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Brief research report

Dissemination of evidence-based body image interventions: A pilot study into the effectiveness of using undergraduate students as interventionists in secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

Dissonance-based body image interventions are among the most effective interventions for adolescent girls. However, dissemination of these interventions remains challenging. In addition, the emerging field of positive body image suggests that interventions should promote body appreciation as well as reduce pathology. The current study examines whether undergraduate students can effectively deliver a dissonance-based intervention to secondary school girls. In addition, it examines whether this intervention can increase body appreciation. Sixty-two adolescent girls were randomly allocated to the intervention or control condition. In the intervention group, body dissatisfaction was significantly reduced and body appreciation was significantly improved from pre- to post-intervention. There were no changes in body dissatisfaction or body appreciation in the control group. There was a reduction in thin-ideal internalization for all participants. These preliminary findings suggest that undergraduate students can be effective interventionists for dissonance-based programs in schools and dissonance-based interventions can promote body appreciation.

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Introduction

Body image concerns are reported by 50–70% of adolescent girls and have numerous negative consequences (Wertheim & Paxton, 2011). Effective intervention programs to reduce body dissatisfaction among 12–18 year–old girls do exist (Stice, Shaw, & Marti, 2007; Yager, Diedrichs, Ricciardelli, & Halliwell, 2013) but the dissemination these programs remains a challenge. For example, it is difficult to recruit clinicians with expertise or time to deliver the interventions (Stice, Rohde, Durant, Shaw, & Wade, 2013) and teachers are often reluctant to take on this task (Ricciardelli et al., 2010). Recent evidence of psychological health benefits associated with positive body image suggests that, in addition to alleviating distress associated with body dissatisfaction, interventions should strive to promote body appreciation (Tylka, 2011). This pilot study investigates whether undergraduate students are effective interventionists in a secondary school settings and whether the impact of cognitive dissonance-based interventions (CDI) extend to body appreciation.

Schools present an ideal location for the delivery of body image interventions because they allow access to a large and inclusive group of adolescents (Diedrichs & Halliwell, 2012). CDIs have been found to be the most effective targeted interventions to date for girls aged 14 and above (Stice et al., 2007). For girls with pre-existing body image issues, CDIs lead to reductions in thin-ideal internalization, body dissatisfaction, negative affect, psychosocial impairment and risk for onset of eating disorders (Stice et al., 2007) with effects maintained up to 3 years post-intervention (e.g., Stice, Rohde, Shaw, & Gau, 2011). There is also evidence that a universal delivery of a 90-min CDI reduces body dissatisfaction and thin-ideal internalization among secondary school girls (Halliwell & Diedrichs, 2014).

However, the majority of effective body image lessons in secondary schools have been delivered by body image experts (Stice et al., 2007; Yager et al., 2013). Reliance on specialists limits the dissemination of effective programs and, therefore, alternative methods of dissemination need to be explored. Teachers are ideally placed to deliver body image interventions, yet many do not feel confident in delivering this material (Ricciardlli et al., 2010). In peer-led trials, undergraduate students with between 13 and

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16 hr of training have been shown to be effective interventionists for undergraduate women (Becker et al., 2010; Stice et al., 2013). The scripted nature of CDIs means that they are well-suited for this method of dissemination (Stice et al., 2013). Moreover, CDIs can also be effective as single session interventions further improving dissemination (Matusek, Wendt, & Wiseman, 2004). Matusek and colleagues found a single session 1-hr CDI successfully reduced thin-ideal internalization, drive for thinness, and disordered eating among university women at a 4-week follow up. However, to date no research has examined whether undergraduate students can also effectively deliver CDIs in secondary schools.

Recently, there has been a shift in the body image literature to move away from a primary focus on pathology and incorporate positive body image (Tylka, 2011). Body appreciation, the operationalization of positive body image, is positively associated with multiple measures of well-being (self-esteem, optimism, life satisfaction, self-compassion) and negatively associated with pathology (Tylka & Kroon, 2013; Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012). Furthermore, body appreciation is distinct from body satisfaction and predicts additional variation in well-being after accounting for body satisfaction (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005). Therefore, to foster well-being and health among adolescent girls it is important to reduce levels of body dissatisfaction and also increase levels of body appreciation. Before developing interventions specifically to target positive body image, it is helpful to examine whether existing body image interventions that reduce body dissatisfaction also increase body appreciation.

The aims of the current study were two-fold. First, we examined whether undergraduate students could effectively deliver a CDI to adolescent girls in a secondary school setting. Second, we examined whether CDIs improve body appreciation among adolescent girls.

Method

Participants

Participants were 62 girls aged 14 and 15 years (M_{age} = 14.84, SD_{age} = 0.37, M_{BMI} = 20.39, SD_{BMI} = 2.35), recruited from one mixed-sex secondary school in the south-west of England. The school was slightly smaller than average, with an above average proportion of pupils receiving government funding and additional support with their learning. The majority of participants were White (97%). Participants were assigned to the intervention condition (n = 29) or to the control condition (n = 33).

Materials

The activities in the 1-hr CDI are described in Table 1.

Measures

Body dissatisfaction. The Body Areas Satisfaction Scale from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (Brown, Cash, & Mikulka, 1990; Cash, 2000) was used to assess body dissatisfaction. Participants rate their dissatisfaction with nine body areas on a 5-point rating scale ranging from *very dissatisfied* (1) to *very satisfied* (5). The scale has good validity and reliability with adult women (Cash, 2000). Cronbach's alpha was .90 at baseline and .94 post-intervention.

Positive body image. The Body Appreciation Scale-2 (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015) was used to assess positive body image. Participants responded to 10 items on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). The scale has good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and construct validity with college women (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Cronbach's alpha was .94 at baseline and .95 at post-intervention.

Table 1
Activities included in the cognitive dissonance-based intervention.

1.	Introduction to the program and voluntary commitment.
2.	Defining and exploring the origins of the thin-ideal of female beauty.
3.	Cost of pursuing the thin ideal.
4.	Challenging Negative Body Talk[a]. This activity was an extended version of the Succeed 'Fat talk' activity. Participants discussed whether appearance comments had to be negative to reinforce the thin-ideal and discussed the impact of these comments. They then practiced alternative ways of talking, for example giving non-appearance-based compliments.
5.	Role plays[a]. The role play activity from the Succeed Body Image Programme was adapted for this session. Participants came up with three points to persuade their friend not to pursue the thin-ideal.
6.	Body activism list.
7.	Self-affirmation exercise.

[a] Adapted activities. The content of the intervention was selected and adapted from the Succeed Body Image Programme (Becker & Stice, 2011), a UK translation of Reflections (Becker & Stice, 2012).

Thin-ideal internalization. The internalization subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-4; Schaefer et al., 2014) was administered. Participants indicated their agreement with nine statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *definitely disagree* (1) to *definitely agree* (5). Construct validity and internal consistency of this measure have been demonstrated for young women (Schaefer et al., 2014). Cronbach's alpha was .93 at baseline and .94 at post-intervention.

Intervention evaluation. Participants were asked: "How relevant was the body image lesson?" and "How interesting was the body image lesson?" They responded to each question on a 5-point scale from *not at all* (1) to *very* (5). Participants were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback on the sessions.

Procedure

This research project was designed when the school approached the first author to request a body image lesson for year 10 students. A study design was created around the constraints set by the school. Within the school, students were grouped into tutorial groups, which met each morning for registration, and teaching groups for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE); each PSHE group was made up of a random selection of students from different tutorial groups. The school wanted all students to receive the body image intervention during the same week. We had to develop a method of randomization and a control group that was consistent with this requirement. We used the tutorial groups for data collection and the PSHE groups for intervention delivery. By randomly allocating tutorial groups into the control or intervention condition, we created a random selection of students in each PHSE body image lesson allocated to the control or the intervention group. Moreover, the groups used as the basis for randomization were not meaningful groups in relation to the students' experience of lessons or of the intervention. Students in the control group completed baseline questionnaires on Monday and post questionnaires on Friday the week before the body image lesson. Students in the intervention group completed baseline questionnaires on Monday and post-questionnaires on Friday of the intervention week. All students received a 1-hr dissonance-based body image intervention on the Tuesday or Wednesday of the second week in single-sex groups of between 10 and 15 students (the boys completed a different body image lesson than girls). Therefore, for the intervention group, post-intervention measures were collected 2 or 3 days after the intervention. The contact from the school came toward the end of the academic year, so there was no opportunity for follow-up data collection. Instead we used benchmarking to compare the

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