
Watching reality television beauty shows is associated with tanning lamp use and outdoor tanning among college students

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Background: Ultraviolet radiation exposure through natural sunlight or tanning lamps is a risk factor for skin cancer.

Objective: As the media can influence behavior, we studied whether watching reality television (TV) beauty shows is associated with tanning lamp use or outdoor tanning.

Methods: College students (n = 576) were surveyed on their reality TV beauty show watching, their use of tanning lamps, and outdoor tanning behavior. We asked media attitude questions about connectivity with reality TV shows and Internet use of Facebook to discuss reality TV shows.

Results: Those who did versus did not watch reality TV beauty shows used tanning lamps (12.9% vs 3.7%, $P < .001$) and tanned outdoors (43.3% vs 28.7%, $P < .001$) at significantly greater percentages. Significant predictors of tanning lamp use included watching reality TV beauty shows (odds ratio [OR] 2.58, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.11-6.00), increasing age (OR 1.17, 95% CI 1.04-1.32), and female sex (OR 10.16, 95% CI 3.29-31.41). Significant predictors of outdoor tanning included watching reality TV beauty shows (OR 2.11, 95% CI 1.33-3.34).

Limitations: The specific names of the reality TV beauty shows watched were not obtained and therefore we cannot determine if particular shows were more or less associated with this behavior.

Conclusion: Watching reality TV beauty shows is associated with both tanning lamp use and outdoor tanning. Dermatologists should consider discussing the potential harmful aspects of tanning beds and outdoor tanning, especially with their patients who watch reality TV beauty shows. (J Am Acad Dermatol 2013;68:784-9.)

Key words: behavior; mass media; skin cancer; skin neoplasms; social media; sunbathing; sunburn; suntan; television; ultraviolet rays.

Skin cancer is a very common form of malignant cancer in the United States.¹ Ultraviolet radiation is the main cause for skin cancer and ultraviolet radiation exposure can occur from exposure to natural sunlight or tanning lamps.² With regard to exposure from natural sunlight, sunburn prevalence is quite high with 50.1% of all adults reporting at least 1 sunburn in the past 12 months.³ With regard to exposure from tanning lamps, each

year approximately 30 million people in the United States use tanning lamps.²

Demographics are associated with natural sunlight overexposure and tanning lamp use. Those of younger ages (18-29 years) have a greater number of sunburns^{3,4} and greater percentage of tanning lamp use^{5,6} than those of older ages during a 1-year time period. Men are more likely to be sunburned through exposure to natural light than women.⁶

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Women are more likely to use tanning lamps than men whether college students,⁷ young adults, or middle-aged people.^{5,8} Non-Hispanic whites and American Indians/Alaskan Natives have the greatest prevalence for sunburn. Also, non-Hispanic whites have greater sunburn prevalence than non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics.^{4,6} Non-Hispanic whites are more likely to engage in tanning lamp use than non-Hispanic blacks, non-Hispanic others, and Hispanics.^{5,6}

The media can influence tanning behavior. One study of female college students found that combined attitudes toward the media of television (TV), movies, and magazines were associated with increased indoor tanning behaviors.⁹ Another study of female college students viewing images of modeling of tanning in magazines targeting young women found a significant increased association with the attitude of “like to get a suntan” but no significant association with the attitude of “attempt to get a suntan.”¹⁰ With regard to reality TV shows, 1 opinion article suggests that reality TV is associated with increased tanning behavior.¹¹ We are only aware of 1 data-based study on reality TV and tanning lamp use.¹² This study found that for women, exposure to reality TV was significantly associated with the attitude that tanned women are more fashionable, with greater positive attitudes toward tanning lamp use, and with greater intentions to use tanning lamps. For men, exposure to reality TV was not associated with the attitude that tanned men are more fashionable or with greater positive attitudes toward tanning lamp use. Men had a significant association with greater intentions to use tanning lamps.¹² This study did not assess the relationship of reality TV watching to tanning behaviors with either tanning lamp use or outdoor tanning.

There are reality TV shows that focus on beauty and include individuals featured as attractive with tanned skin. These include *America's Next Top Model*,¹³ which includes beauty makeovers given to contestants, and *Toddlers & Tiaras*¹⁴ about child beauty pageants. This study compares those who watched versus those who did not watch reality TV beauty shows with regard to separate outcomes of both tanning lamp use and outdoor tanning. We used a multivariate framework to adjust for demographic and media variables.

METHODS

Participants

We approached 642 college students at an inner-city college in Brooklyn, NY, to complete the survey. Of those approached, 22 refused to complete the survey and 15 invalid surveys were returned. The response rate of 94.2% was computed from the 605 surveys that were completed correctly [(605/642) * 100%]. To allow for a more consistent young adult sample, we excluded from the analyses 23 individuals older than 35 years and 4 individuals who did not provide age data. We also excluded 2 individuals who did not answer the question on reality TV beauty shows. Data were analyzed from 576 participants. Participants completed the anonymous surveys at the college in the library, cafeteria, classrooms, and various other public places.

Informed consent was obtained from participants. The survey received institutional review board approval from Brooklyn College (#11-04-006-0133) on April 27, 2011, and was conducted following the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were surveyed from May 2011 through October 2011.

Measures

Personal demographics. Three personal demographic variables were measured: age (years), sex (male/female), and race/ethnicity (white, black, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian, or other).

Audience-Persona Interaction Scale. The Audience-Persona Interaction Scale consists of 4 subscales, with 22 items in total, each ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.¹⁵ Items are added together for total subscale scores. Greater scores indicate greater agreement level with the particular construct about a favorite TV character. The parasocial identity subscale measures viewer identification with a favorite TV character. The parasocial interest subscale measures viewer interest in a favorite TV character. The parasocial group subscale measures viewer attitudes that the favorite TV character is similar to the viewer's peer group. The parasocial problem subscale measures viewer attitudes about a favorite TV character handling problems. The items were slightly modified from the

CAPSULE SUMMARY

- Ultraviolet radiation exposure through natural sunlight or tanning lamps is a risk factor for skin cancer.
- Persons who watch reality television beauty shows are significantly more likely to use tanning beds and to tan outdoors than those who do not.
- Dermatologists should consider discussing the potential harmful aspects of tanning beds and outdoor tanning, especially with their patients who watch reality television beauty shows.

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