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The Effect of Exposure of Normalized and Idealized Body Images on Males and Females

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Abstract

College students were used as participants to test body satisfaction after viewing an idealized body slideshow or a normalized body slideshow. Each slideshow had 12 close-up photos up body parts, without faces, ruling out any confounds with the pictures. The Scale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Statement and the Appearance Evaluation Scale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire recorded the participant’s body satisfaction after viewing the slideshows. No significant results were obtained from this study.

Keywords: Body satisfaction, idealized bodies, normalized bodies.

In today's society there is a prevalent number of people with body dissatisfaction that is widely influenced by media outlets that portray what the perfect body should look like. Surrounded by pictures of women with thin, toned bodies and men that are muscular from head to toe could skew what a person believes to be an idealized body and in some cases might make them feel self-conscious and or unsatisfied with their own bodies.

Researchers Forbes, Curtis, Rade, and Jaberg studied college students who were categorized as masculine-typed, feminine-typed, androgynous, or undifferentiated using the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Forbes et al., 2001). The researchers believed that the ‘western perception’ of the desired body types for women has drastically changed over the years to today’s society, where the idealized female body is an unhealthy and unrealistic perception. This correlates with the higher incidence of eating disorders in women (Forbes et al., 2001). Participants were asked to choose between drawings of different body types and then complete a questionnaire in which they were asked what
body most closely resembled their own, which body they preferred to have, which body they thought their sex would prefer to have, and the body type that the opposite sex would prefer. The results showed that female college-students were increasingly more dissatisfied with their own bodies than the men were (Forbes et al., 2001).

Researchers Arbour and Ginis studied the effects of exposure to muscular and hypermuscular media images on young men’s muscularity dissatisfaction and body dissatisfaction. They hypothesized that the men with higher levels of body dissatisfaction would have greater body and muscularity dissatisfaction than men with lower levels of body dissatisfaction after viewing the media images (Arbour & Ginis, 2006). Participants were asked to view a 30-minute slide show of muscular and hypermuscular photos and then to complete a questionnaire where they provided the overall muscularity rating for the two slide shows. The results of the experiment showed that there was positive correlation between body and muscularity dissatisfaction for the muscular and hypermuscular slide shows (Arbour and Ginis 2006). They also found that men considered the muscular images to be more ‘ideal’ as the bodies they saw in magazines and on TV compared to the hypermuscular bodies that were not as popular and relevant in the media.

Researchers Taniguchi and Aune suggested that body satisfaction is related to how college students communicate with their parents (Taniguchi & Aune, 2013). A large amount of literature is focused on mother and child relationships and body satisfaction but (Taniguchi & Aune, 2013) suggested that we should bare closer attention to father and child relationships as recent research examined father and daughter relationships which found that a father’s negative perception; rejection, overprotection – is related to
eating disorder symptoms in women (Taniguchi & Aune, 2013). The researchers tested 143 undergraduate students and found that daughters who had stated as having open communication with their fathers correlated with higher body satisfaction. It was also found that the sons’ body satisfaction was positively correlated with open communication with their mothers, which proved to be the best thing for sons’ body satisfaction, meanwhile problematic communication with mothers was the most powerful predictor of daughters’ body satisfaction (Taniguchi & Aune, 2013).

The current study further extends on the idea of Brinder’s (2012) study to examine body satisfaction in college students. (Brinder 2012) had included pictures with faces in her photos that she presented to participants in her study. This created a confound variable as people are subjective to facial recognition and therefore there was less control in accordance to body satisfaction rating. This study will further expand on the study done by (Brinder 2012) and will not include the confound variable. Using the same body satisfaction questionnaires as (Brinder, 2012), this study predicted that participants who viewed the idealized photos would score lower on the body satisfaction questionnaire compared to the participants who view the normalized photos, have lower body perception, and that women would be a strong predictor of low self-body image in regards to the idealized photos.

Method

Participants

The participants used in this study were 16 undergraduate students that were attending the University of Western Ontario, or Huron University College at the time this study was conducted. Eight of the participants were female and eight of the participants
were male. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-22 years of age. The mean age of the participants was 20.63 years (SD=0.96).

**Materials**

The materials of this study included two questionnaires, two PowerPoint files, and media images originating from Google Images. The two questionnaires were the Body Area Satisfaction Scale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Statement (BOA) and the Appearance Evaluation Scale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (AES). See (Cash, 2000) for templates of the questionnaires. There was a normalized body PowerPoint and an idealized body PowerPoint. Each PowerPoint had 12 pictures. The normalized PowerPoint had 6 pictures of females and 6 pictures of males. The pictures presented in the normalized PowerPoint displayed average looking body parts. The idealized Power point had 6 pictures of females and 6 pictures of males. The pictures presented in the idealized PowerPoint displayed athletic and in shape body parts. The pictures in the PowerPoints displayed the following body parts: chest, stomach, arms, back, buttocks, and legs.

**Procedure**

The consent form was given to the participants before the experiment took place and the participant had to read and sign the consent form before the experiment could begin. Participants were then asked to look at either the idealized or normalized slide show. The participants viewed each image of the slide show for 5 seconds. After the participants completed viewing the slide show, a two part questionnaire was given to be
completed which included the (BOA) and (AES). Four of the female participants and four of the male participants were shown the normalized slide show and the other four female and four male participants were shown the idealized slide show.

**Results**

The results of a 2X2 ANOVA revealed there is no significant main effect of gender, $F(1,12)=0.314, p > 0.05$. It also revealed there is no significant main effect of the slideshows shown, $F(1,12)=1.485, p > 0.05$. Lastly, it revealed no significant interaction between gender and the slideshows, $F(1,12)=0.912, p > 0.05$. Figure 1 demonstrates the results of the ANOVA. See appendix A for the ANOVA sums of squares table.

**Discussion**

The results do not support the hypothesis that idealized photos would yield lower self-body satisfaction and that women would be most affected by the idealized photos. No significance was found between exposure to the idealized photos and lower body satisfaction, which suggests that the idealized photos had no effect on participants body satisfaction. There are several reasons why the results are the way they are which include self-esteem, pre-sustained body satisfaction, and control issues. More than halfway through the experiment it became evident to the participants that there was a self-esteem factor involved with the study. The participants who seemed to have high self-esteem scored high on the BOA and AES questionnaires whether they viewed the idealized body slideshow or the normalized body sideshow and this high self-esteem or self-confidence seemed to be the predictor of the scores. In a recalled testing session, one participant exclaimed “right when I saw lower torso I knew I was a 5” which is the top score.
Another reason why there was no main effect could have been that a lot of participants had pre-sustained body satisfaction before hand, such as those participants who were physically active and felt that their body was sexually attractive. If a person had a muscular toned body, they are likely to be confident about their body and not be as self-
Figure 1. The results of the 2x2 ANOVA displayed in a graph.
conscious as to how they feel about their body as oppose to a person who is not physically active and feels they do not have a sexually attractive body. Another problem with this study had to do with control. It was found that the researcher who was testing his friends as participants were likely not truthful towards the researcher. Even though the questionnaire was put directly into a folder where it would only be seen by the researcher in order to calculate scores and there were no names written on the questionnaire sheets, participants still did not trust the researcher. Also another reason why the results ended up with no effect could have been the amount of photos shown in each slide show. There were twelve photos in each slide show that were shown for five seconds each and this was possibly not enough time for order there to be an effect on the participant. A further issue of control was that all participants were tested in different areas, some with many distractions.

This study can be replicated in the future with improvements to increase control and hopefully yield a main effect. Firstly, in the future a self-esteem test should be administered in order to gauge the participants’ self-esteem before they watch the slide show. People with high self-esteem should be given a specific slide show of idealistic bodies where as people with low self-esteem would be given a slide show of normalized bodies. This can combat both the high self-esteem participants and the participants who are confident about their body. In order to assess the control issues one must analyze the quality of the participants. It is better to avoid using friends as participants especially on an experiment like this one where trust is an issue. But friends in general are efficient to use because the majority of them will not say no to a test and the researcher needs as many participants as he or she can get. Also to address the problem of trust, the
participants will never fully trust the researcher regardless of the steps that are taken to solidify trust between the participants and the researcher due to the stereotype that psychologists are underhanded and dishonest. The photos and time should be increased as well as this will allow for more exposure time and may possibly lead to a larger likelihood of getting a main effect.

Future studies to consider would be looking at the effect of body satisfaction and comparing it to the eating disorders that affect many people, such as anorexia nervosa. Also future researchers can explore the various reasons of why people work so hard to obtain a body that makes them satisfied and the role social media plays in this drive for an idealized body.

In conclusion, the results of this study were not significant in any way and did not support the hypothesis. Additional measures can be taken in the future to improve control for this study and possibly obtain significant results. Future study ideas can examine media in relation to eating disorders or media in relation to motivation for a desired body.
References


Appendix A

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This is a sums of squares table for the 2x2 ANOVA.