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The Impact of School-Based Education Program on Body Image in Middle School Students

Elizabeth Hendon

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THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAM ON BODY IMAGE IN

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by
Elizabeth Gracen Hendon

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Approved By

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Advisor: Dr. Melinda Valliant

_____

Reader: Mrs. Ellen Ossorio

_____

Reader: Dr. Laura Prior

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ABSTRACT

Body dissatisfaction is an emerging public health concern and carries significant health-related consequences. These implications encompass mental health challenges, eating disorders, unhealthy weight management practices, adverse effects on self-esteem, and potential physical health consequences. Because adolescence is a critical period for healthy body image development due to age-related transitions occurring at this time, it is essential to implement an education program to promote positive body image. Educational programs focused on protective factors to enhance self-compassion can improve body image, eating attitudes, and body satisfaction. School-based body image education programs aim to provide adolescents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to develop a positive self-image, counteract external pressures, and foster a healthy relationship with their bodies. This research aims to assess whether school-based education program positively impacts the body image of middle school students to counteract the negative influences that impact adolescents' self-perception. Participants were recruited from a private school following a parental information session and distribution of consent forms, resulting in a sample of eight adolescents aged 12-14 years. The study utilized the Body Appreciation Scale-2 for children to assess positive body image development. The Functionality Appreciation Scale (FAS) measured participants' awareness of their body's capabilities and achievements. Students completed a pre-survey before the initial lesson focusing on body functionality and self-perception. Subsequent lessons over four weeks centered on self-compassion, media literacy, and promoting positive body image. Following completion, students completed a post-survey to evaluate the impact. Qualitative data indicates that the program effectively promoted positive body image and equipped adolescents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to resist societal appearance ideals and comparisons. Post-intervention assessments revealed increased body appreciation and satisfaction.

Review of the Literature

Body Image

Body image encompasses an individual's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their body, spanning a spectrum from positive and healthy to negative and unhealthy perspectives (Grogan, 2010). Additionally, in human development, an individual's body image interconnects with their self-esteem, self-concept, sexuality, familial relationships, and identity (Harter, 1988). Body image involves evaluating body size, appraising attractiveness, and experiencing emotional reactions tied to body shape and size. Adolescence is a critical period where boys and girls face physical, cognitive, and social challenges as they progress through puberty and reach young adulthood. Also, it is a time of identity development, and adolescents' perceptions of their physical appearance shape their self-concepts and identity. The unique interplay of cultural, social, physical, and psychological changes in adolescence plays a crucial role in shaping body image from ages 12 to 18 (Voelker et al., 2015). Furthermore, the physical changes encountered during puberty signify one of the most rapid and diverse phases in human development, including weight, height, body shape, body composition, and the emergence of primary and secondary sex characteristics. As a result, adolescents become more susceptible to body dissatisfaction when physical changes during puberty align with increased exposure and social comparisons to peers and idealized bodies on social media (Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005).

Negative Body Image

Negative body image, encompassing a person's negative thoughts and feelings about their body, is closely tied to body dissatisfaction. Consequently, this dissatisfaction is a public health concern with significant health-related consequences. These repercussions include challenges to mental health, the development of eating disorders, engagement in unhealthy weight

management practices, suboptimal nutrition, social withdrawal, negative impacts on self-esteem, and the potential for consequences to physical health (Voelker et al., 2015).

Negative body image arises from dissatisfaction with one's body and can manifest differently in girls and boys. According to a study with two hundred and thirty-nine students aged 12 to 18 years, Lawler and Nixon (2011) found that 45.2% of boys were more likely than 19.2% of girls to be satisfied with their bodies. Moreover, 70.2% of girls experiencing body dissatisfaction expressed a desire for a body size smaller than their current one. In contrast, for boys experiencing body dissatisfaction, 23.7% desired a larger body, and 31.2% desired a smaller body size. Concerning Body Image Index body dissatisfaction, every overweight girl expressed a desire for a more petite body, while only 78.6% of overweight boys shared this preference. These trends indicate that girls of average weight generally lean towards a preference for a smaller body size. In contrast, boys with average weight are either satisfied with their bodies or aspire to be larger. In a 10-year longitudinal study with ethnically and sociologically diverse students, Bucchianeri et al. (2013) concluded that diverse males and females become more dissatisfied with their bodies over 10 years. Furthermore, body dissatisfaction increased between middle and high school and more while transitioning to young adulthood. In the female cohort, the younger group experienced a rise in dissatisfaction from high school to early adulthood, but the older female cohort's body dissatisfaction remained unchanged. However, in the male cohort, the younger group did not show any change in dissatisfaction during high school. Additionally, average levels of body dissatisfaction among male participants were much lower than those reported by females. Overall, both male and female adolescents showed escalating body dissatisfaction over time.

Although some authors argue that body dissatisfaction develops during adolescence, some suggest that boys and girls become dissatisfied with their bodies before adolescence. Grogan (2021) suggested that girls from age five choose a thinner ideal body size than their current size. Few studies have asked female adolescents to describe their experience of dissatisfaction with their body shape and size. However, by talking with adult women, Grogan (2021) found that women felt pressured to be slim from primary school onward. Additionally, in a focus group with 8-year-olds, they all agreed they wanted to be thin now and when they group up. When asked if they worried about how they looked, they all feared getting fat, and those who were overweight wanted to lose weight. The results suggest that girls from primary school age onward are sensitive to cultural pressures to conform to a limited range of acceptable body shapes.

Likewise, studies have shown that preadolescent boys also experience body dissatisfaction. Grogan's (2021) study revealed that as many as 50% of 8-year-old boys are concerned about leanness and muscularity and prioritize having a "fit" body. Micheal Maloney and colleagues (1989) also conducted a study on a large sample of US boys and girls. Of the boys, they found 31% of 9-year-olds, 22% of 10-year-olds, 44% of 11-year-olds, and 41% percent of 12-year-olds wanted to be thinner, 31% of boys had tried to lose weight, and 14% had dieted. This study suggests that boys and girls have body shape concerns starting before adolescence. However, boys experience body dissatisfaction differently than girls. In an interview and focus groups, Gemma Tatangelo and Lina Ricciardelli (2013) found that boys' body satisfaction was linked to body function, particularly their sporting ability. This implies that sports provide one avenue where boys find it socially appropriate to discuss their bodies. Boys frequently used sports and physical ability-related social comparisons when talking about their

bodies and the bodies of others. Naturally, gender trends in children's social comparisons are promoted through socialization. Boys are conditioned to evaluate their bodies based on strength and athleticism, while girls are socialized to anticipate evaluation primarily on their appearance.

Body satisfaction is essential for the overall well-being of adolescents. Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2006) followed a group of 2,516 junior and senior high school students from 1999-2004, investigating connections between body satisfaction and health-related behaviors to explore the significance of body satisfaction. They found that in females, lower body satisfaction predicted higher levels of dieting, unhealthy and very unhealthy weight control behaviors, binge eating, and lower levels of physical activity and fruit and vegetable intake. Furthermore, in males, lower body satisfaction predicted higher levels of dieting, unhealthy and very unhealthy weight control behaviors, binge eating, smoking, and lower levels of physical activity. The results reveal that lower levels of body satisfaction are linked to more health-compromising behaviors, including unhealthy weight control practices and binge eating, as well as fewer health-promoting behaviors like physical activity. Lower body satisfaction did not yield advantages in terms of behavioral outcomes, except for reported healthy weight control behaviors, often in conjunction with unhealthy weight control behaviors. In conclusion, this study suggests that body satisfaction does matter, and we should be concerned about the high prevalence of adolescents who express body dissatisfaction.

Positive Body Image

A positive body image entails having a low negative body image and experiencing high body satisfaction. Positive body image involves (a) a profound love and respect for one's body, enabling individuals to recognize the unique beauty and functionality of their body; (b) embracing and appreciating their body, including aspects that differ from idealized standards; (c)

focusing on their body's strengths rather than fixating on perceived flaws. (Tylka & Piran, 2019).

The themes of positive body image encompass the importance of high self-esteem, low internalization of societal body ideals, low engagement in appearance comparison, and consideration of aspects related to gender and ethnicity in social identity (Grogan, 2010). Moreover, in a research study involving late-adolescent Swedish youth, Wängqvist and Frisén (2013) discovered that girls with more robust interpersonal identity commitments held more positive perceptions of how others judged their appearance. Likewise, boys with stronger interpersonal identity commitments expressed more favorable evaluations of their appearance. These findings suggest that body image may improve as adolescent's sense of self becomes increasingly stabilized (Voelker et al., 2015).

Impact of negative body image to overall health

Body dissatisfaction can directly affect adolescents' eating behaviors to sculpt one's body into a perceived ideal (Stice & Shaw, 2002). Furthermore, the complex relationship between weight status and body image is essential due to its influence on health behaviors. Research has demonstrated that adolescents experiencing significant body dissatisfaction predict the emergence of disordered eating behaviors and clinical eating disorders, particularly concerning psychosocial variables like perfectionism (Voelker et al., 2015). Moreover, body dissatisfaction and concerns about weight are precursors to dieting and other strategies to alter one's body (Markey, 2010). The connection between body dissatisfaction and the emergence of disordered eating is often attributed to diminished self-esteem and the experience of negative emotions, including depression, that typically accompany feelings of dissatisfaction with one's body (Voelker et al., 2015).

Negative body image is a central diagnostic feature for all clinical disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although all eating disorder diagnoses include criteria about body image disturbance, symptoms are manifested and presented differently for each disorder. Anorexia nervosa entails significantly limiting food intake to an unhealthy extent, leading to a state of caloric deprivation. On the other hand, Bulimia nervosa involves individuals engaging in episodes of excessive overeating, followed by compensatory behaviors such as vomiting, using laxatives or diuretics, or engaging in compulsive exercise (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These actions aim to counteract the surplus caloric intake. In addition, compulsive exercise extends beyond what is deemed "healthy," incorporating feelings of compulsion, guilt, and inflexibility regarding the definition of exercise (Reel, 2015). This form of exercise may function to offset consumed calories and as an effort to manage feelings of guilt and a negative body image. Furthermore, compulsive exercise surpasses the boundaries of what is considered "healthy," as it involves feelings of compulsion, guilt, and inflexibility regarding the definition of exercise (DeYoung & Anderson, 2010). Disordered eating and dieting behaviors that do not meet full clinical criteria for eating disorders diagnoses are common among adolescent girls. Dieting is popular among teens to change their weight or size. Even when employing these disordered eating behaviors at a frequency or duration below the threshold for a clinical diagnosis, categorizing them as "sub-clinical" (i.e., less severe than a clinical eating disorder), they can still lead to a variety of health consequences. Both clinical eating disorders and disordered eating can disrupt almost every bodily system (Voelker et al., 2015).

Eating disorders not only have the highest mortality rate among adolescents compared to all psychiatric conditions but they are also linked to an elevated risk of suicide and self-harming

behaviors. Purging activities, such as recurrent vomiting, can exert excessive strain on the

esophagus, larynx, or voice box, leading to issues like bleeding, tearing, or a ruptured esophagus.

Additional physical complications encompass cardiovascular issues, amenorrhea (i.e., absence of

the menstrual cycle), gastrointestinal problems, tooth decay, diminished bone density, and

compromised colon function. Electrolyte imbalances pose an extra risk for individuals with

eating disorders and may necessitate hospitalization (Katzman, 2005). Regrettably, the

envisioned achievement of one's ideal body and the corresponding sense of satisfaction are rarely

actualized, as adolescents frequently become consumed with an obsessive focus on the next

perceived bodily flaw or the pursuit of shedding the next 5 pounds (Burt et al., 2015).

Factors that Influence Body Dissatisfaction

It is essential to comprehend the complex interactions of various factors influencing body

dissatisfaction. Aparicio-Martinez et al. (2019) suggested that body dissatisfaction is associated

with the desire to change the body image to achieve a thinner body using dieting. Numerous

factors shape how individuals perceive their bodies, including the environment, social media,

appearance, and cultural ideals. According to Grogan (2021), in Western societies in the 21st

century, slenderness is associated with happiness, success, youthfulness, and social acceptability,

while being overweight is linked to laziness, lack of willpower, and being out of control. The

cultural expectations on social media for girls emphasize being thin and lean with large breasts.

In contrast, the cultural expectations for boys emphasize being tall and muscular. Additionally,

The rise in popularity of social media platforms focused on fitness inspiration and imagery

promoting health and wellness reflects an increased societal pressure to achieve a toned,

muscular, and slender physique. Most people do not naturally have slender and toned bodies, so

they must be constantly vigilant through diet and exercise to conform to body ideals like the thin

ideal and athletic or muscular ideal portrayed in various media outlets.

Social Media and Body Dissatisfaction

Social media has become part of our everyday lives and has significantly impacted how

people communicate with each other and seek and receive information. Vuong et al. 's (2021)

study consisted of 1200 adolescents ranging from grade 7 to 10, and most participants used

Instagram (90.89%) and Snapchat (90.72%). Social media exerts pressure on individuals to reach

an unachievable standard of weight and beauty, which can trigger body dissatisfaction and,

eventually, dieting and disordered eating. One theme across the literature implies that social

media negatively impacts body image and increases body dissatisfaction. Aparicio-Martinez et

al. (2019), Rounsefell et al. (2020), and Rodgers et al. (2020) have concluded that a relationship

exists between body image, beauty ideals, and the use of social media, along with increased body

dissatisfaction. Aparicio-Martinez et al. (2019) concluded that social media plays a role in

formulating what is attractive in society and increases the desire to change one's body because of

the beauty ideals of athletic-ideal and thin-ideal. Aparicio-Martinez et al. (2019) used validated

surveys (EAT-26, BSQ, CIPE-a, SNSA) that evaluated participants' appearance and social

network addiction. The internalization of the athletic ideal predicts compulsive exercise. The thin

ideal is associated with the desire to have a thinner body with a tendency toward frustration

based on a larger body image than desired. Further, Rounsefell et al. (2020) concluded that

engagement in social media activities could cause one to be more susceptible to negative body

image and food choice outcomes. Rodgers et al. (2020) concluded that social media was

correlated with a high internalization of appearance ideals, a higher tendency to engage in

appearance comparison, dietary restraint, and body dissatisfaction. As mentioned by Grogan

(2021), the surge in popularity of social media platforms dedicated to "Fitspiration" (a fusion of "fit" and "inspiration" featuring images aimed at promoting health, fitness, and empowerment) mirrors the heightened pressure to attain a physique that appears toned, muscular, and slender. Fitspiration sites endorse problematic attitudes toward body image and restrictive eating.

Moreover, access to social media is associated with increased body dissatisfaction. Tiggemann and Slater (2017) examined the relationship between Facebook use and body image concerns with 438 adolescent girls in grades 8 and 9. During this time, Facebook was the most popular social networking site, with over 1.15 billion active users worldwide. Tiggemann and Slater (2017) found that girls with a Facebook profile initially scored noticeably higher on the drive for thinness than their peers without Facebook after two years. In addition, Clark and Tiggemann (2006) investigated how peer and media influences contributed to body dissatisfaction in girls aged nine to twelve. The results indicated that media and peer influences concerning appearance ideals contribute to body dissatisfaction through internalizing these ideals. However, peer influences impacted body dissatisfaction and internalization more than media. Factors such as appearance conversations, peer appearance norms, and peer body dissatisfaction were correlated with these outcomes. Watching or reading appearance-related media significantly correlated with discussions among friends about appearance subjects. Consequently, the more girls engaged in discussions about clothes, makeup, and favorite pop stars, the more they perceived their friends as concerned with appearance matters and the more they internalized these appearance ideals. In contrast, Ricciardelli et al. (2000) examined influences that affected both body image and body change methods in boys during individual interviews, which consisted of twenty boys in grade 7 and twenty boys in grade 9. They found that the media and the role of social comparisons may also promote body satisfaction in boys.

Several boys viewed the media as having a positive effect on their body image, while about half of the boys stated the media as having no effect on body image. This is a striking difference to the findings on girls, as girls perceive the media as a significant force leading to body dissatisfaction. This gender difference may be because the media depicts a broader range of acceptable body shapes and sizes for males.

Adolescents can access constant information through social networking sites such as status updates, picture and video sharing, tagging, and news feeds. They can receive this information from friends and celebrities they follow at any given time because they can access the Internet on their smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers. Fatt and Fardouly (2023) investigated the relationship between adolescents' body image concerns and digital social evaluation, measuring the frequency and types of digital social evaluation, the importance of social evaluation, body dissatisfaction, restrictive eating attitudes, and drive for muscularity. In a study with 245 Australian adolescents, females had higher ratings for all forms of digital social evaluation than males, except for receiving negative comments, which were low for both sexes. The study found significant correlations between three body image measures (body dissatisfaction, restrictive eating attitudes, and drive for muscularity) and social media use. Those with more Instagram followers, frequent positive appearance comments, and greater perceived importance of digital social evaluation were more likely to experience these body image concerns. In addition, those who received likes or comments on their social media posts were also more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and restrictive eating attitudes. Finally, those who received more frequent negative appearance comments were more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and drive for muscularity. All forms of digital social evaluation were correlated with at least one aspect of body image concern, with the strongest associations

(medium effect) found for the importance of the number of likes and followers received and for receiving positive appearance comments. As per findings by Fatt and Fardouly (2023), while it might be assumed that compliments regarding one's appearance would enhance body image, they may inadvertently solidify the notion that appearance holds paramount importance. This can lead to negative feelings about one's body, restrictive eating habits, and a desire for a thinner body or more muscular build. Moreover, greater body dissatisfaction and restrictive eating attitudes were also uniquely associated with the greater importance of receiving likes. Therefore, "likes" may reinforce the importance of thinness and attractiveness in images posted on social media. These findings suggest that social media use can significantly impact body image concerns.

Adolescents are given more opportunities to view what their peers and celebrities are doing, facilitating greater social comparison. One important trait of social media platforms is that they promote interactivity by giving autonomy to users to become active participants. Instead of being passive receivers of content on social media platforms, users have the autonomy to decide who they want to follow and to be in their network, shape online communication, and engage in content creation (Perloff, 2014). A recent study conducted by Vuong et al. (2021) found a significant link between social media usage, particularly on Instagram and Snapchat, and body dissatisfaction. This association is observed in both boys and girls and can be attributed to the internalization of thin and muscular body ideals promoted on these platforms. However, girls reported significantly higher social media use, thin-ideal internalization, body dissatisfaction, and lower muscular-ideal internalization than boys. Additionally, in girls, thin-ideal internalization emerged as the only variable that was significantly associated with body dissatisfaction. Unexpectedly, thin-ideal, or muscular-ideal internalization did not mediate the connection between social media use and body dissatisfaction among girls. In boys, muscular-

ideal internalization moderates the relationship between social media use and body

dissatisfaction. These findings highlight the significance of athletic-ideal internalization, a newly

introduced concept encompassing muscularity and thinness (Vuong et al., 2021). In a study with

1,056 adolescents from a secondary school in Singapore, Ho et al. (2016) investigated the impact

of adolescents' participation in comparisons with friends and celebrities on social media

platforms regarding (a) their body image dissatisfaction and (b) their drive to be thin (DT) or

muscular (DM). They concluded that social comparison with friends on social media platforms is

significant for body dissatisfaction, the drive for thinness for girls, and the drive to be muscular

for boys. Social comparison with celebrities was only positively associated with females' body

image dissatisfaction and drive to be thin. The relationship between social comparison with

celebrities and males' body image dissatisfaction and drive for muscularity was non-significant.

Therefore, the findings suggest that comparing with peers on social media platforms has a

stronger relationship with body image dissatisfaction and drive for thinness or muscularity than

for celebrities.

Appearance Ideals and Body Dissatisfaction

Adolescents are exposed to a limited spectrum of accepted body shapes, contributing to

an increasing cultural uniformity of ideals in the 21st century due to the global media and social

media platforms (Grogan, 2010). Additionally, appearance-oriented culture targets teens as

potential consumers and has a significant negative impact on their body image (Voelker et al.,

2015). According to Grogan (2021), the body's outward appearance is seen as a symbol of

personal order and disorder, and slenderness symbolizes being in control. Additionally, muscled,

and toned bodies have become another symbol of willpower, energy, and control. The cultural

expectations for girls emphasize being thin and lean with large breasts, which is seen in different

types of media (Voelker et al., 2015). This body type is physically impossible and looks much like the Barbie doll: stereotype, tall, thin, and busty. The changes during puberty, such as wider hips and an increase in adiposity, can be perceived as unfavorable and inconsistent with the "thin ideal" (Grogan, 2010). Nevertheless, boys are not immune to body image concerns. An increase in height and muscle mass associated with puberty moves some boys to fit the cultural expectations to be tall and muscular. Notably, boys who mature later and do not meet socially constructed body ideals for men tend to report greater body dissatisfaction compared to their early-maturing peers (Voelker et al., 2015).

As a result of appearance ideals, both males and females seem to internalize socio-cultural messages about appearance ideals and experience pressure to adhere to these standards (Lawler & Nixon, 2011). Lawler and Nixon (2011) concluded that internalizing appearance ideals independently contributes to body image dissatisfaction. Internalization also acted as a mediating factor in the association between appearance discussions with friends. In contrast, Petrie et al. (2010) concluded that body satisfaction in adolescent girls in the United States was not predicted by internalization but was significantly influenced by body comparison. In this study, they proposed that body comparison may have arisen due to the internalization of the thin ideal during this stage of girls' development. Moreover, in a study involving adolescent boys in the United States, Smolak and Stein (2010) found a positive correlation between media investment and the drive for muscularity at two different time points. Boys with greater investment in muscular ideals were also more inclined to employ muscle-building techniques. These results underscore the significance of internalizing the muscular ideal in anticipating male body image concerns. According to Paxton et al. 's (2006) study, the thin beauty ideals promoted through the media are persuasive and reach all ages. Consequently, popularity and success in

relationships, sexuality, and material pursuits are linked to being thin, a concern relevant to both boys and girls. However, being African American predicted a lower increase in body dissatisfaction in both girls and boys during middle school. Therefore, African American ethnicity emerged as a protective factor against increases in body dissatisfaction in middle adolescence.

Social media engagement and appearance ideals are closely related, and findings indicate that social media has a significant influence on adolescents, potentially causing them to internalize appearance ideals regarding physical attractiveness and beauty (Tiggemann & Slater, 2017) (Vuong et al., 2021). This internalization may lead to dissatisfaction with their own appearance, especially when they perceive challenges in aligning with these ideals. The stage of adolescence is critical concerning body dissatisfaction. Numerous adolescents place substantial importance on their appearance and are susceptible to developing concerns related to body image (Vuong et al., 2021). Vuong et al. (2021) found that social media and the internalization of appearance ideals are highly relevant to body dissatisfaction. Fatt and Fardouly (2023) concluded that internalizing ideals and valuing one's appearance beyond any other aspects has been proposed as a central mechanism for eating disorders and is strongly associated with the importance of the number of likes and followers received and for receiving positive appearance comments. Tiggemann and Slater (2013) suggest that time spent on the Internet was significantly related to the internalization of the thin ideal, body surveillance, and drive for thinness. Therefore, when addressing body image concerns, media literacy programs have shown success in combating negative body image.

Promoting Positive Body Image

Cultivating a positive body image is crucial considering the related health implications. Identifying key factors predicting a positive body image in individuals of all genders paves the way for targeted interventions. This strategic approach seeks to customize interventions for both girls/women and boys/men, providing a unique and effective means to foster a positive body image (Grogan, 2010). By addressing the concerns of those experiencing dissatisfaction or anxiety about their bodies, this method ultimately promotes the health and well-being of individuals across all genders. Due to negative body image, women may avoid exercise (Choi, 2000), and men might resort to anabolic steroids and other drugs to enhance muscularity (Grogan et al., 2006). Additionally, women may adopt unhealthy eating behaviors like binge eating, restrictive dieting, and self-induced vomiting (Grogan, 2010). Therefore, promoting positive body image in adolescents is essential to protect them from body dissatisfaction.

In the past, negative body image prevention programs have sought to diminish negative body image by involving participants in diverse activities targeting hypothesized mediators of change. These mediators include educating youth about unrealistic thinness norms and natural body weights, imparting media literacy skills, promoting activism and empowerment concerning the media, boosting self-esteem, facilitating critical group discussions on social pressures, and establishing new peer norms regarding body issues. However, in recent years, prevention programs have focused on psychological processes related to positive experiences of being in the body (Piran, 2015). According to Piran (2015), the five dimensions (processes) of positive embodiment include (a) positive body connection enhanced by positive self-talk that counters adverse experiences, (b) experiences of agency and functionality, (c) attuned self-care, (d) positive experiences and expressions of bodily desires, and. (e) inhabiting the body as a subjective rather than as an objectified site.

To address the risk factors associated with negative self and body image, it is imperative to implement a protective factor approach in adolescent health promotion through social interventions. Risk-taking behavior has been identified as significantly influenced by low self-esteem and a negative self and body image. According to Golan et al. (2013), three factors identified as prospective predictors and often addressed in health promotion programs for adolescents include self-image, body image, and self-esteem. Cultivating a healthy self-image involves a lifelong process of self-image change, commencing with the acquisition of self-acceptance and being liked and accepted by others. In Braun et al.'s (2016) literature review, research advocated for exploring protective elements that can modify, alleviate, or otherwise influence factors known to be associated with negative body image and eating-related issues. Because protective factors can disrupt or interact with an array of body image-related variables implicated in the etiology of eating pathology, for example, thin-ideal internalization, self-objectification, poor interoceptive awareness, body or appearance comparisons, body dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness (Braun et al., 2016).

Self-compassion, which involves treating yourself kindly and with understanding, can have positive effects on body image and eating disorders. At the same time, adolescence is the life stage characterized by the lowest levels of self-compassion given intense pressures such as stress over academic performance, the need to be popular or "fit in," and body image problems amplified by puberty changes (NEFF, 2003). In addition, higher levels of self-compassion are associated with lower body image concerns in adults and adolescence (Mahon & Hevey, 2023). Braun et al. (2016) state that self-compassion is a protective factor against negative body image and eating-related issues through four main mechanisms. Initially, it directly alleviates the harmful consequences of poor body image or eating pathology. Second, it proactively prevents

the emergence of risk factors, such as internalizing a thin ideal, associated with adverse outcomes like eating pathology. Third, self-compassion can interact with a risk factor, moderating its adverse effects by altering the strength or direction of the relationship between a predictor and an outcome. Finally, self-compassion may intervene in the mediating sequence through which risk factors exert their influence.

Practicing self-compassion is integral to education interventions that can enhance body image perceptions and foster a more nurturing relationship with themselves. Moffitt et al. (2018) explored the efficacy of brief self-compassion and self-esteem interventions for state changes in body dissatisfaction and self-improvement motivation after exposure to a realistic and threatening body image scenario. They concluded that engaging in a self-compassion writing task promoted compassion toward one's body and reduced weight dissatisfaction and appearance dissatisfaction, compared to a self-esteem writing task. Therefore, engaging in self-compassion writing tasks appears to enhance both immediate bodily feelings and the likelihood of making healthier lifestyle choices, particularly when facing negative feelings about body weight, shape, or appearance. Moreover, Rodgers et al. (2018) assessed the effectiveness of BodiMojo, a mobile (app) intervention focusing on self-compassion to promote positive body image among late adolescents and emerging adults. The findings provided preliminary support that BodiMojo, the mobile app, improved body image and self-compassion. Additionally, users of the BodiMoji intervention reported enhanced appearance esteem, aligning with previous research on the efficacy of self-compassion and mindfulness interventions positively impacting body image. Accordingly, Neff and McGehee (2010) concluded that self-compassion plays a role in adolescent well-being and offers adolescents a means to cultivate positive feelings about

themselves without getting entangled in the problematic cycle of self-judgment and evaluation related to negative body image.

Similarly, fostering adolescent self-esteem is a logical strategy for preventing body image and eating issues. Self-esteem involves evaluating our inherent worth. Children and adolescents with elevated self-esteem experience satisfaction with their identity as individuals (O'Dea, 2004). Additionally, a strong sense of self-esteem involves a balanced self-evaluation of a child's traits and abilities and an attitude of self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-worth (Paxton, 2002). Enhancing and maintaining self-esteem is crucial for tackling and preventing body image concerns, given the acknowledgment that diminished self-esteem serves as an indicator for body image issues, dieting, disordered eating, and eating disorders. Enhancing self-esteem can also impact other factors contributing to body image concerns, such as a positive self-image and sense of self-worth, which can improve adolescents' satisfaction with their body shape and size. As a result, adolescents with elevated self-esteem are better equipped to handle teasing, criticism, stress, and anxiety, all of which are linked to eating problems (O'Dea, 2004).

One effective way to improve body image is by implementing self-esteem programs. These programs have shown positive outcomes in fostering a healthier perception of one's body. O'DEA's (2004) self-esteem program, "Everybody's Different," aimed to improve young male and female adolescents' body image, eating attitudes, and behaviors by focusing on developing their self-esteem. The central theme emphasized that uniqueness is to be expected, valued, and accepted, and the approach featured nine weekly lessons with student discussion, group work, teamwork, and games. The program significantly improved the body image of students compared to the controls. The initiative yielded significant positive outcomes, particularly for female students and those identified as high-risk for eating disorders. These individuals demonstrated

enhancements in critical areas, including reduced body dissatisfaction, diminished drive for thinness, improved physical appearance ratings, decreased reliance on dieting, and adoption of healthier weight loss behaviors following the intervention. Additionally, both male and female students exhibited reduced emphasis on the importance of social acceptance, physical appearance, and athletic competence. Furthermore, Mahon and Hevey (2023) conducted a 5-week Digital SMART (Social Media Adolescent Resilience Training) body image intervention for adolescents aged 15–17. Each session introduced a different theme/topic related to self-compassion, body image, and social media; students were invited to reflect on topics and engage in interactive activities (writing/ role-play/brainstorming exercises). Some individuals believed the program was relatable and tackled relevant issues, including self-criticism and body dissatisfaction, which were overlooked in the school curriculum. However, boys did not perceive the program as highly relatable because they felt they did not grapple with body image, social media, or self-criticism. Digital SMART significantly improved body appreciation and satisfaction from pre- to post-intervention. Although effect sizes were small, findings are consistent with literature highlighting the usefulness of self-compassion interventions for body image (Moffitt et al., 2018). However, participant outcomes differed by gender: boys' body satisfaction significantly increased, girls' body appreciation increased, and self-criticism reduced from pre- to post-intervention. Findings may be related to the differences in how each gender experiences body image and/or self-compassion. In contrast, Neff and McGehee (2010) believe that self-esteem is challenging to raise and can contribute to certain problematic behaviors, including bullying, self-enhancement bias, and narcissism.

Moreover, another effective method to improve adolescents' body image is through media literacy, which aims to challenge unrealistic appearance ideals and pressure adolescents to

conform to them as they are promoted within the social media environment. Bell et al. (2022) conducted a single-session classroom-based intervention, "Digital Bodies", with 290 British adolescents ages 12-13 to improve adolescents' body satisfaction and reduce their internalization of societal messages surrounding appearance. It began with a short affirmation exercise activity. Participants were asked to describe one important thing to them and why that can help them overcome the initial resistance to health promotion messages. They concluded that adolescents who participated in Digital Bodies reported significantly higher body satisfaction at 1-week post-intervention and an 8-week follow-up compared to the control group. Additionally, Golan et al. (2013) conducted "In Favor of Myself" an educational outreach program to enhance positive self and body image by empowering adolescents by imparting coping strategies, enabling them to resist media-driven and culturally inappropriate messages and emphasize the diversity of beauty and attractiveness. The program also aimed to assist adolescents in acquiring skills to critically assess social media messages. At post-test, the intervention group exhibited a statistically significant advantage over the control group in terms of heightened awareness of changes during adolescence, recognizing the use of media strategies, employing positive versus negative communication, reduced reliance on others' approval and appearance for self-worth, and a diminished drive for thinness and desire to alter one's appearance. Additionally, the intervention successfully narrowed the disparity between the current and ideal body figures of girls in the intervention group, potentially explaining the observed improvement in the drive for thinness. Therefore, education programs in the school setting have effectively improved adolescent body image.

Due to the rising concern about negative body image among adolescents, educational institutions and authorities acknowledge the importance of addressing it in schools. Yager et al.

(2013) systematically reviewed classroom-based body image programs. The programs evaluated were classified into three categories of effectiveness based on the significance of the change in the primary outcome of body image or body dissatisfaction at the post-test. The groups were categorized based on their results: (1) those showing significant improvements in body image or dissatisfaction measures, (2) those displaying improvements in factors linked to body image but without significant changes in body image itself, and (3) those showing no signs of improvement in body image or related factors. Yager et al. (2013) found 16 studies published, and of those, 43% (n=7) showed a significant improvement in at least one measure of body image or body dissatisfaction from pre- to post-intervention, which are referred to as 'Effective Programs'. The most common approach used by the 'Effective Programs' was media literacy (n=6), information and activities aiming to improve self-esteem (n=4), and discussion on peer influence (n=3). Out of the six programs that reported significant improvements on secondary outcome measures but not body image, the majority included psychoeducation about eating disorders (83%, n = 5), information about maintaining a healthy weight (67%, n = 4), self-esteem (50%, n = 3), and pubertal development (50%, n = 3). In addition, all the 'Effective Programs' were multi-session, ranging from 150 minutes to 720 min. The most effective programs were interactive (87% n=14) and targeted younger adolescents 12-13 years. Body image researchers argue that early intervention is critical and needs to address body image concerns and appearance ideals before adolescents' ideas about appearance and dissatisfaction become fixed. Furthermore, schools are a widely recognized suitable site for interventions to improve body image due to adolescents already being in a learning environment. The classroom setting differs from other environments, such as community or after-school settings. Therefore, prevention programs for adolescents in classrooms require a unique approach, and the lessons should be designed to align with the

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existing dynamics of the class and adhere to time constraints and class structure. However, no programs were found to be effective in improving body image for both girls and boys. Prior studies offer differing views on whether body image interventions for girls and boys should be held in mixed or single-sex settings. Advocates for separation argue that distinct messages are necessary to address differences in appearance ideals and developmental trajectories, mainly related to adolescent pubertal and social development. Discussing these topics in front of the opposite sex may induce feelings of embarrassment and vulnerability (Paxton, 2002). However, given that most schools are coeducational, there are also strong arguments in favor of addressing body image in mixed-sex settings.

More research is needed to develop effective body image programs for both girls and boys in both single-sex and mixed-gender environments. Due to the growing public health concern about negative body image and its health consequences, it is crucial to develop a school-based intervention program that does not require expert delivery and utilizes a framework that focuses on body functionality, self-compassion, media literacy, and the importance of a healthy body image. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to counteract the negative influences that impact adolescents' self-perception and provide them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to develop a positive and realistic self-image, counteract external pressures, and foster a healthier relationship with their bodies.

Methods

Program Development

The body image education program, Loving YOU for YOU, was carefully designed through a collaborative effort, drawing inspiration from the Embrace Hub Kids program in Australia. In addition, it was edited in close consultation with administrative officers at Regents School of Oxford to ensure alignment with their language and curriculum standards. The students completed a pre-survey prior to the first lesson focusing on body functionality and self-perception. The following lessons occurred weekly for 4 consecutive weeks, focusing on self-compassion, media literacy, and promoting posit body image. After these lessons, the students completed an anonymous post-survey to access the education program's impact. Refer to the table below for an outline of each lesson.

Table 1: "Loving YOU for YOU" Education Program Overview

Lesson Focus	Topics	Activities
Lesson 1: What is body image? Body functionality over appearance	Gain an understanding of body image and discern the distinction between positive and negative perceptions of one's body. The significance of maintaining a positive body image for both mental and physical well-being. The significance of prioritizing body functionality over outward appearance.	Pre-survey Transforming negative discussions about the body into positive affirmations centered on bodily functionality. Worksheet centered on acknowledging positive attributes and cultivating self-compassionate thinking.
Lesson 2: Self-Compassion	3 aspects of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness Self-Compassion Traffic Light Importance of Emotional Wellness	Comparison to Compassion Worksheet
Lesson 3: Media literacy and the components of media impact on body image and self-esteem.	Steps that can be implemented to ensure that social media does not exert an overwhelmingly negative influence.	Media Literacy "Tool box" Encouragement Worksheet: pep-talk to self highlighting the

| | Christian-based social media accounts that promote positivity to populate one's feed.

Different forms of media and acquiring the skill of critical thinking regarding the content encountered. | significance of valuing the functionality of the body. |
|---|---|---|
| Lesson 4: Importance of a healthy body image and creating own body image

Body Functionality Review | The significance of a healthy body image extends beyond physical appearance, and acknowledging individual strengths.

Being our own biggest critics and techniques to overcome self-criticism, such as gratitude and positive affirmations. | As a class, committed to embracing and appreciating our bodies, and encouraging others to do the same.

Post-assessment & Student Feedback Form |

Participants

Participants were recruited from a private school in Oxford, Mississippi after consulting with the administration to align a body image education program with their mission and curriculum. An informational session was conducted to address any questions parents of potential participants might have. Following this, consent forms were sent home of the 7th and 8th grade students, resulting in a final sample of eight participants, aged 12-14 years, who participated in the body image education program. All participants in the program were female and identified as white.

Measures

Body Appreciation

The Body Appreciation Scale-2 for children was utilized to gauge and evaluate the development of positive body image among adolescents, as demonstrated by Halliwell et al. (2017). This scale comprised 10 inquiries aimed at eliciting thoughts about one's body (e.g., "I

feel good about my body"), with respondents indicating their agreement on a 5-point scale (1=never, 5=always). Halliwell and colleagues validated the Body Appreciation Scale-2 in conjunction with assessments of body esteem, media influences, body surveillance, mood, and dieting. The findings underscore the beneficial effects of body appreciation on both body-related and emotional well-being in children. Therefore, it represents a crucial tool in research endeavors aimed at comprehending and evaluating children's positive body image.

Functionality Appreciation Scale

The Functionality Appreciation Scale (FAS), consisting of seven items, assesses an individual's acknowledgment of their body's capabilities and what it can achieve. Acknowledging the functionality of one's body cultivates appreciation and forms a vital component of a positive body image. Originally validated with adults (Alleva et al., 2017), the scale has also demonstrated success with younger populations (e.g., Sahlan et al., 2022). Participants respond to the seven questions, such as "I appreciate my body for what it is capable of doing," using a five-point scale (1=never, 5=always). This scale facilitates a more holistic understanding of body image and offers valuable insights for enhancing embodiment and assessing intervention efficacy.

Qualitative Measures

To enhance the study's robustness given the limited sample size, we distributed an additional open-ended feedback questionnaire following the fourth and final lesson to gather qualitative data. This questionnaire prompted participants to share insights on their favorite lesson and key takeaways. Additionally, an email containing a Google Form for parent feedback was sent via email, aiming to evaluate whether their child engaged in discussions about the

program upon returning home, to gauge its effectiveness, assess overall satisfaction, and invite open-ended comments or additional feedback.

Procedure

Ethical approval for conducting the study was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Mississippi prior to survey administration and program implementation. Throughout the design phase of the educational program, school principals and administrators were actively engaged and informed about the study's objectives. They received comprehensive materials including body image education lessons and proposed questionnaires. Parental information sessions were held to provide further details, during which consent forms and information sheets were distributed. Upon agreement from school authorities, informational letters and consent forms were sent to parents or guardians of 6th to 8th-grade students. The study's purpose and procedures were clearly communicated, and parents who consented to their child's participation returned signed forms. Prior to commencing the first lesson, students were informed of the study's voluntary nature and were required to sign assent forms. These forms outlined the study's objectives, IRB approval, anonymity of responses, and their right to withdraw from participation at any time. Adolescents were encouraged to seek clarification by posing any questions they had regarding the study.

The four lessons were conducted during regular school hours, held in the first period, and led by the primary researchers, all of whom were college aged. Over the subsequent three weeks, the group of eight girls participated in a comprehensive body image education program. This program included interactive elements such as PowerPoint presentations, group discussions, and worksheets aimed at fostering appreciation for one's body, shifting comparisons to self-compassion, recognizing individual uniqueness, and understanding the significance of bodily

functions. After each lesson, participants filled out worksheets and engaged in discussions based on their written responses, allowing for assessment of their comprehension and assimilation of the key messages. After the fourth lesson, the students were administered a post-survey to evaluate the impact of the study. An additional open-ended survey was handed out to the students to gather their opinions, feedback, and main insights on the program for qualitative results. The qualitative feedback gathered from these open-ended questionnaires will provide invaluable insights and perspectives that will guide future researchers in shaping the content and structure of future body image education programs. Moreover, these insights will help us better understand the needs and preferences of our students, allowing us to tailor programs to be more effective and impactful in promoting positive body image.

Results

Due to the limited participant pool (n=8), our study did not yield adequate data to run pre- and post-comparisons to determine whether significant changes occurred. Nevertheless, the intimate class setting fostered an environment conducive to open dialogue, enabling participants to comfortably address body image concerns. While quantitative data may be lacking, the bonds forged throughout the program suggest a tangible impact of the body image education initiative on participants. The participant's qualitative feedback post-survey indicated they enjoyed the program. Participants expressed positive feedback in response to inquiries regarding engaging or enjoyable activities and discussions. One participant noted, "Yes I liked talking about the social media literacy even though I don't have it yet, I liked learning about it for when I do have it." Additionally, a participant expressed appreciation for "Appreciating my body." Another participant emphasized enjoyment of the social media lesson, stating, "I really liked the social media lesson that we did. I often see ads of people who have perfect bodies and perfect hair and I

always felt bad about myself." Another participant remarked, "Yes, because I learned all about the functionalities of my body that I should be grateful for." Moreover, feedback suggests that despite only one participant having a personal social media account, others without such accounts found the information beneficial in anticipation of future exposure.

The participants expressed a positive rapport with the college-aged facilitators of the educational program, viewing them as relatable figures. The connection between the participants and facilitators contributed significantly to the participants' willingness to engage in discussions concerning body image. Participants frequently cited the facilitators as a pivotal factor when asked about their comfort level in discussing body image-related issues within the program's setting. One participant remarked, "yes because the teachers were yall." Another stated, "yes because yall were nice and welcoming and won't be mean." Furthermore, parental feedback underscored the impact of the facilitators, with one parent noting, "my 8th grader loved the girls working the class…"

The research aimed to counteract the negative influences affecting adolescents' self-perception and empower them with the knowledge and confidence needed to cultivate a positive and realistic self-image, thereby promoting a healthier body relationship. When questioned about their main insights or lessons gained, one participant remarked, "I should be grateful for my body that it lets me do things even when I'm injured." Another expressed, "I learned I am beautifully and wonderfully made in God's image and I don't need to compare myself to others." Yet another participant realized, "Everyone is different and we can all do different things." Additionally, a participant reflected, "that no matter what other people think about you are perfect because you are made in God's image." As a result, participants gleaned meaningful insights that could alter their perceptions of their bodies and relationships with them.

Although formal pre- and post-data analyses were not conducted, noteworthy positive shifts were observed in participants' perceptions of their bodies following the body image education program. Among the eight participants, three exhibited improvements in their body attitudes post-intervention. Moreover, five participants reported experiencing increased self-love towards their bodies after the program, whereas the remaining three participants noted no change. Regarding social media literacy and body awareness, four participants expressed feeling more beautiful despite discrepancies between their appearance and societal ideals portrayed in media. Similarly, four participants indicated heightened gratitude for their body's health, regardless of it not meeting their ideal standards post-intervention. While the limited sample size constrained quantitative analysis, these discernible positive changes underscore the program's efficacy in influencing adolescent girls' body image perceptions and attitudes. Hence, the findings suggest that a body image education program positively impacts participants' body image.

Discussion

This study aimed to alleviate the negative impacts on adolescents' self-perception by empowering them with essential knowledge, skills, and confidence to develop a positive and genuine self-image. By addressing external influences such as social media pressures and unrealistic beauty standards, the research aimed to foster a healthier relationship between adolescents and their bodies. The study's curriculum consisted of four lessons centered on body functionality, self-compassion, media literacy, and strategies for promoting a positive body image. Each lesson ultimately directed participants toward discovering their true identity and worth in God. This approach was particularly tailored for implementation at a private, classical Christian school to complement their existing curriculum focus.

The "Loving YOU for YOU" program was designed for participants in early adolescence, aged 12-14, a critical period due to their dissatisfaction with their appearance starting as early as eight years old, influenced by societal pressures (Grogan, 2021). A systematic review of 16 body image education programs revealed that the most effective ones were interactive and targeted younger adolescents, specifically those aged 12-13, aiming to address body image concerns before they solidify. Furthermore, conducting the program in a classroom setting was deemed effective, as it provided a suitable environment for interventions to improve body image (Yager et al., 2013). The age group, intervention setting, and interactive approach of "Loving YOU for YOU" mirrored those of the most successful programs identified in Yager et al.'s (2013) systematic review, underlining its potential effectiveness in enhancing body image.

In the initial session, the significance of prioritizing function over looks was stressed, underscoring the remarkable capabilities of our bodies that are often overlooked. Whether dancing, cheering, playing sports, making music, or creating art, our bodies exhibit incredible abilities. By centering on bodily function, attention is diverted from the appearance ideals that bombards adolescents daily. The unrealistic cultural standards, particularly for girls resembling the Barbie doll stereotype (Voelker et al., 2015), and the puberty-induced changes often conflicting with the "thin ideal" (Grogan, 2010), exacerbate body image dissatisfaction due to societal pressures.

Internalizing societal ideals of appearance significantly contributes to dissatisfaction with one's body image (Lawler & Nixon, 2011). Therefore, redirecting the focus toward functionality within an educational program can be a highly effective strategy. By emphasizing the capabilities and remarkable functions of the human body rather than solely its outward appearance, individuals are empowered to appreciate their bodies for what they can do rather than how they

look. This shift in perspective fosters a more positive relationship with one's body and can

mitigate the adverse effects of societal beauty standards on self-esteem and mental well-being.

Through discussions on bodily function, participants actively engaged, sharing activities they

enjoy and recognizing the everyday functions like digestion and breathing. In the third session,

participants revisited essential themes like function and self-compassion through a reflective

worksheet, emphasizing the value of understanding how our bodies operate and treating

ourselves kindly. This worksheet served as a self-encouragement tool. The table below outlines

some key insights gained by participants when focusing on function rather than appearance. The

subsequent reflections from participants, highlighting their appreciation for what their bodies

enable them to do, indicate a shift towards prioritizing function over appearance. Moreover, this

shift aligns with newer psychological processes linked to positive body experiences (Piran,

2015).

Table 2: *Participant Reflections on Body Functionality*
In class activity worksheet from Embrace.Kids

Participants	Reflections
Participant 1:	"My body allows me to do other things that some bodies can't, like sports, reading, learning…"
Participant 2:	"Everyone is created differently. We all have different talents and abilities. My body enables me to do things. I can think, talk, run, and walk. I am thankful I can do all these things."
Participant 3:	"My body is awsome. There are no other bodies like my body. It can run, and jump, and lift, and draw. I can do so many talents. Use them and enjoy them."
Participant 4:	"It lets me do cheer, dance, and so much more…It does stuff while I'm not even thinking like breathing."

Self-compassion can have positive effects on body image and eating disorders (NEFF,

2003). The second lesson explored the concept of self-compassion and its role in supporting

participants during self-comparison. This discussion highlighted the importance of treating

ourselves kindly during times of struggle rather than resorting to self-judgment or criticism.

Body comparison may result from the internalization of the thin ideal (Petrie et al., 2010), and

self-compassion can proactively prevent the emergence of risk factors like the internalization of

the thin ideal (Braun et al., 2016). Therefore, practicing self-compassion is imperative in

education interventions to promote positive body image. Helping adolescents recognize the

distinction between critical self-talk and compassionate self-talk is crucial in providing them

with the understanding and self-assurance necessary to navigate real-life challenges effectively.

During a lesson activity, participants were prompted to recall a scenario where they compared

themselves to someone else and reflected on their emotional response. They were then

encouraged to respond to this scenario with compassion rather than self-criticism. Refer to the

table below for scenarios where participants responded with self-compassion rather than

criticism. Participating in a self-compassion exercise has fostered compassion toward one's body

and alleviated dissatisfaction with weight and appearance (Moffitt et al., 2018). The participants'

responses illustrate how they applied self-compassion instead of criticism in various comparison

scenarios. By acknowledging their feelings and offering themselves kind reassurances, they

shifted from negative self-talk to compassionate self-talk. This exercise demonstrates the

importance and effectiveness of self-compassion in promoting positive body image and

combating the detrimental effects of comparison.

Table 3: Worksheet: Transitioning from Comparison to Compassion
In class activity worksheet from Embrace.Kids

Participant 1:

Table 3 (continued): Worksheet: Transitioning from Comparison to Compassion
In class activity worksheet from Embrace.Kids

Prompts related to comparison scenario	Responses
Describe what happened, and how it made you feel?	"I was running a race, and I beat a girl that I wanted to beat, but my time wasn't as good as someone else's time. I felt good at first, but then that good feeling got taken over by not being fast enough."
Do you think other people feel this way, and why do you think that is?	"I feel like especially in track people tend to compare their times a lot. I feel like there is always a standard people have to meet when competing."
What kind things could you say to yourself about this?	"I would say, if you tried your best then its ok how you competed."

Participant 2:

Prompts related to comparison scenario	Responses
Describe what happened, and how it made you feel?	"I've never been good at sports…The kids I played tennis with would talk bad about me and tell people that I was horrible and that I needed to quit. I was really upset."
Do you think other people feel this way, and why do you think that is?	"I think that since not everyone is good at sports, of course some people feel like they don't have any talents or aren't good at anything because sports are so heavily praised. People can forget about the other talents people have."
What kind things could you say to yourself about this?	"You can tell yourself that God made us all differently and that we all have different talents. While I might not be good at sports like tennis, I can sing, play instruments, and mountain bike really well."

Participant 3:

Prompts related to comparison scenario	Responses
Describe what happened, and how it made you feel?	"I went shopping after a soccer game & was in my soccer uniform. I felt weird and not in regular clothes. I wanted to look nice & in a pretty outfit while seeing others."
Do you think other people feel this way, and why do you think that is?	"I think others compare themselves to other people when they don't look their best or do look their best. It is our human nature to compare"
What kind things could you say to yourself about this?	"I don't have to look the same as other people and can do things without the mean approval of others. I can learn to not compare myself to others and know I was created in God's image."

Due to the pervasive influence of social media, individuals are often subjected to unrealistic beauty standards, which can result in feelings of dissatisfaction with their bodies, leading to unhealthy behaviors such as dieting and disordered eating (Vuong et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media platforms shape societal perceptions of attractiveness and fuel the desire to alter one's appearance (Vuong et al., 2021). Therefore, addressing media literacy becomes paramount in nurturing body positivity and enhancing body satisfaction. Despite only one participant having a social media account, the media literacy lesson emerged as a favorite among several. One participant, who did not use social media, expressed appreciation for the insights gained, remarking, "I liked learning about social media literacy...I liked learning about it for when I do have it." This underscores the importance of equipping adolescents with tools to critically assess social media content, thereby safeguarding them against internalizing unrealistic beauty standards prevalent online. Another participant, active on social media, highlighted the impact of the lesson, stating, "I really liked the social media lesson that we did. I often see ads of people who have perfect bodies and perfect hair and I always felt bad about myself." This testimonial further emphasizes the necessity of empowering adolescents to navigate social media's influence on body image and self-esteem. Body image education programs that highlight strategies to counter media-driven messages promoting unrealistic ideals have been shown to reduce reliance on external approval for self-worth and diminish the desire to conform to unrealistic beauty standards (Golan et al., 2013). During the media literacy lesson, participants engaged in discussions on mitigating the negative impact of social media, analyzing altered photos, and challenging media messages. By shedding light on the deceptive nature of social media imagery and its effects on body image and self-esteem, the program empowered

adolescents with strategies and confidence to resist societal pressures and reduce the internalization of appearance-focused messages perpetuated by the media.

Research has highlighted the effectiveness of body image education interventions centered around self-compassion, social media literacy, and body image awareness in enhancing body appreciation and satisfaction (Mahon & Hevey, 2023). Consistent with these findings, this education program exhibited notable positive changes in participants' attitudes towards their bodies as evidenced by pre- and post-surveys. Specifically, the findings demonstrate a marked increase in participants' appreciation for their bodies following the program. Examining responses on the Body Appreciation Scale-2 reveals that individuals exhibited increased feelings of fondness and gratitude towards their bodies. For instance, there was a noteworthy increase in five participants who acknowledged feeling love for their bodies. Moreover, four individuals reported heightened sentiments of beauty independent of societal standards, as indicated by their responses to the statement, "I feel like I am beautiful even if I am different from pictures and videos of attractive people." There were also discernible positive changes in the Functionality Appreciation Scale. Four participants reported increased gratitude for the health of their bodies, even when not always meeting their ideal health standards. Additionally, three individuals expressed a heightened awareness of how much their bodies do for them. These findings indicate a crucial aspect of fostering positive body image—developing an appreciation for one's body and capabilities. By cultivating sentiments of love, beauty, and gratitude towards their bodies, participants in the study have taken significant steps toward fostering a healthier body image. This underscores the efficacy of the body image education program in promoting positive self-perception and its importance in promoting overall well-being.

Promoting positive body image among adolescents is crucial for shielding them from body dissatisfaction. Recent research emphasizes prevention programs that target psychological processes that foster positive experiences within the body. One of these essential processes involves cultivating a positive body connection through encouraging self-talk, which counteracts negative experiences (Piran, 2015). The present study utilized interactive worksheets and discussions to promote positive self-talk among participants. These included activities like the "Comparison to Compassion" worksheet, an "Encouragement Worksheet: Pep-Talk to Self," and a worksheet prompting participants to embrace self-love and appreciate their bodies for their unique gifts. During a worksheet centered around positive self-talk, participants were asked to compose a pep talk aimed at appreciating their bodies. In response, participants expressed heartfelt reasons for loving their bodies. For instance, one participant shared, "My body is uniquley and beautyfully made by God. I am not made like anyone else and I should remember God took time to make me and I shouldn't want to change that. My body allows me to do other things that some bodies can't, like sports, reading, learning." Another participant highlighted the functional aspects of their body, stating, "My body enables me to do things. I can think, talk, run, and walk. I am thankful I can do these things." Furthermore, a different participant expressed gratitude for the opportunities their body provides, stating, "It lets me participate in cheer, dance, and so much more. My body makes me, me." Engaging in positive self-talk, practicing self-compassion, and embracing one's unique qualities and talents fosters a nurturing relationship with the body, ultimately leading to increased body satisfaction. By reinforcing the notion that everyone is unique and valuable in their own way, these interventions contribute to developing a healthier and more positive body image among adolescents.

Limitations

Nevertheless, with all research, the current findings must consider this study's possible limitations. First, one significant limitation of this study is the small sample size, comprising only eight participants, which restricted the ability to conduct robust pre- and post-comparisons to ascertain significant changes, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings to a broader population. Another notable limitation of this study was the inconsistent attendance of some participants (n=2), resulting from scheduled appointments or other commitments. Consequently, individuals who missed one or two sessions were unable to fully benefit from the entire program, potentially impacting the overall improvement in body satisfaction outcomes. Furthermore, the variability in participant attendance led to uneven data collection, thereby limiting the completeness and reliability of our dataset, and subsequently affecting our ability to analyze the impact of the intervention comprehensively. A key limitation of this study was the reliance on self-reported scales to assess adolescents' attitudes toward their bodies.

Since the data collection involved unfamiliar individuals entering a classroom setting, participants may have felt intimidated, particularly during the initial sessions, which could have influenced their willingness to respond candidly. Despite assurances of confidentiality, establishing trust might have been challenging in this context, potentially affecting the accuracy and depth of participant responses. All being said, the results from this study and the comparison with previous studies underscore the urgency of introducing comprehensive body image education programs in classrooms due to the escalating public health issue of negative body image among adolescents. The positive outcomes observed in this study highlight the efficacy of programs that prioritize protective factors to foster positive body image through strategies such

as self-compassion, emphasis on functionality, media literacy, and the cultivation of understanding regarding the significance of maintaining a healthy body image.

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study carry significant clinical implications for educators and policymakers, particularly concerning students' mental health and well-being. Implementing a body image education program within schools holds promise for positively influencing students' self-esteem and mental health outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates the connection between body dissatisfaction and the emergence of disordered eating, often accompanied by diminished self-esteem and negative emotional experiences such as depression. Early intervention through education may play a crucial role in enhancing overall well-being.

Body image education programs can also help mitigate risks associated with poor body image, such as engagement in risky behaviors like extreme dieting. Studies indicate that eating disorders stemming from body dissatisfaction exhibit the highest mortality rates among adolescents compared to other psychiatric conditions, with elevated risks of suicide and self-harm (Voelker et al., 2015). By fostering healthier attitudes towards self-acceptance, body image education programs have the potential to address these alarming trends and promote protective factors among students. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of targeted interventions encompassing media literacy, even without direct social media exposure. Equipping adolescents with critical media analysis skills before exposure can mitigate the pressure to conform to cultural and appearance ideals perpetuated by social media. Addressing self-compassion is equally vital, allowing adolescents to cultivate positive self-perception and break free from cycles of self-judgment associated with negative body image. Interventions should also confront social comparison by instilling confidence in individual uniqueness and

talents. Small-group interventions can foster open dialogue and discussion on challenging topics, encouraging participants to explore protective factors like self-confidence and self-compassion in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

Notably, public health services should collaborate with legislators to regulate the use of altered and distorted body images in advertisements, aiming to mitigate the adverse effects of unrealistic body ideals perpetuated by the media. In conjunction with educational boards at the state and national levels, policymakers should prioritize integrating body image education programs into school curricula. This concerted effort could yield long-term public health benefits by reducing the burden on healthcare systems associated with mental health issues and eating disorders. Additionally, the collaborative effort between policymakers and educators can significantly enhance the well-being of young individuals and promote healthier attitudes toward body image. In conclusion, this study advocates for the need for comprehensive strategies to tackle body image issues among adolescents, emphasizing the pivotal roles of self-compassion, body functionality, media literacy, self-esteem, and cultivating a healthy body image. Implementing these elements effectively within a classroom-based intervention is crucial for promoting positive body image among young individuals.

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Body Appreciation Scale-2

1. I feel good about my body.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

2. I respect my body.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

3. I feel that my body has a least some good qualities.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

4. I take positive attitude towards my body.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

5. I pay attention to what my body needs.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

6. I feel love for my body.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

7. I appreciate the different and unique things about my body.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

8. You can tell I feel good about my body by the way I behave.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

9. I am comfortable in my body.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

10. I feel like I am beautiful even if I am different from pictures and videos of attractive

    people.

    (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

Appendix B

Functionality Appreciation Scale

1. I appreciate my body for what it is capable of doing.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

2. I am grateful for the health of my body, even if it isn't always as healthy as I would like it

   to be.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

3. I appreciate that my body allows me to communicate and interact with others.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

4. I acknowledge and appreciate when my body feels good and/or relaxed.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

5. I am grateful that my body enables me to engage in activities that I enjoy or find

   important.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

6. I feel that my body does so much for me.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

7. I respect my body for the functions that it performs.

   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Often (5) Always

Appendix C

Student Feedback Questions

1. Did you find any particular activities or discussions within the program particularly engaging or enjoyable? If so, please elaborate.

2. What were the key takeaways or lessons you learned from participating in the body image education program?

3. Did you feel comfortable discussing body image-related issues within the program environment? Why or why not?

Appendix D

Parent Feedback Survey

1. Do you believe the body image program positively influenced your child's perceptions of their body? __ Yes   __No

2. My child came home and talked about what was discussed in the program.

   __Never   __Rarely   __Sometimes   __Often   __Very Often   __Always

3. How satisfied are you with the content and activities provided in the body image program?

   Very Dissatisfied   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)   Very Satisfied

4. My child expressed new insights or perspectives about body image and self-esteem as a result of participating in the program.

   __Never   __Rarely   __Sometimes   __Often   __Very Often   __Always

5. Would you recommend this body image program to other parents and children?

   __ Yes   __No

6. Are there any additional comments or feedback you would like to share about your child's experience with the body image program?