

**Research Question:** What messages do my peers (teens/young adults) feel they hear from society about what foods are good/bad and how to eat? Do they subscribe to what society tells them or have their own beliefs? Do they feel their own relationship with food and their body is affected by these messaging?

Ask for age and gender as well so I can get the demographics of my responses.

**Hypothesis:** My hypothesis is that most of my peers hold internalized opinions about good/bad foods based on messaging from diet culture, but they don't subscribe to or feel too affected by these messages personally.

**Research Method:** A survey through social media.

I will post a series of questions on my Instagram story for my followers to respond to if they choose. I will first post a consent agreement to which they can either agree or disagree. Then I will post a combination of open-ended questions and multiple choices asking what messages they've received from society about what to eat or specific foods that are good/bad, their own feelings on these messages, and how they feel it affects them.

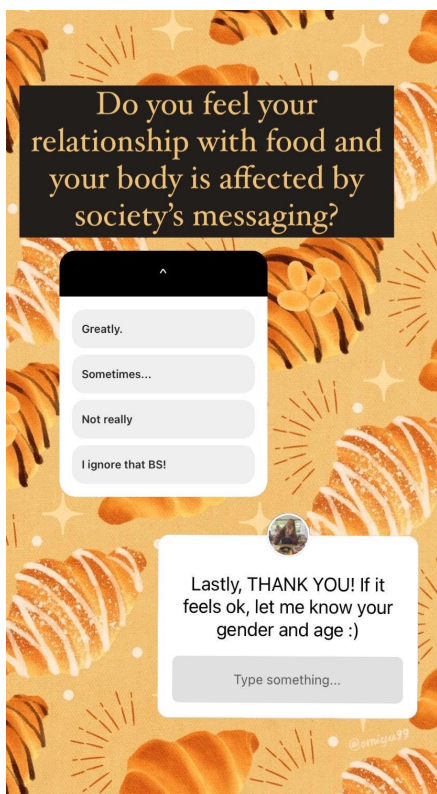
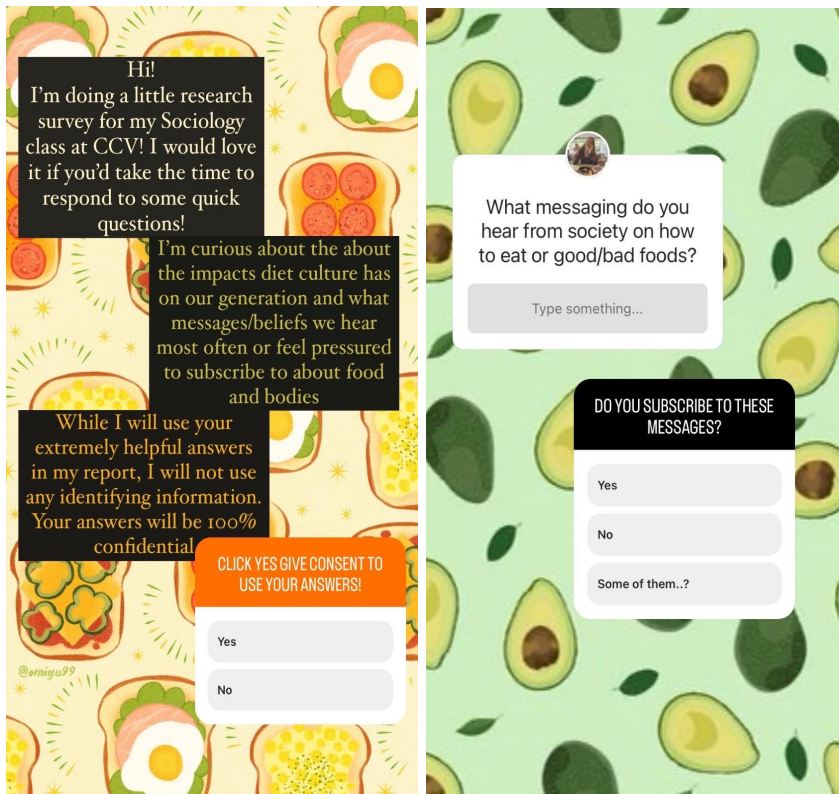
**Research:**

- Time Frame: the time frame will be 24 hours because it will be posted on my story on Instagram, so that is how long it will be visible to my followers.
- # of Subjects: however many people choose to respond. I have about 400 followers but only about 150 or so usually see my stories and I assume a lot less will actually respond. I'd like to get a minimum of 10-15 responses, more if possible.

\*The responses will be open to only my followers so this research will be targeting a specific group of people. I have a private Instagram so my followers are only people I know and have approved. They are all pretty much friends from Vermont and surrounding states that I know and are primarily between the ages of 13-21. I will use my data from this research to generalize to teenagers/young adults but not really other age groups...Depending on who responds, it might also be people primarily from the east coast who are white, and female-identifying because that is the majority of my followers, but I'll have to see who responds before I decide who I can generalize this to.

**Data:**

What I posted on my stories:



**Results:**

- I got 12 responses which is right in the range of what I wanted!
- 100% of people gave consent for me to use their answers

**Question 1: What messaging do you hear from society on how to eat or good/bad foods?**

*"More=bad. Less calories is best. Fats bad. Fruit is unhealthy."*

*"Fats of any kind are bad"*

*"Avoid excessive sugar, highly processed foods, and straight carbs."*

*"Good=fruit and veggies. Bad= eating out a lot, eating things with sugar..."*

*"Eat in moderation and try to consume healthy foods."*

*"It's always about eating "better" or "less." It's prescribed as though we should all eat the exact same."*

*"To eat lots of fruits and veggies and stay away from sugar."*

*"Lots of messages. I often see lots of recipes for specific diets like keto."*

*"What foods are considered bad and how people talk about needing to workout after eating a "bad" food."*

*"Don't eat too much. If you eat "bad" foods you should feel bad about it."*

*"Eat little or no carbs/sugar etc. at all and that's seen as healthy. As long as something has little calories, it's healthy to eat even if it's super processed."*

**Question 2: Do you subscribe to these messages?**

Yes - 7%

Some of them - 80%

No - 13%

**Question 3: Do you feel your relationship with food/body is affected by society's messaging?**

Greatly - 50%

Sometimes - 30%

Not really - 15%

I ignore that BS - 5%

**Question 4: Gender/age \*All between the ages of 15-18\***

Female - 9

Male - 2

Trans (female to male) - 1

## **Summary:**

My survey was an amazing success in my opinion! I had never really done anything like this before and I was so happy to have people responding and engaging with my questions. I got about the amount of responses I was hoping for and everyone gave really thoughtful answers. After the survey was closed, I reached out to the people individually and just started a little dialogue about the harmfulness of diet culture because I felt since I was talking about a topic that can really hurt some people, I should just make it clear that I am available to talk about these things. This started some really awesome conversations.

My responses were majorly female and from people in their mid-teens, though there were a few male answers which did not differ really from the female answers. Since this research was so small and unprofessional I don't think I want to think about it as being generalized to anyone because it was such a small group of people from the same area so the results could vary drastically if say, I did this survey on highschoolers in Florida. I think this was just a really cool thing to do and get some insight on how my peers feel about diet culture.

My original hypothesis was that my peers would have internalized ideas that they'd heard from diet culture, but that those messages didn't personally affect them too much. Question 1 results showed that the first part of my hypothesis was true. Everyone had heard messages from society that they could easily recall about food/ways to eat. My research however could be flawed because of the factor of non-response bias. It could be that a great majority of people DON'T feel that they have heard messaging from diet culture and that is why they didn't respond. If I was to repeat this experiment I might put a Yes/No question box first, asking if they had experienced any messaging about food/eating from diet culture at all.

Questions 2 & 3 showed results that disagreed with the second part of my hypothesis. I had originally assumed that the majority of my peers would not subscribe to or feel that their lives were largely affected by diet cultures messaging. I had believed that they would experience the messaging, but not take it too much to heart and honestly just move past it. My results however showed that my peers feel differently. 87% said that they subscribe to some or all of diet culture messaging, whereas only 13% said that they didn't. 80% said that their relationship with food and their body was somewhat or greatly affected by diet culture messaging and only 20% said that it did not really affect them.

These results are a great eye-opener I think for all of us to really become aware of how deep the messaging about what to eat and how our bodies should look goes. My generation is already saying they are affected by this messaging which can lead to really harmful effects on mental

and physical health. The percentage of people developing eating disorders has increased by more than 100% in the last decade and people continue to increasingly struggle with mental health challenges in our society as things like diet culture make it harder and harder to feel happy existing, simply as who you are.

I posted another story on my instagram after my research questions that said:

*“The diet culture we live in SUCKS! It is not your fault if you struggle with food or body image because we live in a society that idealizes certain body types and oppresses those who don’t fit the standard. Diet culture is constantly trying to tell us what to eat and demonizing certain foods while elevating others. This is a system of oppression and control which perpetuates harmful stigmas and myths and pushes us to lose our own self-trust and self-worth. I invite you to try and reject diet culture when you can and try to bring some compassion and appreciation for yourself and others for existing in all our unique ways.”*

I think this sums up how I feel about diet culture and I feel passionately about helping create change to dismantle diet culture and stop the spread of toxic messaging so that we can cultivate more positive and healthy relationships with food and our bodies.