



The effect of functionality-focused and appearance-focused images of models of mixed body sizes on women's state-oriented body appreciation

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 May 2017

Received in revised form

20 December 2017

Accepted 20 December 2017

Keywords:

Media exposure

State body appreciation

Experiment

Body size

Body functionality

Appearance

ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that exposure to appearance-focused images of models depicting societal standards of beauty negatively affect women's state-oriented body dissatisfaction. The purpose of this research was to extend this experimental research to women's state-oriented body appreciation. The 374 women participants were randomly assigned to view images that were either depicting a model who was representative or not representative of the thin ideal (body size), while this model was in either an appearance-focused pose or a function-oriented pose (pose type). State body appreciation increased significantly after viewing images depicting models who did not conform to societal standards of thinness ($p < 0.001$). Exposure to the control condition images, which were images of natural environments, also produced increases in state body appreciation ($p = 0.049$). These findings provide insight into the construct of state body appreciation and offer implications for future positive body image research.

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1. Introduction

Body image has a profound impact on emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and overall quality of life (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Kearney-Cooke & Tieger, 2015). As a construct, body image is multidimensional, encompassing perceptual, behavioral, and cognitive-affective domains (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). The perceptual component includes the mental representation of body size and shape, which does not always correspond with actual body size and shape. The behavioral component includes behaviors associated with thoughts and feelings about the body, including body checking and body avoidance (Kearney-Cooke & Tieger, 2015). The cognitive-affective component includes self-evaluation, thoughts, and feelings about the body. It also refers to the effects of body appearance evaluation on self-esteem (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Fairburn et al., 2003). Researchers distinguish negative body image from positive body image due to differing presentations of perceptual, behavioral, and cognitive-affective components (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999; Tiggemann, 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a).

This study focuses primarily on positive body image, which involves appreciation and gratitude for the functionality, health, and features of the body. Positive body image has unique characteristics that are conceptually distinct from low levels of body dissatisfaction or negative appearance evaluation (Tiggemann, 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b; Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010). Importantly, positive body image is not on the same continuum as negative body image; possessing positive characteristics does not equal the lack of negative characteristics (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b). One reason this is important is that it broadens a perspective for interventions. Instead of focusing solely on decreasing body dissatisfaction, the focus can shift toward increasing positive aspects of one's acceptance and appreciation of their bodies, which is associated with general mental well-being (e.g., self-esteem, optimism, and proactive coping) and physical well-being (e.g., use of sun protection and medial help-seeking behavior; Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2016a; Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005).

The positive body image approach also offers unique perspectives for research on media influences on women's body image. Dominant theoretical models regarding both body dissatisfaction (e.g., Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2014; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Stice, 1994; Thompson et al., 1999) and positive body image (e.g., Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2016b; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010) posit that sources of societal influence, including media influence,

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are the most antecedent variables along causal pathways toward body image (Karazsia & Berlin, *in press*; Karazsia, Berlin, Armstrong, Janicke, & Darling, 2013; Karazsia, van Dulmen, Wong, & Crowther, 2013). Several seminal reviews of empirical research support the link between exposure to media images depicting the thin ideal and increases in women's body dissatisfaction (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002).

To the best of our knowledge, no previous experimental research has examined effects of media exposure on women's state body appreciation, which is one of the most salient components of positive body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a; Webb et al., 2015; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). Body appreciation expands beyond physical appearance, or the aesthetic qualities of the body, and includes an appreciation for body functionality, including strength and ability (Abbott & Barber, 2010; Mulgrew & Hennes, 2015). One potential method for promoting positive body image is to encourage women to focus on the function of their bodies instead of appearance (Alleva et al., 2015; Mulgrew & Tiggemann, 2016).

Several studies have demonstrated that body appreciation predicts how women respond to beauty-ideal media imagery. More specifically, body appreciation moderates the response of women's exposure to the thin ideal (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2015; Halliwell, 2013). Halliwell (2013) reported that high levels of body appreciation were protective of influence from the thin ideal. That is, the women did not want to change their appearance after being exposed to images of the thin ideal if they had high levels of body appreciation. Andrew et al. (2015) found that body appreciation played a similar role regarding the influence of thin-ideal exposure on body dissatisfaction; women with high levels of body appreciation did not respond negatively to images reflecting societal standards of beauty.

While these studies reveal that preexisting body appreciation can serve a protective role, less is known about what influences body appreciation. An extension of positive body image conceptualizations suggests that exposure to images that broaden one's focus from appearance-oriented depictions of thin models might serve to cultivate greater body appreciation. This possibility could occur in various ways, including exposure to models that do not conform to a thin ideal. It also seems plausible that the extent to which a model's body is emphasized in sources of societal influence, regardless of whether or not she is thin, could also influence self-views of one's own body, including body appreciation. Although we are unaware of previous research that tests this possibility specifically, previous research related to body dissatisfaction suggests that it is plausible. For example, Franzoi (1995) reported that negative body esteem was more common when individuals were more likely to evaluate one's body as an object versus evaluations of body as something that performs functional processes. Linder and Daniels (2017) found that for both men and women undergraduates, viewing sexualized images of athletes lead to more self-objectifying evaluations, whereas viewing performance-based images of athletes lead to more functional or physicality self-evaluations. Mulgrew and Hennes (2015) revealed that women who reported higher athletic-ideal internalization were more likely to respond negatively to objectifying, posed models. These authors also found that, regardless of self-reported internalization levels, exposure to models that were either posed and objectified or engaged in physical activity lead to an increase in feelings of fatness, relative to women who viewed images without models present. Interestingly, Mulgrew and Tiggemann (2016) exposed women to functionality focused images of models who represent the thin ideal and found a detrimental effect for women's appearance and functionality satisfaction.

These studies suggest that body dissatisfaction is likely to increase when primed with images depicting societal standards of beauty. This increase in body dissatisfaction may be intensified

when models depicted in media images are objectified. While body appreciation and body functionality are being researched in relation to media images, further research is needed to clarify these relationships, including the extent to which media exposure can influence one's body appreciation. In the present study, we sought to extend this research to the realm of body appreciation. This is an important extension, and prior research indicates that body appreciation can buffer women's otherwise negative responses to media images that depict societal standards of beauty (Halliwell, 2013). To accomplish this goal, we utilized the State Body Appreciation Scale-2 (SBAS-2), which was recently developed by Homan (2016). Homan (2016) adapted the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a) to assess a state-oriented conceptualization of body appreciation. The creation of this measure offers unique opportunities to explore influences on state experiences of body appreciation, such as societal influences. The present study is among the first to use the SBAS-2 for this purpose.

In the present study, state body appreciation was assessed before and after exposure to images. Two components of image features were manipulated. Consistent with much previous research on body dissatisfaction, one variable was body size of the woman in the image (Halliwell, 2013; Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012). We hypothesized that women's self-reported, state-oriented body appreciation would increase when exposed to fuller-figured models, and that it would decrease when exposed to models depicting the thin ideal. We also manipulated a second feature: the pose of the models in the images. Although far less research has been conducted on specific poses of models in the context of body appreciation, we wanted to explore if pose had an effect on women's body appreciation. The specific "pose" that we manipulated was functionality-focus versus appearance-focus. According to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), appearance-focused poses can be expected to have negative effects on women's body image. Although this concept was developed in the context of body dissatisfaction, we extended this notion to body appreciation and thus expected that functionality-focused images would induce increases body appreciation. Conversely, we expected that more appearance-focused images would induce decreases in body appreciation. Further, we included assessments of internalization of societal appearance standards to offer a baseline comparison across groups on a trait-based measure related to body image, and to test for the possibility that baseline internalization would moderate women's responses to the images they viewed (Mulgrew & Hennes, 2015).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

There were 374 participants that completed the study online via the Amazon.com Mechanical Turk (Mturk) interface. We collected data through Mturk because it yields data that are at least as reliable as data collected from more traditional methods, yet samples are often more diverse (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). According to Gardner, Brown, and Boice (2012), Mturk is useful and appropriate for collecting data on perceptual and attitudinal components of body image. For the present study, participants were included only if (a) they were residing in the U.S., (b) self-identified as cisgendered female, and (c) were between the ages of 18–29 years old. These inclusion criteria were selected in order to control for cultural, gender, and age differences in body image ideals or body satisfaction (Groesz et al., 2002; McGuire, Doty, Catalpa, & Ola, 2016; Tate, Ledbetter, & Youssef, 2013). The mean age of participants was 25.00 years ($SD = 2.81$ years). Based on self-reports of height and weight, the average body mass index (BMI) for partic-

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