Medical Sciences 4300A: Addressing
Healthcare Misconceptions Using Scientific
Inquiry

Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry:
Community Engaged Learning

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Discovering Body Positivity & Self-Image (Gender Equality Coalition of Ontario)

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Gender Equality Coalition of Ontario Body Image and Mental Health

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INTRODUCTION

- The way people perceive their bodies (body image) is intricately linked to their physical and mental health.[1]
- Approximately 65% of young people experience body dissatisfaction.[2]
- Negative body image can lead to a variety of psychological and behavioral problems and disorders, such as body dysmorphia and eating disorders.[1]
- Disturbances in body image are often associated with mental health problems and can have severe long term health effects, such as functional impairment and elevated mortality rates.[2]
- Learning to foster a positive body image by improving self-esteem is important to prevent health consequences associated with negative body image.[3]

Project Goals:

- Provide a two-part *Discovering Body Positivity and Self-Image* workshop in partnership with the Gender Equality Coalition of Ontario to be offered to the London community.
- Allow people of different ages, races, and genders to identify negative self-concepts about body image and learn strategies to foster positive ones in a mentor-mentee setting.
- Teach participants skills to promote a positive body image and coping mechanisms for resilience.

METHODS

- **Communication** between us and co-founders, Linda and Dani, helped our group determine how to begin researching negative body image and mental health.

- **Literature review** was conducted using PubMed database. Search terms included negative body image, male versus female body image, body image and social media, coping mechanisms and resilience. and 10 sources on negative body image and mental health were compiled to inform the focus of the workshop activities.

- **Building the workshop activities** was iterative process; divided the workshop into 2 parts: part 1 focused on understanding self concepts and part 2 focused on lifelong learning about body acceptance. Each part included 2 activities. Used the sources from literature review and additional sources as inspiration for workshop exercises.

RESULTS

The workshop activities and the workbook will spark conversation about body image issues and will provide long-term coping strategies, respectively (Fig. 1 & 2). The results of the checklist will indicate the participants negative social media (Fig. 3)

Figure 1. The four reflective activities that will be delivered in our two-part *Discovering Body Positivity and Self-Image* workshop.
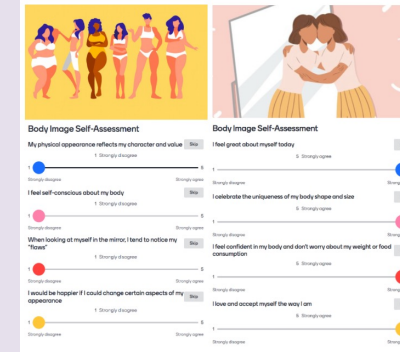

Figure 2. A self-assessment of negative body image (left) and positive body image (right) to identify and recognize current self-concepts surrounding body image.[3]

Figure 3. Social media behaviors checklist to be completed by participants. Results will be discussed between mentor-mentee.

DISCUSSION

Problem
- Body image issues are pervasive among all generations due to societal norms instilled in us by misconceptions and stigmas that encourage negative self-concepts.

Objective
- Deliverable addressed the misconceptions and stigmas perpetuated by society to provide long-term coping mechanisms to encourage resilience, foster conversation, promote self-growth, and bring awareness to a prevalent issue in the London community.

Impact in London
- We hope participants from the London community will incorporate our coping strategies into their daily lives to promote positive self-image and to encourage openness between partners.

Expected Results
- By promoting body positivity and encouraging candid conversations, we expect to see a positive change in participant's perception of their bodies. In comparing the Menti survey results between the first and second deliverable, we expect to see overall growth among the participants.

Evidence
- Local hospitals in London recognize that body image issues largely impact this community.[4] These deliverables will be presented by Gender Equality Coalition of Ontario team members to London community residents. The You vs. Me element of this deliverable aims to challenge participants' identity bias in order to encourage them to be less critical of their external appearance.[5] Participants with a negative sense of identity are more likely to struggle with constructing relationships within society therefore, the deliverables were conducted in a mentor-mentee setting to foster connectivity and enhance mental health outcomes.[6] Our Social (Me)dia activity highlights the impact of social media on perpetuating the "ideal body" image and implores participants to reflect on the degree to which social media impacts their self-worth.[7]

Long-Term Impact
- Sparking conversation about body image issues will allow participants from the London community to integrate the lessons from the deliverable into their daily routines, leading to improved mental health and body image in London.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Current Limitations
Recent construction of the deliverable impacts the size of audience. Online platforms must be used due to COVID-19, which are limited in supporting audience reactions and communication.[8]

Short-Term Future Direction
Include professional support. Gender Equality Coalition of Ontario has partnered with a mental health worker who will be implementing this deliverable. Barriers include online platforms limiting impact, and a lack of funding impacting professional recruitment.

Long-Term Future Direction
Increase outreach to a provincial level through in-person communication. Barriers include COVID-19 and a lack of funding to cover necessary expenses (travel, advertisement, and materials).

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