



The effect of viewing ultra-fit images on college women's body dissatisfaction

Kristin Homan*, Erin McHugh, Daniel Wells, Corrinne Watson, Carolyn King

Grove City College, Grove City, PA, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 March 2011

Received in revised form 26 July 2011

Accepted 26 July 2011

Keywords:

Media exposure

Athletic ideal

Internalization

College women

Body dissatisfaction

Experiment

ABSTRACT

Modern ideals of female attractiveness include an extremely toned and fit appearance in addition to extreme thinness. Although viewing thin models has a negative effect on women's body image, research has not tested the effect of exposure to the ultra-fit physique separate from the thin-ideal. This randomized, posttest-only experiment tested the effects of the athletic aspect of the current ideal by exposing 138 undergraduate women to thin and athletic models, normal weight athletic models, or a control condition consisting of neutral objects. The study also tested the moderating effects of thin-ideal and athletic-ideal internalization. Exposure to thin ultra-fit models, but not normal weight ultra-fit models, produced an increase in body dissatisfaction and neither internalization variable moderated this effect. Findings suggest that interventions that focus on the benefits of fitness while challenging the desirability of thinness may offer promising results.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Sociocultural explanations for the development of disordered eating typically emphasize the role of the media in establishing unrealistic standards of female attractiveness. Modern ideals include an extremely toned and fit appearance in addition to thinness. Ample evidence shows that exposure to media images of thinness increases women's negative feelings about their bodies, particularly when women have internalized the desirability of the cultural thin ideal (Dittmar, Halliwell, & Stirling, 2009; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). However, the effects of exposure to images that exemplify the extremely fit and muscular aspect of the cultural ideal remain unclear. Various lines of evidence suggest that exposure to fit, athletic images is linked with body dissatisfaction only when the athletes are very lean (Daniels, 2009; Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003), suggesting that the source of dissatisfaction is not so much the strong and fit appearance of the women but their thinness. The purpose of the current study was to experimentally test whether exposure to an ultra-fit physique would produce body dissatisfaction in the absence of extreme thinness, as well as to explore the moderating role of internalization of the cultural ideal.

Media Effects and the Cultural Ideal

The negative effects of exposure to media images of thinness have been well-documented. Correlational studies have estab-

lished a positive association between media consumption and body dissatisfaction in adolescents and young adults. For example, women who read fashion magazines more regularly or watched more appearance-focused television programs reported more negative feelings about their own bodies (Bissell & Zhou, 2004; Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Stice, Schupak-Nueberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994). Numerous experimental studies have shown that exposure to ultra-thin media images produces a transient increase in body dissatisfaction (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). This effect has been documented with a variety of media forms, including fashion magazines (Stice & Shaw, 1994), television commercials (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002), and music videos (Bell, Lawton, & Dittmar, 2007; Tiggemann & Slater, 2003). The effect has been observed following short term as well as more long term exposure (Stice, Spangler, & Agras, 2001). Thus, existing evidence indicates that the media can and do affect the way young women feel about their bodies. Body dissatisfaction itself is important because it is now widely regarded as a risk factor for eating pathology (Stice, Ng, & Shaw, 2010). It is also linked with dieting, bulimic symptoms, depression, and low self-esteem (Johnson & Wardle, 2005; Stice, 2001).

The modern body ideal is not only very thin, but also extremely fit (Grogan, 2008; Thompson, van den Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004). Research has documented a shift toward a more angular, less curvaceous shape (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986), which involves well-defined musculature in the upper body, abdominals, and quadriceps (Lenart, Goldberg, Bailey, Dallal, & Koff, 1995). Consistent with this ideal, a majority of college women who were asked to choose an ideal body shape selected a muscular physique that would have required substantial physical activity

* Corresponding author at: 100 Campus Drive, Grove City, PA 16127, USA.
Tel.: +1 724 458 2043.

E-mail address: kjhoman@gcc.edu (K. Homan).

to achieve (Lenart et al., 1995). There has also been an increased emphasis on exercise as a means of losing weight. For example, since the 1980s, magazines have featured more articles on exercise in order to lose weight than diet articles (Wisemann, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992) and this trend has continued (Luff & Gray, 2009).

Research exploring the effects of exposure to the fit ideal has produced equivocal evidence. Some results suggest an unhealthy link with disordered eating and attitudes. For example, frequency of reading fitness magazines was related to disordered eating symptoms even when controlling for interest in fitness and dieting (Harrison, 2000; Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Exposure to a fit peer while exercising produced a decrease in body satisfaction relative to exposure to an unfit peer or no peer (Wasilenko, Kulik, & Wanic, 2007). Female college students reported an increase in negative mood states following 30 minutes of viewing a fitness magazine (Garvin & Damson, 2008). However, other research presents a healthier association. Some studies reported a negative correlation between hours of watching sports programs and body dissatisfaction (Bissell & Zhou, 2004; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996) or between frequency of reading sports magazines and body shame and eating disorder symptomatology (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003). Women and girls who viewed photographs of female athletes actively engaged in their sport made fewer objectifying self statements than female viewers who saw models and athletes in a sexualized context (Daniels, 2009). Finally, other researchers have found that effects on body image depend on the type of sport involved. Bissell (2004) reported that exposure to sports media in general was linked to lower body dissatisfaction in women; however, women who watched more lean sports such as diving, gymnastics, or cheerleading experienced greater body dissatisfaction. Harrison and Fredrickson (2003) found that viewing nonlean sports such as basketball or soccer had no effect on women's tendency to self-objectify, but viewing lean sports such as gymnastics or ice skating elicited an increase in women's self-objectification. Interestingly, the latter finding was true only for White women. In sum, the relationship between exposure to the fit ideal and body image is not yet clear.

Despite the fact that the cultural ideal has shifted toward a more fit and athletic look, most media images of female attractiveness continue to promote a very slender body. Rarely do the mass media feature a strong and fit body of normal weight as a standard of attractiveness. Even magazines with an emphasis on fitness (as opposed to fashion) tend to use young, thin models (Wasylikiw, Emms, Neuse, & Poirier, 2009). Essentially, the "fit ideal" is confounded with the thin ideal. As a result, it is possible that the negative consequences of exposure to fit images are due to the thinness of the models rather than their firm, tight, and muscular appearance. Hence, one of the goals of the current study was to isolate the effects of exposure to images of a hyper-fit physique from the effect of exposure to the combination of fitness and thinness. We hypothesized that images of the idealized fit look would produce increased body dissatisfaction only when the depicted models were simultaneously very thin.

Internalization as a Moderator

Thin-ideal internalization is defined as the extent to which an individual cognitively endorses the desirability of a thin body and adopts thinness as one's own personal ideal (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Internalization has been shown to mediate the relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction (Stice et al., 2001). The process is straightforward; as women are bombarded by stimuli emphasizing societal ideals of thinness, they gradually internalize the desirability of those ideals. They subsequently develop negative feelings about their bodies

because of the inevitable discrepancy between their actual appearance and the cultural ideal, which is considered unattainable for most women (Brownell, 1991).

Substantial evidence documents the potentially harmful effects of adopting the thin ideal. For example, thin-ideal internalization prospectively predicted a variety of negative outcomes, including onset of bulimic behavior (Stice & Agras, 1998), dieting (Stice, Mazotti, Krebs, & Martin, 1998), increases in body dissatisfaction (Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Stice, 2001) and compulsive exercise (Homan, 2010). In addition, experimental manipulation to reduce thin-ideal internalization through a cognitive-dissonance based intervention produced decreases in body dissatisfaction, dieting, negative affect, and bulimic symptoms (Stice, Shaw, Burton, & Wade, 2006). Together, this evidence strongly supports the idea that thin-ideal internalization is a risk factor for the development and maintenance of disordered eating.

In addition to these negative outcomes, women who internalize the thin ideal become more vulnerable to the effects of exposure to thin-ideal media. Several studies have shown that higher levels of thin-ideal internalization intensified negative emotions such as anger, body anxiety, and depression following exposure to thin-ideal media (Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, & Williams, 2000; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Durkin & Paxton, 2002). For example, Dittmar et al. (2009) found that exposure to thin models produced greater body-focused anxiety than exposure to normal weight or neutral objects, but this effect was conditional on whether or not women had internalized the thin ideal. That is, exposure to ultra-thin models had no effect on women who were not striving to achieve thinness themselves. Given the importance of both media influences and internalization in the development of eating disorders, additional research on the interaction between these two factors is warranted. Thus, the second goal of this study was to replicate these findings regarding the moderating role of thin-ideal internalization.

Athletic-ideal internalization refers to personal affirmation of the desirability of an extremely athletic look. In contrast to thin-ideal internalization, athletic-ideal internalization has not received substantial attention. A short-term longitudinal study found that elevated athletic-ideal internalization did not prospectively predict body dissatisfaction, implying that this construct was not as detrimental as thin-ideal internalization (Homan, 2010). However, another study reported that eating disordered inpatients scored higher than college students on a measure of athletic-ideal internalization, suggesting that this form of internalization is an indicator of more serious disordered attitudes (Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2004). Based on this limited evidence, the role of athletic-ideal internalization in regard to body image is not yet clear. It is reasonable to expect that women who more ardently espouse an athletic ideal would be more strongly affected by exposure to idealized athletic images, but this idea has not yet been empirically tested.

Hypotheses

This study had three goals. First, we sought to experimentally test whether the ultra-fit element of the current cultural ideal would be sufficient to produce an increase in body dissatisfaction. Based on the proposition that the most salient aspect of the cultural ideal is thinness, and previous findings that showed that sports media exposure was most likely to produce negative feelings when the sports involved very lean bodies, we predicted that images of strong, fit women would produce body dissatisfaction only if those women were thin. We predicted that viewing normal weight women with an ultra-fit physique would not cause increased body dissatisfaction. Second, based on previous research addressing the moderating role of thin-ideal internalization in media exposure experiments, we predicted that elevated thin-ideal internalization

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات