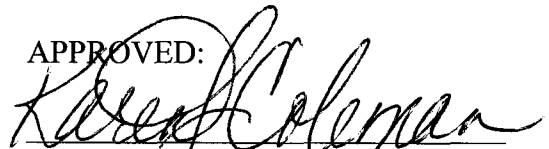


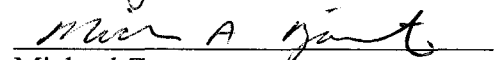
IMPROVING WOMENS' BODY IMAGE BY INCREASING THEIR KNOWLEDGE
OF MEDIA INFLUENCE

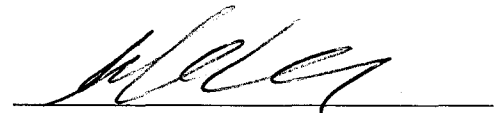
CANDACE DAWN RUTT

Psychology Department

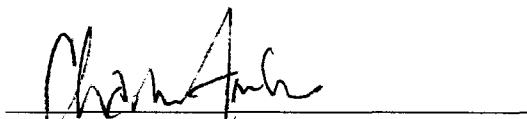
APPROVED:


Karen Coleman, Chair


Michael Zarate


Stephen Crites


Samuel Riccillo


Associate Vice President For
Graduate Studies

This thesis is dedicated to my family, without their love and support I would not have had the courage or strength to accomplish my dreams.

PREVIEW

IMPROVING WOMENS' BODY IMAGE BY INCREASING THEIR KNOWLEDGE
OF MEDIA INFLUENCE

by

CANDACE DAWN RUTT, B. S.

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Abstract

The current study was designed to determine if educating women about the media and its unrealistic images would increase their acceptance of their own bodies. Two instruments were used to assess body image: the Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ) and the Contour Drawing Scale. Variables such as body mass index (BMI), ethnicity, acculturation, socioeconomic status (SES), need for cognition, and media exposure were examined to determine their effects on the efficacy of this educational intervention. The final sample consisted of 46 women (76.1% Hispanic, 15.2% Caucasian, 6.5% Asian, and 2.2% Black) who were moderately acculturated ($M=3.46$, $SD=.85$) with normal BMI ($M=23.3$, $SD=9.9$) and had SES levels of semi-skilled workers ($M=25.4$, $SD=9.0$). At baseline, women with higher levels of acculturation had lower body image satisfaction as measured by the BIQ and women who watched more television had lower satisfaction with their torso (subscale of the BIQ). Participants who agreed with the messages presented in the treatment video showed increased body image satisfaction with their torso, extremities and sex organs at follow-up. In addition, women with higher BMIs reported greater dissatisfaction with their body shapes as measured with the Contour Drawing Scale when compared to women with lower BMIs. Therefore, a 30 minute educational video was effective in improving body image only for those women who agreed with the ideas presented in the video. Future research should compare the effectiveness of various interventions for disturbed body image in large samples of Hispanic and Caucasian men and women.

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As stated in the DSM-IV, a disturbed body image is one of the diagnostic criteria for both anorexia nervosa and bulimia (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Disturbed body image has been defined as increased weight preoccupation, shape concern, and appearance-related schema (Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 1998). Several researchers have found evidence to support that unrealistic media images of women's bodies are related to disturbed body image (Abood & Chandler, 1997; Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1989; Gleaves, Williamson, Eberenz, & Barker, 1995; Streigel-Moore, Silberstein, Frensch, & Rodin, 1989). Not only does current research suggest that a disturbed body image is one of the precursors of eating disorders, it can also be used to predict their future severity (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1989; Button, 1986; Freeman, Beach, Davis, & Solyom, 1985; Leon, Fulkerson, Perry, & Cudeck, 1993; Rosen, 1992; Streigel-Moore, Silberstein, Frensch, & Rodin, 1989; Thompson, Covert, Richards, Johnson, & Cattarin, 1995). In addition, the body image of American women appears to be getting worse: 30% of a national survey reported dissatisfaction with their appearance in 1985, which increased to 48% in 1993 (Cash & Henry, 1995).

In the United States (U.S.), the popular media and advertising strongly influence what is considered beautiful (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980). On average, children and adolescents spend more time watching television than any other activity, except sleeping (Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988). In addition, it has been found that 83% of adolescents spend 4.3 hours per week reading magazines (Levine & Smolack, 1996). Models in the media have an especially negative impact on women because they are presented as realistic representations of beauty and not as artificial, manipulated

images (Fallon, 1990; Heinburg, 1996). This impact is independent of whether or not women have current eating disorders (Murray, Touyz, & Beumont, 1996). Garner and colleagues (1980) found that 69% of Playboy models and 60% of beauty pageant contestants were 15% below the suggested weights for their height, which is considered a diagnostic symptom of anorexia (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Over a 20 year period (1959-1978) the weights for both of these groups has continued to decline (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Snow & Harris, 1986; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992). This increasingly thin ideal standard may be an important factor for increasing the prevalence of eating disorders (Boskind-White & White, 1983; Silverstein, Peterson, & Perdue, 1986).

A dose-response relationship between media exposure and eating disorders was proposed by Anderson and DiDomencio (1992). They found that compared to men's magazines, women's magazines had 10.5 times the number of articles and advertisements for weight loss, which paralleled the fact that women were also 10 times more likely to develop eating disorders (Anderson & DiDomencio, 1992). Nemeroff, Stein, Diehl, and Smolack (1994) found that women's magazines contained 13 times as many weight loss articles compared to men's magazines. Finally, Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly (1986) compared the four most widely circulated men's and women's magazines and found that women's magazines contained 63 ads for diet foods, 96 ads about the body, 1,179 food ads and 228 food articles, while the men's magazines contained one ad for diet foods, 12 ads about the body, 15 food ads, and 10 food articles.

There are several factors which influence the relationship between media exposure and body image (Hamilton & Walker, 1993; Heinburg & Thompson, 1995; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Stice & Shaw, 1994; Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 1998). Stice and colleagues (1994) found that body dissatisfaction was mediated by internalization of social pressure to be thin and gender role endorsement. While Stice and Shaw (1994) concluded that pictures of thin models did not immediately lead to body dissatisfaction in all women, but exacerbated body shape distortion in those who were already self-conscious about their body shape or who had an unstable body image. Participants with high levels of body image anxiety also recalled more instances of negative comments after watching a video in which a man commented to a woman about her appearance (Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 1998). Heinburg and Thompson (1995) found that women who had disturbed body images became more depressed after viewing an appearance videotape than after viewing the control video, conversely, individuals who were satisfied with their body image reported no change or reported less depression after watching either video.

Many of the studies reviewed above deal with Caucasian samples, however, Snow and Harris (1989) reported that excessive weight concern and disordered eating patterns are not simply a white upper-middle class phenomenon. It has been found that culture plays an integral part in the formation and attainment of an “ideal” body image as well as the development of eating disorders (Cash, 1990; Pate, Pumareiga, Hester, & Garner, 1992; Rosen, 1992). Research on body image has been conducted with Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans (Altabe, 1998; Cash, &

Henry, 1995; Felts, Parrillo, Chenier, & Dunn, 1996; Fitzgibbon et al., 1998; Lopez, Blix, & Blix, 1995; Ogden & Elder, 1998; Robinson et al., 1996; Story, French, Resnick, & Blum, 1995).

The most studied minority to date has been African Americans (see Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1998 for a review). Researchers discovered that African Americans had lower rates of eating disorders and lower body dissatisfaction than those found in Caucasian populations (Abood & Chandler, 1997; Abood & Mason, 1997). Furnham and Alibhai (1983) compared African-Americans who had recently immigrated from Kenya to Great Britain to those who already lived there. The new immigrants favored heavier body types and viewed a slender body type as less appealing (Abood & Mason, 1997). In addition, increases in African American women's disturbed eating patterns have been reported with increasing levels of acculturation to majority Caucasian societal notions of an "ideal" body image (Abrams, Allen, & Gray, 1993; Anderson & Hay, 1985).

The results of comparisons between Hispanics and other groups have shown an inconsistent relationship. Robinson and colleagues (1996) found that Hispanic girls reported significantly greater body dissatisfaction than either Asian or African American girls, with even the leanest Hispanic girls reporting dissatisfaction with their bodies (Robinson et al., 1996). In adult women, Cash and Henry (1995) found that Hispanics were similar to Caucasians with respect to body dissatisfaction while other researchers have found that Hispanic body dissatisfaction was between that reported for African American and Caucasian participants (Altabe, 1998; Felts et al., 1996). Finally, Story