

An Ecological Momentary Assessment of the Effects of Weight and Shape Social Comparisons on Women With Eating Pathology, High Body Dissatisfaction, and Low Body Dissatisfaction

Tricia M. Leahey

Kent State University,

The Miriam Hospital's Weight Control and Diabetes Research Center
and The Warren Alpert Medical School at Brown University

Janis H. Crowther

Jeffrey A. Ciesla

Kent State University

This research examined the effects of naturally occurring appearance comparisons on women's affect, body satisfaction, and compensatory cognitions and behaviors. Using ecological momentary assessment, women with high body dissatisfaction and eating pathology (EPHB), high body dissatisfaction (HB), or low body dissatisfaction (LB) recorded their reactions to appearance-focused social comparisons. EPHB and HB women made more upward appearance comparisons than LB women. All women experienced negative emotions and cognitions after upward comparisons, including increased guilt, body dissatisfaction, and thoughts of dieting. EPHB women were most negatively affected by comparisons; they experienced more intense negative emotions, more thoughts of dieting/exercising, and an increase in eating-disordered behavior after upward comparisons. HB women experienced more negative affective consequences and thoughts of dieting than LB women. Results are consistent with social comparison theory and provide

important information that may be used to inform eating disorder treatment and prevention efforts.

BODY DISSATISFACTION, DEFINED AS displeasure with some aspect of one's appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002), is common among women in our society. Women with body dissatisfaction experience frequent dysfunctional cognitions triggered by weight- and shape-related stimuli in the environment. These dysfunctional thoughts are theorized to trigger the occurrence of reasoning and information processing errors that (a) maintain the dysfunctional beliefs (e.g., confirmatory bias, selective attention, and cognitive rigidity), (b) augment the frequency of the dysfunctional beliefs (via selective attention to weight- and shape-related stimuli in the environment), and (c) enhance the development of complex maladaptive body-focused cognitive schemata (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Vitousek & Hollon, 1990).

Women with eating pathology are thought to experience higher levels of body dissatisfaction than women without eating pathology for three primary reasons: (a) their self-evaluation is based primarily on weight and shape (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 1994; Cash & Deagle, 1997); (b)

Address correspondence to Tricia M. Leahey, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44240, USA; e-mail: tleahey@lifespan.org.

0005-7894/11/197-210/\$1.00/0

© 2011 Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

they strive to achieve an unrealistic, or “thin-ideal” body weight; and (c) they attend more frequently to body-focused, particularly thin-ideal, stimuli in their environment (Vitousek & Hollon, 1990). Furthermore, selective attention to the thin ideal is thought to reinforce and maintain body dissatisfaction among women with eating disorders.

Body dissatisfaction and associated cognitive processing errors have been theorized to lead to eating disorders via two pathways (Stice, 2002). In the first pathway, body dissatisfaction, as a result of attending to the thin ideal, is thought to motivate women with eating disorders to restrict their food intake in order to attain the ideal body. This restriction of food intake is proposed to increase the likelihood of binge eating, which then triggers purging behaviors (e.g., vomiting, laxative use) to counteract the possible weight gain effects associated with binge eating (Stice, 2001, 2002). In the second pathway, attending to the thin ideal is thought to increase body dissatisfaction and heighten levels of negative affect in women with eating disorders. In an effort to cope with their negative mood, it is proposed that women binge and purge to escape these otherwise overwhelming emotions (Stice, 2002). Because of the role body dissatisfaction plays in the development and maintenance of eating pathology, whether it be through increasing motivation to restrict caloric intake or enhancing the likelihood of maladaptive eating behavior in response to negative emotions, further understanding of the mechanisms underlying the development and maintenance of body dissatisfaction and related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral sequelae is imperative.

Social comparison theory has been used to better understand how exposure to appearance-focused stimuli leads to increased body dissatisfaction and its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences. Festinger (1954) proposed that individuals compare themselves to others in order to obtain information regarding where they stand on a particular attribute. Upward comparisons are those in which an individual compares him- or herself with someone believed to be better off, and downward comparisons are those in which someone compares him- or herself with someone believed to be worse off. In the original theory, social comparisons were thought to convey certain information depending on their direction; specifically, Festinger proposed that upward comparisons indicate that improvement is possible thereby enhancing self-improvement motivation, whereas downward comparisons communicate that one is performing well but has the potential to be doing worse.

Contemporary theories have expanded on Festinger's (1954) original social comparison

theory and suggest that upward and downward comparisons can lead to positive or negative consequences depending on an individual's perceived *similarity* to the comparison target. Collins (1996) and Buunk and Ybema (1997) suggest that upward comparisons with *dissimilar* targets suggest that one is not doing well and, because he or she is unlike the comparison target, he or she will not be able to achieve the status of the target. Thus, upward comparisons with dissimilar targets lead to contrast effects and associated feelings of inferiority and negative self-appraisal. Conversely, upward comparisons with *similar* targets may lead to feelings of identification with the comparison target and, therefore, feelings of inspiration, motivation, and self-worth. While upward comparisons may lead to contrast or identification effects depending on perceived similarity to the comparison target, the effects of downward comparisons have shown to be consistently associated with positive affective consequences (Collins, 1996). Consistent with these contemporary social comparison theories, research findings have demonstrated the negative effects of upward comparisons and the positive effects of downward comparisons (Amoroso & Walters, 1969; Gibbons, 1986; Leahey, Crowther, & Mickelson, 2007; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988; Testa & Major, 1990).

Social comparison theory provides a rich theoretical basis for understanding the nature and effects of the appearance-focused social comparison process. Survey research has found that the tendency to engage in appearance-focused comparisons predicts body image and eating disturbances (Stormer & Thompson, 1996; Thompson, Coovert, & Stormer, 1999); however, the cross-sectional nature of these studies does not allow causal conclusions to be drawn. Although laboratory research indicates that viewing thin media images negatively impacts body satisfaction and eating behaviors and beliefs (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002), only one laboratory study (Lin & Kulik, 2002) has directly examined the effects of upward and downward comparisons on affect and cognitions (most studies assume directionality of the comparison based on stimuli provided [Leahey & Crowther, 2008]). Lin and Kulik (2002) exposed female undergraduates to pictures of thin peers, overweight peers, or no photo at all (control condition) and asked participants to determine the attractiveness of themselves and the individual in the picture they viewed. They found that upward comparisons (comparing themselves to a more attractive peer) reduced body satisfaction and increased negative affect, whereas downward comparisons (comparing themselves to a less attractive

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