



## Accounting for fluctuations in body dissatisfaction

Lauren A. Colautti, Matthew Fuller-Tyszkiewicz\*, Helen Skouteris, Marita McCabe, Stephen Blackburn, Elise Wyett

School of Psychology, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria 3125, Australia

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### ABSTRACT

The present study evaluated whether the strength of relationship between contextual cues (presence of company and mood) and state body dissatisfaction varied as a function of individual differences in key trait measures (body shame, body surveillance tendencies, internalization of appearance standards, and trait affect) which have been linked to trait body dissatisfaction. Fifty-five undergraduate women completed a questionnaire containing the trait-based measures and then carried a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) for a 7-day period. The PDA prompted participants six times daily to self-report their current mood and state body dissatisfaction. Multi-level modeling revealed that individual differences in body shame predicted inter-individual variability in the strength of the relationships between presence of company and state body dissatisfaction, and positive mood and state body dissatisfaction. Trait positive affect also explained variance in the positive mood state-body dissatisfaction relationship. The implications of the findings for prevention of body image disturbances are discussed.

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### Introduction

Body image is a multidimensional construct defined as an individual's perception of, and attitudes towards, his or her body and appearance (Cash, Fleming, Alindogan, Steadman, & Whitehead, 2002). It encompasses a range of cognitive, affective, and perceptual phenomena (Banfield & McCabe, 2002; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Body dissatisfaction is one aspect of body image, relating to an individual's degree of dissatisfaction with particular parts of the body (Cook-Cottone & Phelps, 2003). It is argued that body dissatisfaction consists of both state and trait aspects (Cash et al., 2002; Thompson, 2004; Vocks, Hechler, Rohrig, & Legenbauer, 2009). Trait body dissatisfaction is considered to be a stable and unchanging characteristic that is transferable across a wide range of contexts. Trait body dissatisfaction has been linked to personality traits (e.g., perfectionism, trait affect, and self-esteem), appearance-related factors (e.g., shame felt about one's appearance, body surveillance, internalization of the thin ideal), and socio-cultural influences (e.g., media, interpersonal relations) (Anschutz, Engelsa, Van Leeuwea, & van Strie, 2009; Stice, 2002; Tissot & Crowther, 2008; van den Berg & Thompson, 2007).

In contrast, state body dissatisfaction is thought to fluctuate on a moment-by-moment basis, and these fluctuations have

been associated with contextual factors (e.g., social settings, exercise, and body exposing situations, such as looking in a mirror), current mood state, and individual differences in personality dispositions and disordered eating symptomatology (Hausenblas & Fallon, 2006; LePage & Crowther, 2010; Melnyk, Cash, & Janda, 2004; Paquette & Raine, 2004; Rudiger, Cash, Roehrig, & Thompson, 2007). The relationship between body dissatisfaction and its purported contributors has most commonly been measured using trait measurements and within cross-sectional designs. However, as this approach is insensitive to the state-dependent aspects of body dissatisfaction ratings, the results of these studies are likely to conflate state- and trait-based components of body dissatisfaction (Melnyk et al., 2004).

State-based approaches to measure body dissatisfaction have typically involved the use of simple pre–post induction based methods to elicit state-like changes in body dissatisfaction (Cash et al., 2002; Haimovitz, Lansky, & O'Reilly, 1993; Tiggemann, 2001; Vocks, Legenbauer, & Heil, 2007). For example, Krones, Stice, Batres, and Orjada (2004) compared changes in self-reported body dissatisfaction for women who interacted with a confederate who either conformed to the thin-ideal or who had body dimensions representative of the average woman in the general population. They found that body dissatisfaction increased significantly for participants exposed to the thin-ideal confederate but not for the normal weight confederate.

While induction-based studies demonstrate the malleability of body dissatisfaction, they are limited in several ways. First, such methods may have limited ecological validity as the event that

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 3 9251 7344; fax: +61 3 9244 6858.

E-mail address: [matthew.fuller-tyszkiewicz@deakin.edu.au](mailto:matthew.fuller-tyszkiewicz@deakin.edu.au)  
(M. Fuller-Tyszkiewicz).

induces changes in body dissatisfaction may be more (or less) likely than everyday situations to elicit changes in body dissatisfaction. This may inaccurately represent the extent to which body dissatisfaction levels actually vary from moment to moment (i.e., the level of intra-individual variability). Second, pre–post assessments only measure two time points and, as such, do not allow for measurement error in these ratings. More extensive, repeated measurement is preferable as atypical and outlying responses can then be averaged out. Moreover, the averaged effect is likely to be more representative of the actual effect size than a single instance of testing (Nesselrode & Ram, 2004). Third, despite evidence of within-group variability in pre–post change in body dissatisfaction ratings in these induction-based studies, the possibility that the relationship between state variables may vary as a function of individual difference factors (inter-individual variability) has been largely ignored.

Recent methodological advances have led to techniques of data collection that are cost effective, less invasive than experimental designs, and suitable for capturing moment-by-moment data (Beal & Weiss, 2003). The experience sampling method (ESM; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987), which involves repeated measurement of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions *in situ*, permits researchers to address more sophisticated questions based on the intra-individual variability of these state variables and the dynamic relationship between state- and trait-based variables than has previously been possible. This has led to empirical evaluations of whether the predictors of trait-based body dissatisfaction may also be predictive of state body dissatisfaction. For instance, it has been shown that personality factors (notably, perfectionistic self-presentation) and appearance-relevant trait measures (psychological investment in appearance, disturbed eating attitudes, and appearance-fixing coping strategies) are predictive of intra-individual variability in state body dissatisfaction ratings (Lattimore & Hutchinson, 2010; Melnyk et al., 2004; Rudiger et al., 2007).

While these studies demonstrate that trait measures are predictive of variability in state body dissatisfaction, it is likely that contextual (or state-dependent) cues may also provide opportunities for an individual to feel more (or less) dissatisfied with her/his appearance. To date, only two studies have used ESM to evaluate the extent to which contextual factors influence state body dissatisfaction. Lattimore and Hutchinson (2010) monitored post-meal mood, body dissatisfaction, and perceived caloric intake in a group of women enrolled in a weight loss program. They found that intra-individual variability in state body dissatisfaction was linked with intra-individual variability in both mood and perceived caloric intake. LePage and Crowther (2010) took a different approach by examining the extent to which individual differences at the trait level could account for inter-individual variation in the strength of relationship between instances of exercise and state body dissatisfaction. They found that exercise was associated with decreases in state body dissatisfaction and that the relationship between motives for exercise and state body dissatisfaction was moderated by trait body dissatisfaction.

While the results of these state-based body dissatisfaction studies demonstrate that contextual variables and a number of key trait variables are related to variability in state body dissatisfaction, there are still many important questions that need to be addressed. First, the role that social context (company) plays in fluctuations in state body dissatisfaction ratings throughout a person's day-to-day life has yet to be empirically evaluated. This is despite theoretical arguments that state that the presence of others provides an opportunity for body-based comparisons with others and the possibility to have one's body visually scrutinized; either of which could result in increased body dissatisfaction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Body-based comparisons are most likely to occur in the company

of same-sex individuals of similar age (such as friends), although appearance concerns may also be salient when in the company of one's romantic partner or a potential mate.

Second, there has been limited research into the influence of mood state on fluctuations in body dissatisfaction. Although Lattimore and Hutchinson (2010) found an association between intra-individual variability in mood and state body dissatisfaction, this finding does not ensure that changes in body dissatisfaction and mood occurred synchronously. Third, the possibility that inter-individual differences exist in the strength of association between context and body dissatisfaction has been neglected. Trait-based variables which have been linked to the etiology and maintenance of trait body dissatisfaction may also make individuals more susceptible to increases in state body dissatisfaction in the presence of others and/or when one's mood state becomes increasingly negative. For instance, it is possible that the influence of company on state body dissatisfaction is greatest for individuals with trait-level body image concerns, such as internalization of appearance standards, body shame, and the tendency to engage in body-surveillance behaviors.

The present study used an ESM approach to determine whether: (a) state body dissatisfaction can be predicted by current mood state and/or presence of others and (b) inter-individual differences in the strength of the relationship between state body dissatisfaction and these contextual factors are influenced by key trait measures (body shame, body surveillance, negative or positive trait affect, internalization of the thin ideal tendencies) that, as noted above, have been shown to relate to trait body dissatisfaction. ESM was chosen in preference to a simple induction design in order to capture intra-individual variability in body dissatisfaction states in a more ecologically valid way. By re-sampling the relationship between context and body dissatisfaction six times daily for a period of 1 week, it was expected that estimates would better reflect daily experience and be less influenced by atypical responses and/or extraneous influences (Beal & Weiss, 2003).

Based on previous findings, it was hypothesised that decreased positive mood, increased negative mood, and presence of company would be predictive of higher state body dissatisfaction. It was additionally predicted that a stronger relationship between state body dissatisfaction and presence of company would be evidenced for women with higher body shame, body surveillance tendencies, and who were more strongly invested in the socio-cultural value placed on physical appearance (internalization of the thin ideal). To further explore associations found previously between mood states and body dissatisfaction (LePage & Crowther, 2010), trait negative and positive affects were also included (in addition to the appearance-based measures) to explain inter-individual variation in the relationship between mood states and state body dissatisfaction. It was anticipated that trait negative affect would moderate the relationship between negative mood and body dissatisfaction, whereas trait positive affect would moderate the relationship between positive mood and state body dissatisfaction.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 57 women were recruited from advertisements made during undergraduate lectures and tutorials offered at a large metropolitan university in Melbourne, Australia. Two women were excluded due to incomplete data. The 55 remaining participants ranged in age from 19 to 51 years with a mean age of 29.69 ( $SD=9.62$ ) years. Self-reported body mass indices ( $BMI=kg/m^2$ ) ranged from 17.96 to 36.29 ( $M=24.03$ ,  $SD=4.38$ ).

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