Student Wellness Centre | McMaster University

SWC presents...

WOW, SAME.

Real stories from Real people.

A collection of anonymously-shared stories about body image and sexual experiences.

Unfiltered and brazenly honest, these disclosures let you know you're not alone in your experiences.

PROMPT #1

What influences the way you view your body and why?

"Family always telling me to eat less and comparing my body to others."

"Definitely my family, growing up in a South Asian household the pressure on body image is immense."

"Movies, Instagram, and worst of all... pornography."

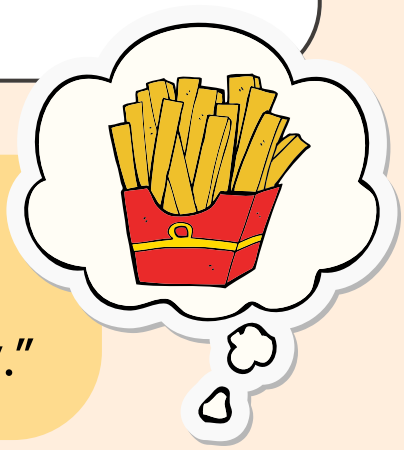
"People that look like me (ethnicity, skin color and body shape) since I can "relate" more."

"Seeing women with a similar body type to me in person and online & realizing how beautiful they are."

"Seeing celebrities at award shows and in music videos dedicated to rating people's appearances and criticizing every little part of completely beautiful people."

"Social media, because it advertises only the best moments of people rather than a typical moment."

"Peers: constantly surrounded by people who monitor the amount they eat and criticize how little/how much I eat -- makes me insecure that I'm eating too little or too much."



"Diet culture and athletic performance/fitness heavily influence the way I view my body."

PROMPT #2

What are some sources of media that you feel provide a positive depiction of body image and why?

"I love female content creators who show off the very real and unfiltered side of themselves. It's so refreshing to look at someone so beautiful show their armpit hair and say "same here girl!""

"Heated Rivalry, is that crazy to say? It was just refreshing to see people of colour, have sex, that it's normal, and even appealing."

"I've personally yet to find (mainstream) media that I feel completely represented in. I find media in general has been more inclusive with showing a variety of body types, but not always necessarily in a positive way. I think some recent TV shows tend to have more positive depictions of body image."

"Not a lot. Stay off social media. Look for places and people who have been through it, who are educated, and who hold opposing views to mainstream society..."

"I like dieticians content especially, because they don't stigmatize ANYTHING related to food. They talk about food in the most neutral way possible. If you genuinely do want to lose weight, they provide healthy ways to do it."

"There are some influencers who do but it also does feel like a money grab. Very specific scenes in shows try to get at this message. Even seeing plus sized and diverse featured people in advertisements and in magazines is nice."

"Certain social media influencers post more "realistic" pictures here and there to remind us that social media is an illusion! I appreciate all the post-meal selfies, the zoom ins on blemished skin, and the reminders not to take what we see seriously."

"Constantly seeing beautiful actors and social media influencers definitely makes me feel as though I need to look like that as well."

"I look for anti-diet podcasts (Burnt Toast is a favourite) on body liberation, especially with the goal of dismantling white supremacy and capitalism; it's hard to hate yourself when you frame your existence as an act of political resistance"

PROMPT #3

How would you describe your relationship with your sexuality and body image?

"Don't care about either! I have two legs that walk me to places, two arms that lift and move, and fingers and toes work as intended. Everything I have functions! What a gift!"

"Inconsistent, can be positive or negative depending on the day and how much social media use."

"I'd say I have good days and bad. I can usually catch myself when I think in ways that are unhealthy, but if I'm around media or people who comment on my body (even in a positive way), I "allow" myself to think unhealthy thoughts. As for sexuality, I'm still kind of figuring myself out. I feel like sexuality is a spectrum and I fall into an "almost straight" category if that makes sense?"

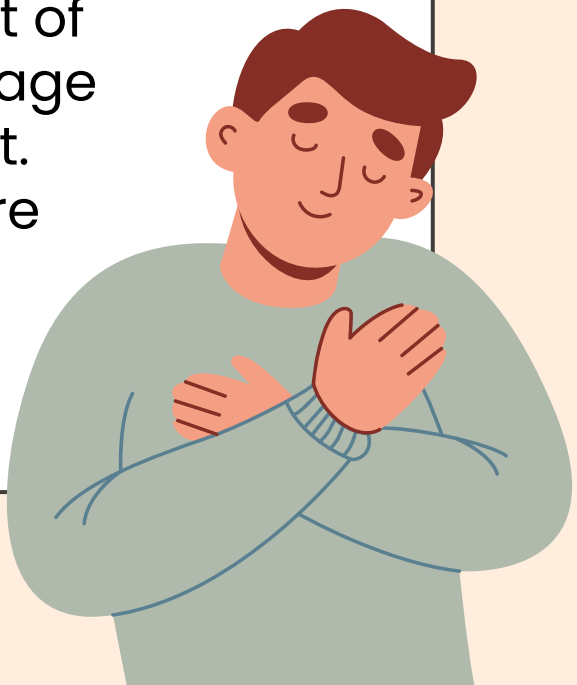
"I find that I struggle to even allow myself to think freely about pleasure as a woman and due to the stigma surrounding it in my culture. I also recognize I have really low self-esteem and this is largely due to a previous interactions and comments I've had on my body. I've struggled with being chubby a lot of my life and find myself always feeling like I'm taking too much space and only really feeling safe when I'm by myself or with the select people I trust."

"As someone who didn't realize they were queer until later in life I think my body image has changed after realizing I wasn't straight. I still don't love to label my sexuality. I think my body image has fluctuated depending on how I view my sexuality. I'm working on trying to keep my body image more positive through queer media consumption and staying away from media that is harmful to me."

"I am comfortable with my sexuality and body. Any insecurity I have with my body I use as motivation to take action. However, I am also happy with who am I now and really try to centre my focus on being healthy and happy."

"It's okay, actually I would say it's great!"

"I am very fortunate to have a good relationship with my sexuality and body image in general. It is not really on the list of priorities for me and I find that when I am struggling with any aspect of my life, sexuality and body image are usually not the causes of it. Of course there are days where I don't feel very good but I think that is normal for everyone."



"My sexuality is a bit complicated and in therapy for past trauma. I 'm working to find out what I want and trying not to take on too much shame :) My body image is pretty abysmal, so I'm working on that too."

"Exploring sexuality and sexual experiences has improved my body image a lot. My partner doesn't map any gendered expectations, or really any gender at all, onto my body. They just see my body as mine, and beautiful, which has helped me to feel that my body is mine and not one belonging to a gender I don't identify with."

"I'm in a place of acceptance now. I had a long period of self hatred towards my sexuality, but now I am realizing that sexuality is normal (we literally wouldn't exist without it!)."

"I feel okay in my body at times, but when I am insecure I feel less in tune with my sexuality. When my boyfriend sees me, I feel a lot better about my body and more confident in sexuality."

"Flexible, some days is hard and feel ugly. Other days when my own depiction is comparable to others or including other versions of myself, then I'm happy. Sexuality no issues."

"Overall pretty decent but mixed. I had body image issues in the past but have recently realized my body is hotter when I have enough energy (due to eating enough) and my thighs are actually okay."

"I am exploring my sexuality now more than ever. I have a loving, supportive partner who I can experience new and exciting things with. This has helped my body image tremendously, though it doesn't fully take away those negative thoughts associated with my body. It certainly helps, and I'm learning to love myself more each and every day."

"I'm in a place of acceptance now. I had a long period of self hatred towards my sexuality, but now I am realizing that sexuality is normal (we literally wouldn't exist without it!)."

"I love my body. To be fair it's never been a huge source of insecurity for me because of my amazing friends and family. In terms of sexuality I have definitely struggled a bit more with it, being queer has been such a huge part of my identity for so long. I lived in a small town in the countryside where all my classmates were straight and white, and I was friends with the only other coloured girl and the one gay guy. So I've always been surrounded by queer people, in love with being queer and found family in the gay community. However when I started university I ended up dating a man, I love him to death, however 2 years into our relationship now I feel I've lost that identity I held so close for so long. But I guess everything is a journey and I hope to connect with my queer roots more this year!"

PROMPT #4

What's one thing you wish everyone knew about sexual experiences and body image?

"That there is always someone who will try to put you down for how you look, but their voice is one among millions. At the end of the day, the people who truly care about you, which should include yourself, see you as a whole person, not just your sexuality or physical appearance."

"Literally nothing happens the way you think it will. Your sexual experience will occur differently than you think and there's no one "right" way to have sexual relationships so don't expect everything will be just like movies and tv. Same with body image, your body WILL change, and you won't always be happy with how you look or your perception of yourself. It's really hard to get over this, but realizing you're deserving of love and happiness regardless of what your body looks like will change your life."

"Your body is normal. Your body will change - it's inevitable - and you will be so much happier once you stop fighting that fact. You are not alone."

"Your relationship with your sexuality and body image is dynamic, it is not always going to be good and that's okay. Everyone is growing and learning new things about themselves and those lows that you may experience about you sexuality and body image and just small setbacks that will lead to growth."

"Sex drive doesn't determine your value. High or low, you're normal and you deserve to have as much sex as what makes you happy."

"Body image can taint your sexual experience; however, body image and confidence is often based on your own perception, so it is important to do what you need to do to stay confident, as long as it is healthy."

"It's okay to be different. It makes you unique!"

"Sex is not dirty, wrong or bad. Sex can be such an empowering thing if you find the right person to do it with. In a healthy relationship, your partner uplifts you, encourages you and loves you. Suddenly, you don't care if you have rolls, scars or stretch marks. That is truly a beautiful feeling. Find someone with your same views and values and make sure it is someone you TRUST. Safe sex is great sex."

"It's a self awareness path to look within. Body image is hard and every day is an experience that needs compassion and patience."

"I think something most people forget is that there is a lot of expectations on what sexual experiences should look and feel like, and those are very sensationalized & unrealistic. Pleasure should come from comfort, trust and consent. Regarding body image, I think we forget that we can be our own harshest critic about ourselves regarding our body and others are typically less judgemental and harsh than we think."

"Don't compare yourself to someone's sexual experiences and body image."

RESOURCES

Student Wellness Centre (PGCLL 2nd Floor)
905-525-9140, ext. 27700

- Offers medical care (including STBBI and pregnancy testing), counselling services, and health promotion programming.

Student Health Education Centre (MUSC 202)
shec@msu.mcmaster.ca

- Provides peer support and free health supplies (such as, pregnancy tests and condoms).

Pride Community Centre (MUSC 221)
pride@msu.mcmaster.ca

- Peer support for all 2STLGBQIA+ and questioning students

Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office
905-525-9140. ext. 27581

- Offers consultation, support, and education in-person, by phone, or video call.