearance or body shape.

Q: What messages do the media send us in relation to how we should look?

A: Very strong messages are sent to everyone (males and females of all ages) through the media, not only about how we should look, but also, about what we should have, own and how behave which place pressures and expectations on our society. The beauty and appearance ideals seen in the media sends the message that Thin/Muscular/Lean = Better, happier, more successful, more lovable, more attractive and overweight or 'fat' (for want of a better word) makes you undesirable, not good enough, unhappy, unlovable and unsuccessful. This is a dangerous message that is far from true which is why as a society we need to challenge these ideals and remember that people are more than just physical beings.



Q: What can the media do to promote positive body image in our society or help impact this issue in a positive way?

A: The media could really help this issue by including images that are much more diverse, which highlight the reality that body shapes and people come in all different shapes and sizes and colourings – to support the fact that beauty and attractiveness come in many different packages. Highly stylized and digitally manipulated images can also be very misleading, particularly for young people and so reducing the amount of digital manipulation used by art teams and instead using images that reflect ‘reality’ rather than ‘perfection’ would also be a really great support. If an image is highly stylized or digitally manipulated, including a statement or disclaimer that confirms the image has been enhanced can also help to educate consumers about what they’re really looking at – which is ‘art’ rather than reality.

Q: Does using ‘curvy’ body shapes promote positive body image?

Often the media will use curvy body shapes as a way to promote positive body image. Unfortunately this too is unhelpful as all it does is promoting another ‘shape’ as the beautiful or attractive one, sending the message that if your body doesn’t look this way then it’s not beautiful either. Body image is a feeling above all else and regardless of a person’s weight, shape, size or colourings they can FEEL positively and comfortable in their own skin.

Q: Are people who fit society’s beauty and appearance ideals less like to experience negative body image?

A: Every person, regardless of their physical attributes or genetics can experience negative body image because it is a feeling state which can be impacted by many things. Often people whose career relies on their appearance can be more ‘at risk’ of negative body image.

Q: Are body image problems something that every teenager experiences?

A: Body image concerns problems and issues can impact people of all ages and at different stages of their life. Any person may feel dissatisfied or uncomfortable in their own skin as a result of different experiences. Whilst adolescence is a time where people are susceptible to negative body image, it is not something that consumes all young people.



Q: Will losing weight improve a person's body confidence?

A: Making positive changes with food, exercise and attitudes can improve the feelings a person has about their whole self, including their appearance and it can positively impact on their overall health and well-being. It is important that people adopt food and exercise practices that are maintainable and realistic with 'health' as the focus rather than 'weight loss or weight management'.

The weight loss and fitness industries use advertising and marketing that make promises suggesting that the solution to a person's body dissatisfaction and life's challenges can be 'fixed' simply by losing weight – this is most incorrect and unfortunately once someone starts engaging in unhealthy practices with food and exercise (dieting, supplementation, weight loss as the focus for eating/activity) it actually can move them to a more negative/unhealthy place in body and mind.

Q: Does body image issues affect males?

A: In years gone by it was very much thought that body image issues and eating problems were just a female thing and something that rarely affected males. Sadly, due to the pressures and ideals that exist within our society more males are experiencing body dissatisfaction and engaging in unhealthy practices with food and exercise as a way to manage these negative feelings. According to the Mission Australia 2010 Youth Survey, 1 in 3 females and 1 in 4 males ranked body image as their number one personal concern.

Q: Does the media cause eating disorders?

A: Eating Disorders are serious and complex mental and physical illnesses that develop due to lots of different reasons. These include psychological, biological, environmental and socio-cultural factors (see Eating Disorder fact sheets for more information). When a person is suffering from a clinical eating disorder there is much more to it than them wanting to simply look like the images they see in the media, there are far greater and deeper psychological and social issues. The media is a significant socio-cultural factor in the development of body dissatisfaction, but for a clinical eating disorder to develop there are many more factors that contribute.

Q: Why do people create and follow 'pro-ana' and 'thinspiration' websites?

A: Sadly when people are consumed with an eating disorder or serious body image issues they are very unwell – physically and mentally. Sufferers often feel very disconnected and isolated from the people around them and these sites provide them with a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Unfortunately these sites are far from positive and are extremely toxic and damaging to a person's mental and physical health. They impair recovery and do not support the person who is unwell and often the sufferer will not realize how damaging these sites are to their recovery.

It is important that sufferers avoid these sites and surround themselves with positivity and support that can assist them on their journey to a more positive place in mind and body – which they are deserving and worthy of.

If you (a friend or loved one) requires support please contact the **Butterfly Support Line** – T: 1800 33 4673 or E: support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

