

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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“Sold on Looks” teaches youth the negative effect media has on body image

AT A GLANCE

After this program, student post survey scores for negative appearance assumptions decreased indicating less body dissatisfaction and improved body image

The Situation

Studies have found that, especially among females, exposure to media content that presents the thin ideal — thinness as the ultimate desired body shape and as a condition for social and personal success and happiness — leads to increases in body dissatisfaction, depression, and to low self-esteem. Lower body satisfaction predicts higher levels of dieting and unhealthy weight control behaviors. Dieting and the use of unhealthy or healthy weight control behaviors are significant predictors of long-term weight gain and increase the risk of becoming overweight.

Our Response

A school education program “Sold on Looks” was developed to teach the impact of media on what people value, how they feel about themselves, their approach to life and their beliefs about the role of appearance. The program included a slide show and pre-and post-survey. Elementary schools throughout Franklin County were invited to have an University of Idaho Extension educator teach the “Sold on Looks” program. Four sessions were held at the two elementary schools in Franklin County, and 338 4th and 5th graders participated.



Group of children accessing media on phones. (bigstockphoto.com)

Program Outcomes

A pre-and post-survey of eight questions from Appearance Schemas Inventory (Cash and Labarge, 1996) was given to assess the extent students agreed with negative appearance assumptions using a Likert scale 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Average pre-and post-survey scores were analyzed and compared using a two-tailed paired-sample t-test. The results are in Table 1. On all but one of the average scores for the negative appearance assumptions, the scores decreased in the post survey indicating more disagreement with the statement after the presentation. A lower score has been associated with less body dissatisfaction and a higher body image.

Table 1. Average Pre- and Post-Survey Scores

Statement	Pre	Post	P-value
Physically attractive people have it all.	2.12	2.03	0.2976
The first thing people notice about me is what's wrong	2.28	2.48	0.0337
The way a person looks on the outside is a sign of the	2.05	2.01	0.5817
If I could look just as I wish, my life would be much	2.58	2.20	0.0004
By controlling how I look, I can control my friendships	2.40	2.25	0.1144
I should always do whatever I can to look my	3.02	2.61	0.0004
Media messages make it seem impossible for me to be successful and happy unless I look a certain way.	2.09	1.97	0.2647
The only way I could ever like my looks would be to	1.96	1.91	0.60647

The Future

Media awareness education will continue to be offered at the elementary schools in Franklin County.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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