

The Influence of Media Exposure and Experimenter Effects on Female Body Image Dissatisfaction

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Background & Hypotheses

The incidence of reality television shows has made a dramatic impact on prime time television. A range of popular television stations such as ABC, NBC, TLC and MTV have incorporated reality shows into their daily programs. Over the past decade, reality shows have pushed the barrier of what is acceptable on family television as their viewers crave the more intense shows that use humiliation, violence, sex and extreme situations to keep their viewers tuned to their channel. Due to the direct relationship between low self-esteem and depression, the study of body image dissatisfaction is essential to helping others become healthier mentally, emotionally, and physically (Koff, Rierdan, and Stubbs, 1990; as cited in Turner, 1997; Rierdan, Koff and Stubbs, 1989; as cited in Turner, 1997). Previous research has examined the effect of magazine articles and commercials featuring women portraying the ideal body shape (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, as cited in Cusumano, 1997; Monro & Huon, 2005). The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a direct effect of media exposure, specifically beauty makeover shows, on women's body dissatisfaction. The current study also attempted to establish if there was an experimenter effect, due to the attractiveness of the experimenter present during the experiment, on participant's body image dissatisfaction.

Hypotheses:

- B There will be a main effect for type of media exposure, such that the beauty makeover show group will have higher body image dissatisfaction than the home video group.
- B There will be a main effect for experimenter attractiveness such that, the attractive experimenter group will have higher body dissatisfaction than the non-attractive experimenter group.
- B There will be an interaction effect between type of media exposure and experimenter attractiveness such that the beauty attractive group will have a higher body dissatisfaction than the home non-attractive group.

Methods

Nine undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a medium east Texas university were recruited for the offer of extra or course credit in exchange for participation. An additional 34 participants were recruited from a small telecommunication's company in east Texas. One participant was excluded because they did not answer the manipulation check. All participants were female in the range of 18 to 39 years old, with 97.5% falling in between the ages of 18-24. The ethnic background of the participants modeled the east Texas demographic.

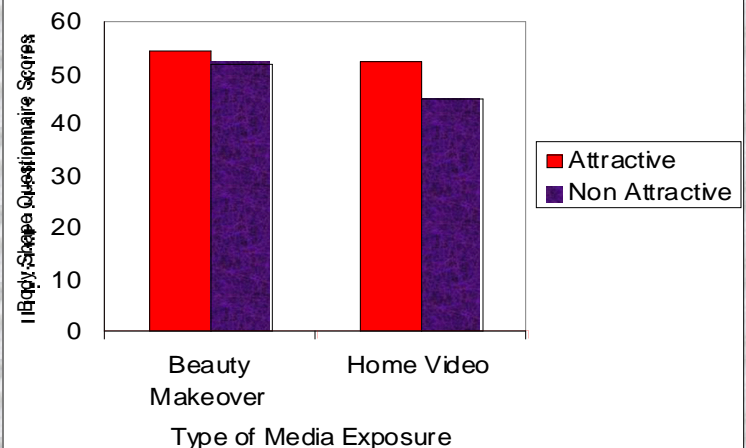
The participants viewed one of two types of media (beauty makeover show or home video). While viewing the video an attractive or non-attractive experimenter was present. After viewing the video each participant completed an 18-item Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper, Taylor, Cooper & Fairburn, 1987) to assess their body image dissatisfaction. All responses were tallied using a Likert scale with 1=Strongly Disagree and 6=Strongly Agree. A higher score was reflective of higher body image dissatisfaction while a lower score was reflective of lower body image dissatisfaction.

Results

For each participant responses to the 18-item survey were recorded, with no questions reverse scored. A Cronbach's Alpha was performed and indicated that all 18 questions were highly inter-related, Cronbach's Alpha=.92. Therefore, the responses to the 18 questions were summed, and they were used in the subsequent analysis. An alpha level of .05 was used for all analyses.

In order to investigate a possible covariate, participant ages were correlated with cumulative survey scores. Age did not show a significant correlation with participant body image dissatisfaction scores and therefore, was not used as a covariate, $r(39) = .1522$, $p < .05$.

A 2 (type of show) \times 2 (experimenter attractiveness) between ANOVA was performed. There was no significant main effect for type of media exposure. Participants who viewed the beauty show ($M = 53.6$) received comparable scores to those participants who viewed the home video ($M = 48.65$). There was no significant main effect for experimenter attractiveness. Participants who viewed either show while an attractive experimenter was present ($M = 53.4$) received comparable scores to those participants who viewed either video while a non-attractive experimenter was present ($M = 48.95$). There was no significant interaction effect between type of media exposure and experimenter attractiveness, $F(1,40) = .17$.



Discussion

None of the original three hypotheses were supported. First, unlike what was predicted, the beauty makeover show group did not show higher levels of body image dissatisfaction than the home video group. This trend is likely due to the short length of each video used in the current study (i.e. 5-minutes). Therefore, the length of the videos should be increased to create a longer exposure period to the selected media. Once the lengths of the videos are extended the videos viewed will closely resemble a realistic length of the real world episodes viewed by women. Furthermore, the participants exposed to the attractive experimenter did not score higher levels of body dissatisfaction than those exposed to the non-attractive experimenter. Eighty-three percent of participants rated the experimenter as attractive, regardless to which experimenter they were exposed. Finally, contrasting the third hypothesis predicting a significant interaction between type of media exposure and experimenter attractiveness, there was no significant interaction. It is likely that this trend was not developed in the current study due to short exposure and unsuccessful manipulation of experimenter attractiveness. To improve the current study and examine the interaction effect both the length and number of exposures should be increased while utilizing an experimenter consistently agreed to be attractive or non-attractive.

References

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