

NECHA Grant 2007

Promoting a Positive Body Image at Wellesley College: Concepts, Messages and Communication Plan

Submitted by
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Introduction

Wellesley College is an all female residential institution of 2300 undergraduate students, located in a suburb outside of Boston, MA. The school is very competitive, with the majority of students ranking in the top 10-20% of their high school graduating class. The college is ethnically diverse. The 2010 college demographics indicate that 41.1% of the students are part of the ALANA (African American, Latina, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American) population, 45.9% are Caucasian, and 7.5% are international students, with 4.3% identifying as unknown and 1.2 % as other.

The Wellesley College Director of Health Education advised a “graduate student consultant” (Debra Noll) from the Emerson/Tufts Health Communication program for the spring 2007 semester. The student’s assignment was to design a health communication campaign to promote a positive body image culture on Wellesley’s campus. The project was the student’s Applied Learning Experience; a requirement for graduation.

In preparation for the campaign, Debra did a complete literature review and conducted an environmental scan by interviewing 11 staff members from the following departments: health center, counseling center, residential life, athletics, the disabilities program and the cultural awareness network (advisors to students of Latina, Asian and African descent.) She also contacted COPHE schools of similar size and student population to learn about their current attempts to address body image dissatisfaction on their campuses. In addition to that, she conducted 2 focus groups on campus eliciting student responses to questions about body image and a final focus group to elicit student feedback to some images she designed, based on the input from the first 2 focus groups and the environmental scan. A body image survey was also designed by our graduate student, but due to time constraints and the multiple surveys being conducted on campus by our Office of Institutional Research, we decided to focus our attention on the data gathered from the focus groups and to implement the survey at a later date.

Debra also reviewed the NCHA 2004 survey data for the Wellesley Campus, as part of her needs assessment. She applied both the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory to the “communication intervention” of the project. Debra completed the assignment by providing us with a large binder containing all of the above information as well as a template, images, campaign logo and timeline for implementing a positive body image campaign geared to first year students for the 2007-2008 academic years.

Statement of Purpose

Eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction are somewhat prevalent in the college age population. “An estimated 40-50% of college women are characterized as disordered eaters (Natenshon 2002). Disordered eating refers to unhealthy eating behaviors such as restrictive dieting, bingeing or purging. Although the severity and frequency of these behaviors do not meet the criteria for the diagnosis of an eating disorder, continuous disordered eating that begins to interfere with daily activities may develop into an eating disorder. Depression and negative self-esteem are among negative outcomes that have been linked to body image dissatisfaction (Choate, 2005, Noll 2007)” The national research by Cash and others on eating disorders indicates that women who have a positive body image are less likely to engage in disordered eating, develop an eating disorder, be depressed or have a poor self-concept.

In the fall of 2004 the health center initiated the National College Health Association (NCHA) survey on our campus. “Over 50% of the study participants indicated they were trying to lose weight: 39% of participants were

attempting weight loss through dieting, 7% were vomiting or taking laxatives, 4% have had anorexia and 7% have had bulimia. Wellesley's reported rate of eating disorders was 3% higher than the national average. In addition, eating disorders, disordered eating, depression and poor self-esteem have been linked to body image dissatisfaction among college women generally. (Noll 2007, NCHA Survey 2004)"

The purpose of the project is to design and implement a communication campaign aimed at promoting a healthy body image communication campaign to incoming first year students. First year students were selected as they are in a transition period, which may put them at risk for negative health behaviors. Because our first year students live and have class with the upper-class women on campus, those students will be affected as well. "The proposed EMBRACE YOUR SHAPE campaign will address the overarching factors negatively influencing body image and encourage Wellesley Women to perceive their bodies in a realistic and healthy way, ultimately leading to a healthy body (Noll 2007)." The messages and concepts used for the campaign are aimed at creating a "body positive" environment at Wellesley.

The feedback from our focus groups gave us the following information

1. Wellesley students compare their bodies to those in the media, and the idea of being "successful" extends to having the perfect body.
2. Students want tips on how to have a more positive body image.
3. The messages that are designed need to be amusing, eye-catching, and empowering.
4. Messages about healthy foods and physical activity should NOT be linked to messages about body image.
5. The students wanted more information about healthy habits, and to stress the functionality of the body vs. the aesthetics of a body.

Although the target population for the communication campaign is ALL first students, we will target specific groups by working with the cultural advising network, and the professional staff of residential life, athletics, the health center and the counseling center. It will be imperative to include the first year mentors, resident assistants, health reps and the members of the student health advisory committee in the project.

Overarching Program Goal

To ultimately reduce the incidence of eating disorders disordered eating, and negative self-esteem

Health Communication Goals and Objectives

1. To decrease the rates of body image dissatisfaction by creating a culture of "body acceptance" through promoting acceptance and appreciation of one's natural body shape via a marketing campaign on campus.
2. To describe the impact of the campaign on first year students through both process and outcome evaluation methods.

Program Design

The program is primarily a print media campaign, but the theme "Love Your Body," and the logo "Embrace Your Shape" will be used as messages in first year orientation materials. The first year mentors, residential life staff, and health reps will be informed of the campaign during their training sessions in late summer. They will be invited to participate in the campaign by placing posters and table tents in their residence halls. The First Year Mentor Director, the Resident Directors who have participated in the project, and the Director of Health Education will provide an outline and some tips for engaging first year students in discussions about body image.

The print campaign has four phases:

Phase I (August, September)

Print materials will include the theme and logo for the project, as the initial “awareness- raising” part of the project. “Health Tips for Wellesley Women” will include a page with the logo and information about maintaining healthy bodies. First year students complete a survey at orientation, and questions will be included pertaining to the project. First year mentors meet with their first year groups on a weekly basis and can make sure the first year students understand the messages.

Phase II (October 1- November 9)

Messages will focus on the “success barrier” along with the theme and logo and will be included on posters, table tents, and stickers for bathroom mirrors.

Phase III (November 12-December 21)

Messages will focus on “comparisons” and the theme and logo to be distributed as previously, possibly adding bookmarks to the printed materials. In addition, slides show depicting “Images of Women throughout History, designed and presented by the Director of Health Education, will be scheduled in two or three of the residence hall complexes. The presentation and discussion will focus on body acceptance.

Phase IV (January-May 2008)

Messages focus on the functionality/aesthetics barrier will be distributed. Mouse pads containing the logo and the theme will be placed in computer stations around campus. The annual “Love Your Body Day” Fair organized by the health reps and other health related student groups will take place in the campus center. The fair includes the athletic trainers, aerobics instructor, a dance instructor, two nutritionists, the health center staff, counseling center staff, a massage therapist, and the Jean Kilbourne video *Killing Us Softly III*. All of the activities are geared toward students taking care of their bodies in a healthful manner,

Programs will be planned throughout the year with the Counseling Center, Department of Athletics, Residential Life and the Religious Life Office to support the theme and logo for the campaign.

Evaluation

As indicated in the goals, process evaluation questions would be added to the orientation survey students are required to complete. If problems exist with the current campaign messages, modifications can be made.

Outcome evaluation questions could be included in the sophomore survey or in a separately designed survey at the end of the first year experience.

Relevance to College Health

The culture of “thinness” in the United States has been implicated as a reason for the rise in body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders in girls and young women in this country. Many of our first year students come to campus embracing the social norm that thin, white women with western features are both beautiful and successful in our society. The ideals are promoted in both print and visual media, in families, and by peers. The literature on body image and eating disorders over the past 10 years has indicated that women of Asian, African, and Latina descent have also begun to embrace the ideal by striving for thin bodies, western features, blonde hair, or light skin. The current campaign is intentionally general to reach the diverse student population. Campaigns targeting individual cultural and ethnic groups will be developed in subsequent years.

The particular project is relevant to college students as it is designed for a residential campus and has particular relevance for college women who often engage in “fat talk” and are influenced by media messages and the college culture. The messages we have designed may be used for women on co-ed campuses. The programs

designed to accompany the messages are geared toward students making healthy lifestyle choices, and can be used at similar institutions.

Funding

We are requesting \$1000 to cover the print media campaign, primarily. The evaluation component of the project will be conducted with our Office of Institutional Research, and the programmatic component will be instituted by the professionals currently working on campus. Messages and theme logos printed on good quality paper using colored images is beyond the present health education budget. Additional funding will be sought from the Wellness Fund in the Dean of Students Office, and other departments such as the counseling center and the residential life office. The funding will be used to buy copyright for some of the images, stickers for the bathroom mirrors and other print materials.

The following costs are anticipated for the first semester:

Posters

300 colored posters @.40 each x 4 (each phase of campaign) \$480.00

Table Tents

200 table tents @.40 each x 4 (each phase of the campaign) \$320.00

Mouse Pads

200 mouse pads to be placed in computer stations on campus \$200.00

Total

\$1000.00

References

Cash, T.F.& Hicks K.L. (1990) Being fat versus thinking fat: Relationships with body image, eating behaviors and well-being, *Cognitive Therapy Research* 14 327-341

Choate, L.H. (2005). Toward a theoretical model of women's body image resilience. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 83, 320-330.

National College Health Association Health Risk Survey (Wellesley College) 2004

Noll, Debra, Health Communication Graduate Consultant, *Promoting a Positive Body Image at Wellesley College: Concepts, Messages and Communication Plan*, April 30, 2007