

The “Positive” Side of Social Media:

Body-Positive Posts as a Protective Factor Against Media-Induced Body Dissatisfaction



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Introduction

- Past research has shown that exposure to mass media that depicts and promotes thinness as a standard of physical attractiveness reduces the body satisfaction of women in Western society.
 - Harrison & Cantor (1997) established a positive correlational relationship between exposure to thinness-depicting and thinness-promoting mass media and eating disorder symptomatology.
 - Mabe, Forney, & Keel (2014) showed that 20 minutes of Facebook use maintains body image preoccupations among college-age women.
- However, minimal research has yet explored the psychological effects of the *body-positive* ideals of female beauty that have recently established a presence across online forums. Body-positive posts promote body acceptance, celebrate a diversity of body types, challenge and critique the thin-ideal, and advocate for positive body image through messages of health, nourishment, and resistance to conventional Western standards of the female physique.
 - Halliwell, Easun, & Harcourt (2011) found that a media literacy intervention can offset the effects of the thin-ideal on the body image of adolescent girls.
- This study combines classic research on mass media and female body image with contemporary findings on *social* media’s impact on women’s perception of self and body in order to examine the relative effects of the thin-ideal and the body-positive movement on the body dissatisfaction of college-age women.
- It was predicted that body-positive social media material would serve as a protective factor and source of resilience against media-induced body dissatisfaction for young women exposed to the “thin-ideal”.

Procedure

College-age women ($N = 40$; $M_{age} = 20.125$, $SD_{age} = 1.326$) were randomly assigned to view a 30-second slideshow of social media images representing either thinness-depicting and thinness-promoting (TDP) messages, body-positive stimuli, a combination of the two perspectives, or body-unrelated media material. The 9-item Body Dissatisfaction Subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983) was administered post-intervention.

Sample Items:

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | U | O | S | R | N | I feel satisfied with the shape of my body. |
| A | U | O | S | R | N | I like the shape of my buttocks. |
| A | U | O | S | R | N | I think my hips are too big. |
| A | U | O | S | R | N | I think that my thighs are just the right size. |

Statements are self-rated on a scale of relevancy ranging from “always”, “usually”, “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, or “never”.

TDP Media

30 DAY CRUNCH CHALLENGE

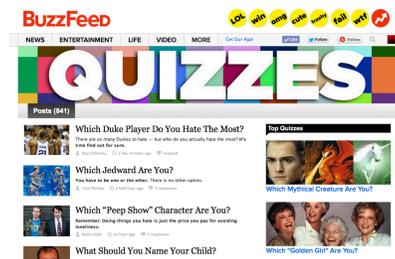
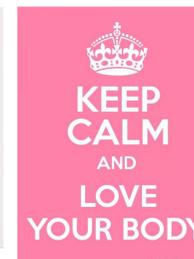
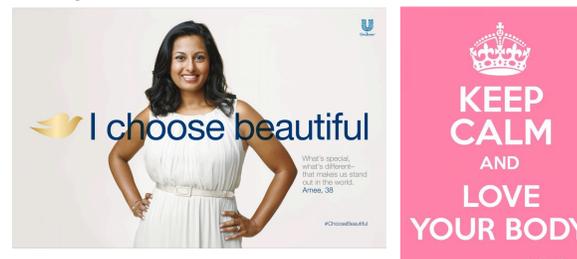
DAY 1	20 CRUNCHES	DAY 16	REST
DAY 2	25 CRUNCHES	DAY 17	100 CRUNCHES
DAY 3	30 CRUNCHES	DAY 18	105 CRUNCHES
DAY 4	REST	DAY 19	110 CRUNCHES
DAY 5	40 CRUNCHES	DAY 20	REST
DAY 6	45 CRUNCHES	DAY 21	115 CRUNCHES
DAY 7	50 CRUNCHES	DAY 22	120 CRUNCHES
DAY 8	REST	DAY 23	125 CRUNCHES
DAY 9	60 CRUNCHES	DAY 24	REST
DAY 10	65 CRUNCHES	DAY 25	130 CRUNCHES
DAY 11	70 CRUNCHES	DAY 26	135 CRUNCHES
DAY 12	REST	DAY 27	140 CRUNCHES
DAY 13	80 CRUNCHES	DAY 28	REST
DAY 14	85 CRUNCHES	DAY 29	145 CRUNCHES
DAY 15	90 CRUNCHES	DAY 30	150 CRUNCHES



Body-Unrelated Media



Body-Positive Media



Results

- One-way ANOVA $\sim F(3, 36) = 1.230, p = 0.313$
- Despite overall non-significance, a battery of pairwise comparison tests revealed near-significant differences between the mean body dissatisfaction score of the combined group and the body-positive only group [$t(36) = 1.710, p = 0.096$], between the mean body dissatisfaction score of the combined group and the TDP group [$t(36) = 1.511, p = 0.139$], and between the mean body dissatisfaction score of the combined group and the control group [$t(36) = 1.432, p = 0.161$].

Condition	N	Mean Body Dissatisfaction	SD
TDP	10	8.20	5.029
Body-positive	10	8.70	5.982
TDP + body-positive	10	4.40	2.951
Body-unrelated	10	8.00	7.528
Total	40	7.33	5.672

Discussion

- Despite overall non-significance, women assigned to the blended TDP and body-positive condition were considerably and consistently less dissatisfied with their bodies than those exposed to TDP media alone.
- Interestingly, in spite of viewing TDP material as one half of their slideshow stimulus, those assigned to the combined manipulation were also noticeably—albeit non-significantly—less dissatisfied with their physique than women who were only exposed to body-positive material or who did not see body-related posts at all.
- The contrast of thinness-depicting and thinness-promoting ideals against body-positive undertones may have fostered critical consciousness by juxtaposing unrealistic beauty standards to messages of body diversity, self-love, and the value of health over thinness.
- Using the participant’s actual social media feed as the stimulus may have been more persuasive and strengthened modeling effects.
- The relatively small sample ($N = 40$) limited power to a modest observed value of 0.301. Even if the type of attitude about the female body conveyed through social media did have an effect on a woman’s body dissatisfaction, the current experimental design only had a 30% likelihood of detecting it.
- A larger sample size may have supplied the added power needed to solidify emerging trends and attain significance.
- Factors such as self-esteem, gender-role endorsement, and general self-determination have been proposed by past investigators as mediating the relationship between exposure to TDP media and eating disorder symptomatology. Administering measures of these variables as part of a within-subjects, pretest-posttest variation of the present study may reveal that certain preexisting psychological constructs affect responsiveness to body-positive interventions.

References

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