

Fat

TEACHERS GUIDE

LESSON 1

Ideal Weight, Cultural Stereotypes, and Eating Disorders

Introduction:

This lesson helps students to explore the societal stigma that accompanies people who are overweight. In addition, students will be able to research current medical thinking on "ideal weight" and identify how the perception of body image can lead to eating disorders.

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Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Identify the societal prejudices against people who are overweight and explain using examples how these prejudices are manifest in American culture (advertisements, film, etc.).
- Articulate current medical opinion(s) about whether there is such a thing as an "ideal body weight" for an individual and identify other measures of healthy weight/body composition.
- Compile data about his or her peers' perceptions of body image and explain how body image influences eating disorders.

Correlation to National Health Standards:

(from http://www.aahperd.org/aahe/natl_health_education_standards.html)

HEALTH EDUCATION STANDARD 1:

Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention through:

- explaining the impact of personal health behaviors on the functioning of body systems

- analyzing how the environment influences the health of the community

HEALTH EDUCATION STANDARD 3:

Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks through:

- evaluating a personal health assessment to determine strategies for health enhancement and risk reduction

Materials Needed:

- TV /VCR
- Videotape of the FRONTLINE film "Fat"
- Media: magazines, newspapers, etc.
- Access to computers with Internet

Teaching Strategy:

1) Begin by looking at media images (magazines, movies, advertising) and brainstorming the common characteristics of the men and women depicted. How many are overweight? (Students will find that few or none are overweight.) Follow up by sharing statistics about body image and the media. Recent statistics may be found at one or more of the following online resources:

- MediaScope: Body Image and Advertising
<http://www.mediascope.org/pubs/ibriefs/bia.htm>
- Something Fishy: Website on Eating Disorders
<http://www.somethingfishy.org/cultural/themedia.php>

2) Watch an online video clip from NOVA's "Dying To Be Thin" titled "Cultural Pressures: The Perfection Game" at
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/thin/program.html>.

3) Ask students to discuss or write in journals in response to these questions: "Is there such a thing as an ideal weight?" "What factors would influence someone's 'ideal weight?'"

4) What do healthcare professionals think about the concept of "ideal weight?" Ask students to research this question on the Web or by contacting local healthcare professionals. Using the sites listed below, students might plug in values for a hypothetical individual; is the "ideal weight" recommended by each source the same?

- University of Michigan: Ideal Weight Table

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/primry/life15.htm>

- HealthStatus: Ideal Weight
<http://www.healthstatus.com/iwc.html>

5) Body Mass Index is also a measure of healthy vs. unhealthy weights. To learn more about BMI, visit one or more of the following sites:

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: BMI Calculator
<http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control: BMI Calculator and Factors that Affect BMI
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/bmi-for-age.htm>

6) Percentage of body fat is another measure of overall fitness and wellbeing. To learn more about this measure, visit:

- Body Fat Test.com: Body Composition
<http://www.bodyfattest.com/why.php>
- WebMD: Weighing In On Body Fat
<http://my.webmd.com/content/article/1728.60804>

7) Begin a class discussion by asking the students, "Is there a prejudice against people who are overweight?" Ask students why these prejudices exist and encourage them to give specific examples of prejudicial behaviors. After hearing student opinions, show "Fat" video clip 15:00 - 19:00. Afterwards, ask if the video has changed students' opinions, and how. Visit to the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance Web site at <http://www.naafa.org/> (go to "NAAFA Policies" section) to learn about employment discrimination, education discrimination, and size-related legislation.

8) Ask students to write in journals about their own body image. Do they think they are at a healthy weight? How do they think others perceive their weight? Stress that student responses will be kept confidential. Follow this up by asking students to take the body image survey found at <http://www.med.monash.edu.au/healthpromotion/pamphlets/BodyImage/index.html>.

Again, this information is just for the students and should not be shared unless the students volunteer.

9) Students will construct their own body image survey, which they will administer anonymously with their peers. It would be interesting to include various different age groups (young children, older adults). The survey may be created and analyzed in small groups, with anonymous, aggregate results shared with the class as a whole. As a class, discuss how body image may relate to eating disorders. **Show "Fat" video segment 19:00 - 29:00.**

10) Invite a registered dietician and a psychologist to speak to students about eating disorders like anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and compulsive overeating. What do we know about the causes for these disorders?

11) As an extension, students may wish to research one or more disorders and create

pamphlets, public service announcements, or multimedia projects:

- Anorexia information
<http://www.somethingfishy.org/whatarethey/anorexia.php>
- Bulimia information
<http://www.somethingfishy.org/whatarethey/bulimia.php>
- Compulsive over-eating information
<http://www.somethingfishy.org/whatarethey/coe.php>
- National Women's Health Information Center: Eating Disorders
<http://www.4woman.gov/bodyimage/BodyImage.cfm?page=125>
- Eating Disorders for People of Color
<http://www.somethingfishy.org/cultural/roles.php>

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