



Fashion Magazines and Social Media. Do they work together or against each other to influence body image and social comparison in men?

Ivana Markova & Cristina Azocar

San Francisco State University

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Social media and entertainment media (fashion magazines) make up a large part of the overall media landscape in the U.S. These two types of medias' negative effects on body image and body satisfaction have also been well researched, but the effects of different social media outlets has not been well understood especially when it comes to males. Over 2.2 billion people are active participants in social media worldwide (Regan, 2015) and in the United States, 1.79 billion individuals engage with social media networks at least once a month, while users access social media for approximately 2.7 hours per day (Statista, 2014).

**Framework and Method.** Social comparison theory and cultivation theory were applied in this study. Social comparison theory was first developed by Festinger (1954) and stressed that individuals are driven to evaluate their abilities and opinions generally in the absence of objective non-social criteria. For these types of comparisons, the consequences look to be influenced by the direction of the comparison -- upward or downward. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998) posits that long-term exposure to mass media messages and images impact people's views of social reality. Being exposed to media may reinforce attitudes toward thin body ideals (Park, 2005; Shrum, 2009). For example, individuals are exposed to, and thus create negative image for themselves (Yu, Damhorst, & Russell, 2011), which can turn them away from purchasing an item being presented by a fashion model. However, consumers today are exposed to a variety of body images from around the globe on social media, and they might be positively influenced by these images viewed on social media rather than by images seen in fashion magazines (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014). Fashion magazines have been recognized as an important source of unrealistic body types and body ideals (Harper & Tiggemann, 2008). Fashion models and celebrities are depicted as thin, tall, young individuals with Caucasian-like features. These images are unattainable for an average individual and studies have shown over the years that exposure to such images in many media contexts causes body dissatisfaction in women (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). Most studies have focused on female body dissatisfaction as a result of media exposure, and male individuals have been largely ignored. This study will attempt to close the gap in research on male body image perceptions. The primary purpose of this study is to focus on male individuals and the effects of media exposure (in fashion magazines and a variety of social media) on body dissatisfaction and social comparison. The secondary purpose is to examine perception of body representation on different media outlets such as social media and fashion magazines. Male participants were selected from a large sample pool of 1,391 participants. Of the participants, 584 were male undergraduate students. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 44 ( $M=22.79$ ,  $SD=3.47$ ). Respondents varied in ethnic background. Two measures were used in this study. The BAT instrument which was developed and validated by Probst et al. (1995). This measured body dissatisfaction of male respondents ( $\alpha=.87$ ). The social comparison measure (UPACS & DACS), which included the upward and downward physical appearance social comparison ( $\alpha=.92$ ) validated survey (O'Brien et al., 2009). Statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS using correlation, and chi-square testing.

**Results and Implications.** Findings did not fully align with the *cultivation theory*. The body dissatisfaction findings present a convincing argument that the increase in body dissatisfaction in males is mostly prevalent when exposed to certain media outlets such as fashion magazines ( $r=.186$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and not to social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and others. Surprisingly,

out of all social media outlets only Pinterest ( $r=.118$ ,  $p=.00$ ) showed a relationship with body dissatisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the effects of fashion magazine exposure on body dissatisfaction in women (Gardiner & Slater, 2000; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Thus, these results add to the growing body of evidence for negative effects and fashion magazines. The unrealistic images of thin and beautiful models and celebrities in fashion magazines negatively affect both genders.

*Social comparison* was assessed with media exposure as it has been repeatedly found to be a predictor of body dissatisfaction (Myers & Crowther, 2009). The more males engaged with most of the media outlets, the greater the increase in social comparisons. So, even though the exposure to social media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram did not create body dissatisfaction in men, it did increase their engagement in social comparison. These results contradict many studies dealing with body image issues and social comparison among women. But, the findings fully align with the social comparison theory as males exhibited this when exposed to most of the social and fashion magazines media studied. Exposure to Instagram ( $r=.192$ ,  $p=.00$ ), which are mainly visual images, increased greater social comparison in males than exposure to Facebook ( $r=.152$ ,  $p=.00$ ), Pinterest ( $r=.111$ ,  $p=.00$ ), Tumblr ( $r=.103$ ,  $p=.00$ ), and Snapchat ( $r=.120$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Males have also indicated they compare themselves to other better looking individuals (upward comparison) rather than to worse looking individuals (downward comparison), which is believed to decrease individual's well-being (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). And although the current study didn't find that this affected their body image, over time cultivation theory would predict that the associations will strengthen. Men were also asked how well their body types were represented in fashion magazines and social media. White American males had the most agreement (32.4%) with African American males following closely (31.3%). Asian-American (16.8%) males exhibited the least agreement with believing their bodies are well represented in fashion magazines ( $\chi^2=32.8$ ,  $p=.035$ ). Only a third of the respondents said that they would purchase a fashion item if the fashion model advertising it was of their body type and their ethnicity.

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