



# Promoting body confidence in schools

Dr Helen Sharpe



centre for applied  
developmental  
psychology

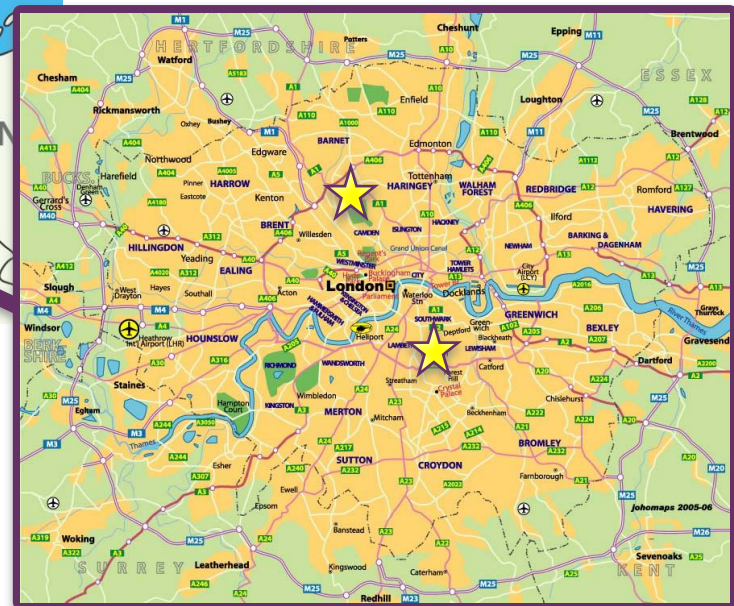


Department of Clinical Psychology  
University of Edinburgh



Evidence Based Practice Unit

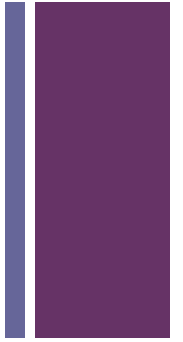
Part of Anna Freud Centre



**KING'S**  
College  
LONDON

Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience

# + Aim for this session



- Unpack the concept of body image in children and adolescents
- Introduce you to some recent findings on the development of body image in children
- Highlight school-based programmes for body image that are available, and the evidence behind them

# + Why concern ourselves with body confidence?



- Body image is a top concern for young people
- 60% girls and 20% boys have been on a diet by the age of 16
- Because of worries about their looks:
  - 19% girls won't try out for a team or club
  - 19% girls won't go to a social event, party or club
  - 15% girls won't go to school
  - 13% girls won't give an opinion.

☑ Mission Australia Youth Survey (2013)

☑ Neumark-Sztainer (2011) *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*

☑ Dove (2010) *The Real Truth About Beauty; Revisited*

# + Effects of low body confidence?



Body dissatisfaction

Eating disorders

Depression

Self-harm

Smoking

Risky sexual behaviours

Overweight and obesity

...

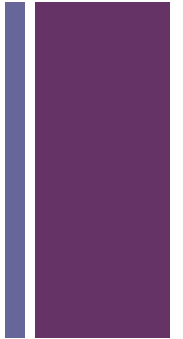
# + Body image: multi-dimensional

- Affective: feelings about the body, body dissatisfaction – body satisfaction
- Cognitive: thoughts and beliefs about the body
- Perceptual: mental representation of the body

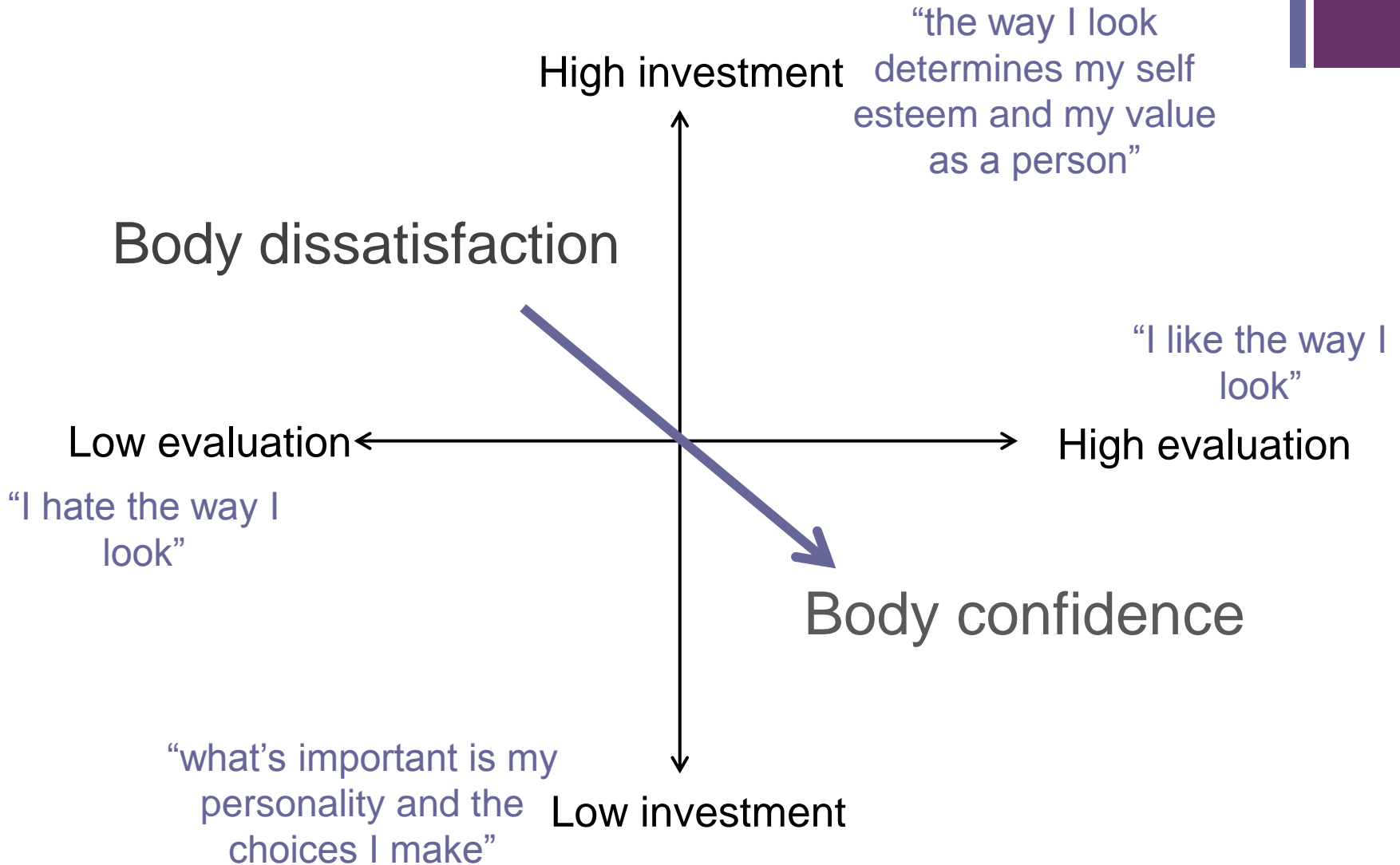
Body image evaluation

vs.

Body image investment



# + Promoting body confidence





+ The development of body  
dissatisfaction

Some recent findings



# + Four studies



1. The association between body dissatisfaction and internalising symptoms
2. Ethnic differences in the development of body dissatisfaction
3. Adolescent girls' experiences of body image
4. (Body confidence and overweight)

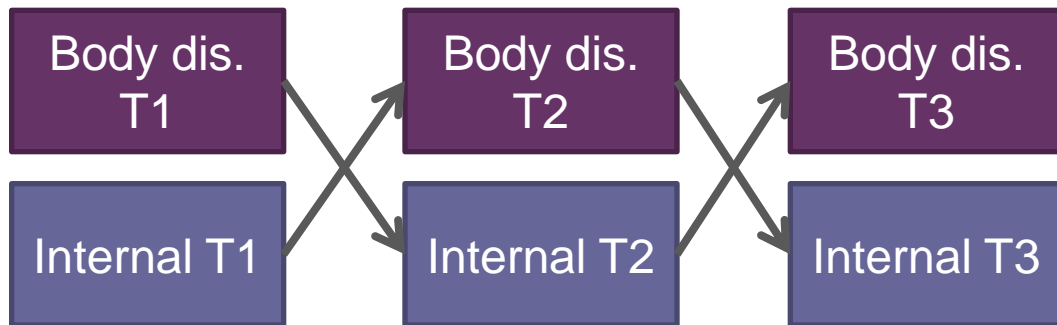


# Study 1: Body image and internalising symptoms

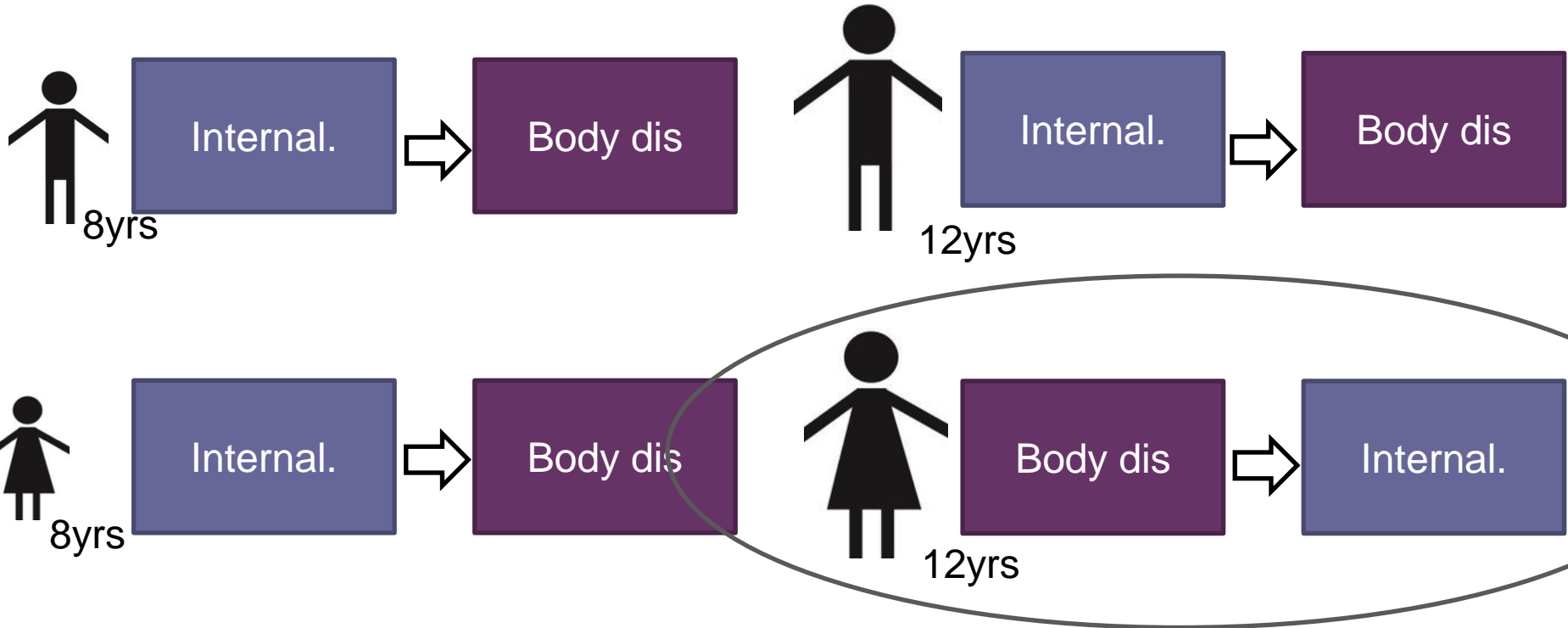
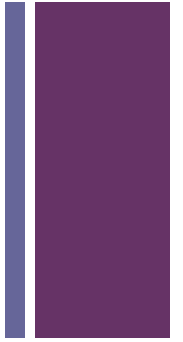
Patalay, Sharpe et al. (2015) JCPP



- Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS) initiative in England
- >10,000 children in y4 (aged 8-9) and y7 (aged 11-12) followed over 3 years
- Two questionnaires: internalising symptoms (Me and My School) and “I like the way I look”



+ Internalising symptoms predict later body dissatisfaction, for all groups apart from adolescent girls



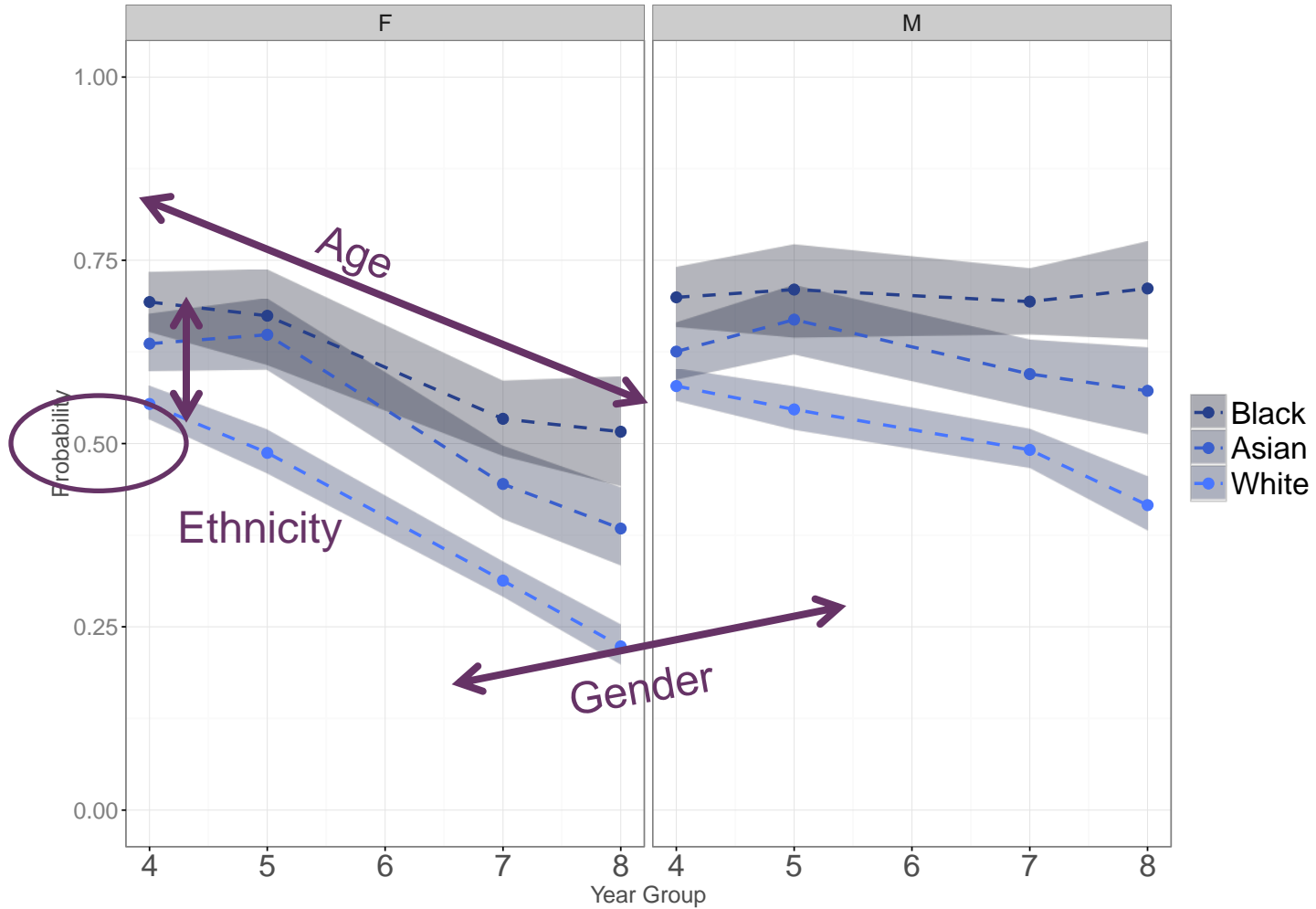
# + Study 2: Ethnic differences in body image. Sharpe et al (under review)



- TaMHS data
- Cross sectional and longitudinal data
- Snapshot of 4 year groups – Y4, Y5, Y7, Y8
- 43,414 children from White, Black and Asian backgrounds (we excluded children from other backgrounds).



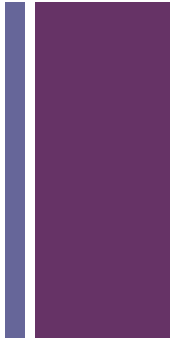
Ethnic minority status is protective against body dissatisfaction, even from Y4 (age 8)





# Study 3: Adolescents' experiences

Sharpe et al. (2013) Eating and Weight Disorders



- 22 female students from one girls' secondary school, aged between 13 and 15 years
- Predominately of White British origin
- Four, 1hr focus groups, conducted at school



## Not everyone is appearance conscious, but occasional dieting is normalised



“I don’t really put that much effort into the way I look when I come to school because I don’t really care because it’s not something that’s important.”

–Student 4, Aged 13.

“I think image is really important and that everyone has to try and make an effort in how they show themselves.”

– Student 8, Aged 15

“We’re all trying to be a bit more careful for the summer. And loose a bit of weight we gained over Christmas.”

– Student 7, Aged 15.

# + “Fat talking” is common

“They say something like ‘I’m so fat, I need to get on a diet!’ or something like that, and then people who are actually like more overweight might think like ‘oh they’re saying that and they’re skinnier than me, which means that I’m even worse than them’.”

– Student 13, Aged 13.

“I think the people who really are on diets are the ones who don’t actually say anything about it. And those are the ones where you can kind of tell because it’s like hidden.”

– Student 22, Aged 15.





## Social media play a central role



“Facebook like gives you the opportunity to look at whoever you want whenever you want [...] it’s made the whole appearance thing a lot more noticeable.”

– Student 16, Aged 13.

“I just remember last summer being on Facebook and just looking at people and when they come back from holiday and they upload their photos and they look so skinny in a bikini. And I’m just there with my paleness and just my kind of average figure.”

– Student 9, Aged 15.

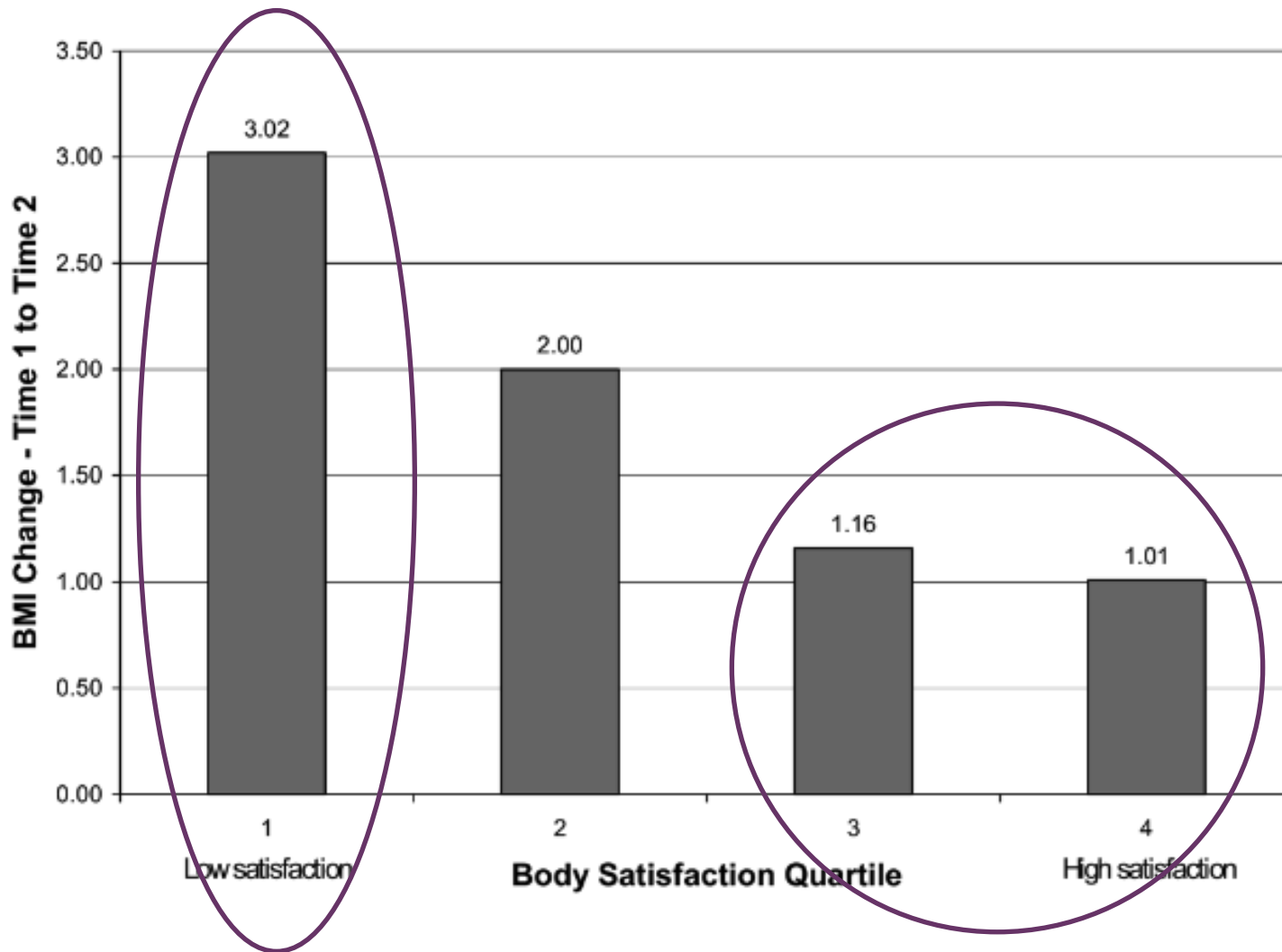
# + Study 4 – Body image and overweight

Van den Berg (2007) *Journal of Adolescent Health*

- ProjectEAT. 373 girls, with BMI >85<sup>th</sup> percentile in the USA
- Aged 13-15 at baseline
- Assessed twice, 5 years apart



# + Body confidence promotes healthy weight



## + Summing up

- Body dissatisfaction is common in childhood and adolescence, particularly for White girls.
- Body dissatisfaction is closely linked with internalizing symptoms
- Sociocultural factors play an important role in the development of body dissatisfaction
- Body dissatisfaction exacerbates problems with overweight





## What can schools do about it?

- General suggestions when working with school staff
- A look at the evidence
- Resources

Get staff to think about their own body image – modeling body confidence

**Start with staff**

**Stop fat talking**

Recognise and challenge negative body talk

Being able to access, analyse, evaluate, and create (social) media

**Teach media literacy**

**Tackle the big issues**

Link with weight stigma, feminism, racism, consumerism



## Start with staff

Get staff to think about their own body image – modeling body confidence

- Body dissatisfaction doesn't just affect students
- Focus on creating a body confident school environment– staff are central to this
- Fat talking, body shaming, fad dieting, excessive exercising



# + Stop fat talking

Recognise and challenge negative body talk

- Bring fat talk to PSHE
  - It resonates with young people
  - Tie in with broader negative self talk
  - Focus on recognising fat talking and understanding what effects it has on how we think, feel and act
  - ‘Friends don’t let friends fat talk’ pledges
- Resources:
  - Tri Delta Fat Talk Free Week





# + Teach media literacy

Being able to access, analyse, evaluate, and create (social) media

- Media are actively constructed for a purpose (usually influence/power/profit)
- Media are changing: Our students are digital natives, but, they need to manage social media, graphic online content, cyber bullying, sexting, digital footprint.
- Remember: social media puts teens in an unprecedented position of power in creating positive media – focus on empowerment
- Resources:
  - Centre for Media Literacy [www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)



# + Tackle the big issues

Link with weight stigma, feminism, racism, consumerism

## ■ Discussion starters:

- On what basis do we value other people?
- What does it mean to be a man / woman in our society today?
- How are people of different ethnicities and backgrounds represented in the media?
- Can you buy happiness?

## ■ Resources:

- Dove – Evolution
- The Mask You Live In (Be a Man)
- Everyday Sexism Project





# Evidence for body image interventions in schools



Body Image 10 (2013) 271–281



Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

## Body Image

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/bodyimage](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/bodyimage)



Review article

## What works in secondary schools? A systematic review of classroom-based body image programs



Zali Yager<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Philippa C. Diedrichs<sup>b</sup>, Lina A. Ricciardelli<sup>c</sup>, Emma Halliwell<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Education, La Trobe University, Edwards Road, Bendigo, Victoria 3550, Australia

<sup>b</sup> Centre for Appearance Research, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY, United Kingdom

<sup>c</sup> School of Psychology, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria 3125, Australia

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 9 August 2012

Received in revised form 15 March 2013

Accepted 4 April 2013

### ABSTRACT

Governments, schools, and curriculum authorities are increasingly recognizing that body image during adolescence is a public health issue that warrants attention in the school setting. After 30 years of eating disorder prevention research, and given the current interest in this area, it seems timely to review the research on interventions to improve body image in schools. We reviewed universal, selective, classroom-

# + Evidence for body image interventions in schools



- Classroom-based body image programmes in secondary schools (2000-2012)
- 16 programmes were reviewed
- 7 were 'effective' in promoting body image in the short term, 3 were 'effective' over the longer term (3-30 months)
- Small effect sizes
- Most effective programmes:
  - 12-13 years
  - Focus on media literacy, self esteem, peer interactions
  - >5 hours (not a single shot)

# + Evidence for body image interventions in schools

- There are effective body image interventions for adolescents
- We know less about what works in primary schools (watch this space for a review!)
- Most research has not been in co-educational settings



# + Evidence-based programmes



- The Body Project
- Media Smart
- Dove Self Esteem Fund
- Me, You and Us

# + The Body Project (USA)



- A very well evidenced American programme for young adults and adolescents.
- Targeted intervention, 4/6 sessions
- Based on cognitive dissonance principles
- Training and resources are available, but based in the USA...
- <http://www.bodyprojectcollaborative.com/>

# + Media Smart (Australia)



- Not to be confused with Media Smart UK
- 8 session media literacy programme
- Effective programme, with long term follow up
- Resources available for schools to buy (in Australian Dollars)
  - <http://www.flinders.edu.au/sabs/psychology/services/flinders-university-services-for-eating-disorders/mediasmart/media-smart-purchase.cfm>



# + Dove Self Esteem Fund (UK)

- Loosely based on cognitive dissonance model
- 1 or 5 session versions
- Currently being evaluated with reasonable results, when teachers were given brief training
- Resources available for download or free workshop sign up:
  - <http://selfesteem.dove.co.uk/Articles/Written/Teachers-and-schools.aspx>
  - <http://selfesteemsignup.dove.co.uk/>



# + Me, You and Us (UK)



- 6 sessions, girls aged 12-13.
- Focuses on media literacy, fat talking and mood
- Teacher-delivered (ideally following training)
- Teacher manual and student workbook available
  - Email me!

## + Summing up

- Body image is an important issue for young people, and one in which schools can play a central role.
- A range of factors contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction during adolescence
- School-based programmes are available, although the best evidenced are based overseas





Thanks for your attention

Helen Sharpe

[helen.sharpe@ed.ac.uk](mailto:helen.sharpe@ed.ac.uk)

