

A Public Health Perspective on Addressing Weight Bias and Stigma in the Theater Arts

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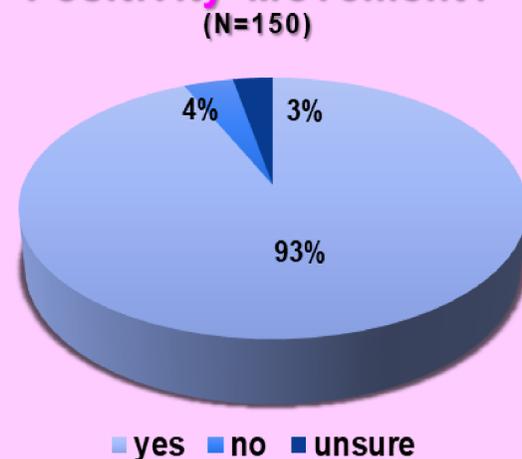
BACKGROUND:

Weight bias and stigma have been linked to poorer health outcomes. Previous research indicates that such discrimination is linked to greater risk of stroke or heart attack, and stigma is on the rise (Pearl, 2018). While public health campaigns on body positivity have been created to address this issue, no empirical studies have been conducted on the impact of weight stigma and body positivity campaigns in the theater arts.

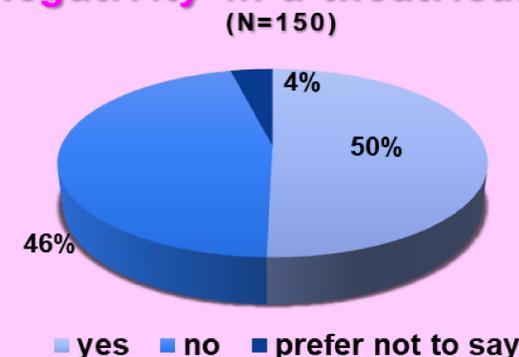
METHODS/RESULTS:

The current study surveyed 150 theater professionals regarding their knowledge and experience about body positivity and weight discrimination in the theater industry. Results indicated that 93% of respondents were familiar with the body positivity movement, but only 50% had encountered it in a theatrical setting. 84% of respondents reported having negative experiences with anti-fat bias, body shaming, or other body image negativity in a theatrical setting. Study participants provided qualitative suggestions for combating weight bias and stigma in the theater arts, with themes including casting roles outside of stereotypical body type, improving communication with actors regarding costume fittings, and providing more education about the history and research behind the body positivity movements.

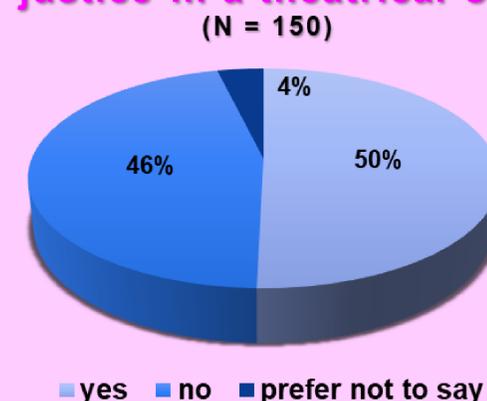
Are you familiar with the Body Positivity Movement?



Have you had a negative experience with anti-fat bias, body shaming, or other body image negativity in a theatrical setting?



Have you had a positive experience with body positivity, body neutrality, or body justice in a theatrical setting?



DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS:

The survey results highlight a need to change the way we view bodies in theatrical spaces. From rehearsals and performances, to measurements and fittings, the language we use to discuss people and their bodies is important to creating healthy and collaborative spaces. A limitation to the study was the smaller sample size. The survey was primarily distributed online via Facebook groups, due to the pandemic. Future studies would benefit from reaching out directly to theatres or university theatre programs. In conclusion, there is strong evidence that people want to see the diverse world around us reflected in the world we see onstage.