



## Editorial

## School-Based Body Image Intervention: Overcoming Challenges to Dissemination



Body dissatisfaction is prevalent among adolescents and is associated with adverse and long-lasting impacts upon physical health and psychosocial functioning [1,2]. In light of these negative consequences, a large number of interventions have been designed to improve body image, mostly targeted at adolescents. At this developmental phase, schools are an ideal setting for promoting positive body image. They offer the possibility of reaching large groups of young people from differing backgrounds [3] and provide a prime opportunity for discussing peer relationships and influences on body image. In a broader perspective, students can also be encouraged to modify the school environment [4].

Most studies testing the effectiveness of interventions in this field face several problems. They (1) over-rely on small, under-powered trials; (2) do not evaluate long-term effects [5]; (3) lack independent replication [6]; and (4) rarely assess intervention fidelity. The work of Diedrichs et al. [7], presented in this issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, is a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the effectiveness of school-based approaches. This study assesses the impact of a teacher-delivered, universal body image program for early adolescents. There are two strengths in this study that deserve mention. Classroom-based interventions delivered by teachers have been insufficiently studied, despite representing low-cost interventions with high potential for dissemination. In addition, most limitations pointed out in previous studies were overcome, making this work one of the largest and most solid school-based effectiveness trials evaluating a body image intervention.

Findings are encouraging and suggest that this teacher-led intervention is effective in improving adolescent's body image and self-esteem. From the students' point of view, the intervention is acceptable, enjoyable, and effective.

However, not all results were encouraging. The effect sizes were small, and the intervention did not produce significant improvements on risk factors for body image, such as internalization of appearance ideals and social comparisons tendency. These findings converge with previous research carried out with stand-alone interventions [5], and in particular, classroom-based

approaches [6]. Current interventions commonly target risk factors for body dissatisfaction, with a preventive focus. The small magnitude of improvements in body image leads us to rethink this focus and consider a broader approach to body experience. Although the Dove Confident Me offers a quite comprehensive approach to body image, future iterations of the program could benefit from an expanded construct of positive body image. A theoretical guide to be considered in this refinement is described below.

Positive body image embraces a more holistic understanding of body image and is theoretically distinct from and not on the same continuum as negative body image. Positive body image is a multifaceted construct that involves accepting the body as it is and appreciating its uniqueness and functionality. It comprises six core components: (1) gratitude for the function, health, and unique features of the body; (2) acceptance of aspects of the body that diverge from appearance ideals; (3) perceptions of beauty based on a variety of appearances and internal characteristics; (4) adaptive investment in body care, including attention to needs such as food, sleep, and exercise; (5) feelings of worth and beautiful on the inside; and (6) interpreting incoming information in a body-protective manner, accepting positive messages and rejecting or reframing negative body-related information [8].

Three facets of this construct, particularly, merit attention to their potential to reorient body image experience from appearance to function and health. By emphasizing the relevance of being aware of and attentive to the body's needs, the focus on body health can be an important dimension to stress in interventions. Among other health behaviors, attuned self-care can foster intuitive eating, which has been linked to weight maintenance and improved psychological health [9]. The functional view of the body is another relevant dimension to emphasize, encouraging youngsters to praise the body for what it is able to do, rather than just how it looks. Body functionality encompasses a diverse range of attributes (e.g., physical capacities, bodily senses, communication with others), from which individuals can derive satisfaction [10]. Accordingly,

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Frisén and Holmqvist [11] found that a functional view of the body was considered a core dimension of appearance satisfaction by early adolescents. Last, by placing a greater focus on the promotion of inner positivity (feelings of beauty and worth inside), interventions may target positive effects on well-being, external appearance, and adaptive behavior, such as kindness and mindfulness [8].

Looking to the future, Diedrichs et al. [7] pointed out one important challenge for the Dove Confident Me program: the large-scale dissemination. We need to implement independent replication trials, and thereafter, if favorable outcomes, we need to plan how to scale up the program successfully. To be broadly implemented, programs should be financially sustainable. A set of strategies can be considered to achieve this purpose. One, the involvement of multiple organizational partners that could be trained to become self-sufficient in implementing it. Two, the development of social media campaigns aimed at lend visibility to the program and building interest for fundraising initiatives. Three, the investment in a train-the-trainers approach, involving people from other organizations to sustainably train others to implement the intervention [12]. Lastly, there would need to be a consolidation of strategies to motivate schoolteachers to receive training on the program (e.g., getting credits for a professional career by attending the training course) and to continue to deliver the intervention to other students in the following years (e.g., offering coaching sessions, creating a public webpage to publicize “body activism” initiatives carried out in schools in the scope of the program).

Overall, the Dove Confident Me program has made a good contribution along the efficacy-effectiveness-dissemination continuum. With attention to barriers to scalability, Diedrichs et al.'s research provides a good starting point to large-scale dissemination and offers a valid tool to promote healthy body image among youth.

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