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Research Proposal

Much effort has been put into educating the public about the risks of indoor tanning, especially given the sharp increase of skin cancer within the past decades. However, it appears that despite having knowledge about the dangers, people are still prioritizing the self-affirmation they receive from tanning over their physical health. Previous studies suggest that this self-affirmation effect mediates from narcissism, egocentrism, low self-esteem, mood, and body image. It is proposed that the need to “feel good about oneself by improving self-perceived physical appearance and improving how others perceive oneself” are strong indicators for tanning motivations (Mays and Zhao 128). Since indoor tanning is for many a self-affirmation experience, if people become aware and realize their need to protect and maintain a positive image of themselves, it may make a more convincing argument for them to decrease indoor tanning intentions.

One study suggests that the usual self-affirmation exercises may not be potent enough because of the threat to oneself when their tanning behaviors are under attack. Many studies have successfully found correlations between psychological motives and tanning intentions and have seeked to understand the motivations behind it; however, few studies have been done on finding effective means of influencing individuals indoor tanning behavioral intentions. May’s and Zhao’s study showed that messages about the risks of indoor tanning (loss-framed messages) were more effective than messages about the gains of avoiding tanning (gain-framed messages) (123). However, because of how self-affirmation is tied to indoor tanning and learning from previous studies that messages about health risks by itself are not very effective, the next logical step would be to test the effectiveness of combining messages that target the self-affirmation effect and loss-framed messages.

By incorporating the results from previous studies, it may be possible to develop a more effective way to lower indoor tanning intentions among the public. Knowing that there is a negative correlation between how an individual views oneself and tanning intentions, I hope to find a way to boost self-esteem and make individuals aware of the self-affirmation effect, while simultaneously presenting loss-framed messages to the individual. The hypothesis is that the self-affirmation messages will help reduce defensive strategies when the individual is then presented with the loss-framed messages, which may seem like a threat to the individual. I propose a study where participants in the control group will be presented with only loss-framed messages. The other participants will be presented with both loss-framed messages along with messages targeting traits that are correlated to tanning intentions. There will be different experimental groups, where variables such as the order in which messages will be presented. Additionally, this study will also test whether messages targeting multiple traits at once, namely narcissism, egocentrism, self-esteem, and body image will be more effective in decreasing indoor tanning intentions. After being displayed these messages, participants will fill out a questionnaire regarding their indoor tanning intentions or their likelihood of quitting indoor tanning.

This study hopes to find that addressing the motivations for individuals to indoor tan will potentially help in reducing future tanning intentions. If the results of the study shows that one of the experimental groups is significantly better are reducing tanning intentions, then a new approach to public messages may be developed targeting indoor tanning may be developed. Taking into account the number of skins cancer cases annually, it is in the public’s best interest to find a suitable method of lowering indoor tanning intentions.

Work Cited

Mays, Darren and Xiaoquan Zhao. "The Influence of Framed Messages and Self-Affirmation on

Indoor Tanning Behavioral Intentions in 18-30 Year-Women." Health Psychology,vol. 35,no. 2, Feb. 2016, pp. 123-130.