

## STANFORD UNIVERSITY STUDY ON THE BE BODY POSITIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR COLLEGE CAMPUSES

*“After struggling with an eating disorder freshman year and relapsing again during winter quarter of my sophomore year, becoming a Be Body Positive facilitator this past spring was the best timing I could ask for...The group helped me realize the huge body-image and self-love problem on the Stanford campus, and that I, along with other passionate and committed people, have the power to change it.”*

—Be Body Positive student leader, Stanford University

In 2014, The Body Positive partnered with Stanford University researchers Megan Jones, PsyD, Athena Robinson, PhD, and Kristen Lohse, PsyD Candidate, to conduct a pilot study to evaluate the preliminary efficacy, feasibility, and acceptability of the Be Body Positive leadership program for college students. The study was designed to assess the ability of The Body Positive’s peer education program to train student leaders to use the Be Body Positive curriculum to reduce body dissatisfaction and eating disorder risk factors among their peers. A core component of the program is to teach students to facilitate ongoing discussion groups where they assist other students in establishing and maintaining a positive relationship to their bodies, and developing an intuitive relationship with eating and exercise.

In the spring of 2014, five Be Body Positive student groups were held on the Stanford University campus in various dorms and sororities. More than 30 students participated in the groups, which were led by 12 undergraduate and graduate students who were trained in a weekend intensive. The leaders were trained to use the curriculum to teach their peers about the five Competencies of the Be Body Positive Model. They taught the curriculum in weekly, two-hour groups over an eight-week period.

Participants responded to a set of questionnaires immediately before the groups began, after the last group ended, and at follow up time points of two weeks, eight weeks, and eight months. Many participants also submitted qualitative writing that provided feedback, insights, and lessons learned from the group experience.

The quantitative results of this pilot study demonstrated significant improvements on measures associated with increased resilience against eating and body image problems (*measured by effect sizes—Cohen’s  $d$ . See chart below*). Group participants reported a reduction in their shape/weight control beliefs, body surveillance, and internalization of the thin ideal, an increase in body satisfaction, and fewer social determinants of poor body image, from baseline to the end of group. Further improvements on all measures were shown eight months after group ended.



*“Our beauty is the unconditional love we have for ourselves and others.”*

This pilot study provides evidence to suggest that those who participate in Be Body Positive groups experience meaningful and positive changes related to eating, body image, and social relationships.

### Statistical Findings:

Cohen's d: small effect size = 0.2 – 0.49, medium effect size = 0.5 – 0.79, large effect size = 0.8 and up

Measure	Baseline—End of Groups	Baseline—8 Month Follow Up
Thin Ideal Internalization	Close to medium effect size (d= -0.44)	Close to medium effect size (d= -0.47)
Body Area Satisfaction	Small effect size (d= 0.36)	Medium effect size (d= 0.49)
Body Surveillance	Small effect size (d= 0.34)	Medium effect size (d= 0.53)
Shape/Weight Control Beliefs	Small effect size (d= 0.36)	Close to medium effect size (d= 0.042)
Social Determinants of Body Image	Small effect sizes (d= -0.219 to -0.279)	Small to medium effect sizes (d= -0.34 to -0.67)
Weight Concerns	Negligible effect (d= -0.11)	Small effect size (d= -0.37)
Body Shame	Negligible effect (d= 0.06)	Small effect size (d= -0.21)

In a survey of all group participants to determine their satisfaction in the program, 86% rated the quality of the Be Body Positive group as good or better, 76% said that the groups helped them effectively deal with a problem related to body image, and/or eating and exercise, and 71% said they would recommend the program to a friend. Qualitative findings indicated that members felt the groups were a positive source of community, and also expressed appreciation for the conversations on intuitive exercise, vulnerability, intuitive sexuality, and challenging the thin ideal. *See testimonials below.*

The Body Positive's program was so well liked at Stanford University that a student organization called Students Supporting Body Positivity was created after the study ended. This organization has hosted additional Be Body Positive training opportunities for Stanford student leaders, and continues to facilitate ongoing discussion groups, and conduct activism projects to forward the campus-wide "body positive" movement started in 2014.



*"Our beauty is being proud of who we are and where we come from."*

## Testimonials from Stanford University Be Body Positive Student Group Participants:

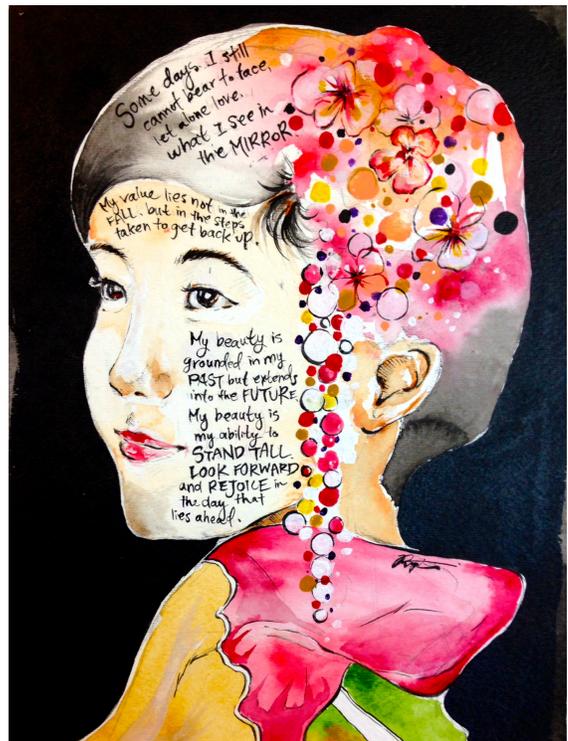
“What I got was an intimate exchange of histories from women, and two brave men, which allowed me to see deeply the struggles for health and beauty. I particularly enjoyed the safety of Ujamaa [residence hall] as a predominately Black space because it allowed for the free flow of stories without having to painfully explain every aspect of our culture. It is not often that we are allowed to discuss and dissect (in an academic setting for credit) the development of ideals of health and beauty within a Black context. The Body Positive turned out to be a safe space for us to come together and reframe the way we think about our bodies and achieving health.”

“I am muscular and have large dominant quad muscles. My butt will never fit into a thong bikini and my thighs will never gap. But I love that I am these things because I love how strong my legs are and how high they help me jump for my sport, and I love my large butt because it is strong, bubbly and powerful. I would not trade my butt for anyone else’s in the world and it feels so good to proclaim this because before The Body Positive, I would have said the exact opposite. This class has almost flipped my view of my body 180 degrees and it has been the most fantastic experience. I am confident in my body and the imperfections that make me unique.”

“The body is intertwined into every aspect of life. The fact that I came into the group not knowing anyone but could feel so comfortable sharing my life story and opinions on subjects not usually talked about, like eating disorders, is what struck me as so unique. Forming emotional ties to people in such a short amount of time is a positive aspect of The Body Positive. By creating a safe and open space, I appreciated how The Body Positive encouraged us to analyze our perceptions, our futures, and ourselves.”

“Today, once and for all, I’d like to state my new definition of health: being able to go about my daily routine comfortably, loving myself, a byproduct, not the end goal, of my activities. Here is my new definition of beauty: not a size or a number, not my boobs or my butt. My beauty is in the love in my heart and how I treat others; it is in lovely memories and my hope for my future; it is in the lives that I have touched and those that have touched mine; it is in my laugh lines and my deft fingers; it is even in my jiggle thighs—they have powerfully carried everything—and my round tummy—it has held sad students and vulnerable friends lost in the midst of difficult times and comforted them.”

“I had fun discussing topics I had never really verbalized before. The best part of the group was hearing different points of views from my peers. Hearing about their experiences and insecurities made my own feel much smaller through solidarity. We all have thought about our bodies negatively at some time in our lives, and it is important to recognize how this can be detrimental to us in the long run. So far, I haven’t obsessed about losing weight since the group began. I don’t even weigh myself. I feel like I have become much more happy as a result and I feel better than ever. I am learning to embrace whoever I will become in the future and not be my own worst enemy.”



*“My beauty is...” self portrait by Stanford University Body Positive leader, 2014*