PROMOTING BODY RESPECT IN YOUTH: EXAMPLES FROM ICELAND
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What is body image?
◦ Our attitudes, feelings, thoughts and perceptions about our body
◦ Not only appearance but our lived experience of being in a body and how it functions
◦ The value we place on these things matters more than how satisfied or unsatisfied we are with them
◦ Our body image affects how we think, feel, behave and communicate with each other throughout the lifespan

The development of body image
◦ Children become aware of sociocultural norms and expectations very early in life
◦ They want to fulfill the standards of their society
◦ Fat children less likely to be chosen as playmates
◦ 40-50% of girls between 7 and 11 years old would like to have a thinner body
◦ Body image tends to worsen with age
◦ "Girls’ body image on average worse than boys’"

Negative body image is a risk factor
◦ Eating disorders
◦ Binge eating
◦ Unhealthy eating habits
◦ Lack of physical activity
◦ Smoking
◦ Increased sexual risk
◦ Depression
◦ Self-harm and suicidal behavior

Unhealthy Weight Loss Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skipping meals</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet pills</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
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Superman from 1940 to 2010

Disney princesses have bigger eyes than waists...

Thin is happy, fat is sad...
Children and Weight Stigma

- Content analysis of popular children’s films from 2006 to 2010 showed 70% contained negative comments and jokes about being fat
- Analysis of animated cartoons found difference in the way thinner and fatter characters were displayed in terms of intelligence, physical attractiveness, and the display of prosocial and antisocial behaviors
- Klein & Shiffman, 2005
- Consistent anti-fat bias among preschool children
  - associate a story’s villain more readily with a larger figure
  - attribute more negative and fewer positive characteristics to pictures of heavier children
  - indicate less preference for higher weight peers as playmates
  - Dornano et al., 2012; Velez, Kubitz, Hoehn-Olehnhoff, Laurene & Musher-Eizenman, 2011; Spiel et al., 2012

Weight teasing and bullying

- Higher weight youth often targets of teasing and bullying
- Fatness has been identified across multi-national samples as the most common reason for teasing and bullying
- Puhl, Loth, O’Brien, Luedicke, Potam et al., 2015
- Weight-related bullying most problematic among students according to a U.S. national study among over 5,000 teachers and education support professionals
- A study among 1,500 adolescents found that 84% witnessed a higher weight peer being teased in school
  - 2 in 3 had observed them being ignored, avoided, excluded from social activities, or negative rumors spread about them
  - Most had witnessed verbal threats, teasing during physical activities, and physical harassment toward higher weight peers
  - Puhl, Luedicke & Heuer, 2011

Health Impact of Weight Stigma

- Chronic stress factor
- Depression, low self-esteem, negative body image
- Disordered eating and binge eating
- Less interest and engagement in physical activity
- Bias and discrimination in health care settings
- Prejudice and discrimination increase risk for severe health problems, e.g. hypertension, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer and atherosclerosis
  - Weight gain, abdominal, metabolic syndrome
  - Puhl & Heuer, 2010; Puhl & Suh, 2015
Body Activism in Iceland

- 2006: 1st Icelandic International No Diet Day
- 2007: The concept líkamsvírðing - body respect - is born
- 2009: Iceland’s first body-positive blog & facebook page
- 2012: Association for Body Respect founded
- 2012: Fight to include weight as a protected category in Iceland’s new constitution
- 2014: 1st Annual Body Respec Day
- 2015: National report on weight bias
- 2016: Iceland’s capital city of Reykjavik includes weight as protected category in its human rights policy
- 2016: Human Beings – Not an Epidemic campaign

Healthy life is about healthy behavior – not the “right” type of body

Marilyn Wann: Activist & writer

FAT! SO?

YAY!
I STAND for people’s right to feel good in their own skin

I STAND for a healthy body image, for myself, for my daughter and everybody else

I STAND against bullying

I STAND for being able to see beauty in everything

I STAND for being able to look in the mirror without a single negative thought popping into your head…
I STAND up for myself. I am perfect the way I am.

Body Respect Day in 2014
The Directorate of Health in Iceland manages universal health promoting efforts such as “Health Promoting Schools”, “Health Promoting Workplaces” and “Health Promoting Communities”.

Emphasis on body respect and reducing harm associated with negative body image, body shaming, weight teasing and bullying.

Guidelines for Health Promoting Schools include:
- Promoting healthy body image
- Focusing on health rather than weight in school health promoting efforts
- Having effective anti-bullying strategies in place
- Developing a positive school ethos that celebrates body diversity as part of human diversity

All of Iceland’s upper secondary schools, half of primary schools and lower secondary schools, and a growing number of preschools, body respect in Reykjavik’s Human Rights Policy

- Body discrimination declared a form of social injustice
- Weight discrimination prohibited in the city’s workplaces
- City workplaces required to create respectful atmosphere free of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination related to body build, appearance and type
- City activities are to avoid encouraging negative attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices or discrimination in connection with build, appearance or body type

Schools are required to take effective action against weight and appearance related teasing and bullying

- Body types and appearances should be discussed in a positive and unprejudiced manner.
- Avoid materials presenting negative stereotypes regarding body build, weight or appearance.
- Ensure that school health promotion efforts are free of negative messages about body weight or appearance “as it is important for children and youth to feel that they are welcome and respected on their own premises.”

Reykjavik City, 2016.

Body Respect as Children’s Rights

- A welcoming environment for body diversity is necessary for all children to feel included as valued members of their society.
- Weight stigma needs to be recognized as a form of social injustice and actions taken to confront it in all segments of society.
- The right to feel safe, respected and at home in one’s body should be regarded among the most fundamental of children’s rights.
Thank you!
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