



Media matters for boys too! The role of specific magazine types and television programs in the drive for thinness and muscularity in adolescent boys



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of specific magazine types and television programs on drive for thinness and muscularity in adolescent boys. A sample of 182 adolescent boys with an average age of 15.2 years completed questionnaire measures of magazine and television consumption, drive for thinness and drive for muscularity. Different media genres showed varying relationships with drive for thinness and muscularity. Specifically, the consumption of men's magazines and the viewing of soap operas emerged as significant unique predictors of drive for thinness, with the consumption of men's magazines also offering unique prediction of drive for muscularity. A comprehensive approach that considers both type and genre of media is critical in increasing our understanding of the complex relationships between media exposure and disordered eating in adolescent boys.

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1. Introduction

Although boys have typically experienced much lower levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than girls, there is now considerable evidence to suggest that these are now salient issues for boys (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). Whereas girls commonly express a desire for a thinner body, body dissatisfaction in boys is often expressed by a desire for a larger, more muscular body (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). This desire for muscularity may have damaging consequences, with potential links to exercise dependence, steroid use (vandenBerg, Neumark-Sztainer, Cafri, & Wall, 2007) and disordered eating (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2003).

The mass media are often cited as the most powerful sociocultural influence on body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (e.g., Levine & Murnen, 2009). In particular, the media are held responsible for the transmission of messages about the ideal body, which for boys and men is a lean but highly muscular, V-shaped figure, often referred to as the 'muscular mesomorph' (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1986). Although most of the existing research has investigated women, a few studies have suggested that exposure to idealized muscular media images is similarly related to lower body esteem (Hobza & Rochlen, 2009; Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, & Peugh, 2007), increased

muscle dissatisfaction (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009) and drive for muscularity in adult men (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). However, two studies with adolescent boys found no relationship between body image or eating disorder symptomatology and magazine exposure (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004) or thin-ideal media exposure (selected television programs and magazines) (Harrison, 2000). Thus the first aim of the current study was to further investigate the link between media exposure and drive for thinness and drive for muscularity in adolescent boys.

One limitation of the existing research is that different forms of media (television, magazines) have largely been considered equivalent, often being evaluated using a composite or broadband measure (Stice, Schupakneuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Tiggemann, 2003). Yet different types of media may have different effects. For example, Botta (2003) found that reading fashion magazines was related to decreased drive for muscularity while reading health/fitness magazines was related to increased drive for muscularity in adolescent boys, while Tiggemann (2005) found that the watching of soap operas was related to drive for thinness and drive for muscularity, and the watching of music video programs was related to drive for muscularity in adolescent boys.

In sum, the relationship between media exposure and body image and disordered eating in adolescent boys (as in other groups) is likely dependent on the type and specific format of media. The current study aimed to provide a more detailed examination of the differential impact of different types of magazines and television programs on the drives for thinness and muscularity in adolescent boys.

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2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 182 adolescent boys aged 13–17 years (mean age = 15.22, $SD = .59$) from two co-educational, public secondary schools of medium to high socio-economic status in Adelaide, South Australia. The boys were in Year 9 ($n = 108$) and Year 10 ($n = 74$) of schooling. Students attending these two schools are predominately (>95%) White. The boys had an average height of 175 cm ($SD = 9.45$) and an average weight of 63.71 kg ($SD = 12.77$), resulting in an average Body Mass Index (BMI) of 21.04 ($SD = 3.14$).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Magazine exposure

Consumption of specific types of magazines was measured by asking participants “How often do you read the following types of magazines”: fashion/teen magazines (e.g. *Cosmopolitan*, *Girlfriend*), Men’s Magazines (e.g. *FHM*, *Ralph*), Entertainment Magazines (e.g. *TV Week*, *New Weekly*), Sport/Fitness Magazines (e.g. *Sports Illustrated*, *Surfing Life*) and Music Magazines (e.g. *Rolling Stone*, *Smash Hit*). Participants indicated their frequency of consumption using a 5 point scale (0 = never to 4 = always).

2.2.2. Television exposure

Overall television exposure was measured by asking participants how many hours they spent watching television on each specified day of the week and summing these times. The viewing of specific programs was measured by asking “How often do you watch the following types of television programs”: Music Videos (e.g. *Video Hits*, *Rage*), Soap Operas (e.g. *Home & Away*, *Neighbours*), Sit-Coms (e.g. *Friends*, *Frasier*), Drama (e.g. *All Saints*, *CSI*), Sports Programs (e.g. *Swimming*, *The Footy Show*) and Reality Programs (e.g. *Australian Idol*, *The Block*). Frequency of consumption was indicated as for magazine consumption.

2.2.3. Disordered eating

Two scales were used in the present study as measures of disordered eating. The first was the Drive for Thinness subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory (EDI; *Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983*). Participants respond to 7 items using a 6-point scale ranging from never (1) to always (6). Here the entire range of possible scores was used, as recommended for non-clinical samples by *Schoemaker, van Strien, and van der Staak (1994)*. This results in a range of total possible scores from 7 to 42, with higher scores indicating greater drive for thinness. *Garner et al. (1983)* reported an internal reliability (α) of .85 for this subscale in a sample of non-clinical women. In the current sample, the reliability coefficient was also .85.

The current study also included the Drive for Muscularity scale developed by *Yelland and Tiggemann (2003)* as a pertinent indicator of disordered eating symptomatology in adolescent boys. This 7-item scale was modeled on the Drive for Thinness items, but changed to assess the pursuit of muscularity (e.g. “I exaggerate or magnify the importance of muscles”). Response options are as for the EDI subscales, with total possible scores also ranging from 7 to 42. The construct and criterion validity of this scale have recently been demonstrated (*Tod, Morrison, & Edwards, 2012a,b*). In the current sample, the internal reliability was $\alpha = .88$.

2.3. Procedure

Approval to conduct the present study was received from the Institutional Review Board. The adolescents in the current study were part of a larger study on sport participation and body image, some of the findings of which have been published elsewhere (*Slater & Tiggemann, 2010, 2011*). Parental consent was obtained for each

student and all boys completed an assent form. The questionnaires were administered in pencil and paper format by the first author at school in class groups. Missing values ranged from 0.0% (for fashion magazines, men’s magazines and music magazines) to a maximum of 6.6% (for sports/fitness magazines). Given the overall low levels of missing data, listwise and pairwise deletion was deemed appropriate (*Bennett, 2001*).

3. Results

The means and standard deviations for all variables are reported in *Table 1*. As can be seen, with regard to magazine consumption, boys were most likely to report reading men’s magazines, followed by sport/fitness magazines, music magazines and entertainment magazines. With regard to television consumption, the boys reported watching 17.6 h of television per week, or just over 2.5 h per day. Sports programs were the genre reported as most watched, followed by dramas, sit-coms, music videos, reality programs and lastly, soap operas.

3.1. Relationships between media exposure and Drive for Thinness and Muscularity

The correlations between media types and formats and drive for thinness and muscularity are also presented in *Table 1*. For magazine consumption, the reading of men’s magazines was positively correlated with both drive for thinness and drive for muscularity. Consumption of sports and entertainment magazines was also positively correlated with drive for muscularity.

Total television viewing time showed no significant correlation with drive for thinness or drive for muscularity. However, the watching of soap operas was associated with both drive for thinness and drive for muscularity, and the watching of reality programs was associated with drive for thinness.

To assess the unique contribution of the significant media genres (i.e., men’s magazines, sports magazines, entertainment magazines, reality programs, soap operas), two multiple regression analyses were conducted to predict drive for thinness and drive for muscularity separately. The results indicated that the combined media genres offered significant prediction of drive for thinness, $R^2 = .15$, $F(5,163) = 5.52$, $p = .00$, with men’s magazines ($\beta = .15$, $p = .05$) and soap operas

Table 1
Means (and standard deviations) for all variables, and correlations between media exposure and Drive for Thinness and Drive for Muscularity.

Variable	Descriptive statistics		Correlations with disordered eating	
	Range	Mean (SD)	Drive for Thinness	Drive for Muscularity
<i>Magazines</i>				
Men’s Magazines	0–4	1.22 (1.24)	.20**	.27**
Sport/Fitness Magazines	0–4	0.93 (1.10)	.12	.21**
Music Magazines	0–4	0.84 (1.04)	.08	.18*
Entertainment Magazines	0–4	0.68 (0.99)	.07	.13
Fashion/Teen Magazines	0–4	0.20 (0.57)	.04	.09
<i>Television</i>				
TV viewing per week	Hours	17.62 (9.18)	.12	–.00
Sports Programs	0–4	2.24 (1.36)	.02	.05
Drama	0–4	2.06 (1.27)	.05	.06
Sit-Coms	0–4	1.92 (1.08)	–.08	.02
Music Videos	0–4	1.72 (1.05)	–.01	–.02
Reality Programs	0–4	1.53 (1.11)	.19*	.14
Soap Operas	0–4	1.04 (1.17)	.34**	.17*
<i>Disordered eating</i>				
Drive for Thinness	7–42	13.23 (6.51)		
Drive for Muscularity	7–42	17.25 (7.57)		

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

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