

“Celebrate Your Body and Food”: A Body Size Acceptance and Presence of Eating Project

Kathy Menkhaus, B.S., Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Wyoming, PO Box 3354, Laramie, WY 82071-3354; Tel: (307) 766-4145; Fax: (307) 766-5686

INTRODUCTION

The “ideal” body size and shape for teenagers and college students, as portrayed by media messages, is unrealistic for most individuals. As young women and men strive to develop or maintain this perceived ideal body type, unhealthy eating patterns and attitudes may develop. “Celebrate Your Body and Food” is a display and presentation encouraging teenagers and young adults to critique the health consequences and reality of maintaining the ideal body size and shape portrayed by the media. Additionally, this project challenges individuals to recognize the benefits of food and examine the relationship between food perceptions and self-image.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of “Celebrate Your Body and Food” are to challenge individuals to (1) accept their own body size and that of others, (2) respect the gift of food, (3) connect positive self-image to healthy eating behaviors, and (4) include physical activity as part of a daily lifestyle.¹

IMPLEMENTATION

This project is intended for teenage/young adult audiences. It includes a presentation involving discussion and activities, a bulletin board display, and a method of evaluation. Presentations were directed toward high school students in a classroom setting, whereas displays were directed toward college students at a local university. The content of the presentation and display could be adapted for younger or older audiences.

Presentation. The presentation emphasizes three Wellness IN Wyoming principles¹: respect for food and acceptance of body size and shape are strongly

linked, positive self-image can help motivate and maintain healthy eating behaviors, and enjoying and valuing physical activities is important to daily lifestyle.

The presentation begins with a discussion regarding personal eating habits and media messages about food. Students are given a “gift of food,” such as dried fruit, licorice, or an orange slice, that is wrapped in aluminum foil. Once the participants have attempted to guess the contents, they open and slowly eat the scrumptious treat. This activity allows students to discuss and enjoy the aromas, textures, flavors, colors, and sounds the food provides.

Next, students identify media messages portraying “ideal” body images and advertisements reflecting messages of body size diversity. Students discuss their reactions to being compared to ideal body images and are challenged to accept that such images are unrealistically attainable by most individuals.

To attempt to develop the “perfect” body promised by the captivating diet industry of drugs and fads, individuals are willing to jeopardize their health. Students discuss the negative consequences of dieting²: decreased energy and strength, increased self-criticism and criticism of

Celebrate Your Body and Food!

Respect for food and acceptance of body size and shape are strongly linked. Positive self-image can help motivate and maintain healthy eating behaviors.

Respect Food

- R** Reclaim the pleasure of eating and become aware of the variety and quantity of food your body really needs and desires.
- E** Eat *slowly* and limit distractions while eating.
- S** Strive to take control of eating by listening to hunger and satiety cues.
- P** “Pleasure” senses by taking advantage of the various smells, textures, sounds, appearances, and tastes of food. Take pleasure in eating.
- E** Expose yourself to a variety of foods. No foods are “forbidden”—if eaten in moderation.
- C** Challenge yourself to respect and enjoy the gift of food.
- T** Treat yourself to an “ideal” meal. Where will you eat? What foods will be served? What aromas, sounds, and sights will surround you?

Accept Your Body

- A** Assert: “It is with great joy that I share with you my personal discovery that my body is not my enemy and that your bodies are not my competition.” (Marius Griffin, Body Size Acceptance Speaker, 1993)
- C** Celebrate your body. Respect it. Accept it. Take advantage of all it offers—the ability to dance, run, laugh, write, draw, cook . . .
- C** “C” your body as a functional instrument rather than as a decorative ornament.
- E** Every body, regardless of size or shape, deserves acceptance and recognition.
- P** Participate in physical activities for the joy of feeling your body move.
- T** Talk back to messages that focus on unrealistic body images as symbols of success and happiness.

Figure 1. Bulletin board display content.

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others, disruption of normal eating resulting in overeating and eating disorders, and encouragement of food and weight obsessions. Individuals should develop healthy eating patterns, rather than dieting, and should participate in daily physical activities.

To conclude the presentation, students are left with this message:

Developing acceptance for every body, regardless of size and shape, is challenging and requires time and encouragement. One step at a time . . . challenge size prejudice; accept that there is no ideal body size, shape, or weight that every individual should strive to achieve; respect food as a gift; realize that positive self-image relates to healthy eating behaviors; and exercise daily to contribute to optimal health.

Bulletin board display. The display consists of messages about respect for food and body size acceptance; each message helps to spell “respect” and “accept” (Fig. 1).

Evaluation. To assess the presentation and display, participants were encouraged to answer two questions: “What does the message ‘accept your body and respect food’ mean to you?” and “How has this display or presentation affected your perceptions about your body and food?” The participants’ answers were copied on the back of laminated mat board and assembled to create a gigantic puzzle with the message “Celebrate Your Body and Food” (see Table 1 for instructions to create the puzzle). The completed puzzle, as shown in Figure 2, was displayed, and individuals who viewed it were encouraged to remove pieces and read students’ comments.



Figure 2. Puzzle image.

Table 1. Instructions to create puzzle.

<p>Supplies 2 mat boards Marker Glue Knife Lamination 1"-square self-stick Velcro pieces</p> <p>Instructions 1. Design and print image with message “Celebrate Your Body and Food.” Enlarge to 2’ by 3’ (size may vary). 2. Cut two pieces of mat board to match size of enlarged image. 3. Glue the image to one piece of mat board. Laminate front and back. 4. Cut out the puzzle; number pieces on back from left to right, top to bottom. 5. Attach Velcro (both front and back parts) to the center back of each puzzle piece. 6. Starting at top left corner of the second mat board, stick puzzle piece #1 to the mat board. 7. Once all puzzle pieces are attached, remove each so one side of Velcro is attached to the board and one side is attached to the puzzle piece. 8. Reattach puzzle pieces to the mat board and outline each with a marker to create a puzzle.</p>

IMPACT ON AUDIENCE

Student evaluations indicated that 25% of the presentation participants believe that “ideal” body images portrayed by the media are unrealistically attainable by most individuals. In addition, 28% of the presentation participants wrote that participating in daily exercise and developing long-term healthy eating behaviors is important. Eighty-three percent of comments from bulletin board viewers reflected the beliefs that individuals must realize that there are many acceptable body types (not simply one ideal body type), and everyone should celebrate and respect both food and their bodies. Students wrote that the bulletin board display made them consider the importance of eating a variety of foods and the importance of eating slowly—without the distractions of studying or watching television. Examples of participants’ comments from the presentations and bulletin board displays are shown in Table 2.

NOTE

For a complete presentation outline and additional handouts, please contact the author.

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2. Berg FM. Women afraid to eat: breaking free in today’s weight-obsessed world. Hettinger, ND: Healthy Weight Network, 2000.

Table 2. Participants’ comments.

Presentation	Display
<p>“We need to listen to what our body is telling us. Like when you’re hungry, it’s okay to eat, and when you’re full, stop eating.”</p>	<p>“Understand your body type . . . don’t force it to be something it isn’t . . . see food as something to be enjoyed and needed by your body . . . not to be denied or overused.”</p>
<p>“Be happy with the way you are. Don’t try to be perfect like the magazines and televisions show you.”</p>	<p>“We should accept who we are and be happy with out individuality. Food is a gift, as our body is a gift.”</p>
<p>“I think the message should read respect your body and accept food!”</p>	<p>“Perhaps I should not eat in front of the television as often or eat as fast as I have been.”</p>
<p>“I now know that all those pictures of skinny girls aren’t really what I need to look like, and I can make a statement to people using something other than my looks.”</p>	<p>“Simply being born gives me the right to use food and the responsibility to care for my body. I cannot care for my body if I don’t accept it for what it is and what it can do. Respecting food is difficult in a society of fast food, which prevents us from seeing at what cost it is produced.”</p>

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