

Abstract

This experiment examines the effects of the physical ideal in the media on various body image perceptions among women. Participants were 47 female undergraduate students who viewed a series of magazine advertisements. Participants were shown either fashion advertisements consisting of inanimate objects (control) or very attractive, thin women. Participants then completed the Body Esteem scale and were debriefed. Results of a principal components factor analysis revealed that the Body Esteem scale can be separated into 8 distinct subscales, some of which show orthogonal relationships with other subscales. There were no significant mean differences between the conditions on any of these subscales. This suggests that body image perceptions among college aged women may not be as vulnerable to media portrayals as is assumed. In addition, these results suggest that body image among females consists of several elements, some of which are unrelated (e.g., perceptions of sexuality and perceptions of one's physique).

Feeling Sexy

The Many Faces of Body Esteem and How It's Effected by Advertisements



Allison Runyon Jonathan S. Gore
Eastern Kentucky University



Introduction

In America today media is extremely pervasive. Media influences and perceived body image are two of the most influential factors in determining self esteem (Kilmartin, Kliever, Myers, & Polce-Lynch, 2001). Cultural forces, such as media images, are key players in the development and maintenance of eating and bodily pathologies (Markney, 2004). By frequently being exposed to these unrealistic ideal images that are presented in the media individuals feel as if they need to look this way in order to be found attractive and accepted by society. Previous research shows that many individuals, especially women, experience pressure from society to be thinner (Champion & Furnham, 1999). The current experiment tests the hypothesis that women who are exposed to advertisements that contain a thin-ideal model will have lower self-esteem than women who are exposed to fashion advertisements that contain inanimate objects.

Stimulus Examples



Table 1. Mean Differences

Variables	Thin-Ideal Condition		Inanimate Condition		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Physique	2.44	0.86	2.20	1.00	0.84
Fitness	3.10	0.71	2.71	0.91	1.61
Lower Body	2.44	1.03	2.51	0.91	0.26
Face	3.37	0.65	3.24	0.73	0.64
Sexuality	3.49	0.60	3.34	0.94	0.63
Fat Storage	3.10	0.90	2.74	0.82	1.43
Symmetry	3.58	0.85	3.48	0.64	0.45
Muscles	2.92	0.74	2.97	1.00	0.22

Method and Results

Participants: 47 female undergraduate students at Eastern Kentucky University volunteered to view a series of magazine advertisements

Materials: The Body Esteem Scale (BES) was used to assess how the participants felt about their body. Participants rated items on a 5-point scale (1 = *strong negative feelings*, 5 = *strong positive feelings*).

Procedure: Participants viewed a series of 15 advertisements with each being viewed for 15 seconds each. Participants were then asked to complete the Body Esteem Scale and following that they were asked to list all of the advertisements they could recall.

Results showed that there were no significant differences between conditions (see Table 1). A principle components factor analysis revealed that the Body Esteem Scale can be divided up into 8 subscales as opposed to 3 (see Table 2, and that many of the subscales are orthogonally related (e.g., sexuality and physique; see Table 3)

Table 2. Factor Analysis

Factor	Label	Items
1	Physique	Waist, Body Build, Figure, Appearance of Stomach, Weight
2	Fitness	Physical Stamina, Energy Level, Agility, Physical Condition
3	Lower Body	Thighs, Hips, Legs
4	Face	Ears, Chin, Face
5	Sexuality	Sex Drive, Sex Organs, Sex Activities
6	Fat Storage	Appetite, Buttocks, Arms
7	Symmetry	Width of Shoulders, Cheeks/Cheekbones, Appearance of Eyes
8	Muscles	Muscular Strength, Biceps

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Physique	----	.51*	.52*	.16	-.14	.41*	.23	.13
2. Fitness		----	.35*	.21	.25	.35*	.30*	.25
3. Lower Body			----	.25	.01	.38*	.23	.30*
4. Face				----	.12	.14	.52*	.01
5. Sexuality					----	-.08	.17	-.04
6. Fat Storage						----	.23	.27
7. Symmetry							----	.09
8. Muscles								----

Implications

These findings suggest that college age females are not as negatively influenced by images in the media as previously thought. They also showed that the Body Esteem Scale can be divided up into 8 distinct subscales. This suggests that there are many factors that influence body image perception in females. Future research may aim to look at females from different age groups.