

A Meta-Analytic Review of Stand-Alone Interventions to Improve Body Image

Alleva J.M., Sheeran P., Webb T.L., Martijn C., Miles E. (2015). A meta-analytic review of stand-alone interventions to improve body image. *Plos One*, 10(9). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0139177.

What Was The Study About?

Effective Change Techniques for Improving Body Image

- Educating about role of cognition
- Monitoring and restructuring of cognitions
- Changing negative body language
- Guided imagery
- Exposure exercises
- Size-estimate exercises
- Stress management training
- Relapse prevention
- Psycho-education

The authors of this meta-analysis reviewed 62 studies of stand-alone interventions to determine their effectiveness on improving body image, and to identify techniques within the interventions that led to improvement. Body image is what people believe their own body looks like; it includes multiple components – cognitive, perceptual, affective and behavioral.

What did they find?

The study found that interventions led to small but reliable improvements in body image, but insignificant effects on beauty internalization and social comparison tendencies. Previous reviews had found larger effect sizes in all three outcome areas but had high risk of bias across and within studies. The study identified numerous change techniques (noted above in the text box) that are effective and could be used in future interventions, and also several that are contra-indicated: 1) self-esteem enhancement (cautionary, needed more studies), 2) discussing physical fitness and 3) discussing client's individual differences (both #2 & #3 potentially due to focus on weight and appearance).

Why is the Study Important?

- Studies indicate negative body image can emerge in childhood. In preadolescence, about 50% of girls and 30% of boys dislike their bodies.
- Negative body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and social anxiety, and development of eating and body dysmorphic disorders.
- It also is a predictor of physical inactivity, unhealthy eating and weight gain, and associated with unsafe sex, smoking and skin cancer risk behaviors.
- Even higher percentages of adult men and women have poor body images, and the rates remain stable across lifespan.

What can School Social Workers Do?

- Educate school staff, in particular health and physical education teachers, as to the impact of specific language on students' body image.
- Collaborate with school staff to develop curriculum that incorporates specific change techniques.
- Gain buy-in from administration to implement Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions identified as having positive impact.
- Incorporate learnings into Tier 3 interventions targeting body image and self-esteem.
- Conduct further research to broaden understanding of the most effective ways to affect body image.