



Investing in the ideal: Does objectified body consciousness mediate the association between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem in women?



Amy Noser, Virgil Zeigler-Hill *

Oakland University, Rochester, MI, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 June 2013

Received in revised form

12 November 2013

Accepted 16 November 2013

Keywords:

Body image

Self-esteem

Contingent

Objectified

Appearance

ABSTRACT

Appearance contingent self-worth has been shown to be associated with low appearance self-esteem but little is known about the role that objectified body consciousness may play in this relationship. The purpose of the present study with 465 female undergraduates was to examine whether objectified body consciousness mediates the association between appearance contingent self-worth and low levels of appearance self-esteem. This was accomplished using a multiple mediation model to examine whether components of objectified body consciousness (i.e., body surveillance, body shame, and control beliefs) play unique roles in the connection between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem. Results showed that body surveillance and body shame were significant mediators of the connection between appearance contingent self-worth and low levels of appearance self-esteem. Discussion focuses on the implications of these results for the ways in which appearance contingent self-worth may promote heightened body consciousness and possibly contribute to low levels of appearance self-esteem.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The feminine body has been socially constructed as an object to be admired in Western culture which often leads women and girls to measure their worth primarily by evaluating their physical appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Socially constructed standards of attractiveness are believed to develop as a result of external pressures (e.g., media) such that women accept these standards of attractiveness as normative and incorporate them into their daily social experiences (Birch & Fisher, 1998; Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994). In turn, women often personally identify with these social values which they then use to construct their self-concepts (Costanzo, 1992). That is, women and girls who are constantly exposed to societal standards of beauty (e.g., magazine ads depicting extremely attractive women) may develop a preoccupation with their appearance and their perceived attractiveness may become a primary means for these women and girls to determine how they feel about themselves. The tremendous emphasis that women and girls place on their appearance is not irrational given that physical attractiveness has been linked with a variety of

important life outcomes for women including dating and marriage opportunities (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002), higher educational and economic attainments (Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009), and better physical health (see Langlois, Kalakanis, Rubenstein, Larson, Hallam, & Smoot, 2000 for a review). These findings are consistent with the idea that physical appearance plays an important role in determining the social and economic status of women which may provide at least a partial explanation for why many women are so highly concerned about their attractiveness.

Emphasizing physical appearance is accompanied by a variety of costs. Women who rely on meeting external standards of physical attractiveness to maintain their feelings of worth are believed to possess appearance contingent self-worth (i.e., basing feelings of self-worth on appearance) which often leads them to adopt an outsider's perspective of their own body which is referred to as *objectified body consciousness* (e.g., Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008; McKinley, 1999; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). In turn, this heightened body consciousness is associated with negative outcomes such as low self-esteem and negative self-perceptions of attractiveness (Overstreet & Quinn, 2012; Patrick, Neighbors, & Knee, 2004). This suggests the possibility that women with appearance contingent self-worth may experience lower appearance self-esteem due, at least in part, to heightened body consciousness. It is important to note that appearance self-esteem is focused on satisfaction with physical appearance unlike global self-esteem which reflects overall feelings of self-worth. A recent study by Overstreet and Quinn

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Oakland University, 212A Pryale Hall, Rochester, MI 48309, United States. Tel.: +1 248 370 2676; fax: +1 248 370 4612.

E-mail address: zeiglerh@oakland.edu (V. Zeigler-Hill).

(2012) has begun to explore these relationships by considering the role that body surveillance may play in the association between a variety of self-worth contingencies (e.g., appearance, approval from others) and appearance satisfaction. The purpose of the present study was to expand the existing literature by gaining a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem by examining the full objectified body consciousness construct (i.e., body surveillance, body shame, and control beliefs). This was accomplished using a multiple mediation model to examine the possible mediating roles that different components of objectified body consciousness may play in the connection between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem after controlling for a number of factors (i.e., global self-esteem, body mass index, and age) that are known to influence concerns regarding appearance (e.g., Mendelson, Mendelson, & Andrews, 2000). This is important because it allows us to capture the unique role that objectified body consciousness plays in the association of appearance contingent self-esteem and appearance self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to an evaluation of the self that reflects the extent to which individuals like themselves (see Zeigler-Hill, 2013 for a review). Self-esteem is an important part of daily experiences that reflects interactions and feedback from others such that feelings of acceptance often lead to feelings of value and worth (Leary & Downs, 1995). Individuals differ in the extent to which they view this acceptance as conditional or unconditional. Contingent self-worth reflects feelings of self-worth that are conditional on meeting some self-prescribed or external standard that may influence motivation, behavior, cognition, and affect (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1995). That is, contingent self-worth refers to what individuals believe they must do or be in order to have value and worth as a person. In contrast, non-contingent self-worth reflects feelings of self-worth that are secure and do not depend on external reinforcement. For example, feelings of self-worth that are contingent on physical appearance reflect a concern for meeting or exceeding standards of attractiveness that the individual believes is necessary in order to feel good about oneself. Individuals who possess appearance contingent self-worth tend to experience higher levels of self-esteem when they believe they are attractive, whereas the association between self-esteem and perceptions of attractiveness is much weaker for those who do not base their feelings of self-worth on their appearance (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). It is important to clarify that *appearance contingent self-worth* refers to the extent to which individuals base their feelings of self-worth on their physical appearance, whereas *appearance self-esteem* reflects the extent to which individuals are satisfied with their physical appearance.

Western cultures place unrealistic standards on beauty (Stice & Shaw, 2002). Women who possess appearance contingent self-worth may be more likely to internalize these unrealistic standards for their appearance which may, in turn, lead to objectified body consciousness. Objectified body consciousness includes three components: *body surveillance* or the continual self-monitoring of the body to ensure conformity to cultural standards of beauty (e.g., McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Moradi, 2010), *body shame* which refers to negative attitudes about the body that extend to the self as a whole and may develop due to feelings of being exposed as someone who does not meet cultural standards (McKinley, 1999), and *control beliefs* which reflect beliefs that one has the ability to control the appearance of their body (e.g., McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Individuals with appearance contingent self-worth may be more likely to attempt to achieve unattainable standards of beauty which may foster a preoccupation with their appearance that is expressed through enhanced body surveillance and body shame (John & Ebbeck, 2008; Overstreet & Quinn, 2012). This is problematic because increased body surveillance and body

shame have been found to be associated with a variety of negative outcomes such as diminished performance on demanding tasks (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998), body dissatisfaction (Smolak & Murnen, 2008), disordered eating (e.g., Fitzsimmons-Craft, Bardone-Cone, & Kelly, 2011), and lower psychological well-being (Sinclair & Myers, 2004). In contrast, women who believe they have some degree of control over their appearance generally report less body monitoring and fewer feelings of shame toward their bodies (Taylor, 1989). However, it is important to note that the associations that control beliefs have with various outcomes appear to be mixed (e.g., McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Sinclair & Myers, 2004; Taylor, 1989). For example, studies have found that women who believe they are capable of controlling their weight have higher rates of body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms (e.g., Furnham & Atkins, 1997), whereas other research has found no connection between control beliefs and body dissatisfaction (e.g., McKinley, 1999).

Diminished feelings of global self-worth are consistently found among individuals who have a heightened awareness of their own bodies (e.g., Lowery et al., 2005). For example, women who closely monitor their bodies and are aware of external standards of beauty are likely to try and reduce any discrepancies between themselves and these standards but this is extremely difficult given the unrealistic standards of beauty that women often internalize. The failure of women to meet their standards of beauty may lead them to experience feelings of body shame which may, in turn, diminish their feelings of worth (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Previous research concerning the association between objectified body consciousness and low self-esteem has generally focused on global self-esteem without considering domain-specific self-esteem (i.e., self-evaluations within a particular area of life such as attractiveness). Consideration of domain-specific self-esteem may be important when considering the consequences of objectified body consciousness because global feelings of self-worth may not represent all domains of the self equally (Gentile, Grabe, Dolan-Pascoe, Twenge, Wells, & Maitino, 2009). Previous studies have suggested that measuring domain-specific self-esteem provides a more accurate understanding of the connection between performance in a particular domain (e.g., academic success) and attitudes about the self in that same domain (e.g., academic self-esteem; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Valentine & DuBois, 2005). This suggests the possibility that women who have a heightened awareness of their bodies may be especially at risk for low levels of appearance self-esteem.

Overview and Predictions

The purpose of the present study was to examine the degree to which the components of objectified body consciousness mediated the association between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem. We predicted that appearance contingent self-worth would be negatively associated with appearance self-esteem (e.g., Overstreet & Quinn, 2012). That is, we believed that women who possessed appearance contingent self-worth would report feeling less positively about their appearance. This prediction is consistent with findings suggesting that women with appearance contingent self-worth experience negative self-perceptions of attractiveness which puts these women at a greater risk for dysphoric symptoms and eating disorders (Gentile et al., 2009; Harter, 1997).

We expected that the connection between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem would be mediated by components of objectified body consciousness. That is, we believed that the connection between appearance contingent self-worth and appearance self-esteem would be largely due to women with appearance contingent self-worth becoming preoccupied with

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/902743>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/902743>

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