

IGNORANCE IS BLISS?

Results of a qualitative examination of the relationship between calories on menus and body image



Research Question

How do individuals across the lifespan perceive and use calorie information in relation to their body image?



Participants and Methods



12 men & 22 women completed the study

- Aged 20-82 years



Online semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed



The research team used reflexive thematic analysis (coding, organizing, comparing and contrasting data) to generate themes

Results

Participants expressed varying opinions about calories on menus, and responses were often paradoxical in nature, which were evident across 3 themes:

1. Do as I say, not as I do? The who, what and when of calorie use

Good for you, but not for me



Most participants expressed that calories on menus were most useful for individuals with limited nutrition knowledge and/or individuals in larger bodies



Although many were shocked by calorie counts on menus, most participants said they did not use calorie information to inform their meal choices

Shock value



Treat yourself?



Participants' attention to and use of calorie information on menus was dependent on contextual factors, such as if they viewed dining out as a treat or not

2. It's not funny when your pants don't fit: Appearance concerns and calories

"A minute on the lips, a lifetime on the hips": Weight and shape concerns



The apple doesn't fall far from the tree



Appearance and functionality: the influence of ideals

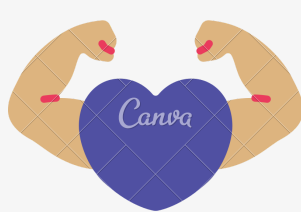


Participants expressed that they were more likely to use calorie information when they were dissatisfied with their weight or appearance

Familial and sociocultural experiences influenced participants' body image, and their attention to and use of calorie information

The internalization of the ideal, and conformity to Western body ideals affected how participants interacted with calorie information on menus

3. The 'good, the bad and the ugly: Affective responses to calories on menus



Tough love?

Seeing calories on menus led some participants to experience shame and guilt. Some thought these negative responses were the point of menu labels, while others expressed concerns about potential harmful outcomes

Some participants tried to ignore calorie information to protect themselves from negative feelings. Participants identified downfalls to calorie labelling including negative body image experiences and overvaluation of calorie information



Ignorance is bliss

Overall

Participants perceived calories were beneficial for overweight and uneducated populations, and identified negative outcomes of calorie labelling. Body image experiences influenced perceptions and use of calorie information



This study received clearance from Brock University's Research Ethics Board (REB #20-348). For more information, contact **Sarah** at sg13vl@brocku.ca, or **Dr. Kimberley Gammage** at kgammage@brocku.ca