



Brief research report

Improving uptake and engagement with child body image interventions delivered to mothers: Understanding mother and daughter preferences for intervention content



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ABSTRACT

Mothers are a key influence on adolescent girls' body image. This study aimed to improve understanding of mothers' and daughters' preferences for content in body image interventions designed to assist mothers to promote positive body image among their daughters. British mother–daughter dyads ($N = 190$) viewed descriptions of five evidence-based influences on body image (*family, friends, and relationships; appearance-based teasing; media and celebrities; appearance conversations; body acceptance and care*). Mothers and daughters each selected the two most important influences to learn about in these interventions. Overall, both mothers and daughters most frequently opted for *family, friends, and relationships* and *body acceptance and care*, whereas *media and celebrities* was their least preferred topic. While the overall sample of mothers and daughters agreed on preferences, Fisher's exact tests showed that within-dyad agreement was low. Recommendations for improving parent and child engagement with, and effectiveness of, child body image interventions delivered to parents are discussed.

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Introduction

Mothers play a key role in influencing their daughter's body image (Rodgers & Chabrol, 2009). They can foster positive body image among their daughters by modelling positive attitudes and behaviours towards their own appearance (Abraczinskas, Fisak, & Barnes, 2012). To an extent, they can also protect their daughters from sociocultural appearance pressures (e.g., helping them to deconstruct unhelpful media messages) (Hart, Cornell, Damiano, & Paxton, 2015). Alternatively, maternal pressures on daughters to lose weight and appearance-related criticism prospectively predict body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among daughters (Francis & Birch, 2005; Presnell, Bearman, & Stice, 2004). Consequently, mothers have an important role in interventions that aim to improve body image among adolescent girls. Mothers can receive interventions to improve their body image so that they can role model positive body image, or, they can act as interventionists directly delivering techniques to foster positive body image among their daughters.

A recent systematic review of studies conducted between 1992–2013 found that involving parents in interventions designed to improve children's body image and prevent disordered eating can be effective (Hart et al., 2015). Of the 20 studies reviewed, three studies were sufficiently methodologically rigorous to isolate the effect of parental involvement on body image outcomes among children. Two studies found that parental involvement was beneficial for girls' body image (Corning, Gondoli, Bucchianeri, & Salafia, 2010; Sniezek, 2006), while one study did not (Trost, 2007). For example, Corning et al. (2010) evaluated mothers' participation in four 90-min workshops covering mother–daughter communication about body image and eating, and pressures from friends and the media. Their daughters did not receive any intervention. Daughters whose mothers received the intervention reported significant reductions in perceived maternal appearance pressures and their own drive for thinness. Hart et al. (2015), however, concluded that most studies suffered from small parent sample sizes, often due to difficulties with recruitment and retention. Furthermore, despite a call 15 years prior to engage parents in the design of body image and eating disorder prevention interventions (Garber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996), they concluded that little research had met this call.

More research into parents' preferences for interventions designed to help them improve their children's body image (e.g., their preferences for intervention content, format, length, and delivery) may enhance intervention uptake and effectiveness.

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There is some evidence that interventions tailored to users' preferences are more effective (Noar, Benac, & Harris, 2007). For example, a recent study evaluating an online intervention for mothers that was designed to improve their own, and their daughters', body image found that individually tailoring the intervention to mothers' preferences for content significantly improved maternal engagement and psychosocial outcomes (Diedrichs et al., 2016). Involving 'end-users' in intervention design and development through consultation and participatory approaches has also been identified as crucial to the effectiveness and broad scale uptake of successful body image interventions delivered directly to adolescent girls and young adult women (Becker, Stice, Shaw, & Woda, 2009).

To date, however, there has been little published investigation of what parents and children prefer in interventions that aim to help parents to foster positive body image among their children. A recent study asked mothers what they thought made their pre-adolescent daughters feel good/bad about their bodies (McLaughlin, Belon, Smith, & Erickson, 2015). They also asked their daughters what made them feel good/bad about their own bodies. Encouragingly mothers' responses closely reflected empirically established risk factors for poor body image among adolescent girls, however, there was little concordance between mothers' and their own daughters' responses. These results suggest that in addition to assessing parent preferences for interventions, it may be important to establish if parents' preferences are in accordance with their child's perceived preferences for body image support from their parents, as this could have implications for intervention effectiveness. Specifically, poor concordance within parent–child dyads may result in content being delivered to parents that is irrelevant and unimportant to their children, thereby potentially resulting in an intervention that is not acceptable and ultimately ineffective.

The current study aimed to increase understanding of mothers' and daughters' preferences for content in body image interventions designed to help mothers improve their adolescent daughters' body image. It also aimed to understand if mothers' and daughters' preferences are aligned. Specifically, we asked mothers what topics they would like to learn about, in order to help them support their daughters to have positive body image. Their daughters were also asked to indicate what topics they would like their mothers to support them with, in order to improve their own body image. Finally, we assessed concordance of preferences between the overall sample of mothers and daughters, and concordance within mother–daughter dyads. We did not have any formal hypotheses as this was an exploratory study and, to our knowledge, the first to explore parent–child preferences for body image intervention content.

Method

Participants

Mother–daughter dyads ($N=235$) were recruited from nine towns across the United Kingdom by a market research agency via telephone database sampling and approaching women face-to-face in shopping areas to take part in a 'website development study'. Dyads were recruited primarily for a cluster randomised controlled trial evaluating an online intervention for mothers that was designed to improve their adolescent daughters' body image (Diedrichs et al., 2016). Inclusion criteria were: daughters aged 11–14 years; English was the first language of mother and daughter; dyads used the internet more than once a week; mother identified body image as a relevant issue for their daughter; mother had participated in ≤ 3 market research studies in their lifetime. Participants were blind to the objectives of the intervention trial and the current research study. Of the total sample recruited to the

intervention trial, 190 dyads reported their preferences for body image intervention content and their data is reported in this paper. Mothers' mean age was 41.9 years ($SD=4.96$, range = 31–54) and daughters' mean age was 13.0 years ($SD=0.86$, range = 11–15). On completion of the intervention trial mothers and daughters were paid £120 and £50, respectively. See Diedrichs et al. (2016) for more detailed information on participant recruitment and demographics.

Measures

Mothers' preferences. Mothers were presented with a list of five topics that have been "identified as important influences on body image and self-esteem among adolescent girls". Each topic was accompanied by a 2–3 sentence description. The topics were empirically established influences on adolescent girls' body image that are commonly targeted in effective body image interventions for adolescent girls (Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Yager, Diedrichs, Ricciardelli, & Halliwell, 2013). Topics included: (1) *Family, friends, and relationships* (i.e., exploring how family and friends can model body image behaviours and attitudes, and be a source of appearance pressures); (2) *Teasing and bullying* (i.e., exploring the impact of appearance-related teasing and developing strategies to promote resilience); (3) *Media and celebrities* (i.e., critiquing media messages and developing resilience to unrealistic appearance ideals in media); (4) *Talking about appearance* (i.e., exploring how conversations about appearance, including "fat talk", can negatively influence body image, and developing strategies to avoid problematic conversations); (5) *Respecting and looking after yourself* (i.e., body acceptance and care strategies). In order to best support their daughters to have positive body image, mothers were asked "Please select two topic areas from the list below that you would most like to learn about and rank these in order of preference".

Daughters' preferences. Daughters were presented with the same list of topics and were asked "Thinking about you, and how you feel about your body, which of these topics would you be most interested in talking to your Mum about? Please select two topics from the list below".

Procedure

Mothers and daughters attended a testing facility in their respective town and completed their paper-based questionnaire under standardised supervised conditions in separate rooms from one another.

Results

Preferences for Body Image Intervention Topics

The frequency with which the overall sample of mothers and daughters selected each topic area as being within their top two preferences for intervention content is presented in Table 1. An inspection of the frequencies indicated that *respecting and looking after yourself* (i.e., body acceptance and care) and *family, friends, and relationships* were the most preferred topics among mothers, in that order. Similarly, these topics were also the most preferred topics among daughters, with *family, friends, and relationships* rated most preferred, followed by *respecting and looking after yourself*. Overall, daughters' topic choices were fairly evenly dispersed across the remaining three topics, whereas mothers largely preferred *teasing and bullying*, and few selected *talking about appearance* and *media and celebrities*. *Media and celebrities* was the least preferred topic among both mothers and daughters.

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