BODY IMAGE CONCERNS IN MALE AND FEMALE ADULTS. THE EFFECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL GROUP INTERVENTION.

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ABSTRACT

Body image is a person's perception of their physical body including their feelings and attitudes towards it. A negative body image is related to negative mental and physical health and this effect is particularly strong for women who place a high value on their appearance. Recognition of the impact of body image for men is growing and therefore intervention is needed for both. A cognitive-behavioural group intervention program was implemented for adults identifying as having body image concerns. The aim was to educate adults (n = 77) about body image perceptions and their origins, challenge negative beliefs and behaviours associated with body image and improve body image perceptions and impact on life. Pre-and post questionnaires showed improvements in body satisfaction, decreases in negative behaviours associated with body image concerns, decreased body image distress, reduced body consciousness and social physique anxiety. Need for prevention and intervention is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Body image is a person's perceptions of, attitudes and feelings towards their physical body (Cash, Felming, Alindogan, Steadman & Whitehead, 2002). Discontent with body image in women has been described as 'normative' due to the high number who report dissatisfaction with it (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984; Tiggemann and Lynch, 2001). Body image dissatisfaction is also predominant amongst males mostly with a desire to be more muscular (Tiggerman, Martin, & Kirkbride, 2007). This discontent is problematic because it has a significant impact on well-being and mental health (e.g. Pope, Phillips, Olivardia, 2000; Tiggeman et al., 2007). It is therefore important to intervene and improve the body image of people experiencing body dissatisfaction. Cash's (2008) model has been supported by researchers investigating the development of body image dissatisfaction (Tiggemann and McGill, 2004) leading to suggestions for intervention including educational, behavioural and cognitive aspects (Stanford & McCabe, 2005; Weiss & Werthein, 2005). Programs for adults that have used cognitive behavioural (CB) techniques and found improvements in body satisfaction and self esteem (e.g. Farrell, Shafran, & Lee, 2006).

The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a CB based program promoting positive body image in adult men and women. The program was based on previous body image research focusing on intervention (e.g. Cash and Pruzinsky, 2004; Farrel, Shafran & Less, 2006; Posovac, Posovac & Weigel, 2001 and included education about where perceptions about the body come from, cognitive challenging of appearance assumptions and education about behavioural strategies for appearance change and why they lead to unhappiness with the body and self.

Improved body image including increased satisfaction with overall appearance and particular parts of the body were expected. As were reductions in body image related shame, surveillance, and distress and that participants would rate that body image had a more positive impact on their life after the intervention.

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-six females and 11 males (16-52 years) from the general community and university participated in the study. Thirty-nine of these females and eight of these males completed both the pre and post evaluation questionnaires.

Measures
Pre and post intervention questionnaires consisted of six sections that examined participants’ attitudes towards and perceptions of their body image, the impact of their body image upon their psychosocial functioning and satisfaction with life. Satisfaction with past, present and future life was measured by the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). A higher score indicates greater satisfaction with life. The Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS) of the Multidimensional Body- Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) was used to measure participant’s satisfaction with particular parts of their body (Cash, 2000a). Levels of physique anxiety were measured by the Situational Inventory of Body Image Dysphoria (SIBID) (Cash, 200b). A higher score indicates higher levels of physique anxiety. Participants’ feelings of body shame and surveillance were measured using the Body Shame and Surveillance subscales from the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBC) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). A higher score indicates higher levels of body shame and surveillance. The impact of body image on participant’s psychosocial quality of life was measured by the Body Image Quality of Life Inventory (BIQLI) (Fleming & Cash, 2002). Higher scores on this measure indicate a more positive impact of body image on quality of life.

Procedure
The six week intervention program began with an explanation of body image, theories of its development and common body image perceptions. How to challenge negative body image thoughts and self-defeating behaviours were taught. Education about eating disorders and healthy lifestyle as well as relaxation and mindfulness skills were used in order to help participants reduce their body image anxiety and distress. Separate groups were run for men and women.

RESULTS
Data were analysed using SPSS 15.0. Prior to data analyses, the data was screened and all assumptions for normality were met.

Females
Female participants initially reported feeling moderately satisfied with life as measured by the SWLS (see Table 1 for female mean scores) but fairly unsatisfied with the overall appearance of their bodies as measured by the overall score of the BASS. The BASS measures participants’ satisfaction with particular parts of their bodies and indicated that female participants were fairly satisfied with their hair, height and face. However, they were unsatisfied with their mid torso, weight and lower torso.

Female participants reported moderate levels of physique anxiety on the SIBID indicating that they sometimes experience distress in a range of every day situations such as ‘when trying on new clothes’

Female participants also reported moderately high levels of body shame and surveillance, measured by the OBC, indicating that they often feel anxiety about their appearance and are concerned about others' perceptions of their bodies. The majority of female participants reported that body image had a negative impact on areas of life including ‘interactions with people of the other sex’ and ‘relationships with friends’. Overall, participants rated that body image had a slight positive effect on their quality of life using the BIQLI.
Males
Participants reported feeling moderately satisfied with life (M=3.85) and somewhat satisfied with the overall appearance of their body (M=3.29). Satisfaction with the overall appearance of their body was somewhat higher than that of female participants. Overall, male participants reported moderate levels of satisfaction with their face (M=3.5), overall appearance (M=3.32), lower torso (M=3.5) and hair (M=3.25). However, males reported lower levels of satisfaction with their weight (M=3.13), muscle tone (M=3.38) and mid torso (M=3.38).

Participants also reported moderate levels of physique anxiety (M=2.60). They also reported moderately high levels of body shame and surveillance (M=3.95) indicating that they often feel anxiety about their appearance and are concerned about others’ perceptions of their bodies. Overall, males rated that body image had a slightly positive impact on their quality of life (M=3.95).

Evaluation of Positive Bodies Program
A series of paired sample t-tests were performed to determine the effectiveness of the Positive Bodies intervention in improving female participants’ body image. The analyses were only performed for females as only eight males completed the post-evaluation questionnaire.

As 14 t-test comparisons were planned, a Bonferroni adjustment was made to the alpha level to reduce the chances of Type 1 error. The Bonferroni adjusted alpha level was 0.0036 (0.05/14). The results of the t-test comparisons for females are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: T test results for pre and post intervention measures for females

Consistent with the hypotheses, the mean physique anxiety score as measured by the SIBID was significantly lower after than before the intervention, this difference was also statistically significant. The eta squared statistic (0.44) indicated a large effect size (see Table 2 for details of t-test comparisons for females).

The mean impact that body image was perceived to have on quality of life as measured by the BIQLI was slightly more positive after than before the intervention. Although this difference was not statistically significant using the Bonferroni adjustment, the eta squared statistic (0.23) indicated a large effect size.

Contrary to the hypotheses, participants’ mean levels of body shame and surveillance before and after the intervention were not statistically significant and the eta squared statistic indicated a very small effect size (0.0038).

The mean satisfaction with life scores were very similar before and after the intervention as the difference between the scores was not statistically significant.

As predicted, participants’ mean satisfaction with body appearance as measured by the BASS was higher after the intervention than before the intervention, this difference was significant. The eta squared statistic (.38) indicated a large effect size. Female participants’ satisfaction with particular parts of their body also increased during the intervention. The mean satisfaction with weight and the lower, mid and upper torsos were significantly higher after the intervention as compared to before
the intervention. However, the mean satisfaction with face and muscle tone was not significantly higher after the intervention as compared to before the intervention (see Table 2 for details of body part t-test comparisons).

Table 2: T test results for body part satisfaction comparisons pre and post intervention for females

**DISCUSSION**

Consistent with recent research indicating that body image dissatisfaction is ‘normative’ in both males and females (e.g. Tiggerman et al., 2007) the results of the study show that females initially reported low levels of satisfaction with the appearance of their bodies, moderate levels of physique anxiety, and moderately high levels of body shame and surveillance. Males initially reported moderate levels of satisfaction with the appearance of their bodies, moderate levels of physique anxiety and moderately high levels of body shame and surveillance.

Consistent with hypotheses, the results indicate that the Positive Bodies intervention was effective in improving females’ satisfaction with their overall body appearance and with particular areas of their body including their weight, lower, mid and upper torso regions. The intervention was effective in lowering the level of physique anxiety.

The intervention did not improve the levels of body shame and surveillance experienced. It is possible that it may take longer than six weeks for levels of body shame and surveillance to decrease. It was difficult to recruit males to participate in the intervention, this may have been due to perceptions that body image is a female concern.

**REFERENCES**


Table 1: T test results for pre and post intervention measures for females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean score. Pre</th>
<th>Mean score. post</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>-2.20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>&gt;.0036</td>
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<tr>
<td>BASS</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>SIBID</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>OBC</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>BIQLI</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-3.44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>&gt;.0036</td>
</tr>
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Table 2: T test results for body part satisfaction comparisons pre and post intervention for females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Part</th>
<th>Mean sat. pre</th>
<th>Mean sat. post</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Eta squared</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>-2.04</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Muscle tone</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>-2.41</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Weight</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>-3.53</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>0.25</td>
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<td>Lower torso</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>-3.84</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>&lt; .0005</td>
<td>0.28</td>
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<td>Mid torso</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>-5.3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>&lt; .0005</td>
<td>0.43</td>
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<td>Upper torso</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Hair</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Overall appearance</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>-1.95</td>
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<td>&gt; .0036</td>
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