Understanding the effect of body comparison, desire to be popular, and social media engagement on body satisfaction.

Sheri L. Dragoo, Dawn Michaelson, & Jay Yoo
Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA

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Introduction. A review of research on body image identifies proposed factors that lead to body dissatisfaction. Mass media reach large numbers of people through its variety of forms (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the Internet) and influence body satisfaction. Thomsen et al. (2002) summarized that frequent exposure to media portraying attractive people increased body image disturbance, eating disorders and negative attitudes towards their appearance among young women. Social media's relation to body image is often examined using the social comparison theory, in which people self-evaluate based on comparisons with similar others (Festinger, 1954). Studies have found that young women who frequently see media images of the ideal thin body standard demonstrate lower body satisfaction. In a recent study, it was reported that social media engagement with attractive peers significantly increased body dissatisfaction (Hogue & Mills, 2019). Frequently comparing appearance to others was related to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and internalization of cultural ideals of beauty in studies by Grabe, Ward, & Hyde (2008) and Myers & Crowther (2009). Therefore, the goal of this study is to identify the effect of body comparison, desire to be popular, and social media engagement on body satisfaction.

Theoretical Perspective. According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, humans have an innate drive to compare themselves to others to assess their standing in life. One prevalent instance of social comparison is the assessment of one's own body as compared to friends and other peers (Fitzsimmons-Craft, Mardone-Cone, & Harney, 2012). Previous research suggests that women engage in frequent comparisons with peers to gain an understanding of their weight status relative to others. Research has indicated that social comparison with peers may be one pathway through which internalized pressures for thinness may translate into body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Leahey, Crowther, & Mickelson, 2007). Therefore, it is hypothesized that individuals who have higher body comparison (H1), higher desire to be popular (H2), higher frequency of social media engagement (H3), and specific social media platform use (H4) will have lower body satisfaction.

Method. An online IRB approved survey utilizing previously established measures for body comparison (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012), desire to be popular - reading fashion frequency (Thomsen, McCoy, Gustafson, & Williams, 2002), and body area satisfaction (Cash, 2000), were used for this study. Additionally, the researchers asked participants to rate their usage of social media platforms and various fashion media outlets together with demographics. A total of 132 usable responses were collected. The study consisted mainly of college females (96.3%), with a mean age of 20 years, and majoring in Apparel Merchandising (31.8%), Health

Science (16.7%), Apparel Design and Product Development (12.9%), Communication Science and Disorders (8.3%), Child and Family Studies (6.1%), and various others (> 5.0%). The sample was 73.5% Caucasian, 11.4% Hispanic, 7.5% Asian American, 6.1% African American, and 1.5% multiracial. Participants spent an average of three and one-half hours on the internet each day and three hours on social media platforms. Internet usage was mostly for online subscriptions (such as Netflix), YouTube, and following fashion influencers/bloggers. On an average week, they used Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest as their social media platform of choice, while Facebook and Twitter were used monthly. Survey data was exported into SPSS and scale reliabilities were assessed; body comparison ($\alpha = .93$), desire to be popular – reading fashion frequency ($\alpha = .73$), and body area satisfaction ($\alpha = .89$). The hypotheses developed for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA with high versus low variables distributed by the median score for equal distribution to compare to body satisfaction.

Results. To test hypotheses, one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the difference between low and high body comparison ($M=5.40$ on a 7-point scale) and body satisfaction. For H1, there was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(1,130) = 14.626, p = .002$). Individuals who scored high on body comparison orientation measures showed significantly higher body satisfaction when compared to individuals who scored low on body comparison orientation. ANOVA was used to evaluate the difference between low and high desire to be popular - reading fashion frequency ($M=2.83$) and body satisfaction. For H2, there was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(1,130) = 28.189, p = .001$). Individuals who frequently read beauty and fashion publications to be popular demonstrated significantly higher body satisfaction. ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the difference between frequency of social media engagement ($M=2.44$) and body satisfaction. For H3, there was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(1,130) = 6.612, p = .014$). This indicated that individuals who use social media to gain information about fashion more frequently showed significantly higher body satisfaction when compared to individuals who use social media less frequently. Lastly, ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the difference between usage of social media platforms ($M=2.80$) and body satisfaction. For H4, there was no statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(1,130) = 2.406, p = .123$).

Discussion and Conclusion. The goal of this study was to identify the effect of body comparison, desire to be popular, and social media engagement on body satisfaction. When evaluating study participants' level of body satisfaction compared to variables of degree of appearance comparison, desire to be popular through reading fashion media, and social media engagement, participants who scored high on these variables possessed significantly higher body satisfaction. Findings are contrary to our prediction that individuals who make frequent appearance comparisons, and are exposed to and frequently engage in social media to gain fashion and beauty information, would have greater body dissatisfaction. Unlike previous research findings and our hypotheses, study participants were satisfied with their appearance, even when frequently viewing and comparing themselves to the cultural ideal and fashion trends.

In an effort to interpret findings, composition of participants was critically assessed. The majority of the study participants were educated in a fashion or health major and may have greater discernment in interpreting fashion and media representations of the body than prior study populations. Additionally, individuals who engage in social media to learn more about particular content (i.e. beauty and fashion) may be different from those who engage in social media for other reasons. The lack of statistical significance for specified social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram) on body image may also reveal that social media is consumed by many individuals of all body image concerns and for varied purposes. Therefore, it is essential in future research to investigate personality variables that are more susceptible to media exposure and social media influence, rather than solely defining the negative effect of media on body image.

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