The Effectiveness of Media Literacy and Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools: A Controlled Evaluation with 9th Grade Girls

by
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ABSTRACT

DYSART, MILLIE MAXWELL. The Effectiveness of Media Literacy and Eating Disorder Prevention in Schools: A Controlled Evaluation with 9th Grade Girls. (Under the direction of Edwin Gerler.)

The prevalence and deleterious nature of eating disorders encourages prevention efforts. Schools afford a unique opportunity for effecting change and promoting student well-being, but the infancy of prevention research, the complexity of the disorders, and the limitations of school resources challenge the development of a cohesive body of empirically-supported interventions. The following study evaluated an 8 week media literacy program with 9th grade students ($n = 62$) at posttest and 6 weeks. An additional 6 month follow-up ($n = 75$) incorporated a non-randomized new student control group. Analyses of variance demonstrated that internalization of the thin ideal, viewing the media as an important source of information, and seeing oneself and others and similar to media ideals reflected significant group differences at each data collection. Drive for thinness differences were significant initially, but not in follow-up studies. Body dissatisfaction differences approached significance at posttest and 6 months, but bulimia, weight-related anxiety, realism, and self-esteem results were non-significant throughout the study. The noteworthy, sustained results for internalization lend credence to the inclusion of media literacy as a primary prevention effort in high schools.

The control group for the study experienced a substance education intervention. Significant group differences for substance use were reported at posttest, but not in either follow-up study. The comparative studies allowed inspection of some minor overlap of variables: substance use was associated with lower self-esteem, and drinking was linked to body dissatisfaction and weight anxiety. These findings encourage further examination
of substance use behaviors, self-esteem, and body image distress as well as the
development of multifaceted prevention efforts that address these relationships.