



Downward dog becomes fit body, inc.: A content analysis of 40 years of female cover images of *Yoga Journal*



Jennifer B. Webb^{a,*}, Erin R. Vinoski^b, Jan Warren-Findlow^b, Marlene I. Burrell^{a,1}, Davina Y. Putz^{a,1}

^a University of North Carolina at Charlotte Department of Psychological Science, United States

^b University of North Carolina at Charlotte Department of Public Health Sciences, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 January 2017

Received in revised form 2 July 2017

Accepted 5 July 2017

Available online 28 July 2017

Keywords:

Yoga

Physical appearance

Body objectification

Media representations

Fitness ideal

Eating disorder risk

ABSTRACT

The present analysis investigated temporal trends in physical appearance attributes and attire worn by female cover models of *Yoga Journal* magazine between the years 1975–2015. Covers featuring a single female model ($N = 168$) were coded for: pose activity, amount of body visibility, perceived body size, body shape, breast size, skin exposure, and revealing or form-fitting attire. When collapsed across all decades, the majority of cover models was actively posed with high body visibility, rated as at most low normal weight, possessed either a “thin/lean” or “skinny/boney” body shape, and were “flat-chested” or “small-breasted”. Greater body visibility, pose activity, thinness/leanness, skin exposure, and form-fitting attire were featured on more recent years’ covers. Findings suggest that the female “yoga body” conforms to the contemporary thin- and-toned media fitness ideal, particularly recently, which may promote objectified body competence, an unhealthy drive for leanness, and dissuade higher weight women from considering yoga practice.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Yoga, which originated in India over 4000 years ago, is grounded in a holistic spiritual philosophy that advocates cultivating the integration of mind and body and actualizing principles of ethical behavior towards oneself and others encountered within the wider social ecology (Riley, 2004; Wei, 2016). Hatha yoga (the most widely-practiced variant in the U.S.), combines core elements of *asana* (or physical postures and movement), *pranayama* (or focused controlled breathing), and *dhyana* (or meditation) towards improving various aspects of physiological and psychological well-being (Riley, 2004). In recent decades, this system of ancient health-promoting practices has witnessed tremendous growth in popularity in mainstream Western culture. For instance, the nationally-representative 2016 Yoga in America survey indicated that roughly 37 million U.S. adults engaged in yoga within the last six months, nearly doubling the 2012 estimate (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016).

Simultaneous with the rapid expansion of yoga within mainstream culture has been increasing scholarship devoted to examining the potential benefits of the practice for improving body image and eating behavior (Klein & Cook-Cottone, 2013; Neumark-Sztainer, 2014). Consistent with the Embodiment Model of Positive Body Image (Menzel & Levine, 2011), preliminary cross-sectional research indicates that engaging in yoga corresponds with lower negative body image, self-objectification, and eating disturbances along with higher mindful body awareness, body appreciation, bodily responsiveness, and intuitive eating (Daubenmier, 2005; Dittmann & Freedman, 2009; Mahlo & Tiggemann, 2016). Practicing yoga also stimulates greater motivation for participating in physical activity for health, rather than appearance, reasons (Cox, Ullrich-French, Cole, & D’Hondt-Taylor, 2016; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008). Yoga’s positive effects on embodiment were also demonstrated in experimental paradigms with non-clinical adult samples (Cox et al., 2016; Gammage, Drouin, & Lamarche, 2016; Impett, Daubenmier, & Hirschman, 2006) as well as in intervention research in clinical samples of adolescents with eating disorders and women reporting clinically elevated binge eating behavior (Klein & Cook-Cottone, 2013).

Despite this promising evidence, accounts from leading yoga experts (Horton & Harvey, 2012; Roff, 2014) and empirical research (Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, Wall, & Loth, 2010) uncover a more complicated picture. For instance, a recent study found participa-

* Corresponding author at: Charlotte Department of Psychological Science, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223, United States.

E-mail address: jennifer.webb@uncc.edu (J.B. Webb).

¹ Both the authors contributed equally to this study. The order of authorship reflects the alphabetical sequencing of their last names.

tion in yoga and Pilates to be strongly associated with engaging in unhealthy weight control behaviors in a large community sample of young adult women (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010). Other reports have revealed that while yoga holds the promise of cultivating a healthier relationship with one's body and with food, it may also trigger or exacerbate excessive exercising and additional forms of disordered eating behaviors (Horton & Harvey, 2012; Roff, 2014).

Scholars claim that this negative aspect of yoga is a direct consequence of its widespread popularity and increasing adoption of media-driven appearance-focused exercise and fitness cultural values (Horton & Harvey, 2012). This purported shift is not surprising given that yoga was ranked as the 8th top fitness trend of 2017 according to the Academy of Sports Medicine's recent annual survey of fitness professionals (Thompson, 2016). Further, the surge of new yoga practitioners in the U.S. also coincides with the growth of yoga classes being offered in more mainstream health and fitness clubs. In fact, in 2016, a traditional health club or gym setting ranked slightly higher than a yoga studio as the location where people most frequently practiced yoga (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016).

Although choosing to engage in yoga in a gym or fitness club environment may be cost effective and convenient, it may also result in less consistent exposure to the more spiritual and psychological aspects of the practice in favor of prioritizing its physical and athletic side (Bergen, 2014; SenGupta, 2016). Thus, contemporary practitioners may have less contact with breath work, self-compassion, and other acceptance-related cornerstones of yogic philosophy (SenGupta, 2016; Wei, 2016). Instead, there is likely a greater opportunity to encounter messages highlighting the aesthetic- and physical appearance-related benefits of the practice which could perpetuate the experience of negative body image (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008). For instance, 1 in 5 adults surveyed in 2016 disclosed that their main motivation for initiating the practice of yoga was to promote weight loss (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016).

Accordingly, experts have raised concerns over the rather narrowly-defined "yoga body" that is currently disseminated in mainstream media outlets (Horton & Harvey, 2012; Smith, 2014, 2016; Stanley, 2017). This stereotypical representation of who practices yoga closely resembles the contemporary ultra-thin and toned fitness ideal (Bell, Donovan, & Ramme, 2016; Benton & Karaszia, 2015; Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012). Recent evidence confirms that this constrained physical aesthetic dominates the images of female models appearing on the covers (Webb et al., 2017) and in the advertisements (Vinoski, Webb, Warren-Findlow, Brewer, & Kiffmeyer, 2017) of leading westernized yoga lifestyle magazines, echoing the findings of earlier scholarship conducted with top-selling women's health and fitness magazines (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Wasylikiw, Emms, Meuse, & Poirer, 2009).

Webb et al. (2017) further observed that current female cover models were frequently featured with the majority of the body visible in more strenuously active poses and a significant minority partially-clad in skin-revealing attire. This modern version of the unrealistic female body standard (i.e., thin with lean muscularity: Benton & Karaszia, 2015; Homan et al., 2012) showcasing athleticism conveys conflicting messages regarding fitness and health, which fuses notions of physical appearance and objectification with body competence or functionality (Webb et al., 2017). Further, relevant theory (Franzoi, 1995; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) and research (Benton & Karaszia, 2015; Garvin & Damson, 2008; Homan et al., 2012; Mulgrew & Hennes, 2014; Mulgrew & Tiggemann, 2016) would predict that exposure to such images in turn has the potential to promote additional risk for body image disturbance, disordered eating, and psychological distress among the increasing number of women who are practicing yoga in the West.

Although the Webb et al. (2017) analysis spanning the years 2010–2015 has started shedding light on the contemporary objectified depiction of "the yoga body" featured on popular westernized yoga lifestyle magazine covers specifically, it is unclear whether this is mainly a recent trend. It is possible that this media representation of who practices yoga could reflect a more long-standing tradition that is only becoming more salient as a result of yoga's increasing acculturation into the appearance-driven exercise and fitness culture. Therefore, to build upon this previous cross-sectional research, we evaluated the perceived body size, body shape, and breast size along with the level of yoga pose activity, the amount of body visibility, skin exposure, and objectifying attire worn by the female models posed on the covers of *Yoga Journal* between the years 1975–2015. Importantly, we specifically targeted assessing the temporal nature of the observed effects over the course of the title's 40-year publication history.

Aligned with expert critiques (Horton & Harvey, 2012) and previous longitudinal content analytic research with mainstream media (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013; Hatton & Trautner, 2011) and with the advertisements featured in *Yoga Journal* specifically (Vinoski et al., 2017), we expected the increased representation of pose activity, thinness, leanness, high body visibility, skin exposure, and objectifying attire worn in more recent years of the publication.

2. Method

2.1. Sample selection

Yoga Journal magazine was selected for this investigation due to its long-standing publication record, ease of access to a large sample of cover images for analysis, and its widespread circulation across 28 western (e.g., U.S., Australia, France, Germany, Italy, etc.) and non-western countries (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, etc.; reaching a readership of nearly 2 million: *Yoga Journal Media Kit, 2017*). Cover images were sourced from Google Books Archives, Google Images, and the research team's archive.

A total of 272 *Yoga Journal* covers were located. The magazine published five issues during its first year and retained a bimonthly publication schedule (publishing six issues per year) through 2005. Between 2005 and 2007, the magazine published seven issues per year before switching to its current publication schedule of nine issues per year. The sample of 272 located covers represents all of the regular issues of the publication. We excluded "special issues" from the sample. Of all located covers, 168 covers featured only a single female model, which is the final sample size for the present investigation. Our final sample size therefore represents 61.8% of all regular issue covers in *Yoga Journal's* publication history. Years in which the magazine did not publish any covers featuring one single female model (1976 and 1977) are not represented in the final sample.

2.2. Coding procedures

The first and third authors developed a detailed coding guide in collaboration with undergraduate and graduate research assistants. The specific variables for the coding instrument were adapted from previous content analytic research of body image and related physical appearance characteristics evident in magazine media (i.e., Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Farquhar & Wasylikiw, 2007; Franko et al., 2013; Jankowski, Fawker, Slater, & Tiggemann, 2014; Milillo, 2008; Thompson-Brenner, Boisseau, & St. Paul, 2011; Wasylikiw et al., 2009). Codes were further consistent with relevant theoretical models of body conceptualization (i.e., "body-as-process" and "body-as-object": Franzoi, 1995) and body objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5038381>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5038381>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)