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Media influence and body dissatisfaction in Brazilian female undergraduate students

Influencia de los medios de comunicación e insatisfacción corporal en estudiantes universitarias brasileñas

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Abstract

The aim was to evaluate possible associations between media influence (internalization, pressure and information) on body satisfaction in a sample of Brazilian female undergraduate students. Sample consisted of female undergraduate from 37 institutions in Brazil who answered the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-SATAQ ($n = 2,414$) and the Stunkard's Silhouettes Scale ($n = 2,402$). A bivariate correlation among variables was performed, and also a covariance analysis with the SATAQ score and the body satisfaction categories. Linear multiple regression was done to evaluate the influence of variables in body dissatisfaction. Results show 64.4% of students desired to be smaller, 21.8% to be equal and 13.9% to be bigger than their actual figure. The group of students who desired to be smaller had the greatest SATAQ total and all the subscales scores. According with regression analyses, the body dissatisfaction increased 0.22 for each more Body Mass Index point; 0.02 for each more unit in SATAQ Internalization-General subscale; 0.03 for each more unit in SATAQ Pressure subscale. It was concluded that media influence and body dissatisfaction were related; in addition, media Internalization and Pressure predicted body dissatisfaction for this sample. The knowledge provide by these results is important for prevention strategies.

Resumen

El objetivo fue evaluar las posibles asociaciones entre la influencia de los medios de comunicación (internalización, presión e información), con relación a la satisfacción corporal en estudiantes brasileñas. La muestra incluyó mujeres universitarias de 37 instituciones de Brasil que respondieron el Cuestionario de Actitudes Socioculturales hacia la Apariencia-SATAQ ($n = 2,414$) y la Escala de Siluetas de Stunkard ($n = 2,402$). Se realizó un análisis de correlación bivariada entre las variables, y un análisis de covarianza entre las puntuaciones del SATAQ y las categorías de satisfacción corporal. La regresión lineal evaluó la influencia de las variables en la insatisfacción corporal. Los resultados muestran que 64.4% de las estudiantes deseaban estar más delgadas; 21.8% igual y 13.9% deseaban una talla mayor que la actual. El grupo que deseaba estar más delgado, presentó puntuaciones más altas en el SATAQ y en sus subescalas. El análisis de regresión evidenció que la insatisfacción corporal aumentaba 0.22 para cada unidad del Índice de Masa Corporal; 0.02 para cada unidad en la subescala Internalización-General del SATAQ y 0.03 para cada unidad en la subescala Presión del SATAQ. Se concluye que la influencia de los medios de comunicación puede relacionarse con la insatisfacción corporal, además, la Internalización y la Presión de los medios de comunicación predijeron la insatisfacción corporal. Este conocimiento es importante para la planeación de estrategias de prevención de los trastornos de la alimentación.

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Introduction

Evidence from literature demonstrate that media could be an important bias in weight and eating problems, from disordered eating to clinical eating disorders. It's also well known that a frequent exposure to thin bodies, from media messages e.g. magazines and TV, could lead to body dissatisfaction. This influence is more frequent among adolescent and young women, in developing and developed countries (Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, & Thompson 2005; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Stice, Schupak-Neu-

berg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994).

Studies about emergence of body image problems and risk factors for body dissatisfaction have shown that exposure to an idealized body - and - acceptance or internalization of this ideal contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction (Cafri, et al., 2005; Durkin, Paxton, & Sorbello, 2007; Jones, Vigfusdotir, & Lee, 2004; Monro & Huon, 2005).

A sociocultural theoretical model propose that societal standards for an unreal beauty stress the importance of thinness as well as other standards of prettiness, which are difficult to reach (Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003). This model emphasizes that societal standard for thinness is omnipresent, and un-

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fortunately, unachievable for most women. Indeed, although overweight and obesity has been increasing over recent years, evidence suggests that the ideal has become progressively thinner (Spypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004).

Three constructs related to perceived influence of social and cultural factors have received particular attention concerning their relationship with body image attitudes: awareness of a thin ideal in the media, internalization of thin ideal and perceived pressures to be thin (Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Stice, 2002; Thompson & Stice, 2001). Awareness of the thin ideal has been defined as the simple knowledge that a standard exists, as opposed to the internalization of the thin ideal, which is a profound incorporation or acceptance of the value, to the point that the ideal affects one's attitudes - body image - or personal behavior - e.g. dieting. Perceived pressures to be thin, is related to pressure that comes from family, friends, dating partners, and media (Cafri, et al., 2005; Heinberg, Thompson, & Stormer, 1995; Thompson & Stice, 2001). In the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale (SATAQ), the constructs evaluated to measure of societal influences are internalization (general and athlete), pressure and information (a form of evaluation of the awareness); an awareness subscale was first proposed for this instrument but dropped from the final version.

Research has demonstrated that perceived pressure to be thin and internalization may be a causal risk factor for the onset of eating and shape-related disturbances and may mediate the relationship between sociocultural influences and body dissatisfaction (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2004).

In Brazil, the magnitude of body image disturbances is not well explored; most studies are local and evaluated small samples (Bosi, Uchimura, & Raggio, 2009; Moreira, et al, 2005). Even more the media influence is rarely evaluated (Alvarenga, Dunker, Philippi, & Scagliusi, 2010; Dunker, Fernandes, & Carreira Filho, 2009).

Considering the importance of its variables for eating and body disturbances and the lack of informa-

tion about their association in the Brazilian scenario, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the possible association between media influence - regarding information, pressure to be thin and internalization - and body dissatisfaction for a sample of Brazilian female undergraduate students.

Methods

Design & Setting

A sample of undergraduate female students was defined to evaluate media influence, body dissatisfaction, eating attitudes and eating disorders risk behavior in a transversal study in all regions of Brazil (Alvarenga, Scagliusi, & Philippi, 2011). It was a broad study with this sample; and for the present study we will be presenting data regarding media influence and body dissatisfaction.

In order to achieve a sample of young female subjects a partnership with public and private education institutions was sought. Formal invitations for partnership were sent through e-mail to 130 higher education institutions that had undergraduate courses in nutrition and were listed in the National Nutrition Board. Study questionnaires were forwarded to coordinators at the institutions that agreed to participate. A total of 37 (28.5%) responded and signed the research partnership agreement required.

Sample

The sample size was determined as described previously (Alvarenga, et al., 2011). Subjects were selected from nursing, psychology speech therapy, physical therapy, pharmacy and biomedicine majors, which were available in most institutions. Inclusion criteria were a) students attending the first and second year, b) being females, c) aged over 18 and under 50, d) to sign an informed consent agreeing to participate. Exclusion criteria were a) to be a dietitian or attending undergraduate studies in nutrition, b) being pregnant, c) to inform a health condition that could have an impact in eating attitudes (such as an eating disorder). Dietitians and/or those attending undergraduate studies in nutrition were not included because

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