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**The Media's Influence in Everyday Life on Women's Perception of
Body Image**

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Abstract

Many women are not satisfied with their current body figures and frequently attempt to improve their figure. Body image discrepancies occur when a comparison between “actual” self to either “ought” or “ideal” selves don’t match up. If there is a difference between these two self-guides then a discrepancy exists. According to a national survey, half of women report negative evaluations of their appearance and worry about being or becoming overweight. One of the strongest socio-cultural pressures that women face with their body image is the media, such as magazines and television. Studies have shown that when exposed to thin body images depicted in the media, women often experience body dissatisfaction. Studies on the media and body dissatisfaction have, in general, only been conducted in a laboratory setting, which has limited ecological validity. Additionally, some findings are problematic because self-reported data can be systematically biased if they require participants to recall information over long periods of time. This study uses Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) to record daily media usage and body image discrepancies in participants’ natural environment at the moment(s) it occurs. During a two-week period, 63 female college undergraduates carried a Palm Pilot and when an alarm sounded (5 times daily) they reported television and magazine usage and body image discrepancies. On average, women reported having watched television during 28% of the assessments. During these times, they most often watched comedies (37.7% of the time), dramas (23.2%) and reality programs (23%). Individuals read magazines during 3% of the reports, most commonly read beauty (65.2%) and gossip magazines (42.5%). Results show that women reported body image dissatisfaction yet there was no momentary relationship between media exposure and body image discrepancy in these women’s daily lives. Women reporting more self-objectification or disordered eating watched more television and read more magazines, respectively. Discussion addresses future directions relating EMA usage and body image discrepancy and other ways media effects women.

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Introduction

Women have an ongoing struggle in trying to attain the “perfect” body that is youthful and slender throughout their lifetimes. Many women are often not satisfied with their current body figures and frequently improve their weight, shape, and/or appearance. There is an extensive amount of literature on females having poor body image after viewing thin media images compared to looking at average or plus size models (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). The rationale behind women being dissatisfied with their body generally stems from Western society defining beauty as thin. American media has overwhelmingly portrayed this thin standard, giving women a contradictory message as “real” women are, on average, becoming heavier (DeJong & Kleck, 1986). Perceptions of being overweight, and associated weight and shape concerns, appear to be a continuous struggle for many that begins in the adolescent years. In a study conducted by Moses and colleagues (1989), half of the underweight adolescents reported fears of being overweight. This study exemplifies the struggle many women experience with their weight and the insecurities they have in achieving the ideal body image at such a young age. Body image and weight begin at a young age and continue to manifest into womanhood.

Body image influences a person’s self-esteem and often is related to many negative psychosocial factors such as depression, social anxiety and eating disturbances (Cash & Henry, 1995). A national survey conducted in 1993 showed that half of the women reported negative evaluations of their appearance and worries with being or becoming overweight (Cash & Henry, 1995). There is no

doubt that women are concerned about their shape and weight and that these concerns develop from an early age and continue into adulthood.

This pressure to achieve the “perfect” body shape seems to have come from a range of everyday influences. One of the strongest sociocultural pressures that women face with their body image is the mass media, such as magazines, newspapers, television and movies. Groesz, Levine, and Murnen (2002) showed that images of a “perfect” female beauty promoted by magazines, television and films suggest that a female’s external looks determined beauty. This finding illustrates how mass media can influence women to be body conscious of their external looks to win approval from others, an influence that may lead to body dissatisfaction. Champion and Furham (1999) studied the relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls and found out that 54% of the girls wished to have a thinner body shape and 53% wished for a body shape thinner than what was perceived as normal after being exposed to magazine images. These findings support the view that women reported feeling fat and the pressure to be thin when exposed to thin images.

Past research supports the idea that media exposure to thin images has negatively affected women to feel greater body image discrepancy (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). Discrepancy is a measure of dissatisfaction that a person has about himself or herself. Higgins’s self-discrepancy theory (1987) explains three different selves. The “actual” self describes that kind of person an individual believes he or she actually is. The “ideal” self is a representation of what one would ideally possess and the “ought” self is what the individual

believes he or she should possess (Higgins, 1987). A discrepancy occurs when the “actual” self does not match either the “ought” or “ideal” selves. This theory further explains that a discrepancy between actual self and ideal self is associated with depressed mood, whereas a discrepancy between the actual and ought self is related to anxious mood because they have not reached their “ought” attributes. Researchers can utilize this theory as a tool to measure the discrepancy (and dissatisfaction) in female’s perceptions of their body image.

A study conducted by Martin and Kennedy (1993) looked at advertisements with beauty images and demonstrated that exposure to advertising raises the standard of physical attractiveness but does not affect self-perceptions of attractiveness. This study showed that, when viewing thin images, girls alter their standard of external beauty by becoming more critical about what is beautiful and tend to compare themselves to the images more. This finding emphasizes the influence beauty images have on girls and the growing implications it has for girls with weight problems. Ads in magazines are designed to persuade female consumers for example, a brand of cosmetics that will enhance their look. This may undermine a female’s self-confidence, insofar as suggesting that without this make-up she cannot look beautiful, thus contributing to a negative body image (Freedman, 1984).

One type of mass media that is influential is television. Almost every household in America owns a television and an average American household watches around 4 hours of television a day (Television Bureau of Advertising [TVB], 2006). Americans’ main source for immediate news and entertainment

comes from the television. A study researched television viewing behavior and discovered that attractive images on television that appear every 3.8 commercials may go unchallenged because viewers tend to accept what appears on television as true (Martin & Kennedy, 1993). Exposure to glamorized images of beauty and thinness on television in commercials and television shows can create a discrepancy between a female's actual body image and her "ought" and "ideal" body image. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) used situation comedies, like *Friends*, to examine the body weights of female protagonists and the verbal comments they received. Results showed that thinner female characters received more positive comments regarding body weight and shape from males than their heavier counterparts. Another study investigated the effects of television commercials containing idealized female thin images on body dissatisfaction. Girls, ages 13 to 15, reported higher body dissatisfaction immediately after seeing the images and 15 minutes after commercial viewing (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003). These studies have given researchers a reason to be concerned about media usage and body dissatisfaction in females.

Television is not the only medium that sends persuasive attractive images to females. Magazines also have a strong impact in women and how they perceive their bodies. In 2005, research found consumers were more trusting and believing of magazine advertisements than television and about 50% of consumers engaged in reading a magazine fully without any distractions, signifying the potential power of a magazine to influence readers (Ad age, 2006). In a study conducted by Groesz, Levine & Murnen (2002), adolescent girls who viewed magazine

advertisements tended to create a standard to socially compare oneself to society's view of "perfect" female beauty. When females feel they have not reached perfection they are more likely to feel shame and anxious for not becoming what is seen in the magazines. Monro and Huon (2005) studied beauty and health magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* that discovered appearance anxiety increased after viewing ads featuring idealized images. There was a significant interaction between self-objectification levels and idealized body. Self-objectification is the tendency to value physical appearance over and above ability or any other attributes. The focus on appearance is associated with an increase in body dissatisfaction. The exposures to mass media, such as magazine and television, have reportedly increased the level of body dissatisfaction in females (Stice et al, 1994). This finding suggests that women use media as a source of comparison and a set standard of beauty.

The media has an influence on body image dissatisfaction; however it is hard to measure the extent of its influence. There is limited research that explores the different mediums of mass communication, whether it is television, radio or magazines that elicit dissatisfaction in body image in women. The present study explores the different types of media that may influence body image discrepancy. The two forms of media that will be used are magazine and television.

This study used ecological momentary assessment (EMA) allowing participants to report their media usage, mood and body image in their natural environment. Past research studying body image discrepancies were conducted in controlled settings where participants are shown images of females and given a

questionnaire to answer. This can be problematic in two important ways. First, experimental studies conducted in laboratory settings may obtain internally valid responses, but not have ecological validity. That is, the reports women give sitting in the laboratory may not accurately reflect what actually occurs in their “real” life and natural settings. Second, many of these studies rely on self-reports of media exposure, self-image and discrepancy, etc., over long periods of times (days, weeks, months). Retrospective accounts of self-reported data can be systematically biased because they require participants to recall information over long periods of time. According to Smyth and Stone (2003), certain variables may affect recall, such as the current state of mind of the individual. Also participants are more likely to recall the most salient information, i.e., most recent and peak events. Therefore, EMA is an alternative method for collecting information that reduces bias of memory recall and is highly generalizable to real life occurrences.

Using EMA reporting in the natural environment will make the results more precise since it will be measuring the current state of a person while they are exposed to the media. It will also better facilitate recall of exposure to the media since it will ask participants to report on a daily basis rather than a one-time report in a laboratory setting. This is beneficial in providing information that pertains to real life experiences. The study will compare which media types are associated with higher discrepancy of body images in women. It will contrast women’s present body image to their ideal body image and “ought” to be body image using EMA methods. Based on this, there were two main hypotheses. First, it was expected that more media exposure would be associated with greater body image

discrepancy. Second, it was hypothesized that body image characteristics of the women (specifically disordered eating, self-objectification, and thinness norm internalization) would be related to women's media usage.

Methods

Participants

Sixty-three female participants were involved in this study. The sample consisted of 18 to 22 year olds with a mean age of 19.04 years (standard deviation=0.79). All of them were college students taking an introductory psychology class fulfilling a research requirement. Most reported being Caucasian (n=49, 77.78%), Black or African American (n=5, 7.94%), Latina or Hispanic (n=4, 6.35%), Asian American (n=4, 6.35%), mixed race (n=1, 1.59%).

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. This survey gathers personal information about birth date, ethnic background, current relationship status, where participant lives and with who and any medication participant is presently taking.

Contour Drawing Rating Scale. This body-image assessment tool (Thompson & Gray, 1995) consists of nine female contour drawings of a female's body gradually increasing in size (drawing 1, the thinnest; drawing 9, the largest) with clearly defined facial and bodily features. Participants select the figures that most accurately depict their current self, ideal self and ought self. The two discrepancy scores (actual vs. ought and actual vs. ideal) were used to measure the degree of dissatisfaction that they have. These were calculated by subtracting the value for the ideal or ought values from the actual rating. Test-retest

reliability of the self-rating scale within a one week period was 0.78. As a test of the scale validity, 97.6% of the participants correctly positioning the drawings for the female set in order. Also, the correlation between self ratings and the Quetlet's body mass index (BMI) was 0.59 showing that people can understand and use this scale.

Body Image Ideals Questionnaire (BIQ). The BIQ (Cash, 2000) is a self-report measure that evaluates subjective attitudinal and perceptual experiences about one's body, particularly physical appearance. There are two-subscales that measure these perceptions on a 4-point scale. The importance scale rates how important ideals are to the respondent, ranging from "not important" to "very important." The discrepancy scale rates how much the individual resembles her personal physical ideal assessing external characteristics such as ideal height, ideal facial features and ideal body proportions; the scale goes from "exactly as I am" to "very unlike me." A high score on this test reflects a greater self-ideal disparity strongly leaning towards physical ideals. The BIQ's internal consistency, measuring how well the questions relate to each other was 0.76. There is no data available for the BIQs test-retest reliability. The BIQ test was significantly negatively correlated with the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS) $r = -0.72$, and positively correlated with the Situational Inventory of Body Image Dysphoria (SIBID) index of body-image dysphoria $r = 0.64$.

Eating Disorder Examination-Questionnaire (EDE-Q). The EDE-Q (Fairburn & Beglin, 1993) is a self-report measure that is comparable to the Eating Disorder Examination. It is designed to focus on the behavioral aspects of

eating disorders and contains three subscales: Restraint, Shape Concern and Weight Concern. The EDE-Q measures frequency in terms of the number of days a participant reports a particular form of behavior that occurs over a period of time. Participants rate the occurrence on a 7-point forced-choice scale. The EDE-Q is seen as an adequate alternative to the EDE that addresses possible eating disorders. This measure had a Cronbach's alpha for each of the EDE-Q's three subscales: Restraint (.84), Shape Concern (.93) and Weight Concern (.89). Two-week test-retest reliability of the EDE questionnaire subscales are: restraint (.81), shape concern (.94) and weight concern (.92) (Luce & Crowther, 1999). In the present sample for this experiment, the two week test-retest reliability for the EDE-Q was .91.

Ideal-Body Stereotype Scale-Revised (IBS). The IBS (Stice, 1998) is a self-report scale that measures the relationship between body dissatisfaction and thin ideal internalization. A study was conducted using 218 female high school seniors over a 9-month period. Participants use a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to indicate their level of agreement with 10 statements concerning what attractive women look like (example, "taller women are more attractive"). This scale had acceptable internal consistency and concurrent validity in an independent study (Stice, Ziemba, et al., 1996). This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .89. The predictive validity on thin-ideal internalization predicts the onset of binge eating and compensatory behaviors among adolescent females. The nine-month test-retest reliability for the thin ideal

internalization was .80. In the present sample of college women, the two-week test-retest reliability was .76.

Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ). This measure is based on Noll and Fredrickson's objectification theory (1998) assessing the extent to which individuals view their bodies focusing on observable body attributes (example, "How do I look?") compared to non-observable body attributes ("How do I feel?"). Participants are given a list of 12 body attributes and are asked to rank them in order of importance based on their physical self-concept, from most impact to least impact. Six of the items are appearance based (physical attractiveness, weight, muscle tone and coloring) and six are competence based (muscular strength, stamina, health, physical fitness). The rank orders for appearance and competence attributes are summed separately. A higher score suggests a greater personal emphasis on appearance, which is interpreted as greater self-objectification. The questionnaire was positively correlated with the Appearance Anxiety Questionnaire, which assesses preoccupation with observable aspects of the physical self $r=.52$, and Body Image Assessment, a measure of body-size dissatisfaction $r=.46$. No previous studies have reported on the reliability measure. In this experiment, the two-week test-retest reliability for this sample was .81.

EMA Assessments

A customized survey includes a list of items asking about the participants' television exposure, television type, magazine exposure, and magazine type. For television the questionnaire asked if women had watched television or a movie

since the last time they completed the survey and if so, what type(s) of program(s) and it lists action, animation, comedy, drama, reality tv, sports, sitcom and talk show. It also asks if participants read a magazine and if so, what type(s) of magazine(s) was read and it lists beauty/fashion, gossip/tabloid, fitness, hobbies, politics, sports and other. The Contour Drawing Rating Scale and Body Image Ideals Questionnaire were also completed as part of the EMA assessment. These measures are described in the *Measures* section above. In addition to these EMA items, participants also completed questions regarding location, activity, exercise, eating behavior, social contact and depressed and anxious mood; however, these items were not used for the purposes of the present study.

Equipment

PalmOne m105 handheld computers were used for EMA surveys. The customized survey, Body Image Ideals Questionnaire and Contour Drawing Rating scales were downloaded onto the Palm Pilots before they were given to the participant. Each survey was completed on the display screen using a stylus to indicate responses on the custom program.

Procedure

First, female participants were recruited through an introductory psychology website and were assigned to groups of 4-12 students. After giving informed consent, participants completed the demographic questionnaire as well as the Contour Drawing Rating Scale and Body Image Ideals Questionnaire that measure body image dissatisfaction. In the initial meeting, participants also received a Palm Pilot with the customized surveys, information on care, general

operation, and instructions for completing daily assessments. There was one female trainer for all of the sessions.

During the first week, participants were responsible for carrying the Palm Pilot with them through out the day. An alarm sounded from the Palm Pilot between 9am-11pm which signaled to the participants to respond to the Palm Pilot survey at that time. Participants completed five surveys per day. The Palm Pilot survey included the customized survey. Participants were not aware of when the Palm Pilot would signal, however the 14 hours of possible assessment time each day were divided into five equal time segments (one for each signal) to ensure adequate sampling across the day.

During the second week, participants continued to carry the Palm Pilot and the same alarm schedule that occurred during the first week. During the second week, the survey in the Palm Pilot included the customized survey, Contour Drawing Rating Scale and Body Image Questionnaire.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Sixty-three participants provided data using traditional questionnaires and the Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA). In collecting information on body image dissatisfaction the Contour Drawing Rating scale was used to measure the actual vs. ideal discrepancy. This scale had a mean of 1.84 ($SD=1.19$). The actual vs. ought discrepancy had a mean of 2.30 ($SD=1.37$). The Body Image Ideals Questionnaire provided another measure of actual vs. ideal discrepancy and the mean was 1.86 ($SD=1.43$). A discrepancy score of zero would indicate that there

were no differences between how women actually perceive themselves and how they would either ideally (ideal) or think they should be (ought). Independent sample *t*-tests were used to determine if the average discrepancies reported were significantly greater than zero. Results showed that there was a significant actual:ideal ($F(62)=12.24, p<.0001$), actual:ought ($F(62)=13.15, p<.0001$) and BIQ discrepancy ($F(62)=10.20, p<.0001$). These findings indicate that women want to have, and think that they *should* have, significantly smaller figures than they perceive themselves as having.

Participants reported on how much media exposure they had during the two-week period they carried the Palm Pilot (EMA device). On average, participants reported having watched television during 28.1% of the assessments, and on 2.7% of the reports they were exposed to magazines. When participants reported television or media exposure, the Palm Pilot survey asked the types of television and magazine they were exposed to. Of those times when they reported watching television, the different types of television shows that were viewed, in a ranking order of largest to smallest group and the percentage of times that women reported viewing were: comedy shows (37.73%), drama shows (23.22%), reality shows (23.04%), sitcoms (13.76%), other TV types (13.47%), recreation programs (7.97%), talk shows (5.98%), action programs (5.22%), animation shows (2.71%) and soap operas (1.79%). These percentages can be seen in Figure 1. From the times magazine reading was reported, the different magazine genres, in a ranking order from the largest to smallest group and the percentage of assessments when women reported magazine reading were: beauty/fashion

(65.16%), gossip/tabloid (42.53%), other magazine type (9%) and no one reported reading health/fitness, hobbies, news/political or sports/outdoor magazines (see Figure 2). The percentages add up to more than 100% because participants occasionally reported being exposed to more than one type of media at one time.

The EDE-Q is designed to report on disordered eating; this sample had a mean of 1.94 ($SD=1.18$). The mean Self-Objectification Questionnaire score was .41 ($SD=16.75$). Ideal-Body Stereotype Scale measured thinness norm internalization and women in this study reported a mean of 3.43 ($SD=.52$). All of these questionnaires were administered in the traditional paper-and-pencil format.

Inferential Statistics

The first hypothesis was that individuals who are exposed to more media would report larger body image discrepancies than individuals who are exposed to media less. This study used regression analyses to determine if there were any significant relationships between media and body image discrepancy. Both media use and discrepancies were continuous variables, and in the model media was used to predict average discrepancies. EMA reporting was used to record participant's media usage and exposure and body image discrepancies during the assessment period.

We first measured the relationship between television and each of the three measures of body image discrepancy. The association between television exposure and actual:ideal discrepancy (using the Contour Drawing Rating Scale) was not significant, $F(1, 61)=.12, p=.73$. The relationship between television exposure and actual:ought discrepancy was also not significant, $F(1, 61)=.46,$

$p=.50$. There was no relationship between television and the Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ), which had a F -value of $(1, 61)=.36, p=.55$.

For magazine exposure, the relationship with the actual:ideal discrepancy was not significant, $F(1, 61)=.06, p=.81$. In measuring magazine and actual:ought discrepancy using the Contour Drawing Rating Scale there was also no significant relationship, $F(1, 61)=.40, p=.53$. In the sample, the exposure to magazine and BIQ also showed no significant relationship, $F(1, 61)=.75, p=.39$.

The second hypothesis was that body image characteristics (thinness norm internalization, self-objectification, disordered eating) of the women that were measured at the beginning of the study would be related to their media exposure. In this study, participants indicated at the beginning of the experiment a baseline measure of thinness norm internalization, self-objectification and disordered eating. During the experiment, participants recorded the types of media that they were exposed to using EMA devices.

Results were gathered and calculated using regressions, in the same manner as was used for the first hypothesis (i.e., all variables were continuous). First we examined the association between the individual characteristics and television viewing. There was no significant relationship between disordered eating (measured using the EDE-Q) and average television exposure, $F(1, 62)=2.13, p=.15$. There was a significant relationship between exposure to television shows and self-objectification, $F(1, 62)=4.16, p=.04$. Women who reported watching more television also reported more self-objectification during the

assessment times. There was no association between television usage and thinness norm internalization (IBS), $F(1, 62)=.24, p=.63$.

There was a significant relationship between disordered eating (EDE-Q) and the number of times participants read a magazine, $F(1, 62)=4.40, p=.04$.

Women who reported reading more magazines also reported more disordered eating during the assessment times. The relationship between magazine exposure and self-objectification (SOQ) was not significant, $F(1, 62)=.23, p=.63$. Similarly, there was no relationship between magazine and thinness norm internalization (IBS), $F(1, 62)=.40, p=.53$.

Discussion

This study was the first of its kind to gather information on participants in their natural environment using real-time data collection. Media exposure and body image discrepancy was reported using Ecological Momentary Assessment device that was able to measure the participant's dissatisfaction as they went about their daily lives.

In this study, results showed relatively low reporting on media exposure in college females. Past research has discussed media exposure effects on body image however many of these used only one time exposure to media images in experiments. This is the first study to record daily media exposure and suggests that female students ages 18-22 do not consume as much media as may be intuitively expected. This is consistent with past marketing studies that detail how consumers use media throughout the day, showing that 18-24 year olds watch less television than most age groups. This age group also consumed less print media

than other age groups (Elkin, 2005). This does not imply that 18-24 are not consuming media however they might be spending more time on the Internet and digital mediums (music player, DVDs, game consoles) that are not recorded using a more traditional definition of media (e.g., television and magazine).

In this study there were no significant relationships between body image discrepancies and media usage. Previous research (Champion & Furnham, 1999) has supported this claim among adolescent girls. In this study, thin, neutral and fat pictures produced no statistically significant differential effects on participants' body image satisfaction along the variables tested using self-rating scale of weight and attractiveness. Yet, other research has shown significant relationship with media exposure. Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2003) study reported images on television were related to body dissatisfaction in young girls. In another study, Tiggemann and Pickering (1996) showed that the types of television show girls are watching affect how they view their bodies. Girls who watched soap operas, movies and music videos which are likely to show women in stereotypical roles were positively correlated with body dissatisfaction. Monro and Huon (2005), showed that magazine images had a significant interaction with body dissatisfaction in female college students. This inconsistency of results may have occurred because of the methodology that was used. This experiment used EMA data that could monitor media usage and the current body image discrepancy at several points of the day suggesting that the results may accurately reflect processes that occur in the real world.

There was no significant relationship between body image discrepancies and television or magazine use. This means that the more media a person was exposed to was not directly associated with more body image discrepancy. This study differed from other studies because it used EMA data to assess this relationship. The research presented used Palm Pilot reporting to record media exposure several times in a participant's day. Although previous studies may have shown a significant relationship, those studies were conducted in a laboratory where participants were only asked once to recall media exposure and body image discrepancy.

The second hypothesis explored the relationship between characteristics of the women, such as thinness norm internalization, self-objectification and disordered eating, and how these factors may be associated with media usage. There was a significant relationship between exposure to television and self-objectification, with women who reported higher levels of self-objectification also reporting more frequent television viewing. Previous studies have suggested that television is a visual tool that gives verbal cues about body image and attractiveness. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) studied comedy shows on primetime television and found that female characters that were below-average weight were over-represented in situation comedies. Below-average weight female characters received significantly more positive verbal comments from males than their heavier counterparts. The combination of seeing the thin ideal on television and verbal reinforcement by males may contribute to viewers seeing themselves more critically. Harrison (1994) suggests that these findings may be because television

transmits value messages that contain socially desirable norms. Both of these studies have shown that television may have an impact on female's perception of their body.

There was also significant relationship between reported disordered eating and the number of times participants read a magazine. Past research (Monro & Huon, 2005) has shown that viewing magazine advertisements featuring idealized image has increased appearance anxiety. This supports the on-going struggle women have with their body image. A previous study by Harrison and Hefner (2005) revealed that exposure to fashion and sports magazine genres are often stronger predictors for disordered eating than television viewing. The relationship between media consumption and women's disordered eating appear to be stronger for magazine reading than for television viewing. Many magazines contain information regarding dieting and exercises that may help to understand this relationship.

There was no significant relationship between thinness norm internalization, disordered eating and television, or self-objectification, thinness norm internalization and magazines. Although not all of these factors were associated with media use, there are some body image characteristics of women that may be related to their media use.

Strengths and Limitations

This is the first study that has looked at body image discrepancies and media use in the natural environment. Since this experiment used EMA as an alternative way of self-reporting it has eliminated bias of memory recall by

signally participants throughout the course of a day and helps generalize to females' real lives. Data that were gathered through this study has helped to assess the relationship between media exposure and body image.

One potential limitation of this study was that it only examined television and magazine use. Given the relatively low frequency of television and (especially) magazine use in these women, other media types may need to be considered when studying this age group. College students are a specific demographic group that uses the Internet and digital communication, such as music players and music videos more often than other age groups. The Internet is becoming a dominant medium to use for work, entertainment, gathering information, purchasing items and has become a necessity for staying in touch and keeping updated. College students are heavy users of Internet as it is a part of their daily routine, in part because they have grown up with computers (Jones, 2007). This is a future direction that can be taken to study body image discrepancy and media usage.

This study was conducted in a two-week period only allowing participants to report on media exposure and body image discrepancies for a relatively short time period. Although this study only gathered data for two weeks, previous studies in the lab setting have only measured one exposure to media. This study was able to ask participants five times a day, which provides more extensive data than past research. However, longer studies should be conducted in order to continue learning about media usage and body image discrepancy within the college-age group.

One major limitation of this study was that we cannot determine the causal relationship between body image and media use. It is possible that women who are high on self-objectification and feel bad about themselves will seek media to reassure their habits. Alternatively, women who tend to consume a lot of media (e.g., if our momentary assessments reflect ongoing and normal usage patterns) will reflect and think poorly about their body image afterwards. Previous studies generally are consistent with the second view, but it is impossible to definitively determine the causal direction based on this data. Another reason why it is difficult to assess the causal relationship is because there could be other variables that drive this relationship, for example, the household environment. Household influence and media consumption habits can affect young girls who are developing their own sense of body image. If a parent watches television and comments about body image, a child may be exposed to idealized images and self-objectify more at a young age.

Longitudinal studies of body image discrepancies and media usage, as well as other body image variables (e.g., self-objectification, disordered eating) are needed to better understand the relationship. The results shown in this study are important to understand media consumption habits in female college students and how they are related to body image discrepancies. This study was the first to explore this issue through EMA data, which helps to determine the relationship participants have with media and body image in the real world. This study took on a societal issue concerning weight, body image and media exposure and explored the impact it has in everyday life. Studies like this one are important to conduct

because it is a great tool to inform the public about issues females have with body image and the effects media exposure has on dissatisfaction.

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Figure 1. Types of television viewed.

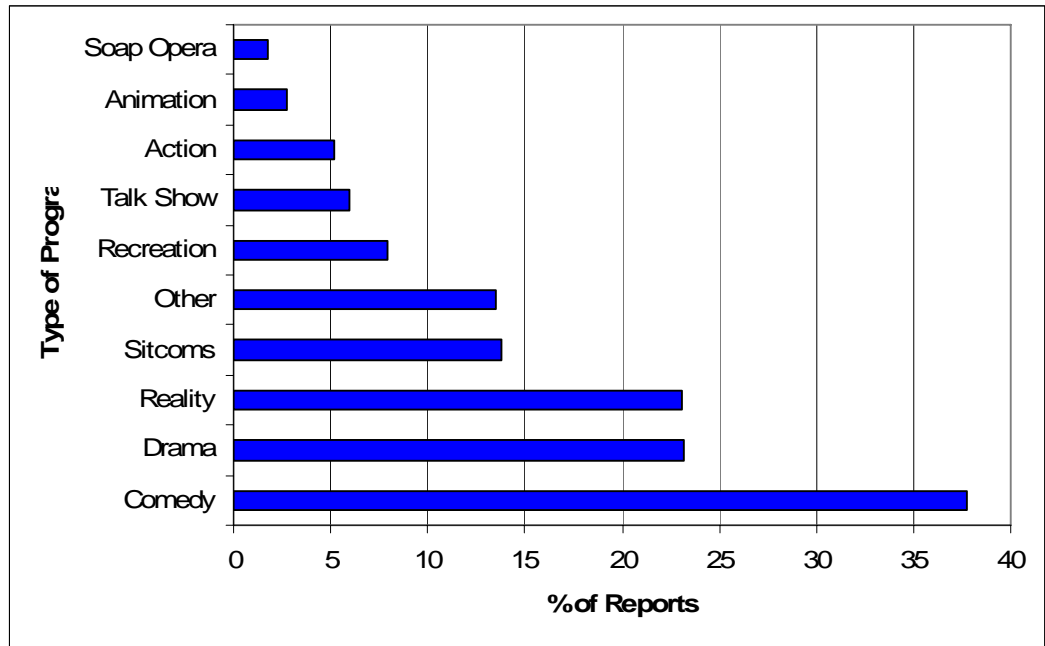


Figure 2. Types of magazines viewed.

