

COVID Body: Mirror Mirror Podcast

Covid Body

- What is COVID body?
- How has the 'meme' defined COVID body culture
- It should be normalized to gain weight in a global crisis

Covid and social media

- How healthy trends have gotten out of hand
- Toxic health i.e., only eating fruit or constantly working out all the time
- Fast fashion and how it's catered to COVID body
- Capitalism is coining on BP with products

Diet culture and COVID

- More diet pills towards children or teens. IE lolly pops or gummies
- Using health as back drop or introduction into eating disorders
- What is health??? WHY is it tied into being smaller or skinnier?

COVID and shaping beauty standards

- What do we think will change after COVID?
- Will beauty standards change or how have they?

How to practice healthy BI during COVID

- Following people who look like you
- Don't give toxic beauty influencers or give them power
- 'Your body is a body. Your body is innocent'

COVID and us

- Reflect, respond
- How has COVID affected you personally?
- How has it affected your friends?
- What trends do you see?
- Have you been a part of any trends?

Fat acceptance in COVID

- Yet again people who are bigger are the target of fake propaganda
- Why does 'being fatter' have to do with COVID?
- Rethink fatness.

Do people work out to be healthy or because they don't want to be fat

- Skinny vs Fat
- Being called fat is different

Eating and what it means (think back to conversation with community member 2)

- Food shouldn't be a war
- Eat when you're hungry
- Listen to your body cues
- What is body talk? How can we dismantle it?
- REFLECT on what diet culture has done to our lives.

Theories about why body image issues arise:

- Self-discrepancy theory states that we have the actual self, ideal self, and ought self. If we pay attention to the ideal and actual self, we can see there may be some discrepancies. The ideal self is constructed by cultural norms that create beauty standards and the actual self is how you perceive yourself. When you feel like your actual self fails to embody the ideal self-there is self-discrepancy and that may lead to attempts/behaviours to fix that discrepancy. When you mix this theory with escape theory eating disorders as a response to negative body image make sense. Escape theory shows that individuals will try to cope or escape awareness of the discrepancy between the ideal and actual self. For example, by engaging in disordered eating. Kind of like body image disruptions that Lindsay and Lexie Kite talk about in their book *More Than a Body* which results in 3 methods of coping: sinking into greater shame, hiding or adapting, or overcoming that disruption. (Filice et al., 2019; Kite & Kite, 2020)

Social media use during COVID:

- Quarantine-15 perpetuates weight stigma. Study on this that analyzed the content of these posts noted that it was very appearance focused, stereotyped weight gain as lazy, controllable, simple, and there was a dislike towards gaining weight. Images were mostly lower-weight (this is the term they used) white women. Something interesting I read in this study is that some advocate for shaming higher-weight (their words) individuals are effective for promoting weight loss (Lucibello et al., 2021).
- UK study below (second one) and lead researcher also discusses that an increase in screen time exposes us to thin/beauty ideals and decreased physical activity all combine together to create negative body image thoughts. Then add stress from COVID and this may diminish the coping skills available to overcome these negative body image thoughts (Swami et al., 2021).
- Social media content that is body positive (showing diverse bodies) has been shown to have mental health benefits in a study (viewing body positivity provides a more positive affect and greater body confidence). Instagram showed the highest rate of exposure to

body positivity but also greatest exposure to thinspiration. There was also a possibility that viewing body positivity protected against harmful effects of viewing thinspiration and fitspiration, but unclear (noted by participants that they still held a positive effect after viewing these things) (Stevens & Griffiths, 2020).

- It may be helpful to view body positivity content but... there is still limited diversity within body positivity
- There are lots of thinspiration/photoshopping seen on social media platforms; I didn't realize until now how many people I used to follow that portrayed this even if it was subtle. Since COVID and especially since this project I am taking a bit more care with who I follow. Recommend Lizzo, the I weigh podcast, Stephanie Yeboah, beauty redefined.
- Study on social media use and body image/self-esteem since COVID (2601 final sample size). There was noted to be a significant increase seen in social media use and increase in the number of women following appearance focused Instagram accounts. For some groups (Gen Z) the frequency of use was either associated with body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness and low self-esteem or just drive for thinness (Gen Y). COVID and the effects of social media use might be linked to a drive for thinness and risk for eating disorders (Vall-Roqué, 2021).
- With these studies we must be careful not to always assume causality, especially with COVID being a bit new in the research field. We have a few studies on eating disorders etc. but need to be hesitant about what all this information means and look forward to more studies in the future.
- Social media use for Indigenous peoples also holds the weight of the settler gaze; online behaviour is shaped by a feeling of being watched by an imagined audience, made up of settler colonizers (Carlson & Frazer, 2020).
- Community member 1 = Intentionality is important... social media can be an echo chamber; expand what you consume on social media... follow people who represent what you want to do in everyday life, regular life things, or people who are destigmatizing marginalized bodies or people not like you to get exposed to diverse bodies... like if you are able bodied, follow someone who is disabled so you don't just see the stereotype seen on TV

Eating disorders/mental health during COVID:

- Body image is linked to emotional, psychological, social, and physical wellbeing (Cohen et al., 2019).

- UK survey looked at changes in eating, exercise and body image since COVID. This study found that women were most likely to report changes in behaviours around food and appearance. Women and younger people reported exercising more. The study makes a good point... are they trying to stay healthy and use it as a coping strategy or appearance focused (because of a fear of gaining weight during COVID). COVID conditions are also impacting those with eating disorders either past or present and changes in body image. Also, changes in eating and body image (especially changes that were greater) were associated with greater levels of psychological distress; Potential ways for eating disorders to be exasperated during pandemic = disruption to routines, increased consumption of media, food insecurity (Robertson et al., 2020).
- Another UK study showed that feelings of COVID related anxiety and stress lead to a desire to be thin for women or muscularity dissatisfaction in men. Covid related anxiety was associated with body dissatisfaction in men and women (Swami et al., 2021)
- One study looked at posts on Reddit in eating disorder related forums which discussed Covid's effects on mental health and eating disorders. There were concerns among users about the disruption of treatment for their ED as well as issues getting support during COVID. Food availability and insecurity during COVID has also posed difficulties such as there being low supplies of safe foods or concerns with compulsive urges with the stockpiling of food. There were also issues with changes in routines and lack of coping mechanisms available such as having to join family members for meals and hearing the criticism or struggles with refraining from these behaviours when anxiety and loneliness set in... 65.9% of users studied struggles with this last piece. However, some users reported feeling less severe symptoms since the pandemic (Nutley et al., 2021).
- Unfortunately, a lot of eating disorder treatments are not overly culturally sensitive and cultural sensitivity can also mean a variety of things to different groups but it's often treated as an all-encompassing thing; eating disorder research has left out people of colour, especially women of colour and the lack of research makes it difficult to create adequate programs; for Indigenous peoples not allowing that relationship with land and food, plus years of poverty, intergenerational trauma, and the white supremacist narrative that put down Indigenous bodies all compiles to present risk factors for eating disorder behaviour; treatments have primarily been tested on white bodies (Sutriasa, 2017).
- Eating disorder treatment also typically lacks a focus on how social injustice, oppression, and historical trauma impacts eating disorders (Dekleva, 2018).

Diet culture/BMI during COVID:

- Pandemic and statements made about “obese” individuals being at higher risk... is this actually true or more fatphobia? BMI is outdated yet using BMI range obese as a health status in the pandemic even with research in this area being sparse (Raspopovic, 2020).
- Limited studies linking BMI to increased COVID risk, may be linked if coupled with heart disease (one study found this), but these health issues could also be the effect of weight bias in medical field and fat people not wanting to seek help. No evidence that losing weight makes COVID effects any better. Diet culture is having an impact on fatphobia today due to the pandemic and fear associated with the pandemic (like fear around health and the effects of COVID) (Harrison, 2020).
- A good definition of diet culture by Alexandra Hauke in her article says that diet culture is a quote “system of beliefs that encourages self-optimization through weight loss” end quote. (Hauke, 2020).
- Diet culture is a belief that weight loss will bring happiness and health
- As Lexie and Lindsay Kite discuss, ignorance is bliss when it comes to these body trends on social media; it’s better not to know about it so you don’t need to feel bad about it but also watch what you put out on social media (Kite & Kite, 2020).
- Male diet culture pushes toxic masculinity. Society offers different and narrow ways that men must diet, and they have a wider range of acceptable, but you still must find just the right diet and weight (Sole-Smith, 2020).
- Diets fail in most cases and diets can lead to a lifelong struggle with food; in a study discussed by Lexie and Lindsay Kite in their book... dieting among 14-15 year old’s was a big predictor for eating disorders (Kite & Kite, 2020).
- We see diet culture all over social media and with increased social media use during COVID this is concerning. People are capitalizing on other people’s vulnerabilities, which are heightened at the moment.
- Community member 2 = diet culture and weight were so ingrained that it led to an intense fear of gaining weight and therefore issues with body image; but it can be hard to realize that this is going on
- Community member 2 = there are certain foods that are “diet culture approved” ... example of Starbucks and Arbonne (restricting food intake)
- Community member 2 = If I have to gain weight it’s for a good reason; mentioned set point weight which is the weight your body normally hovers around

- Community member 2 = short explanation of intuitive eating is that you are listening to your body/hunger cues; anybody that wants to try to get to a point of peace with their body this is the feedback from the community member = it takes a long time to adjust, it takes trial and error, but don't give up, it's possible to eat your ice-cream... food does not need to control your life
- Community member 2 = "I'm not eating to control my body" ... I'm eating for my internal needs
- Community member 2 = recommended "fuck it diet" book and food psych podcast
- Community member 1 = People mistook COVID as a time to be productive, but it has been traumatic for all of us, trauma does not equal productivity
- Community member 1 = With COVID we have not been in the same spaces, some of which have been positive and some of which engage in negative body talk and engaging in a relationship with others means putting down your body like at work or school... if you come across this body talk walk away or say you can't have the conversation or don't want to participate in the conversation; be intentional with who you surround yourself with or who you hear messages from... if you surround yourself with body accepting people you can hold each other accountable

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