

**IS 'THE BODY PROJECT' AN EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION FOR
REDUCING THIN-IDEAL INTERNALIZATION IN ADOLESCENT
GIRLS? A RANDOMISED CONTROLLED EVALUATION IN A
BRITISH GIRLS' SCHOOL**

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INTRODUCTION

'The Body Project' (Stice & Presnell, 2007) is a cognitive-dissonance intervention designed to promote body acceptance in adolescent girls by encouraging them to resist and challenge the sociocultural thin ideal and thus reducing their drive for thinness. Previous research has demonstrated it to be a successful intervention in reducing body dissatisfaction, thin-ideal internalization, negative affect and bulimic symptoms in American adolescents (Stice, Presnell, Gau & Shaw, 2007) with effects still present at three year follow-up (Stice, Marti, Spoor, Presnell & Shaw, 2008). However as yet few studies have delivered this program to adolescents in the UK.

OBJECTIVES

This paper reports on an evaluation of an adaptation of this intervention in a British school to determine its effectiveness to promote body acceptance in adolescent girls aged 12-13 years.

METHOD

In a randomised controlled trial, adolescent girls (aged 13-14 years) were allocated to either an intervention or wait-list control group. The intervention group received 4 x 20 min body image lessons with content adapted from 'The Body Project program' (Stice & Presnell, 2007) delivered by three researchers.

The Body Project Program is an intervention program which is designed to promote body acceptance among adolescent girls by encouraging them to resist and challenge the current beauty ideals which emphasis thinness.

The Body Project draws upon the principles of Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) to guide adolescent girls who have internalised the thin ideal to voluntary engage in written, verbal and behavioural exercises in which they critique this ideal. These counter-attitudinal statements and behaviours produce psychological discomfort which subsequently causes the girls to reduce their pursuit of the thin ideal to reduce this discomfort. Baseline, post-intervention and one month follow-up measures were taken to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention against the wait-list control group. Ethical permission for this research was granted by the University of the West of England faculty ethics committee.

FINDINGS

Comparisons of pre and post-intervention measures indicated the intervention produced desirable effects in the girls which were still evident at one month

follow-up. Post intervention focus groups demonstrated the girls enjoyment and perceived benefit of the lessons.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings demonstrate another successful replication of 'The Body Project' intervention and highlight the effectiveness of incorporating cognitive-dissonance theory in school-based body image interventions.

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