

Implicit and explicit influence of music television on body image and the mitigating effects of a media intervention

Stephanie L. Quigg, Marika Tiggemann, Eva Kemps

Abstract

Negative effects on women's body satisfaction have been repeatedly demonstrated by experimental studies exposing women to idealized images of thin and attractive media images (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002; Want, 2009). Exposure to idealized images are suggested to result in immediate detrimental effects, through women engaging in social comparisons (considered rapid, automatic, and inevitable) with thin attractive models (Blanton & Stapel, 2008; Gilbert, Giesler & Morris, 1995; Want, 2009). The most reported consequence resulting from comparisons with media images, which are seen as unrealistic and unobtainable for the majority of women, is body dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction is associated with negative affect and depression (Thompson & Stice, 2001), and detrimental behaviors such as severe dieting (Strauman, Vookles, Berenstein, Chaiken, & Higgins, 1991).

However, evaluation of the impact of thin media images and interventions for mitigating such effects has predominantly been assessed with explicit self-evaluations (Ahern & Hetherington, 2006; Gurari, Hetts & Strube, 2006; Posavac, Posavac & Weigel, 2001; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac & Posavac, 2005; Want, Vickers & Amos, 2009). Research suggests that implicit attitudes may be more sensitive to the impact of unrealistic social comparison images (Gurari et al., 2006). Considering explicit measures can only evaluate attitudes under intentional control and are subject to demand characteristics (Ahern & Hetherington, 2006; Hamilton, Mintz & Kashubeck-West, 2007), then explicit self-reports may not be providing a full and accurate impression of the negative effect of idealized media images. Therefore, it is important to investigate both implicitly and explicitly the effects women experience from exposure to thin and attractive media portrayals and interventions designed to mitigate such detrimental effects. Thus, the present study aimed to extend previous research on the impact of thin ideal media images, by evaluating the impact of music videos on women's implicit and explicit appearance satisfaction. Music videos were used as the stimuli for idealized media portrayals of women to replicate and extend previous experimental research, by assessing the implicit impact and the detriment among women who internalize media ideals as personal appearance standards (Bell, Lawton & Dittmar, 2007; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). Considering internalization is a moderator in the underlying effects of exposure, and a vulnerability factor for the detrimental impact of media images (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009), music videos which depict thin attractive women, and focus on women's bodies, needs further evaluation among women who internalize the thin ideal (Bell et al., 2007; Dittmar et al., 2009; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004).

The second aim of the current investigation was to assess the implicit and explicit mitigating potential of interventions which highlight the modifications of thin ideal media images through make-up, and image manipulation, similar to those depicted in previous successful experimental interventions (Posavac, et al., 2001; Yamamiya et al., 2005; Want et al., 2009), with women who internalize media ideals. A short television commercial, that presents 75 seconds of footage demonstrating behind-the-scenes techniques used to artificially enhance media portrayals of women, was employed as the intervention. Knowledge of the artificial and unrealistic nature of media images has been effective by providing viewers with reasons to rendering media images as inappropriate comparison objects after they are made (Gilbert et al., 1995; Want, 2009).

A sample of one hundred and sixty-five female university students aged 18 to 30 years ($M=20.69$) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in which they viewed a segment of music television containing either a commercial depicting the modifications of media images or a control commercial. Participant's explicit appearance satisfaction was assessed pre and post exposure with Visual Analog Scales (VAS). Additionally, response latencies to body related targets pairings (e.g., body part /good vs. body part / bad) were used as the implicit measure of body satisfaction (Body-IAT).

A Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess explicit appearance satisfaction of Music Videos and the impact of the intervention among women who vary in internalization of cultural appearance standards. Results suggest that viewing music videos resulted in significantly higher levels of explicit body dissatisfaction, $p < .01$, especially among women who internalize media ideals, $p < .001$, revealing a medium size effect $d = -.58$. Additionally, results suggest that the intervention was marginally significant for women who do not internalize media ideals, when completing the IAT first after exposure to idealized media images, $p = .060$, revealing a medium size effect $d = -.70$. This task may have provided a period of time to contemplate the media modifications and reject models as appropriate for social comparison.

Evaluation of the implicit measures of appearance satisfaction (Body-IAT) repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted, assessing the impact of Music Videos and intervention among women who vary in internalization of cultural appearance standards. Results indicate in a significant effect of Body-IAT, $p < .001$, revealing faster reaction times (RT) for Body part/ Good word parings compared to Body part/ Bad word parings, resulting in a small size effect $d = .38$. This effect was more pronounced among participants with high internalization of media ideals, $p < .001$, producing in a medium size effect $d = .48$, compared to participants with low internalization of media ideals, $p < .05$.

These results extend prior research by evaluating the explicit and implicit impact of music videos, suggesting that this form of media is even more detrimental for women who internalize media ideals as personal appearance standards. Providing information regarding the unrealistic nature of media images may diminish appearance dissatisfaction potentially through reducing social comparison tendencies, among women with low internalization of media ideals. Additionally, considering that implicit attitudes are suggested to reflect social and cultural standards (Varatanian, Herman & Polivy, 2005) it would stand to reason that the Body IAT would reveal faster categorization of body parts and good word pairings. Since the cultural ideal promotes the idea that an emphasis and focus on body parts is good, individuals who internalize these standards would show this effect to a larger degree.

AUTHOR NOTES: This research was funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Foreign Study Supplement awarded to the first author. The current study was granted approval by the Flinders Ethics Board for all procedures conducted, and adhered to all regulations involving the use of human participants.

References

- Ahern, A. L., & Hetherington, M. M. (2006). The thin ideal and body image: An experimental study of implicit attitudes. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 20*, 338-342.
- Bell, B.T., Lawton, R. & Dittmar, H. (2007). The impact of thin models in music videos on adolescent girls' body dissatisfaction. *Body Image, 4*, 137-145.
- Blanton, H. & Stapel, D.A. (2008). Unconscious and spontaneous and... complex: The three selves model of social comparison assimilation and contrast. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 1018-1032.
- Dittmar, H., Halliwell, E., & Stirling, E. (2009). Understanding the impact of thin media models on women's body-focused affect: The roles of thin-ideal internalization and weight-related self-discrepancy activation in experimental exposure effects. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 28*, 43-72.
- Gilbert, D.T., Giesler, R.B. & Morris, K.A. (1995). When comparisons arise. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 227-236.
- Grabe, S., Ward, L.M. & Hyde J.S. (2008). The role of the media in body image concerns among women: A meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*, 460-476.
- Groesz, L.M., Levine, M.P. & Murnen, S.K. (2002). The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 31*, 1-16.
- Gurari, I., Hetts, J. J., & Strube, M. J. (2006). Beauty in the "I" of the beholder: Effects of idealized media portrayals on implicit self-image. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 28*, 273-282.
- Hamilton, E.A., Mintz, L. & Kashubeck-West, S. (2007). Predictors of media effects on body dissatisfaction in European American women. *Sex Roles, 56*, 397-402.
- Posavac, H.D., Posavac, S.S. & Weigel, R.G. (2001). Reducing the impact of media images on women at risk for body image disturbance: Three targeted interventions. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 20*, 324-340.
- Strauman, T.J., Vookles, J., Berenstein, V., Chaiken, S., & Higgins, E.T. (1991). Self-discrepancies and vulnerability to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*, 946-956.
- Thompson, J.K. & Stice, E. (2001). Thin-ideal internalization: Mounting evidence for a new risk factor for body-image disturbance and eating pathology. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 10*, 181-183.
- Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2004). Thin ideals in music television: A source of social comparison and body dissatisfaction. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 35*, 48-58.
- Vartanian, L. R., Herman, C. P. & Polivy, J. (2005). Implicit and explicit attitudes toward fatness and thinness: The role of the internalization of societal standards. *Body Image, 2*, 373-381.
- Want, S.C. (2009). Meta-analytic moderators of experimental exposure to media portrayals of women on female appearance satisfaction: Social comparisons as automatic processes. *Body Image, 6*, 257-269.
- Want, S.C., Vickers, K., & Amos, J. (2009). The Influence of Television Programs on appearance satisfaction: Making and Mitigating Social Comparison to "Friends". *Sex Roles, 60*, 642-655.
- Yamamiya, Y., Cash, T.F., Melnyk, S.E., Posavac H.D. & Posavac, S.S. (2005). Women's exposure to thin-and-beautiful media images: body image effects of media-ideal internalization and impact-reduction interventions. *Body Image, 2*, 74-80.