

Prospective predictors of body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and muscularity concerns among young women in France: A sociocultural model

Marilou Girard^{a,*}, Rachel F. Rodgers^{b,c}, Henri Chabrol^a

^a Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches en Psychopathologie et Psychologie de la Santé, Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, Toulouse, France

^b Department of Applied Psychology, Northeastern University, Boston MA, 02115, USA

^c Department of Psychiatric Emergency & Acute Care, Lapeyronie Hospital, CHRU Montpellier, France

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore a prospective sociocultural model of the influence of media, peers, and partners on body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and muscularity concerns in a sample of young women in France. A sample of 192 undergraduate women with a mean age of 20.97 years ($SD = 2.69$) completed a questionnaire at two time-points, 12 months apart, assessing media and interpersonal influences, appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and muscularity concerns. The final model highlighted that media and interpersonal influences (from peers and romantic partners) were associated over time with increased body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and muscularity concerns one year later, via appearance comparison. Sociocultural influences towards both thinness and muscularity may contribute to increases in body image concerns and risky body change behaviors in young women in France.

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1. Introduction

In many contemporary societies, both appearance improvement and weight control have become essential goals for individuals from a very early age (Tatangelo & Ricciardelli, 2013). Concerns about body image, eating, and food are increasingly prevalent in young women (Neighbors & Sobal, 2007) and are associated with high levels of body dissatisfaction (Cash, 2002; Grogan, 2008). In turn, body weight and shape concerns are core contributors to eating disorders, which have been shown to have among the highest rates of mortality of all mental disorders (Brouwer, Mirabel-Sarron, & Pham-Scottet, 2009). Sociocultural theory has proved to be a useful framework for exploring the ways that influences from the environment contribute to body image concerns (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999), and the examination of sociocultural models of the development of body image concerns across cultural contexts has been highlighted as an important direction for further research (Swami, 2015).

Increasingly, very slender female bodies are viewed as ideal across cultures and national settings (Swami et al., 2010). Sociocultural theory proposes that sociocultural sources promote these sociocultural ideals, and that experiencing these influences is associated with heightened body image concerns and drive to attain these ideals (Thompson et al., 1999). Consistent with this, sociocultural influences promoting the thin ideal has been shown to be associated with negative body image and drive for thinness both cross-sectionally (Johnson, Edwards, & Gidycz, 2014; Keery, van den Berg, & Thompson, 2004; Rodgers, Chabrol, & Paxton, 2011; Shroff & Thompson, 2006) and longitudinally (Soares Amaral & Caputo Ferreira, 2017), from childhood to adulthood (Rodgers et al., 2011; Tatangelo, McCabe, Mellor, & Mealey, 2016).

In recent years, however, the female beauty ideal has evolved towards a body shape that is still extremely slender, but also toned and muscular, and has been described as more “athletic” (Benton & Karazsia, 2015; Jarthon & Durand, 2015; Ramme, Donovan, & Bell, 2016). This more athletic ideal increasingly appears in the media and especially in social media in the guise of “fitspiration” (Benton & Karazsia, 2015; Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2015). Consistent with sociocultural theory, exposure to images promoting an athletic ideal has been suggested to increase women’s drive both for thinness but also muscularity, as well as their engagement in behaviors to achieve a toned body

* Corresponding author at: Bureau A200, Laboratoire CERPPS, Maison de la Recherche, Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès, 5 allées Antonio Machado, 31058 Toulouse Cedex 9, France.

E-mail address: marilou.girard@gmail.com (M. Girard).

and increase muscularity (Field et al., 2005; Thompson, Schaefer, & Menzel, 2012; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). To date, however, researchers have only begun to focus on the role of sociocultural influences in the development of muscularity concerns among women. One notable recent study found that sociocultural pressure perceived from peers, media, and family contributed to both thinness and muscularity concerns and associated body change behaviors in young Brazilian women (de Carvalho, dos Santos Alvarenga, & Ferreira, 2017), providing support for the importance of including muscularity concerns in sociocultural models of body image concerns among young women. In addition, previous literature has supported the emergence of muscularity-related concerns in women and their incremental contribution to body image concerns, above and beyond preoccupations around thinness (McCreary, Sasse, Saucier, & Dorsch, 2004; Rodgers et al., 2018). To date, however, few longitudinal datasets have been described in the extant literature.

Sociocultural influences have, therefore, been robustly associated with body image concerns in young women, but different sources of influence may play different roles across the lifespan. The mass media have been described as consistent critical influences on the development of body dissatisfaction and eating concerns and as promoters of unrealistic beauty ideals for women (Ata, Schaefer, & Thompson, 2015; Thompson et al., 1999). Consistent with this, media exposure has been found to be robustly associated with body image concerns in female adolescents and young adults (Jackson, Jiang, & Chen, 2016; Keery et al., 2004; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Rodgers et al., 2011; Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Swami et al., 2010). In terms of interpersonal influence, peer influences have been found to play an important role both in adolescence (Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014) and young adulthood (Rodgers et al., 2011). Parental and family influences, on the other hand, have been described as being most important during childhood and adolescence when individuals are living at home, with partner influences gaining importance in young adulthood as romantic relationships become a more central focus (Paquette & Raine, 2004; Rodgers & Chabrol, 2009).

Young adulthood is a period of transition and great vulnerability in terms of body image (Arnett, 2001; Quick, Eisenberg, Bucchianeri, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Vohs, Heatherton, & Herrin, 2001). Indeed, high levels of body dissatisfaction have been documented during this period (Rodgers, Salès, & Chabrol, 2010). In addition, young adulthood is a time when greater importance is given to romantic partners (Arnett, 2000), who are a source

of information regarding body shape and appearance (Holsen, Jones, & Birkeland, 2012; Johnson et al., 2014). Both appearance-related compliments and criticism from romantic partners have been shown to be associated with body image concerns (Goldsmith & Byers, 2016; Sheets & Ajmere, 2005). Indeed, recent studies have suggested that romantic partners have a significant influence on women's weight concerns and body dissatisfaction (Carriere & Kluck, 2014; Herbozo & Thompson, 2006), but also on adolescents' and young women's disordered eating (Eisenberg, Berge, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Shomaker & Furman, 2009). Consistent with this, studies have started to emphasize the role of romantic partners in sociocultural models of body image concerns in women (Huxley, Halliwell, & Clarke, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Menzel et al., 2011; Sharp, Tiggemann, & Mattiske, 2015).

Sociocultural theory also predicts that one of the mechanisms through which sociocultural pressure contributes to the development and maintenance of body image concerns and associated behaviors is *appearance comparison*, that is, the tendency to compare one's appearance to that of others (Keery et al., 2004). Consistent with this, a number of studies have found appearance comparison to mediate the relationship between sociocultural influences and body image concerns (Keery et al., 2004; Yamamiya, Shroff, & Thompson, 2008). In addition, recent research has supported a mediated pathway via appearance comparison in the relationship between sociocultural influences and muscularity-related concerns among young women (de Carvalho et al., 2017).

Thus, the extant literature supports the association between appearance pressure from media, peers, and romantic partners and body image concerns in young women including muscularity-related concerns and the mediating role of appearance comparison in these relationships. To date, however, support for this model has almost exclusively been cross-sectional. Several longitudinal studies have supported sociocultural influences as leading to the development of body dissatisfaction (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006; Presnell, Bearman, & Stice, 2004; Quick et al., 2013; Stice & Whitenton, 2002). However, to our knowledge, no study has tested a sociocultural model of body image concerns including thinness and muscularity related concerns, in longitudinal data in young women. The aim of the present study, therefore, was to explore a longitudinal sociocultural model that prospectively predicted body dissatisfaction, muscularity concerns, muscularity-oriented behaviors, and drive for thinness in a sample of young women in France across two time-points 12 months apart (see Fig. 1).

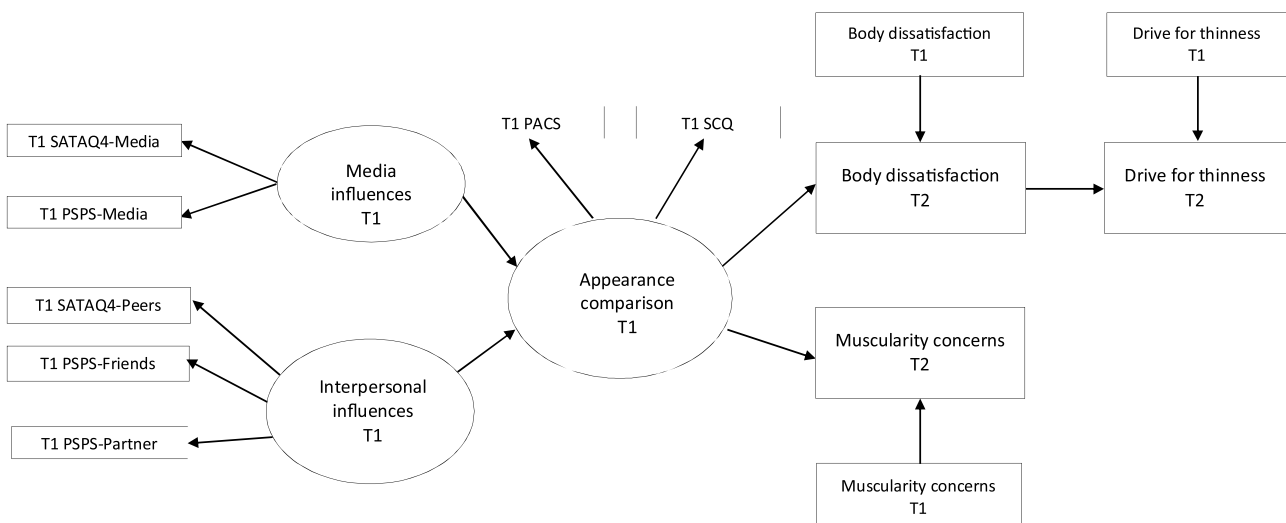


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

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