The connection of teasing by parents, siblings, and peers with girls' body dissatisfaction and boys' drive for muscularity: The role of social comparison as a mediator

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1. Introduction

Body image is a multidimensional construct that refers to how individuals experience and perceive their bodies and the attitudes they form about their bodies (Rieves & Cash, 1996). Body image concerns may begin as early as age 6 for both girls and boys in the United States, with an increase occurring during the adolescent years (Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999). Attention should be given to differences between females and males as Western cultural expectations differ, with females expected to have thin bodies and males expected to have muscular bodies. Indeed, research has shown that the most common source of body image concern among adolescents is thinness for girls and muscularity for boys (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Jones & Crawford, 2005; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). Boys may be satisfied with their body fat or wish to lose body fat while simultaneously desiring to become more muscular (Tylka, 2011). In the present study, we focus on body dissatisfaction among girls and drive for muscularity among boys. Body dissatisfaction refers to an unhappiness regarding specific areas of the body that are often associated with shape changes or increased adiposity, such as the thighs, stomach, and hips (Garner, Olmsted, & Polivy, 1983). Drive for muscularity refers to concerns regarding muscularity, satisfaction with muscle mass, and attempts to increase muscle (McCreary & Sasse, 2000).

Adolescence is an important time to focus on the factors that contribute to body image due to the heightened importance of appearance during this time period. In addition, puberty sets the stage for an increase of concerns about body image due to the body undergoing external physical changes (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007). For example, the majority of girls' bodies move away from the Western thin ideal as a result of pubertal changes involving gains in weight and height, which typically lead to increased body dissatisfaction (Stice & Whitenton, 2002). In contrast, while boys' bodies generally move closer to the muscular ideal, both late-maturing and early-maturing boys tend to be concerned with their muscle mass and engage in strategies to increase muscle size, such as muscle-building exercises or the use of food supplements (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to focus on factors associated with the development of body image concerns during adolescence, specifically within the U.S. where these issues are...
prevalent and may lead to increased risk of disordered eating as well as full-blown eating disorders among both females and males (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004; Rodgers, Ganchou, Franko, & Chabrol, 2012; Stice, 2002).

1.1. Appearance-related teasing

Teasing by family members and peers is widespread and common among American adolescents (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2003; Taylor, 2011). Teasing can be either negative or positive but is typically considered to be negative with the sole purpose of asserting social dominance by hurting, humiliating, or harassing another (Kruger, Gordon, & Kuban, 2006; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991). Teasing can become particularly harmful when it is directed at personal features associated with physical appearance (Kruger et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 1991; Thompson, Fabian, Moulton, Dunn, & Altabe, 1991). Any reinforcement and attention given to appearance, especially in the form of teasing, draws attention to an individual's body and encourages social comparison to others based on physical attributes (Jones, 2004). Particularly for girls during the adolescent period, teasing can be a form of objectification wherein others, especially males, provide criticism and feedback about girls' bodies as objects that do not meet the Western cultural ideal of thinness and beauty.

Research has indicated that both girls and boys experience teasing about their bodies and appearance during adolescence (Eisenberg et al., 2003; McCormack et al., 2011; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Taylor, 2011). For example, among American adolescents, appearance-related teasing by peers was reported by 30–37% of girls and 24–44% of boys, and appearance-related teasing by family members was reported by 28–40% of girls and 16–33% of boys (Eisenberg et al., 2003; McCormack et al., 2011). These studies did not, however, consider each family member separately. When considering mothers and fathers separately, 19% of middle school-aged girls had experienced appearance-related teasing by their fathers and 13% experienced it from their mothers (Keery, Bottelle, Berg, & Thompson, 2005). Of these same girls, 29% also reported being teased about their appearance by their siblings (Keery et al., 2005). Thus, it appears as though appearance-related teasing is a prevalent problem among American youth.

Adolescent girls who experience appearance-related teasing from family members are more likely to participate in unhealthy weight control behavior, have a higher level of body dissatisfaction, and are more invested in achieving thinness (Eisenberg et al., 2003; Keery et al., 2005; McCormack et al., 2011; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010). Additionally, adolescent boys who are teased by their parents tend to have low levels of body satisfaction and a greater drive for muscularity (Eisenberg et al., 2003; McCormack et al., 2011; Smolak & Stein, 2006). Appearance-related teasing by parents likely increases adolescents' body image concerns by reinforcing societal values of appearance-related teasing by peers. Boys' and girls' body image concerns are correlated with adolescent boys' and girls' perception of themselves. Not only does teasing influence adolescents during the time it occurs, but the effects of appearance-related teasing can last into adulthood and beyond (Ata et al., 2007). Because of the negative and potential long-lasting impact of teasing on adolescents, it is essential to thoroughly examine the perpetrators of teasing and both the direct and indirect effects these individuals have on a particularly vulnerable age group.

Because Body Mass Index (BMI; weight [kg]/height [m²]) is a strong predictor of body image, it may be influential in the relationship between teasing and body image (Menzel et al., 2010; Stice, 2002). In particular, some research has suggested that adolescents who are above or below average weight are not only more likely to develop a negative body image but also experience more teasing and other sociocultural pressures to meet the thin and muscular ideals (McCormack et al., 2011; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Stice & Whitenton, 2002). Due to being overweight or underweight, these individuals tend to be targets of teasing in school and body image have found no significant effect of BMI (Keery et al., 2005; Smolak & Stein, 2006). Due to the conflicting nature of these bodies or research, it is important to include BMI as a possible moderator in the connections between teasing and body image.

1.2. The role of social comparison

According to Social Comparison theory, individuals compare themselves to others in order to evaluate themselves (Festinger, 1954). Appearance-related social comparison is the process of comparing one's body and looks to others for the purpose of gathering information about highly valued attributes and societal expectations associated with appearance in order to make a judgment about one's own appearance (Jones, 2001; Smolak et al., 2005). Given that appearance is one of the perceived routes to acceptance and popularity during adolescence, social comparison becomes an important method for learning about appearance-related expectations among peers and for evaluating oneself based on those standards (Jones, 2001).

A recent meta-analysis of the effects of teasing by family members and peers on body image indicated that medium effect sizes existed, ranging from .32 to .43, for both females and males (Menzel et al., 2010). This suggests that teasing has detrimental effects on adolescents' perceptions of themselves. Not only does teasing influence adolescents during the time it occurs, but the effects of appearance-related teasing can last into adulthood and beyond (Ata et al., 2007). Because of the negative and potential long-lasting impact of teasing on adolescents, it is essential to thoroughly examine the perpetrators of teasing and both the direct and indirect effects these individuals have on a particularly vulnerable age group.

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