

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Steps To A New You Improves Size Acceptance/Body Image

The Situation

Half of American women and a quarter of American men see “defects” when they look in the mirror. Dr. Thomas Cash, a body-image expert, has found that individuals can be happier with their bodies if they change their attitude. He encourages people to quit obsessing over any imperfections and to quit imagining that other people see the same defects we do.

Cash states, “Body image accounts for 25 to 30 percent of one’s self-esteem. If you dislike your body, it makes it harder to like the person who lives there.” But for most people, changing the inner self will change the way they see their bodies.

Our Response

Three Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educators (Marnie Spencer, Grace Wittman, Laura Sant) taught a nine-lesson curriculum, *Steps To A New You*, which focuses on respecting and accepting body size differences, physically active living, and pleasurable and healthy eating. In 2007 the three extension educators taught this program in Bingham, Cassia, and Franklin counties.

In these classes participants learned to: (1) accept and value everybody, including themselves; (2) be critical of messages that focus on unrealistic body images as symbols of success and happiness, (3) identify their own strengths and abilities and building on their assets, (4) recognize that people of all sizes and shapes can reduce their risk of poor

health by adopting a healthy lifestyle; and (5) challenge their own size-prejudice beliefs.

In order to measure changes in attitude, participants completed a body image/size acceptance questionnaire at three points: (1) Pre (before the program began), (2) Post (at the end of the program—week 9), and (3) Follow-up (at week 20).

Program Outcomes

The body image/body size questionnaire asked questions about dieting and weight, body appearance, and self-esteem. The pre, post, and follow-up questionnaires were completed by 53, 35, and 33 participants, respectively.

Dieting and Weight results are shown in Table 1. The number of participants who had been on a diet stayed relative constant throughout the study, at 90%. There was an eight percent decrease in the number of participants who planned to diet (from 28% to 20%) and an increase in the number of participants who were satisfied with their weight (11% to 31% to 21%).

Table 1. Dieting and weight results

Questions	Pre (N=53)	Post (N=35)	Follow-up (N=33)
Have you ever dieted	90%	89%	90%
Currently on a diet or plan to start	28%	20%	18%
Satisfied with current weight	11%	31%	21%

Size acceptance: Table 2 results show there was an approximate 20-25% increase in the number of participants who were satisfied with their current shape, overall appearance and who didn't care what people thought about their body size or shape.

Table 2. Size acceptance

Questions	Pre (N=53)	Post (N=35)	Follow-up (N=33)
Satisfied with current shape	8%	29%	24%
Satisfied with overall appearance	19%	40%	30%
Don't care what people think about my body size or shape	19%	46%	52%

Self-esteem: Table 3 results show an approximate 10-30% increase in the number of participants who had good self-esteem and felt their abilities, skills, and strengths were more important than size.

Table 3. Self esteem

Questions	Pre (N=53)	Post (N=35)	Follow-up (N=33)
Good self-esteem	23%	37%	33%
Have abilities, skills, strengths that are more important than size	51%	69%	79%

Barbie™ and GI Joe™ Fantasy: Many participants commented about the Barbie™ and GI Joe™ fantasy in class and on the post evaluation forms. They were very surprised to learn that if Barbie™ were a real person, she would be approximately 6'9" tall, have a 41" bust and 20" waist (see below).



If GI Joe™ were a real person, he would be approximately 5'10" tall, have 27" biceps, and a 55" chest (see below). Although Barbie's measurements have remained fairly constant over the years, this is not true of GI Joe™.



For More Information

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