

Steps to a Better Body Image

Avoid buying health, fitness, and fashion magazines that encourage unhealthy ideals. Love your body, not theirs.

Recognize that bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. There is no one 'right' body size.

Remind yourself that your body size, shape, or weight does not determine your worth as a person, or your identity as a lesbian.

Be aware of the negative messages you tell yourself about your appearance.

Focus on qualities in yourself that you like that are not related to your appearance.

Find friends who are not overly concerned with weight or appearance.

Look critically at the ads that push the 'body perfect' message. Work not towards a 'perfect' female body, but rather one that is healthy.

Demonstrate respect for women who possess body types or who display personality traits that do not meet cultural standards for beauty.

Community Resources

For information and support, contact:

The Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity
#201 - 320 21st Street W.
Saskatoon, SK S7M 4E6
tel: 306.665.1224 fax:306.665.1380
www.avenuecommunitycentre.ca
info@avenuecommunitycentre.ca

Bridgepoint Centre for Eating Disorders
P.O. Box 190
Milden, SK S0L 2L0
tel: 306.935.2240 fax: 306.935.2241
bridgepoint@sk.sympatico.ca

Vicki Herman, M.Ed., Registered Psychologist
Student Counseling Services
University of Saskatchewan
Mental Health Outreach Coordinator
91 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, S7N 0W0
tel: 306.966.4920 fax: 306.966.7059

University of Saskatchewan Students' Union Pride Centre
Rm 104 Memorial Union Building, on campus.
tel: 306.966.6615 fax: 306.6978

Youth Resource Centre —Mental Health Resources
(must be under 18yrs of age)
311 - 20th St. E.
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W8
tel: 306.655.4900

Pamphlet adapted from:



Body Image & Lesbians

Information
& Resources



Body Image and Lesbians

Body image is emerging as a serious health concern in the gay men's community. However, research into lesbians and body image has produced confusing results with no clear indication of whether or not there are emerging issues we need to focus on. Regardless the outcome of these studies one thing we can definitely conclude is that lesbians & bisexual women are not free from societal pressures to be thin or to fit into an ideal body type within their society and culture. This pamphlet examines some of the preliminary results of studies around lesbians and body image.

Pressures Around Body Image

Some research studies claim that lesbians put less value on weight and appearance in determining attractiveness which they contribute to feminist ideologies and the reduced need to seek approval from men. This appears to be supported by the fact that gay men and heterosexual women are most prone to having eating disorders and to developing body image problems. In a few studies

where they have looked at perceived body weight and level of fitness lesbians more accurately perceived their weight and fitness compared to heterosexual women. Lesbians also seem to be significantly heavier and view the ideal weight for women to be higher than heterosexual women do.

Eating Disorders

When it comes to eating disorders it has been difficult to determine whether or not lesbians suffer from anorexia and bulimia at different rates than heterosexual women. In a study conducted in 1994 it was concluded that 14% of heterosexual women and 4.2% of lesbians report having an eating disorder. Other studies could not find a noticeable difference between women of different sexual orientations in regards to eating disorders. When looking at binge eating studies they have indicated that lesbian are more likely to engage in binge eating or have no significantly different rates than heterosexual women.

Gender Roles

It has been argued that gender roles and gender identification are better indicators of body image issues and disorders than sexual orientation.

Regardless of your biological sex, individuals who identify as feminine have a greater prevalence of eating disorders than people who identify as masculine. Several studies have been conducted examining the feminine versus masculine theory with mixed results that support and discredit gender roles as an indicator of body image issues.



Health and Body Image

There is nothing wrong with wanting to look good, have a toned body and to be in good health. Body concerns only become unhealthy when the need to change your appearance begins to interfere or undermine your social relationships, your performance at school or work, or create emotional distress (anxiety, depression) and/or physical health problems.