

MEDIA EFFECTS ON BODY IMAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND  
INTERNAL INFLUENCES: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Masters of Arts  
in the Nicholson School of Communication  
in the College of Science  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, FL

Summer Term  
2011

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## **ABSTRACT**

Media effects on body dissatisfaction is a long-studied issue; however, aspects of the research – such as those regarding cultivation theory and its effects on body image – are unclear or incomplete. This study attempts to clarify the relationship between cultivation and body dissatisfaction. Besides cultivation, social comparison theory is also examined because upward comparisons with media images and peers can shape and reinforce body image attitudes as well. Additionally, the study examines the connection between media and body dissatisfaction by looking at a broader social context – one that includes other social/environmental influences, such as peer and parental attitudes, as well as internal influences such as self-esteem.

A sample of 285 female undergraduate students completed media exposure, parental influence, peer influence, and self-esteem measures, as well as internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction measures. Overall, the study found that while peer comparisons and self-esteem are associated with internalization of the thin ideal, they are not as powerful as the most significant indicators – media attitudes regarding weight and body shape and media comparisons. Contrastingly, peer comparisons and self-esteem were observed to be the strongest indicators of body dissatisfaction. These findings suggest that cultivation is directly associated with the internalization of the thin ideal. However, the cultivation of media messages may not have a direct effect on body dissatisfaction, as social/environmental influences and the internal variable of self-esteem proved to be the most significant indicators.

To Mom, Dad, Aunt Ca, Mimi, and Chad: thank you for your  
constant love, support, and encouragement. I did it!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. William Kinnally. I am extremely grateful for your unvarying support and encouragement. Working with you was an enormous privilege. Thank you for not only convincing me that a thesis was something that I was capable of, but also for never letting me get discouraged. I would have never been able to accomplish this without your guidance!

I'd also like to thank Dr. Tim Brown for being my mentor throughout my graduate career. I feel tremendously lucky to have had the opportunity to work with you and cannot thank you enough for all of your wisdom and support. Your guidance helped me immensely and I will always be thankful!

To Dr. Sally Hastings, thank you for taking the time to serve on my committee and assist me in this process. Your participation and constant positivity has been absolutely invaluable.

I would like to thank Dr. Timothy Coombs, Dr. Sherry Holladay, and Professor Steven Neel for their endless kind words, support, and assistance in this process. Again, I feel lucky to have worked with all of you!

To Nathalia Bauer, thank you for all of your guidance and good humor. Working for you was a wonderful experience that I'm grateful to have had.

To Kirsten Seitz, thank you for the steady stream of encouragement, boosts of self-confidence, and candy... I greatly appreciate you always being there to lend an ear.

I'd like to thank the faculty in the Nicholson School of Communication that I've been fortunate enough to work with, especially Dr. John Malala, Dr. Jeff Butler, and Dr. Jonathan Matusitz. I have never had such strong support and guidance in an educational program before, and this opportunity has been amazing.

I feel extremely grateful and blessed to have been accepted into this program. Thank you to everyone who helped make it such a rewarding experience.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Thin models and actresses are seemingly the standard in current media, constantly present in magazines, television, movies, and Internet sites. Advertisements targeted toward young women use thin and beautiful models in provocative, desirable circumstances in order to sell clothing, accessories, and other products. A 2008 article in *Entertainment Weekly* entitled “Are Skinny Starlets of *90210* Setting a Bad Example?” discussed the “alarmingly thin” actresses featured on the popular CW network show *90210*; the article emphasized that these actresses are emaciated and remarked that none of them can possibly weigh more than 110 pounds (Wheat, 2008). The article detailed how the CW network prefers to use ultra-thin models and actresses in its shows because the audience they are trying to draw – the *Gossip Girl* crowd, which is composed of females age 12-34 – to the thin images portrayed on the programs (Wheat, 2008). The author also pointed out that the show’s young audience may be more susceptible to pressure regarding thinness (Wheat, 2008). Such attention further reinforces the notion that media effects on body dissatisfaction are not strictly an academic concern; media effects on women are becoming important in the broader social context as well.

There is a mediated norm for body image in present-day culture, and it is one that is characterized by bodies that are extremely thin, and continuously shrinking over time (Hendriks & Burgoon, 2003). The mediated thin-ideal is present in mainstream media, and mainstream media are a source women turn to for the information about how they should look (Hendriks, 2002).

Subsequently, women who are heavy viewers of thin-ideal media may develop the attitude that thinness is desirable, experience greater body dissatisfaction, and engage in weight

loss behaviors and cosmetic surgery in an attempt to emulate the models and actresses that they observe in media (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006). Additionally, there exists an undeniable weight prejudice in our society that is reinforced not only by media, but also by social interactions with peers and parents (Triplett, 2007). People who are overweight face not only physiological obstacles – they are often seen as socially undesirable (Triplett, 2007).

Contrastingly, thinness often has a very positive connotation, one that denotes success and social desirability (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006). People who are attractive achieve more in our society; they are viewed as more successful, as well as happier with their lives (Hendriks & Burgoon, 2003). Therefore, some women may see their body shape and weight as a sort of “measuring stick” of social value (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006).

In the last few decades, much research has been conducted regarding body dissatisfaction in women and the elements that influence it. However, some areas of the research, such as those regarding cultivation theory and its effects on body image, remain unclear. Some researchers have suggested that overall television viewing creates body dissatisfaction in women (Eisend & Moller, 1997), while others argue that only specific genres of television watching – particularly those containing portrayals of the thin-ideal – create body dissatisfaction in women (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996). There has also been a lack of clarity in cultivation research regarding the role of the internalization of the thin-ideal and how it relates to body dissatisfaction. This study will attempt to clarify the influence of cultivation; particularly, the effect that cultivation has on body dissatisfaction through social attitudes regarding weight and body shape, as well as the internalization of the thin ideal.

However, media aren't the only source of information regarding body shape and appearance. Cultivation does not fully explain how body dissatisfaction may occur in women; this study will also use social comparison theory in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how media messages interact with other social/environmental factors to influence body dissatisfaction through the mechanism of upward comparisons. Social/environmental influences such as parents and peers are important to consider, as well as internal influences such as self-esteem. Both peer and parental influence will be considered when examining social attitudes regarding the thin ideal. Peers will also be considered through social comparison theory, as they serve as images for upward comparisons. Self-esteem will additionally be examined, as it has been observed to be an important influence on body dissatisfaction.

This project has five goals. The first is to provide clarity to the relationship between cultivation effects and body dissatisfaction and show that heavy viewers of thin-ideal media are more likely to adopt specific social attitudes regarding weight and body shape, as well as internalize the thin ideal. The second goal is to link internalization of the thin-ideal to body dissatisfaction through social comparison theory by examining upward comparisons with media figures. The third goal is to examine body dissatisfaction in a broader social context by predicting that parental and peer influence also affect social attitudes regarding weight and body shape and internalization of the thin ideal, as well as body dissatisfaction. The fourth goal is to examine body dissatisfaction through social comparison theory by examining upward comparisons with peers. The fifth goal is to show that other internal factors, such as self-esteem, are also important predictors of body dissatisfaction.

The aforementioned goals build upon one another to work toward the overall purpose of this project, which is to examine how all of these influences – media, social/environmental, and internal – collectively relate to body dissatisfaction. By focusing on elements of cultivation and social comparison theories, as well considering media in the larger social context (as it interacts with other external social factors such as peer and parental influences, and internal factors such as self-esteem), a better understanding of the effects that are most influential on body dissatisfaction can be obtained, and perhaps steps can be taken to reduce this effect amongst women. If we can gain a better understanding of the impact of media in the larger social context, it may be easier to develop and tailor eating disorder prevention campaigns and media literacy programs, as well as refine current eating disorder therapy strategies. By informing young women of the possibly influential elements present in media, we may be able to lessen the effects of the thin-ideal images that are so omnipresent and discourage upward comparisons with them. Women should also be made aware of the other influences that mold and reinforce social attitudes regarding body image – the attitudes that are promulgated by their peers and parents. It is important to expose these biased attitudes and comparisons in order to raise self-esteem levels, which also have an effect on body dissatisfaction. Overall, by exposing prejudiced attitudes and comparisons and subsequently raising self-esteem, body dissatisfaction may be reduced. Since body dissatisfaction is so often a predictor of disordered eating behaviors, it is imperative that something be done to lessen it.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Media effects on body dissatisfaction in women is a long-studied issue; however, some aspects of the research – such as those regarding cultivation theory and its effects on body image – are unclear. This study will first attempt to clarify the relationship between cultivation and body dissatisfaction. However, while cultivation theory is vital to consider when examining how social attitudes regarding body image are formed, social comparison theory will also be considered because upward comparisons with media images and peers can shape and reinforce body image attitudes as well. Additionally, the study will address the notion that media influence takes place in a much broader context – one that includes other social/environmental influences, such as peer and parental attitudes, as well as internal influences such as self-esteem.

Therefore, this study will explore the effects of media on body image through cultivation theory and social comparison theory. Body shape in current media will be discussed in order to depict what women are being exposed to in their media consumption. When considering cultivation theory, this study will provide an overview of prior cultivation research in body image. It will also attempt to clarify cultivation research and build upon it through social comparison theory to better explain body dissatisfaction.

Body image attitudes will be considered under social comparison theory – particularly, the relationship between upward comparisons and body dissatisfaction. In order to place media effects in the broader social context, social/environmental factors such as peer and parental influence will also be examined with the supposition that these variables are powerful influences on body image. Peer influence will be considered under social comparison theory, in that upward comparisons with peers will also have an effect on body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the

psychological factor of self-esteem will be explored, as it is an important influence on the internalization of the thin-ideal and subsequent body dissatisfaction. Hypotheses and research questions will be presented in association with their related corresponding topics throughout the review of the literature.

### **Female Body Image in Mass Media**

Park (2005) noted that the body size of women portrayed in mass media has been steadily declining since the 1960's. Wiseman, Grey, Mosimann and Ahrens (1992) conducted a content analysis of female beauty icons from 1959 - 1978 and observed that over half of them met the medical criteria for the eating disorder anorexia nervosa; in a follow up study, they observed the same patterns from 1979-1988. Gonzalez-Lavin and Smolak (1995) observed that on shows most popular with middle school girls, 94% of the female characters were thinner than the average American woman of that time period. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) conducted a content analysis of 28 prime time television shows and observed that 33% of the female characters were at a below-average weight.

Hendriks (2002) and Park (2005) noted that the media's recent depictions of the ideal female body emulate the biological norm for male bodies more than female bodies; in other words, they are more androgynous and lacking curves. While these thinner shapes may very well be the currently accepted standards, they do not conform to actual body types and shapes that regularly exist in women (Park, 2005). Women are not naturally supposed to look androgynous; they naturally possess body fat in areas such as the bust and hips for reproduction purposes, while male bodies are typically straighter and lacking curves (Hendriks, 2002). Comparisons

with these androgynous figures may result in body dissatisfaction for viewers who do not embody this particular shape.

There are particular messages associated with body weight in media. Fouts and Burggraf (1999) performed a content analysis in which they observed that overweight female characters receive far fewer positive comments regarding weight and body shape than thin characters. Becker, Burwell, Gilman, Herzog, and Hamburg (2002) observed that television programs often associate thinness with success at work, and the female participants in their study expressed that they thought thinness would boost their chances of obtaining a successful career. Carney and Louw (2006) observed that undergraduate women tended to find overweight models unattractive and unappealing, while they described thin models as looking happier and more satisfied with life. Moreover, Wade and DiMaria (2003) found that participants in their study believed that thin women would have more personality appeal than heavy women. Thus, it appears that in media (especially thin-ideal media), thinness connotes desirability and success while being overweight is associated with negative traits.

Additionally, media figures are viewed as the epitome of success and social desirability. Their body weight and beauty are often associated with their success, while overweight actresses and models are frequently ridiculed in media, as well as by fellow cast members and the audiences. This is especially apparent in thin-ideal media (Harrison, 2000). Thin-ideal media is also called thinness depicting and thinness promoting media (TDP). TDP refers to media that contains noticeably thin female main characters and is composed of fitness and fashion magazines, as well as television programs, that contain such images (Harrison, 2000). Thin-ideal media promote the idea that thinness is an advantageous attribute and place a positive

connotation on a thin body shape, ascribing the attribute to the most “beautiful, desirable, and successful protagonists” (Harrison, 2000, p. 121). This idea may also be communicated in the negative portrayal of overweight characters (Harrison, 2000).

Media often contain successful, socially desirable women whose body shape conforms to the thin ideal; Hendriks and Burgoon (2003) observed that women who are exposed to heavy amounts of this type of media content are likely to accept this as a norm. Holstrom (2004) posited that dissatisfaction arises when heavy viewers begin to see this thin-ideal not only as realistic, but also physically attainable. If women who accept these body shapes as the norm engage in upward comparisons with them, and strive to mimic them (and subsequently cannot), body dissatisfaction can occur (Schooler, 2004).

Thus, cultivation and social comparison theories should be considered when researching media effects on body image attitudes, as heavy viewing may promote internalization of the thin ideal, as well as provide women with media figures that they can use when engaging in upward comparisons regarding body shape and weight.

### **Cultivation Theory**

When considering media effects on body dissatisfaction, cultivation theory is an important theory to explore. George Gerbner (1998) defined cultivation as “the independent contributions television viewing makes to viewer conceptions of social reality” (p. 180).

Cultivation suggests that media effects build over time through frequent, repetitive viewing. The goal of Gerbner’s research was to see if heavy television viewers were more likely to perceive the real world in accordance with what they had viewed on TV (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

Gerbner (1998) focused on violence in television programs and subsequent inaccurate



expectations of trust and crime in reality; he observed that heavy viewers were more likely to believe that people were unable to be trusted and strictly out for their own good, a notion that was later dubbed “mean world syndrome” (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Gerbner’s (1998) studies indicated that heavy viewers of television are more likely to see the world through a television lens; that is, their perceptions of reality will be comparable to television reality.

While considering cultivation, mainstreaming must be discussed. Mainstreaming is the “relative commonality of outlooks and values that heavy exposure to the television world tends to cultivate” (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009, p. 41). Harrison (2003) noted that:

Mainstreaming occurs when groups who are initially divergent in their worldviews come to hold similar views with greater television exposure. Their views converge to reflect the “reality” that is most commonly represented on television (p.257).

Mainstreaming is a minor variation to the general theory of cultivation in that it suggests that people whose lifestyles deviate from what they see on television will be more susceptible to television messages (Shrum & Bischak, 2001). Thus, if women do not embody the thin-ideal yet consume heavy amounts of media that contain it, they may be more likely to accept it as the norm, as well as share this attitude with peers who also consume heavy amounts of thin-ideal media. For example, in thin-ideal media, successful and desirable female protagonists often embody the thin ideal, while overweight female characters are ridiculed or portrayed in a negative light (Harrison, 2002). Thus, it may be reasonable to assume that viewers who consume large amounts of thin-ideal media may believe that thinness connotes desirability and is an important physical characteristic to maintain, and other heavy viewers of thin-ideal media may corroborate this idea because of their own media consumption habits. Mainstreaming

additionally exacerbates the effects of stereotypes on television while corroborating existing attitudes; therefore, heavy viewers of thin-ideal media may be more likely to have similar attitudes about the social value of thinness.

Additionally, elements such as accessibility and heuristic processing should be considered. Shrum and Bischak (2001) observed that: “Research has shown that people often construct their judgments on probability of occurrence on the basis of attributes of the information they retrieve from memory” (p.189). Furthermore, they state that:

People tend to base estimates of frequency or probability on the general ease with which an example can be retrieved...the ease with which a particular event can be imagined... and the similarities between the features of the event being judged and a prototype” (p.189).

Shrum (2009) described heuristic processing as the following: when people retrieve cognitive information, they tend to seek out small amounts of information that are relevant, rather than search throughout their entire cognitive bank of available data. This is noted above, in Shrum and Bischak’s (2001) observation that people may base an estimate of frequency on the similarities between the features of the event being judged and a prototype, with the prototype being an event already in their memory bank. Shrum (2009) explained accessibility; the information that comes to mind during retrieval and processing is the information that is most accessible, or most easily drawn from memory. Constructs and ideas that are frequently activated become more and more accessible over time (Shrum, 2009). Thus, they are the first to come to mind during retrieval.

When considering body image effects, it is important to consider what Shrum (2009) observed: that cultivation may not always create attitudes, but often serves to reinforce them. Television consumption creates effects through the mechanism of repetitive images. When women are steadily inundated with images of thinness, beauty, and the ideal female body, these images could be heuristically retrieved when judgments about weight are made. The more “thin-ideal” images that women observe, the more accessible these images become. Additionally, the positive connotations that are associated with the thin-ideal may become more accessible. Contrastingly, the more negative associations with overweight people that are observed, the more retrievable they may be, augmenting the sense of importance of maintaining a thin body shape. These retrieved associations may serve to enforce social attitudes regarding weight and its social implications – i.e., thinness is good, while being overweight is bad. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) also noted that viewers often seek out programming that reflects and reinforces their existing beliefs, thus strengthening attitudes.

Another element of cultivation theory that must be addressed is that of resonance. According to Shrum and Bischak (2001), resonance is the notion that viewers’ life experiences affect their perceptions of television. If the viewers’ life experiences are similar to the media content that they are viewing, the media messages are more likely to have an effect on them. The authors use the example of crime: if a person has had a direct experience with crime, that instance is most likely detailed and highly accessible. If they view television instances of crime that are similar, the direct experiences are activated more often, making them even more accessible. Instances of direct experience that reflect instances observed on television also combine in the viewers’ minds, making it more difficult for them to recall which was direct

experience and which experience they viewed on television (Shrum & Bischak, 2001).

Additionally, the authors suggest that the combination of the experiences makes the content more accessible and more easily retrieved during cognitive processing. If a viewer directly observes a negative connotation with being overweight and also observes this situation on television, resonance may cause the connotation to be more readily retrieved during judgments regarding weight and shape.

Van den Bulck (2000) observed that women who are exposed to thin-ideal television demonstrate higher body dissatisfaction and express a desire to lose weight; Myers and Biocca (1992) also observed that cultivation effects are related to body dissatisfaction, and that it only takes thirty minutes of television viewing to create an effect regarding the perceived body shape in women. Harrison (1997) reported that women who are attracted to thin media personalities are more likely to experience eating disorder symptomology. Tiggemann (1996) noted that specific types of media – particularly those that show women in stereotypical roles (i.e. soap operas) – are positively correlated with body dissatisfaction in female viewers. Thus, if implementing cultivation theory, it could be posited that women who are heavy viewers of thin-ideal media are more likely to retrieve these particular images, reinforcing existing attitudes and body dissatisfaction. Cultivation and heuristic retrieval can reinforce the idea that certain body types are associated with social desirability and success and important to maintain. Moreover, heavy viewing of thin-ideal characters may make these images more accessible, which can lead to increased upward comparisons with media figures when body shape is being considered.

## **Conflict over Cultivation**

Research surrounding cultivation theory has taken many different paths, and it is unclear how different elements in the research fit together. Some researchers argue that television has a direct effect on body dissatisfaction; others maintain that television predicts internalization of the thin-ideal and subsequent body dissatisfaction. Internalization of the thin-ideal is defined as “the extent to which an individual cognitively ‘buys into’ socially defined ideals of attractiveness and engages in behaviors designed to create an approximation of these ideals” (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Thompson and Stice (2001) noted that internalization of thin ideals occurs because of social reinforcement of these ideals; particularly, reinforcement from media, peers, and parents. In a meta-analysis, Grabe, Ward, and Hyde (2008) observed a relationship between media and internalization of the thin ideal. Subsequently, internalization of the thin-ideal has been observed to encourage body dissatisfaction (Stice, 2001). Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, and Stein (1994) observed that internalization of the thin-ideal leads to body dissatisfaction because it sets unrealistic body shape goals for the women who are internalizing these ideals.

However, some researchers argue that television has no effect on acceptance of the thin ideal. Tiggemann (2003) observed that television consumption is not related but not internalization of the thin ideal, but to body dissatisfaction because it creates awareness of body shape. She stated that internalization of the thin-ideal only occurs through television viewing that is conducted for social learning purposes, such as how to look or behave (Tiggemann, 2003). In other words, she observed that the relationship between thin-ideal television watching and body dissatisfaction is not mediated by internalization of the thin ideal. Therefore, the paths of

internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction in cultivation research are unclear; it is uncertain how the two elements are connected in the larger context.

There has also been some discrepancy regarding whether total television viewing causes body dissatisfaction, or if it only occurs when viewers consume specific types of media – particularly, thin-ideal media. As noted, Eisend and Moller (1997) observed that the amount of overall television watched affected body dissatisfaction, but they argued that the cultivation effects occurred on the viewers' perceptions of self and not their perceptions of reality, an observation that contradicts the general definition of cultivation theory.

However, in his studies of social cognitive theory, Bandura (2001) argued that it is not necessarily the amount of media consumed that creates effects, but the type. Tiggemann and Pickering (1996) confirmed this in their observations that watching particular categories of television, such as soap operas (or genres in which the thin-ideal is present) was correlated with body dissatisfaction. Tiggemann and Slater (2003) conducted an experiment using thin-ideal music videos, in which participants either watched thin-ideal music videos, or television of a non-specific genre. The participants who watched the music videos reported greater levels of body dissatisfaction than participants who watched non-specific genres of television. Schooler, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2004) also observed that the type of television watched was a mediator for cultivation and body dissatisfaction; White and African-American women who watched mainstream television showed body dissatisfaction, while exposure to Black-oriented television produced no effect on either race. Contrastingly, Botta (1999) observed that thin-ideal media had no significant influence on body dissatisfaction. Hendriks (2002) noted that other

factors (such as internal psychological factors and motivations for watching thin-ideal programming) need to be accounted for in the study of cultivation and body image.

Thus, some cultivation research is unclear. Does overall television viewing have an effect, or only viewing of specific genres that portray the thin ideal? How do internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction connect? This study posits that cultivation has an effect on body dissatisfaction through the internalization of the thin ideal. This internalization makes media figures more accessible in memory, making them more likely to be retrieved in formation of attitudes, as well as during comparisons. Therefore, we can formulate our first set of hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Heavy consumers of thin-ideal media are more likely to associate thinness with social desirability and success.

H<sub>2</sub>: Heavy consumers of thin-ideal media are more likely to internalize the thin ideal.

H<sub>3</sub>: Heavy consumers of thin-ideal media who have internalized the thin-ideal are more likely to report body dissatisfaction.

Additionally, increased accessibility reinforces social attitudes (both positive and negative) about body image. When making judgments about weight and body shape, viewers may be motivated by these attitudes to use media figures as “measuring sticks” (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006) by which they gauge their own social desirability. This may lead to viewers engaging in upward comparisons with media figures when making judgments about weight and body shape. Refer to Figure 1 (p. 17) for a pictorial representation of how the elements of cultivation and social comparison interact to influence body dissatisfaction.

## **Social Comparison Theory**

Cultivation theory alone does not explain why women develop attitudes regarding ideal body shape and social desirability, or why internalization of the thin-ideal and subsequent body dissatisfaction occur. In order to examine how social/environmental factors and internalization of the thin-ideal affect body dissatisfaction, social comparison theory must be considered.

Social comparison theory rests upon the idea that people are constantly evaluating themselves, and do so by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). There are two types of comparisons – upward and downward. Downward comparisons occur when people compare themselves to someone else, and find the other person to be lacking. Upward comparisons, however, are when people compare themselves to someone else and find themselves to be lacking.

Tiggemann and Slater (2003) suggested that “the process of social comparison may provide the mechanism by which exposure to media images induces negative effects” (p. 50). When women compare themselves to thin media figures in order to evaluate their own attractiveness, they cannot match what is physically portrayed, and body dissatisfaction occurs (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). Bailey and Ricciardelli (2009) and Richins (1991) found that upward comparisons are one of the strongest reasons for body dissatisfaction. Women who are heavy viewers of television – particularly of thin-ideal media – are presented with a multitude of thin actresses and models to which they can compare themselves. These images become more accessible and may become internalized, and this could result in upward comparisons and subsequent higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Botta (1999) found that women often consume television in order to find the ideal to which they should compare themselves, which leads to



increased body dissatisfaction. Thompson, Coovert, and Stormer (1999) observed that the goal of many media outlets is to induce these comparisons, in order to encourage women to financially stimulate the beauty and fitness industries. Thus, we can posit our next set of hypotheses:

H<sub>4</sub>: Heavy consumers who have internalized the thin-ideal are more likely to engage in upward comparisons with thin-ideal media figures.

H<sub>5</sub>: Women who engage in upward comparisons with thin-ideal media figures will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction.

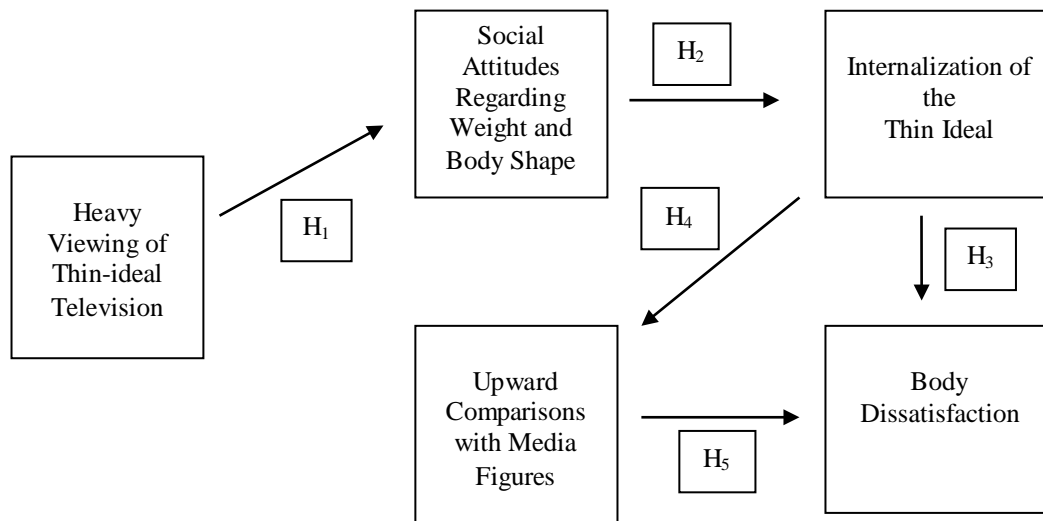


Figure 1: Representation of media influences hypotheses.

However, media figures are not the only figures to which women compare themselves; it is essential to consider upward comparisons that occur in face-to-face interaction when exploring influences on body dissatisfaction.

## **Social/Environmental Influences – Peers**

While it has been established that media are an influence on body dissatisfaction in women, other social/environmental factors have to be considered. It is necessary to explore the influence of peer and parental attitudes regarding weight to explore where these body image attitudes may be reinforced. Additionally, we must consider that internalization of the thin-ideal is reinforced by variables other than media, which makes the influence of peers and parents considerable (Thompson & Stice, 2001).

Social comparison theory must be considered when exploring peer influence on body dissatisfaction. People compare themselves to those around them in order to self-evaluate, and peers are a relevant and easily obtainable source for comparison (Festinger, 1954). If women embrace the thin-ideal yet do not exhibit it, yet their peers possess this shape, they may engage in upward comparison and feel inferior, leading to body dissatisfaction. Jones (2001) observed that weight comparisons to peers are primary correlates of body dissatisfaction; Krone, Stice, Batres, and Orjada (2005) also observed that social comparisons to peers induce body dissatisfaction in women.

Peers are also an important influence on body image attitudes. Keefe (1994) observed that conforming to peer norms often results in the adoption of peer behaviors. Krcmar, Giles, and Helme (2008) found that young women whose peers considered thinness to be an important quality were more likely to value thinness, as well as have lower self-esteem. They also observed that peers can reinforce the mediated thin-ideal, making it more likely that these women will embrace it as reality. Huon et al. (1999) observed that high peer competitiveness can induce dieting.. McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001) observed that women who have high body

dissatisfaction were more likely to have felt peer pressure about weight, particularly that of criticism for weight gain and praise for weight loss. Holstein, Smith, and Atlas (1998) noted that these sources often emphasize the importance of thinness, which is important in internalization of the thin ideal. Peer influence can have a significant impact on what is considered to be desirable or normal regarding to body weight and shape. Therefore, we can formulate our next set of hypotheses:

H<sub>6</sub>: Women who believe that their peers regard weight and body shape as important are more likely to internalize the thin-ideal.

H<sub>7</sub>: Women who believe that their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who have internalized the thin-ideal will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction.

H<sub>8</sub>: Women who have internalized the thin-ideal are more likely to engage in upward comparisons with peers.

H<sub>9</sub>: Women who engage in upward comparisons with peers will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction.

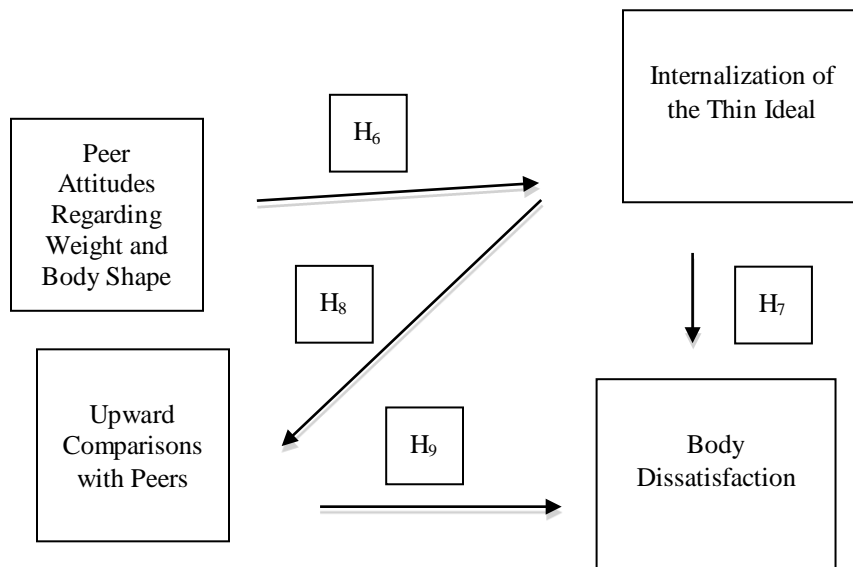


Figure 2: Representation of peer influence hypotheses.

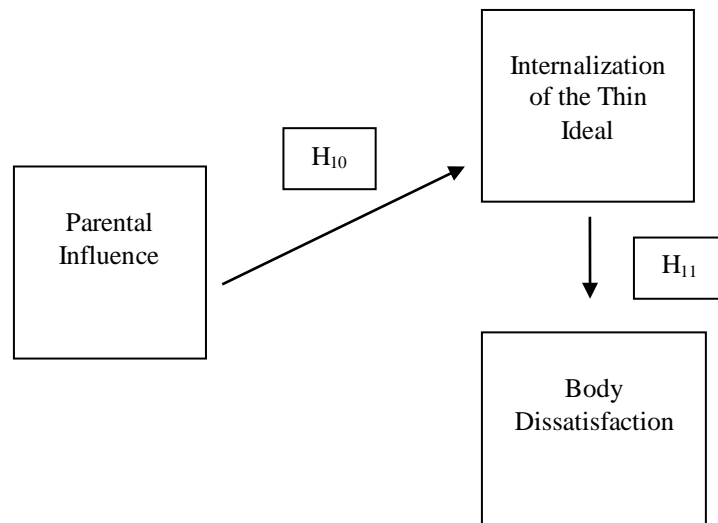
## **Other Social/Environmental Influences – Parents**

It is also important to consider that parental influence can shape body image attitudes, as parental influence is one of the most formative factors in a child's development (Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008). While peer and media influence are certainly important influences on body image attitudes, parental influence must be considered because parents may introduce and reinforce attitudes regarding body shape and weight.

Krcmar, Giles, and Helme (2008) noted that parents who make comments about their children's physical appearance can impose norms about body image and weight – norms that lead to a negative association with being overweight. These comments and negative associations become points of reference for offspring in regards to weight and body image. It has been suggested that parental influence is one of the primary and most significant influences on body dissatisfaction (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007). Rodgers, Paxton, and Chabrol (2009) conducted a study in which they observed a direct relationship between parental comments, body dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness. Levine, Smolak, Moodey, Shuman, and Hessen (1994) observed that parents who place an importance on dieting and other weight control behaviors can have a negative impact on body satisfaction. If parental attitudes towards body shape and weight corroborate those in media, they may be influential on children's body dissatisfaction, in that this corroboration encourages internalization of the thin-ideal. Here, we can formulate our next set of hypotheses:

H<sub>10</sub>: Women who believe their parents regard weight and body shape as important are more likely to internalize the thin-ideal.

H<sub>11</sub>: Women who believe their parents regard weight and body shape as important and who have internalized the thin-ideal will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction.



*Figure 3: Representation of parental influence hypotheses.*

### **Internal Influence – Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a significant internal factor to consider when examining body dissatisfaction. Mead (1934) stated that self-esteem is, in part, a reflection of the opinion others hold of you. When people are overweight, the stigmatization and negative opinions that others hold of them can have a negative effect on their self-esteem (Miller and Downey, 1999). Triplet (2007) observed that being overweight is seen as a stigma, and considered to be a condition that the individual can prevent. As noted, thinness is often given a positive connotation by media, while being overweight is associated with laziness. If women are overweight, they risk being perceived in a negative light because of societal attitudes regarding weight. This may subsequently lower their self-esteem.

Self-esteem is also related to BMI, or body mass index. BMI is the weight/height index used to categorize people into underweight, healthy weight, and overweight. BMI is associated with level of body dissatisfaction; women with a higher BMI are more likely to have higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Moreover, women who are overweight are more likely to possess lower levels of self-esteem (Hendriks & Burgoon, 2003). Miller and Downey stated: “Heavyweight people also may devalue themselves because they fall short of internalized social standards of acceptable weight” (p. 69). These ideals can come from many social outlets, including media, peers, and parents; women who fail to possess a thin body shape may feel as if they are a failure in terms of conforming to the supposed norm, which may lead to lower self-esteem. Low self-esteem can also have the effect of making someone perceive incorrectly that they are heavier than they actually are, which may lead to increased body dissatisfaction (Miller & Downey, 1999). Thus, low self-esteem can be a powerful influence on body dissatisfaction if these particular women are comparing themselves to the thin-ideal that is so prevalent in media. Therefore, we can posit our last hypothesis:

H<sub>12</sub>: Women who report lower levels of self-esteem will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction.

## **Summary**

Therefore, this study attempts to show that cultivation theory is important to consider when exploring media effects on body image because it may serve as reinforcement of body image attitudes and internalization of the thin-ideal, resulting in body dissatisfaction. Social comparison theory must also be considered when examining media effects on body image, as upward comparisons with media figures may result in body dissatisfaction. Additionally, peer

and parental attitudes regarding weight and body shape must be examined. Peer influence must also be considered under social comparison theory, in that upward comparisons with peer figures may cause body dissatisfaction. Finally, the internal factor of self-esteem must be considered, as it can also be an important influence on body dissatisfaction. Overall, this study will explore how media influences, external environmental influences, and internal influences such as self-esteem interact to influence female body dissatisfaction. Thus, we can ask our research questions:

RQ1: Do media have more of an effect than parental influence, peer influence, or self-esteem on internalization of the thin-ideal?

RQ2: Do media have more of an effect than parental influence, peer influence, or self-esteem on body dissatisfaction?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Procedure

Data were collected over a period of two weeks. Participants who completed the survey on paper were given approximately twenty-five minutes of class time for completion. Online classes were provided with the survey link and had two weeks during which they could complete the survey.

Four professors in the Communication program at the University of Central Florida were approached by the researcher in order to obtain permission to survey students. Students were offered extra credit in their class for completing the survey, and were also given the option to complete another assignment so that it was not mandatory to participate in the research for the extra credit points. After consent was given by professors and the Institutional Review Board, two of the classes were given a web address via their course website announcement system for completing the survey. Students were provided with a link to the survey via course email; the survey included a link at the end (to keep results anonymous) which students followed in order to fill out personal information and receive extra credit. Online results were filtered according to the time it took the student to complete the survey; any survey with a completion time less than seven minutes was discarded to ensure fidelity.

As noted, due to questions regarding fidelity, two of the classes filled out paper surveys in order to serve as a comparison group for the surveys completed online. The researcher visited both classrooms during normal class time and offered the survey as extra credit; students filled out the survey during class and turned both surveys and consent forms in to the researcher upon completion. Independent t-tests were used to compare online and paper samples reports for the



independent variables; no significant difference was observed between the two groups ( $M_{online} = 5.59, SD = 1.02; M_{paper} = 5.89, SD = .86$ ).

In the survey, participants indicated their consent to participate in the research project and completed measures of media consumption, sociocultural attitudes towards appearance, internalization of the thin ideal, parental influence regarding weight and body shape, peer influence regarding weight and body shape, likelihood of engaging in upward comparisons with media figures and peers, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction. The measures were originally crafted for female participants; therefore variations of the scales were adapted for male participants – particularly, the internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction scales. However, male data were not intended for use in this project.

## **Participants**

The survey was distributed to 417 undergraduate University of Central Florida students. Subjects were limited to college students; although there may be concerns that students are not representative of the general population and its media consumption habits, this study explore female internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction in relation to media consumption. Bearman, Presnell, and Martinez (2006) observed that roughly fifty percent of girls and young women experience body dissatisfaction (as cited by Smeesters, Mussweiler, and Mandell, 2009); Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, and Stein (1994) noted that body dissatisfaction is an element that is becoming more and more associated with eating disorders in young women. Additionally, Garner, Olmstead, and Polivy (1983) observed that eating disorders are “no longer rare disorders, but rather are prevalent with a marked preponderance in young women” (p. 15).

While the sample may limit the generalizability to the larger population, choosing a moderately homogeneous set of participants allows for a more controlled research sample and more generalizable results for a specific target group – one that is among the most important target groups for body dissatisfaction and subsequent eating disorders.

The sample was unevenly balanced by gender (31.7% male, 68.3% female). For the purpose of this study, only female results were used for analysis ( $n = 285$ ). The age of the female sample ranged from 18 to 37 ( $M = 20.00$ ,  $SD = 2.22$ ). The ethnic makeup of the sample included 65.3% Caucasian/White, 17.9% Latino/Hispanic, 17.9% Black/African American, 4.9% Asian/Asian American, 7% Multiracial, and .4% Other.

Table 1  
*Demographics of the Sample*  
 (N = 417)

	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	0	0.00
Female	285	100.00
<b>Year in School</b>		
Freshmen	104	36.5
Sophomore	71	24.9
Junior	70	24.6
Senior	40	14.0
<b>Racial Background</b>		
Caucasian/White	186	65.3
Latino/Hispanic	51	17.9
Multiracial	20	7.0
Asian/Asian-American	14	4.9
Black/African-American	13	4.6
Other	1	0.4
<b>BMI</b>		
Under 18.5	21	7.4
18.5-24.99	213	74.7
25.00-29.99	28	9.8
30.00 and above	16	5.6
	Mean	SD
Weight (lbs.)	133.87	27.72
Height (inches)	68.84	2.54

*Note:* Frequencies for each category may not add up to the numbers of total participants in the sample due to missing values.

## **Independent Variables**

**Television Exposure Measure.** Following techniques used in prior research (Nabi & Sullivan, 2001; Shrum, Wyer, & O’Guinn, 1998) a composite measure of weekly viewing was constructed to account for television exposure. Participants were asked to report how many hours they watched television during four time periods (6 a.m. to noon, noon to 6 p.m., 6 p.m. to midnight, and midnight to 6 a.m.) on the average weekday, the average Saturday, and the average Sunday. These data were combined, weighting the average weekday by a factor of five to compare to Saturdays and Sundays, in order to compile an average daily viewing measure ( $M = 25.05$ ,  $SD = 17.80$ ).

**Genre Specific Television Consumption Measure.** In order to construct a measure of television genres that could be considered thin-ideal media, a list of genres was acquired from the Most Popular Shows list on the website TV.com (CBS Interactive Inc., 2011). Potential thin-ideal media programming was identified using Heinberg, Thompson, and Stormer’s (1995) definition as programs containing “female actors who epitomize societal ideals of thinness and attractiveness” (as cited by Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004, p. 354). Programs representing a variety of genres were listed and participants were asked to rate how much they enjoyed watching each genre on a 7-point Likert scale where one was “hate it” and seven was “love it”.

Additionally, a measure of individual programs that could be considered most popular was constructed within each genre. Top ten programs from each genre were retrieved from the website TV.com (CBS Interactive, Inc., 2011), although data from the distractor genres (action, news, and comedy) were not used in this project. Again, programming that contained thin-ideal media was identified according to the definition cited by Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2004).

Participants were asked to report how often they watched each individual show on a 7-point Likert scale from one “never” to seven “as often as possible”.

Although the top ten lists were useful, principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to allow the data to determine the extent to which programs were related (refer to Tables 2 and 3). The analysis of the top ten drama television programs revealed three factors accounting for 60.9% of the explained variance. The first factor included *Gossip Girl*, *90210*, and *One Tree Hill* (accounting for 33.6% of the explained variance) and fit the definition for thin-ideal media. These programs were combined with the overall drama genre item to construct a 4-item, thin-ideal drama index ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ).

The analysis of the top ten reality television programs revealed two factors accounting for 49.2% of the explained variance. The first factor, dramatized reality, included *Bad Girls Club*, *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, *Jersey Shore*, and *Girls Next Door* (accounting for 36.5% of the explained variance) and fit the definition for thin-ideal media. These programs were combined with the overall reality genre item to construct a 6-item, thin-ideal dramatized reality index ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ).

Table 2  
*Factor Analysis for Drama Programs*

Show	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
<i>Drama Shows</i>					
Gossip Girl	2.20	2.14	<b>.86</b>	.03	.09
90210	1.66	1.63	<b>.78</b>	.06	.12
One Tree Hill	1.83	1.77	<b>.72</b>	.16	.09
Vampire Diaries	1.57	1.60	.58	.13	.38
Desperate Housewives	2.00	1.87	.56	.23	-.11
Supernatural	1.40	1.21	.02	.12	.87
Private Practice	1.37	1.17	.18	.83	.06
Grey's Anatomy	2.15	2.04	.35	.77	-.05
Off the Map	1.16	.83	-.02	.57	.12
Smallville	1.42	1.16	.17	.02	.84
Eigenvalue of unrotated factor			3.36	1.47	1.26
Variance explained (unrotated)			33.6%	14.7%	12.6%
Mean			2.81		
SD			1.61		
Internal Consistency Reliability			.79		

*Note:* Results were determined using Principle Components extraction and Varimax rotation.

Table 3  
*Factor Analysis for Reality Programs.*

Show	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
<i>Reality Shows</i>				
Real Housewives...Orange	1.85	1.71	<b>.77</b>	-.08
Keeping...Kardashians	2.75	2.27	<b>.76</b>	.26
Bad Girls Club	1.73	1.62	<b>.65</b>	.18
Girls Next Door	1.58	1.36	.60	.18
Jersey Shore	3.31	2.36	.54	.34
America's Next Top Model	2.54	1.95	.49	.39
The Bachelor	1.92	1.84	.27	.50
Dancing with the Stars	1.73	1.35	.13	.75
American Idol	2.07	1.63	.06	.80
Eigenvalue of unrotated factor			3.29	1.14
Variance explained (unrotated)			36.5%	12.66%
Mean			2.77	
SD			1.40	
Internal Consistency Reliability			.78	

*Note:* Results were determined using Principle Components extraction and varimax rotation.

**Upward Comparisons with Media Figures.** The Comparison to Models Survey (Strowman, 1996) was adapted and used to measure participants' likelihood to engage in upward comparisons with media figures. Participants responded to a series of eight statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one "never" to seven "always". The instructions for the scale asked: "When you see models and actors/actresses of your own sex on television, how often do you compare yourself to them?" and statements listed areas in which comparisons may occur, such as "in general" and "in terms of physical appearance" ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Peer Attitudes Regarding Weight.** An adaptation of the SATAQ-revised (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997) was used to measure peer influence on social attitudes regarding weight and body shape. The scale has a female version. The SATAQ-revised awareness measures were modified so that they read “my friends think” or “my friends believe” before the statements, giving an indication of how important participants perceived their peers to consider weight and body shape. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of twelve statements using a 7-point Likert scale from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”. Statements dealt with social attitudes regarding weight and body shape, such as “people with well-proportioned bodies look better in clothes” and “attractiveness is very important if you want to get ahead in our culture” ( $M = 5.35, SD = .96, \alpha = .90$ ).

**Upward Comparisons with Peers.** The Body Comparison Scale (Fisher & Thompson, 1998) was used to measure participants’ likelihood to engage in comparisons with their peers. Participants were asked to rate how often they compare themselves to members of their own sex. They were provided with a series of eighteen physical attributes, such as “waist”, “thighs”, and “overall body”. Participants were then asked to rate their level of agreement with seven statements regarding comparisons to same-sex peers using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”. Statements measured likelihood to engage in comparisons, as well how comparisons made participants feel (i.e., “When I am with others, I compare my weight with theirs” and “When I compare my weight with others, I feel that I am overweight”). The observed Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .93 ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.17$ ).

**Parental Attitudes Regarding Weight.** The parental influence section from the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disturbances with Adolescent



Girls (Van den Berg, Thompson, Obremski-Brandon, & Coover, 2002) was used to measure parental influence on participants' attitudes regarding weight and body shape. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of twenty statements using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one "strongly disagree" to seven "strongly agree". Statements measured participant perceptions of how important weight and shape are to their parents, as well as how their parents may have projected those attitudes onto the participants themselves. Items included "My mother is on a diet to lose weight" and "My father has made comments or teased me about my appearance" ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Self-Esteem.** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) was used to measure participants' level of self-esteem. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of ten statements using a 7-point Likert scale from one "strongly disagree" to seven "strongly agree". Statements measured participant levels of self-esteem, such as "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "I feel that I'm a person of worth" ( $M = 5.61$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

### **Dependent Variables**

**Media Attitudes Regarding Weight.** An adaptation of the SATAQ-revised (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997) was used to measure participant's social attitudes towards weight and body shape. The SATAQ-revised has a version for females. The scale is divided into two subscales – awareness and internalization. Only items from the awareness subscale were used in this measure, because a separate measure was used to measure internalization of the thin ideal. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of eleven statements using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one "strongly disagree" to seven "strongly agree". Statements dealt with social attitudes regarding weight and body shape, such as "people with well-

proportioned bodies look better in clothes” and “attractiveness is very important if you want to get ahead in our culture” ( $M = 5.53, SD = .88, \alpha = .86$ ).

**Internalization of the Thin Ideal.** The Ideal Body Internalization Scale Revised (Stice, Ziemba, Margolis, & Flick, 1996) was used to measure participants’ level of internalization of the thin ideal. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with a series of ten statements using a 7-point Likert scale from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”. Statements dealt with attitudes toward body shape and level of attractiveness, such as “Thin women are more attractive” and “Women with toned bodies are more attractive” ( $M = 4.46, SD = .93, \alpha = .83$ ).

**Body Dissatisfaction.** The Body Dissatisfaction Subscale from the Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983) was used to measure female participants’ level of body dissatisfaction. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of nine statements using a 7-point Likert scale from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”. Statements on the Body Dissatisfaction Subscale from the Eating Disorder Inventory dealt with level of satisfaction with various physical attributes, such as “I think that my waist is too big” and “I think my buttocks are too large” ( $M = 3.81, SD = 1.41, \alpha = .90$ ).

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter provides analysis of the survey data. Independent samples t-tests and univariate analysis of variance were used for hypothesis testing. Additionally, the effects of media, social environment, and self-esteem on internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction were explored using hierarchical regression.

### Hypotheses

**Media Hypotheses.** The first five hypotheses involved media exposure and cultivation measures, as well as comparisons with media figures, and their subsequent effects on attitudes regarding weight and body shape, internalization of the thin ideal, and body dissatisfaction (refer to Tables 4 and 5).

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that heavy consumers of thin-ideal media are more likely to associate thinness with social desirability and success. A mean split was performed on drama and reality TV consumption scores to differentiate heavy and light viewers of these genres and an independent t-test was performed to compare the means of high and low viewers of drama and reality TV shows and SATAQ-revised scores. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). Heavy viewers of reality TV were more likely to perceive weight and shape as being important and socially desirable than light viewers,  $t(264) = -2.25, p < .05$ . There was no observed difference between heavy and light viewers of drama TV,  $t(272) = -1.18, p > .05$ . Therefore, H1 was partially supported.

The second hypothesis (H2) proposed that heavy consumers of thin-ideal media are more likely to internalize the thin ideal. An independent t-test was performed to compare the mean scores of high and low viewers of drama and reality TV shows on the Ideal Body Internalization

Scale Revised measure. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). Heavy viewers of drama TV were more likely to internalize the thin-ideal than light viewers,  $t(27) = -2.59, p = .01$ . There was no observed difference between heavy and light viewers of reality TV,  $t(26) = -.57, p > .05$ . Therefore, H2 was partially supported.

The third hypothesis (H3) proposed that heavy consumers of thin-ideal media who have internalized the thin-ideal will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could not be assumed ( $p < .05$ ). A two-way analysis of variance yielded no significant main effect for drama television consumption,  $F(1, 269) = 1.03, p > .05$ . The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was significant,  $F(1, 269) = 15.00, p < .05$ , such that body dissatisfaction was significantly greater for women with high internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 4.12, SD = .12$ ) than those with low internalization of the thin ideal ( $M = 3.47, SD = .12$ ). The interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 1269) = .28, p > .05$ , indicating that the body dissatisfaction effect was no greater for heavy consumers who had internalized the thin-ideal than for heavy consumers who had not internalized the thin ideal.

A two-way analysis of variance yielded no significant main effect for reality television consumption,  $F(1, 262) = 1.41, p > .05$ . Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could not be assumed ( $p < .05$ ). The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was significant,  $F(1, 262) = 14.70, p < .05$ , such that body dissatisfaction was significantly greater for women with high internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 4.12, SD = .12$ ) than for those with low internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 3.48, SD = .12$ ). The interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 262) = 1.35, p > .05$ , indicating that the body dissatisfaction effect was no greater for heavy consumers

who had internalized the thin-ideal than heavy consumers who had not internalized the thin ideal. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) proposed that heavy consumers who have internalized the thin-ideal are more likely to engage in upward comparisons with thin-ideal media figures. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). A two-way analysis of variance yielded a main effect for drama television consumption,  $F(1, 271) = 12.00, p < .05$ , such that likelihood to engage in upward comparisons with media figures was significantly higher for heavy consumers ( $M = 15.3, SD = 4.44$ ) than for light consumers ( $M = 12.6, SD = 6.18$ ). The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was also significant,  $F(1, 271) = 30.75, p < .05$ , such that likelihood to engage in upward comparisons with media figures was significantly higher for women with high internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 3.32, SD = .10$ ) than for those with low internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 2.81, SD = .10$ ). However, the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 271) = .58, p > .05$ , indicating that the upward comparison effect was no greater for those heavy consumers who had internalized the thin-ideal than those heavy consumers who had not internalized the thin-ideal.

A two-way analysis of variance yielded a main effect for reality television consumption,  $F(1,264) = 7.01, p < .05$ , such that likelihood to engage in upward comparisons with media figures was significantly higher for heavy consumers ( $M = 3.40, SD = .10$ ) than for light consumers ( $M = 3.01, SD = .10$ ). Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was also significant,  $F(1, 264) = 34.95, p < .05$ , such that likelihood to engage in upward comparisons with media figures was significantly higher for women with high internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 3.64, SD =$

.10) than for those with low internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 2.77, SD = .11$ ). However, the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 264) = .84, p > .05$ , indicating that the upward comparison effect was no greater for those heavy consumers who had internalized the thin-ideal than those heavy consumers who had not internalized the thin-ideal. Therefore, H4 was not supported.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) proposed that women who engage in upward comparisons with thin-ideal media figures will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction. A mean split was performed on upward comparison scores to differentiate high and low media comparisons and an independent t-test was performed to compare the means of high and low media comparisons and body dissatisfaction. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). Women who were more likely to engage in upward comparisons with media figures reported higher body dissatisfaction than women less likely to engage in upward comparisons with media figures,  $t(27) = -5.05, p < .001$ . Therefore, H5 was supported.

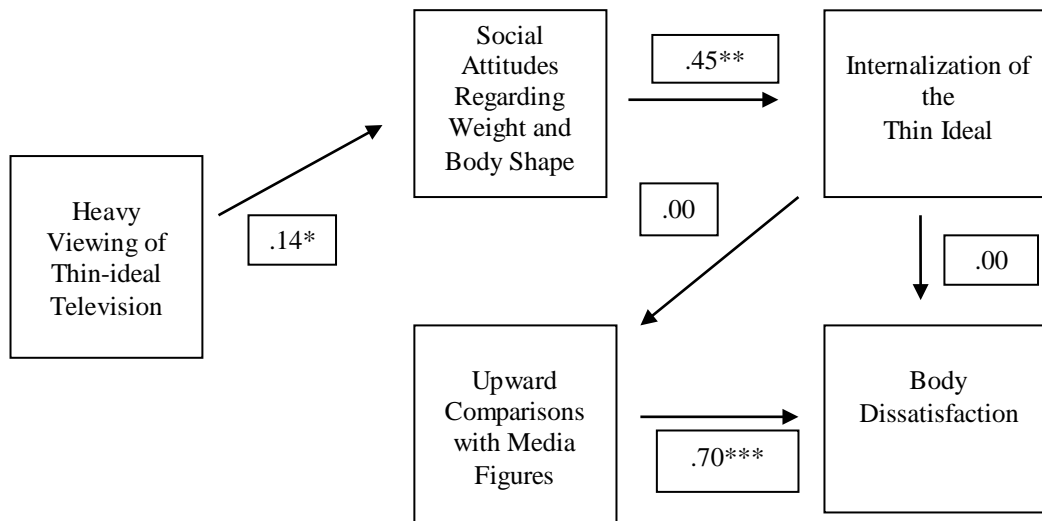


Figure 4: Representation of media influence hypotheses results

Note: Effects size ( $d$ ) is reported in boxes.  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$

**Social Influence Hypotheses.** The following six hypotheses involved peer and parental influence as well as peer comparisons, and their subsequent effects on internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction (refer to Tables 4 and 6).

The sixth hypothesis (H6) proposed that women who believe their peers regard body weight and shape as important (measured with the peer adaptation of the SATAQ-revised) are more likely to internalize the thin ideal. A mean split was performed on peer SATAQ-revised scores and an independent t-test was performed to compare the means of high and low scores and internalization of the thin ideal. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). Women who believed their peers regard body weight and shape as important were more likely to internalize the thin-ideal than women who did not believe their peers regard body weight and shape as important,  $t(26) = -7.03, p < .001$ . Therefore, H6 was supported.

The seventh hypothesis (H7) proposed that women who believe their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who have internalized the thin-ideal will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could not be assumed ( $p < .05$ ). A two-way analysis of variance yielded no significant main effect for peer attitudes regarding weight,  $F(1, 263) = 1.30, p > .05$ . The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was significant,  $F(1, 263) = 10.28, p < .05$ , such that body dissatisfaction was significantly higher for women with high internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 3.97, SD = .12$ ) than for those with low internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 3.41, SD = .13$ ). The interaction effect was significant,  $F(1, 263) = 16.03, p < .05$ , indicating that the body dissatisfaction effect was greater for women who believed their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who had

internalized the thin-ideal than for women who believed their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who had not internalized the thin ideal. Therefore, H7 was supported.

The eighth hypothesis (H8) proposed that women who believe their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who have internalized the thin-ideal are more likely to engage in comparison with peers. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). A two-way analysis of variance yielded no significant main effect for peer attitudes regarding weight,  $F(1,260) = 2.94, p > .05$ . The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was significant,  $F(1, 260) = 14.69, p < .05$ , such that comparisons with peers were significantly higher for women with high internalization of the thin ideal ( $M = 4.21, SD = .11$ ) than for those with low internalization of the thin-ideal ( $M = 3.65, SD = .10$ ). However, the interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 260) = .95, p > .05$ , indicating that the comparison effect was no greater for women who believed their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who had internalized the thin-ideal than for women who believed their peers regard weight and body shape as important and who had not internalized the thin ideal. Therefore, H8 was not supported.

The ninth hypothesis (H9) proposed that women who engage in comparisons with peers will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction. A mean split was performed on peer comparison scores and an independent t-test was performed to compare the means of high and low comparisons and body dissatisfaction. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). Women who were more likely to engage in comparisons with peers reported higher body dissatisfaction than women less likely to engage in comparisons with peers,  $t(26) = -8.29, p < .001$ . Therefore, H9 was supported.



The tenth hypothesis (H10) proposed that women who felt their parents regard weight and body shape as important (measured with the parental influence section from the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disturbances with Adolescent Girls) are more likely to internalize the thin ideal. A mean split was performed on parental attitude scores and an independent t-test was performed to compare the means of high and low scores and internalization of the thin ideal. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could not be assumed ( $p < .05$ ). Women who felt their parents regard weight and body shape as important were more likely to internalize the thin-ideal than women who did not feel their parents regard weight and body shape as important,  $t(254.59) = -2.96, p < .01$ . Therefore, H10 was supported.

The eleventh hypothesis (H11) proposed that women who felt their parents regard weight and body shape as important and who have internalized the thin-ideal will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could not be assumed ( $p < .05$ ). A two-way analysis of variance yielded a main effect for parental attitudes regarding weight,  $F(1,259) = 15.02, p < .05$ , such that body dissatisfaction was significantly higher for women who felt their parents regard weight and body shape as important ( $M = 4.12, SD = .12$ ) than for women who did not feel their parents regard weight and body shape as important ( $M = 3.48, SD = .12$ ). The main effect of internalization of the thin-ideal was significant,  $F(1, 259) = 10.47, p < .05$ , such that body dissatisfaction was significantly higher for women with high internalization of the thin ideal ( $M = 4.07, SD = .12$ ) than for those with low internalization of the thin ideal ( $M = 3.54, SD = .12$ ). The interaction effect was also significant,  $F(1, 259) = .90, p < .05$ , indicating that the body dissatisfaction effect was greater for women who felt their parents regard weight and body shape as important and who had internalized the thin-ideal than for

women did not feel their parents regard weight and body shape as important and who had not internalized the thin ideal. Therefore, H11 was supported.

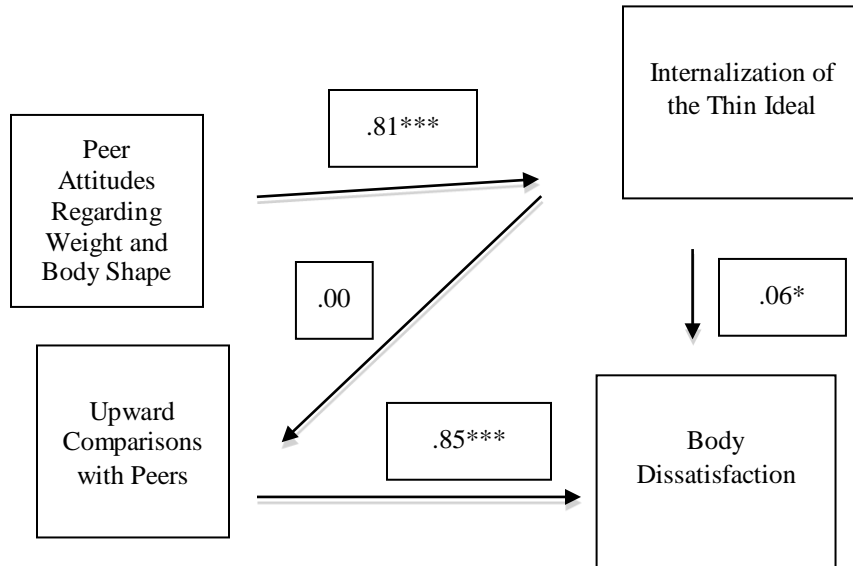
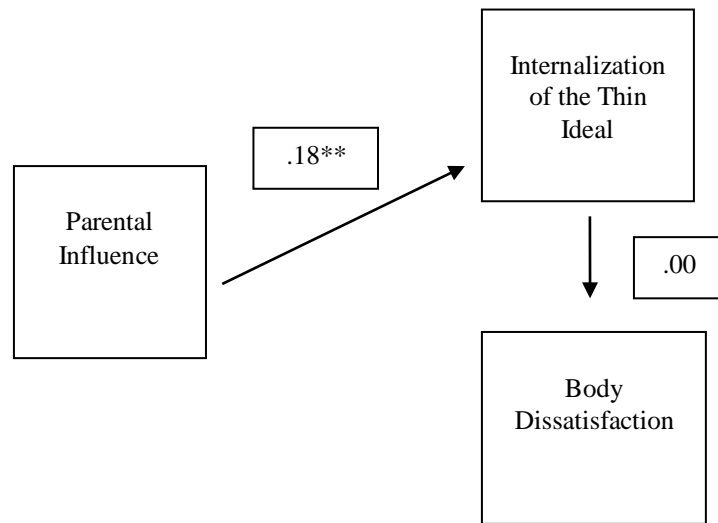


Figure 5: Representation of peer influence hypotheses results  
Note: Effects size ( $d$ ) is reported in boxes.  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$



*Figure 6:* Representation of parental influence hypotheses results  
*Note:* Effects size ( $d$ ) is reported in boxes.  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$

**Self-Esteem Hypothesis.** The final hypothesis involved self-esteem and its subsequent effect on body dissatisfaction (refer to Table 4). The twelfth hypothesis (H12) proposed that women who have lower levels of self-esteem will report higher levels of body dissatisfaction. A mean split was performed on self-esteem scores and an independent t-test was performed to compare the means of high and low scores and body dissatisfaction. Levene's test indicated that equality of variances could be assumed ( $p > .05$ ). Women with low self-esteem reported higher body dissatisfaction than women with high self-esteem,  $t(27) = 9.27, p < .001$ . Therefore, H12 was supported.

Table 4  
*Independent t-test Results for Hypotheses*  
 (N = 285)

	Low Score	High Score	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>d</i>	Dependent Variable
H1 Thin-Ideal Media Use – Reality	5.39 (.88)	5.63 (.87)	-2.25*	264	.14	Media attitudes regarding weight
H2 Thin-Ideal Media Use – Drama	4.31 (.98)	4.60 (.87)	-2.59**	27	.45	Internalization of the thin ideal
H5 Comparisons with Media Figures	3.43 (1.37)	4.25 (1.33)	-5.05***	27	.70	Body Dissatisfaction
H6 Peer Attitudes toward Thinness	4.08 (.78)	4.81 (.91)	-7.03***	26	.81	Internalization of the thin ideal
H9 Peer Comparisons	3.06 (1.25)	4.34 (1.26)	-8.29***	26	.85	Body Dissatisfaction
H10 Parental Attitudes toward Thinness	4.30 (1.01)	4.63 (.82)	-2.96**	254.59	.18	Internalization of the thin ideal
H12 Self-Esteem	4.58 (1.26)	3.19 (1.21)	9.27***	27	.87	Body Dissatisfaction

*Note:* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Table 5  
*Univariate Analysis of Variance Results for Media Hypotheses*  
(N = 285)

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	Dependent Variables
<b>H3 (Drama)</b>				
(A) Drama TV	1	1.03	.00	Body Dissatisfaction
(B) Intern. of the Thin Ideal	1	15.00	.05***	
A x B (interaction)	1	.28	.00	
Error (within groups)	269			
<b>H3 (Reality)</b>				
(A) Reality TV	1	1.41	.01	Body Dissatisfaction
(B) Intern. of the Thin Ideal	1	14.70	.05***	
A x B (interaction)	1	1.35	.01	
Error (within groups)	262			
<b>H4 (Drama)</b>				
(A) Drama TV	1	12.00	.04***	Upward Comparisons
(B) Intern. of the Thin Ideal	1	30.75	.10***	
A x B (interaction)	1	.58	.00	
Error (within groups)	271			
<b>H4 (Reality)</b>				
(A) Reality TV	1	7.01	.03***	Upward Comparisons
(B) Intern. of the Thin-ideal	1	35.00	.12***	
A x B (interaction)	1	.84	.00	
Error (within groups)	264			

*Note:* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 6  
*Univariate Analysis of Variance Results for Social/Environmental Hypotheses*  
(N = 285)

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	Dependent Variable
<b>H7</b>				
(A) Intern. of the Thin Ideal	1	10.28	.04**	Body Dissatisfaction
(B) Peer Attitudes	1	1.30	.01	
A x B (interaction)	1	16.03	.057***	
Error (within groups)	263			
<b>H8</b>				
(A) Peer Attitudes	1	2.94	.01	Upward Comparisons
(B) Intern. of the Thin Ideal	1	14.69	.05***	
A x B (interaction)	1	.95	.00	
Error (within groups)	260			
<b>H11</b>				
(A) Parental Attitudes	1	15.02	.06***	Body Dissatisfaction
(B) Intern. of the Thin Ideal	1	10.47	.04**	
A x B (interaction)	1	.90	.00	
Error (within groups)	259			

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Regression

The first research question (RQ1) asked whether media have more of an effect on the internalization of the thin-ideal than parental influence, peer influence, or self-esteem. A

hierarchical regression was used to examine the relationship of the variables with internalization of the thin-ideal. Table 7 displays the correlations, means, and standard deviations for variables.

The first block was composed of media variables – television viewing measures, comparisons with media figures, and media attitudes regarding weight and body shape,  $R^2 = .329$ ,  $F(5, 228) = 23.41$ ,  $p < .001$  (refer to Table 8). It was observed that media attitudes regarding weight significantly predicted internalization of the thin-ideal ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as did upward comparisons with thin-ideal media figures ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The second block was composed of social/environmental variables – parental and peer attitudes regarding weight and body shape and comparisons with peers,  $R^2 = .343$ ,  $F(8, 228) = 15.88$ ,  $p < .001$ . Addition of the social/environmental variables did not result in a significant incremental increase of  $R^2$ . The third block was composed of the internal variable, self-esteem,  $R^2 = .367$ ,  $F(9, 228) = 15.67$ ,  $p < .001$ . It was observed that self-esteem significantly predicted internalization of the thin-ideal ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 7  
*Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Hierarchical Regression Predicting Influence on the Internalization of the Thin-Ideal*  
 (N = 229)

	Internal. of Thin Ideal	Media Attitudes	Media Comparisons	Drama TV	Reality TV	TV Exposure	Parental Attitudes	Peer Comparisons	Peer Attitudes	Self-esteem
1	-	.52***	.38***	.08	.09	-.12*	.30***	.31***	.48***	-.26***
2	-	-	.26***	-.02*	.15	-.03	.27***	.26***	.76***	-.05
3	-	-	-	.14*	.16**	-.11*	.32***	.46***	.29***	-.28***
4	-	-	-	-	.36***	.16**	-.03	.07	.06	.14*
5	-	-	-	-	-	.15*	.02	-.00	.14*	.16**
6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.13*	-.05	-.03	.05
7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.42***	.20**	-.28***
8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.16**	-.39***
9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.02
10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>M</i>	4.43	5.53	3.20	2.79	2.76	25.02	3.05	3.97	5.40	5.59
<i>SD</i>	.93	.86	1.25	1.62	1.43	17.95	1.14	1.15	.92	1.02

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



Table 8  
*Hierarchical Regression Predicting Influences on Internalization of the Thin-Ideal*  
(N = 229)

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Step 1			
Media Attitudes	.35	.09	.32***
Media Comparisons	.11	.05	.14*
Drama TV	.06	.03	.10
Reality TV	.00	.04	.00
TV Exposure	-.01	.00	-.09
Step 2			
Parental Attitudes	.05	.05	.06
Peer Comparisons	.02	.05	.02
Peer Attitudes	.17	.09	.17
Step 3			
Self-Esteem	-.17	.06	-.18**

Note:  $R^2 = .329$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The second research question (RQ2) asked whether media have more of an effect on body dissatisfaction than parental influence, peer influence, or self-esteem. A hierarchical regression was performed in order to examine the relationship of the variables with body dissatisfaction. Table 9 displays the correlations, means, and standard deviations for variables.

The first block was composed of the internal variable, self-esteem,  $R^2 = .278$ ,  $F(1, 226) = 86.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . It was observed that self-esteem significantly predicted body dissatisfaction ( $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The second block was composed of social/environmental variables – parental and peer attitudes regarding weight and body shape and comparisons with peers,  $R^2 = .434$ ,  $F(3, 226)$

= 42.57,  $p < .001$ . It was observed that comparisons with peers significantly predicted body dissatisfaction ( $\beta = .44, p < .001$ ). The third block was composed media variables – television viewing measures, comparisons with media figures, media attitudes regarding weight and body shape, and internalization of the thin-ideal,  $R^2 = .442, F(5, 226) = 19.10, p < .001$ . Addition of the media variables did not result in a significant incremental increase of  $R^2$  (refer to Table 10).

Table 9  
*Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Hierarchical Regression Predicting Influence on Body Dissatisfaction*  
 (N = 227)

	Body Dissatisfaction	Self- Esteem	Parental Attitudes	Peer Comparisons	Peer Attitudes	TV Drama	TV Reality	Media Attitudes	Media Comparisons	Internalization
1	-	-.53***	.32***	.57***	.08	-.06	-.05	.10	.27***	.19**
2	-	-	-.28***	-.39***	-.02	.14*	.17**	-.05	-.27***	-.26***
3	-	-	-	.42***	.20**	-.03	.02	.27***	.32***	.30***
4	-	-	-	-	.15*	.07	-.004	.26***	.46***	.31***
5	-	-	-	-	-	.06	.14	.76***	.28***	.48***
6	-	-	-	-	-	-	.36***	-.02	.14*	.08
7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14*	.16*	.08
8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.25***	.52***
9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.38***
10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>M</i>	3.74	5.59	3.05	3.97	5.40	2.79	2.77	5.53	3.20	4.43
<i>SD</i>	1.37	1.03	1.14	1.15	.92	1.63	1.44	.87	1.24	.93

*Note:* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 10  
*Hierarchical Regression Predicting Influences on Body Dissatisfaction*  
 (N = 227)

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Step 1			
Self-Esteem	-.49	.08	-.36***
Step 2			
Parental Attitudes	.07	.07	.06
Peer Comparisons	.53	.08	.44***
Peer Attitudes	.12	.12	.08
Step 3			
TV Drama	-.05	.05	-.05
TV Reality	.04	.05	.04
Media Attitudes	-.12	.13	-.08
Media Comparisons	-.05	.07	-.04
Internalization	-.06	.10	-.04

Note:  $R^2 = .278$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .15$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 11  
*Overview of Study Results*

Hypothesis or Research Question	Result
<b>Media Variables</b>	
H1: Thin-ideal media consumption ⇒ Media attitudes regarding weight	Partially supported
H2: Thin-ideal media consumption ⇒ Internalization of the thin-ideal	Partially supported
H3: Thin-ideal media consumption + Internalization of the thin-ideal ⇒ Body dissatisfaction	Not supported
H4: Thin-ideal media consumption + Internalization of the thin-ideal ⇒ Upward comparisons with media figures	Not supported
H5: Upward comparisons with media figures ⇒ Body dissatisfaction	Supported
<b>Social/Environmental Variables</b>	
H6: Peer attitudes ⇒ Internalization of the thin-ideal	Supported
H7: Peer attitudes + Internalization of the thin-ideal ⇒ Body dissatisfaction	Supported
H8: Peer attitudes + Internalization of the thin-ideal ⇒ Upward comparisons with peers	Not supported
H9: Upward comparisons ⇒ Body Dissatisfaction	Supported
H10: Parental attitudes ⇒ Internalization of the thin-ideal	Supported
H11: Parental attitudes + internalization of the thin-ideal ⇒ Body dissatisfaction	Supported
<b>Internal Variable</b>	
H12: Self-esteem ⇒ Body dissatisfaction	Supported
<b>Research Questions</b>	
RQ1: All variables ⇒ Internalization of the thin-ideal	Media attitudes, Comparisons with media figures, Self-esteem
RQ2: All variables ⇒ Body dissatisfaction	Peer comparisons, Self-esteem

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Body dissatisfaction in women is a long-studied issue of major importance, because it may lead to harmful disordered-eating behaviors such as anorexia or bulimia nervosa (Garner et al., 1983). Body dissatisfaction has been observed as being connected to media consumption; media are often a source women turn to for information about their physical appearance, and thin models and actresses are ostensibly the standard in current media. Cultivation is one theory that has been used to examine the association between media consumption and body dissatisfaction. However, current cultivation research contains some areas that are unclear; particularly, the effect that media have on body dissatisfaction through attitudes regarding weight and body shape, as well as the belief that thinness is necessary to achieve success and social desirability. Additionally, cultivation research alone does not fully explain how body dissatisfaction may occur in women. Therefore, social/environmental and internal influences such as peers, parents, and self-esteem are also important to consider. This study was conducted in order to examine the effects of media, social/environmental influences, and self-esteem on female body dissatisfaction, as well as to clarify several unclear aspects of cultivation research in the field of body dissatisfaction.

This discussion will examine the results from media hypotheses in order to explore the relationships between media exposure and both body dissatisfaction and internalization of the thin-ideal. Particularly, it will examine the link between cultivation effects and body dissatisfaction by examining relationships between heavy viewers of thin-ideal media and specific social attitudes regarding weight and body shape, as well as internalization of the thin-ideal. It will also explore the relationship between internalization of the thin-ideal and body

dissatisfaction by examining differences between heavy and light viewers of thin-ideal media and their upward comparisons with media figures.

The discussion will further consider results from social/environmental hypotheses to observe how peer and parental influence affect body dissatisfaction and internalization of the thin ideal. Specifically, body dissatisfaction will be explored in the social/environmental context by examining relationships between parental and peer influence and social attitudes regarding weight and body shape, as well as internalization of the thin-ideal. The discussion also examines body dissatisfaction through its relationship with upward comparisons with peers. Last, results from the self-esteem hypothesis will be examined to determine effects on body dissatisfaction.

All of these observations will build upon one another to work toward the overall purpose, which is to examine how the combination of these influences – media, social/environmental, and internal – interact to influence body dissatisfaction. Hierarchical regression results will be discussed in order to observe which variables had the strongest associations with both body dissatisfaction and internalization of the thin-ideal. Finally, the significance of the study and its addition to the existing research will be discussed.

### **Summary and Discussion of Findings**

**Media Influences.** Media influence was the first element examined. It was observed that thin-ideal media consumption had a significant effect on attitudes regarding weight; heavy consumers of thin-ideal media were more likely to associate thinness with success and social desirability. Additionally, heavy consumers of thin-ideal media were more likely to internalize the thin ideal.

This corroborates Stice (2001), who observed that media pressure to be thin increased internalization of the thin ideal. However, Stice (2001) did not measure participants' actual media consumption; rather, he measured perceived media pressure to be thin using the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale. This scale asked participants to rate the pressure they felt to be thin from parents, peers, significant others, and media. In contrast, the current study collected data reporting both overall and thin-ideal media consumption, and additionally included separate measures for media, peer and parental attitudes regarding weight and the importance of thinness. Greater thin-ideal media consumption was related to stronger media attitudes regarding weight, in that heavy consumers believe thinness to be necessary to achieve social desirability and success. Furthermore, heavy consumers of thin-ideal media were more likely to internalize the thin ideal. This methodology offers a comprehensive approach in individually examining different sources of pressure to be thin and their subsequent effects on internalization of the thin ideal.

Upward comparisons with media figures were observed to be associated with body dissatisfaction, providing additional support for the previous observations of Richins (1991) and Botta (1999). Richins (1991), however, used experimental focus groups to collect data regarding social comparisons and subsequent dissatisfaction with physical appearance, priming participants with magazine ads that either contained thin models or no models at all, and then measuring participants' satisfaction with their own appearance. The current study collected data regarding thin-ideal television consumption via survey questions, offering a more cumulative view of the issue, as well as a different angle regarding type of media consumed.



The methodology in the current project is more similar to that of Botta (1999); it collected data regarding consumption of overall television as well as thin-ideal media. However, although Botta (1999) collected data regarding overall television viewing, his thin-ideal media was composed of drama programs only, while the current study included drama and reality programs in the thin-ideal program measure. Both studies observed that when entered into regression, thin-ideal media consumption was not a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction, as comparisons of body shape and weight were much stronger predictors. By adding the reality television genre to media data collection, this study has broadened the possibility of examining both attitudes regarding weight and internalization of the thin-ideal, as well as comparisons with media figures.

When entered into a regression analysis, media influence on attitudes regarding weight and upward comparisons with media figures were the most significant predictors of internalization of the thin-ideal, indicating that they have a stronger relationship with internalization than social/environmental variables, such as peers and parents. However, when entered into regression analysis measuring effects on body dissatisfaction, media variables predicted little effect. This contradicts Tiggemann's (2003) observation that thin-ideal television consumption has a direct effect on body dissatisfaction. One explanation for the difference in findings is the use of different measurements of media consumption and body dissatisfaction. The current study had participants rank how much they enjoyed different genres of programs, and then instructed them to rank how often they watched individual programs within each genre. It also measured overall viewing time. Tiggemann (2003) had participants indicate, from a *TV Guide* magazine, which programs they had watched the week prior, rather than the frequency

with which they watched the programs on a regular basis. The researcher then calculated overall TV viewing time, as well as time spent watching thin-ideal media consisting of soap operas and music videos. In order to measure body dissatisfaction, Tiggemann (2003) used a Figure Rating Scale to measure participants' perceptions of how their body shape differed from the ideal body they would like to have. In contrast, the current study utilized the Body Dissatisfaction Subscale from the Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983) to measure body dissatisfaction.

**Social/Environmental Variables.** Social/environmental influence was the next element examined. It was observed that peer attitudes regarding weight were a significant predictor of internalization of the thin-ideal, supporting Thompson and Stice's (2001) statement that peer influence can reinforce internalization of the thin-ideal. Peer attitudes were also a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction, supporting previous research (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). However, McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001) used a different method to measure body dissatisfaction, choosing to utilize the Body Image Satisfaction subscale of the Body Image and Body Change Inventory, a measurement previously created by the researchers. The current study used the Body Dissatisfaction subscale (Garner, et al., 1983), a commonly used measure.

Additionally, upward peer comparison was observed to be a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction, supporting previous observations by Jones (2001) and Krone, Stice, Batres, and Orjada (2005). However, Jones (2001) observed middle and high school students while the current study focused on an undergraduate population. Krone, Stice, Batres, and Orjada (2005) measured upward comparisons via an actual experiment, using the prime of a thin-ideal confederate to induce social comparisons in participants, and then measuring body dissatisfaction

with an adaptation of the Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with Body Parts Scale. The experiment was conducted with a small sample (N = 119), offering a narrower view of the issue of body dissatisfaction. In contrast, the current study utilized a survey for data collection in a larger sample (N = 285). This offers a cumulative view of the issue, as it includes measures of attitudes regarding weight and shape, media influence, peer and parental influence, internalization of the thin-ideal, and self-esteem, as well as explores the interaction of peer and media influences and their effect on body dissatisfaction.

Parental attitudes were observed to be a significant predictor of internalization of the thin-ideal. They were also observed to be a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction, supporting earlier observations of Levine, et al. (1994). Findings also corroborated previous observations from McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001), who collected data from a younger, mixed-gender age group. The study additionally used a different method to measure body dissatisfaction. In contrast, the current study collected data from female undergraduate students, offering a different demographic view of the issues of internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction.

When entered into regression analysis, social variables predicted no effect on internalization of the thin ideal, indicating that they are less powerful predictors than media variables or self-esteem. However, when introduced into regression analyses measuring effects on body dissatisfaction, peer comparisons predicted a significant effect, indicating that they have a stronger relationship with body dissatisfaction.

**Self-Esteem Variable.** Self-esteem was the final element examined. In testing the hypothesis, it was observed that self-esteem was a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction.

When introduced into regression analysis, self-esteem predicted effects on both internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction, indicating that it has a strong relationship with both variables. This finding contradicts that of Bailey and Ricciardelli (2010), who observed that upward comparisons with peers are the strongest predictor of body dissatisfaction. The current study observed similar results regarding upward peer comparisons, but observed that self-esteem was a also significant predictor of body dissatisfaction. The difference in findings may be due to the use of different measures. Bailey and Ricciardelli (2001) used a different measure for self-esteem, utilizing the Contingent Self-Esteem scale. This scale measures not only personal standards, but the need to gain the approval of others. In contrast, the current study used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979), which focuses primarily on personal standards and may have led to slightly different results.

### **Significance of Findings**

**Thin-ideal Media and Overall Media.** One issue that this study aimed to examine was the difference in effects of overall television consumption versus genre-specific television consumption – particularly, thin-ideal media – and whether type of viewing had an effect on internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction. Overall television viewing was observed to have no significant effect on either internalization of the thin-ideal or body dissatisfaction, contradicting Eisend and Moller’s (1997) earlier observation that overall television consumption affects levels of body dissatisfaction. This may be because overall television consumption does not expose viewers to the thin-ideal as consistently and as frequently as thin-ideal media. Overall television exposure may contain fewer and less-prominent instances of thin-ideal than the thin-ideal media genres; i.e., news or comedy

programs may exhibit fewer noticeably thin female protagonists than programs in the drama or reality genres. Additionally, previous research has observed that women may be intentionally seeking out thin-ideal media to reinforce already existing attitudes about thinness and social desirability (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996).

Thin-ideal television consumption was observed to have a significant effect on internalization of the thin-ideal. This is unsurprising as thin-ideal media are defined as media that portray thin female main characters; thin-ideal media also promote the idea that thinness is an advantageous attribute and place a positive connotation on a thin body shape, ascribing the attribute to the most “beautiful, desirable, and successful protagonists” (Harrison, 2000, p. 121). This corroborates Bandura’s (2001) observation that it is not necessarily the amount of media consumed, but rather the type that causes effects. Regression analysis showed that overall, thin-ideal television consumption did not have a significant effect on internalization of the thin-ideal when combined with other media variables, such as comparisons with media figures and media effects on attitudes regarding shape and weight. This may be because drama television consumption was significantly correlated with media attitudes and media comparisons, and reality television consumption was significantly correlated with media comparisons. Additionally, thin-ideal media consumption had little effect on body dissatisfaction.

**Internalization of the Thin-ideal and Body Dissatisfaction.** Another issue this study aimed to examine was the link between internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction. Previous research has observed a link between the two (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Stice, 2001; Thompson & Stice, 2001), maintaining that internalization of the thin-ideal may be a predictor of body dissatisfaction. However, no significant link was observed in this

study. While media influence on attitudes regarding weight, comparisons with media figures, and self-esteem were observed to be associated with internalization of the thin-ideal, self-esteem and the social/environmental element of peer comparison were observed to have the strongest connection to body dissatisfaction. Media variables were observed to have little significant influence on body dissatisfaction. Additionally, when entered into regression analysis predicting body dissatisfaction, internalization had no significant effect.

However, internalization of the thin-ideal may have an effect on body dissatisfaction, albeit not directly. This is where the elements of mainstreaming, resonance, and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) may play an important part. Cultivation and media variables were seen to have an effect on internalization of the thin-ideal. According to Shrum and Bischak (2001), mainstreaming broadens the reach of existing stereotypes on television, such as stereotypes of thin female protagonists. It also corroborates existing attitudes, resulting in heavy viewers sharing similar attitudes regarding perceptions of reality – in other words, the idea that thinness is a necessary attribute in order to achieve success and social desirability. This may result in peers who are also heavy viewers of thin-ideal media sharing similar attitudes regarding weight and body shape, especially if their media consumption reinforces existing attitudes regarding thinness. This is also where resonance may occur. Shrum and Bischak (2001) stated that resonance is when viewers' life experiences affect their perceptions of television. If the viewers' life experiences are similar to the media content that they are consuming, the media messages are more likely to have an effect on them. The authors suggest that when viewers mentally link instances of direct (or personal) experience with an instance that reflects television observations,

they have more difficulty attributing the original source of the information. This further reinforces existing attitudes.

Mainstreaming and resonance may then tie internalization of the thin-ideal in with social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory states that people learn through observation, and modify their behavior accordingly in order to obtain desired outcomes (Bandura, 2001). This may encourage women to emulate the thin-ideal that they see on television and in their peers with similar views by engaging in weight-loss behaviors. When comparisons with peers who are also attempting to emulate the thin-ideal occur, body dissatisfaction may arise. This may be especially apparent when other reinforcing influences such as self-esteem and peer and parental attitudes regarding weight are considered. Therefore, although cultivation and television consumption were observed to have an effect on internalization of the thin-ideal, they may not have a direct effect on body dissatisfaction, but instead serve as a tool for reinforcing existing attitudes regarding expectations of physical appearance and thinness.

### **Limitations**

Although the results of this study indicate that the influences on internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction are significantly different, it remains unclear exactly how the two elements link and how internalization of the thin-ideal is connected to body dissatisfaction. There were several limitations to this study; the sample consisted of undergraduate students primarily from the Communication program at the University of Central Florida, resulting in a more homogenous sample that may be more likely to consume larger amounts of media than other majors. While the student population was useful for this particular study, the study is certainly not limited to students. Additionally, understanding viewership and creating top ten

lists for media consumption could have been done in various other ways, such as collecting top ten lists from different websites and conducting factor analysis before data collection, or asking students to list their favorite programs and using that data to create subsequent lists. However, the method used was considered to be the most effective for this particular study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research may take a multitude of directions. It may be useful to examine the specific differences between reality and drama television consumption, as both genres were observed to have different effects on internalization of the thin-ideal and media attitudes regarding weight and body shape.

Although data regarding race were collected, they were not utilized in this particular study and may have a significant effect on results, subsequently affecting how eating disorder prevention/intervention and media literacy campaigns might be tailored to different groups of women. Age may also be another important factor to consider, and both significantly younger and older samples may prove useful in gathering information for shaping specific campaigns to be most effective (as most data in previous research has centered around adolescents and college students).

Additionally, gender is an important factor to consider. Male data were collected but not utilized in this study. Males are also susceptible to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa or muscle dysmorphic disorder, and examining influence on male body dissatisfaction and attitudes regarding weight and shape could be extremely important in creating effective campaigns to safeguard against negative effects.



## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, what matters most? Are media the most influential variable in overall body dissatisfaction although the link between internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction is not directly observable? Or are other social/environmental or internal variables stronger predictors? Although specific significant predictors of both internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction were observed in regression analyses, it is important to remember that all of these variables interact in a much larger context. It is nearly impossible to find the exact origin of body image attitudes. Instead, it may be more useful to consider that the variables serve to reinforce one another and strengthen existing attitudes, despite where they originate. If we can gain a better understanding of media influence in the larger social context, it may be easier to develop eating disorder prevention campaigns and media literacy programs, as well as individually tailor current eating disorder therapy strategies. It is additionally important to expose biased peer and parental attitudes regarding weight, as well as comparisons of body shape and size, in order to raise self-esteem levels. Therefore, all of these variables should be considered significant influences on body image attitudes, and eating disorder prevention/intervention and media literacy campaigns should craft their programs accordingly.

## **APPENDIX A: FEMALE VERSION OF SURVEY**

**Demographics:**

1. What is your major?
2. How tall are you?
3. Please indicate your age in years.
4. Which best describes your race?
  - a. Asian/Asian American
  - b. Black/ African American
  - c. Caucasian/White
  - d. Hispanic/Latino
  - e. Multiracial
  - f. Other
5. Please indicate your year in school.
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
6. What is your weight?
7. Do you participate in any sports?

**Media Consumption:** Please indicate how much you like the following genres of television shows, where one is “hate it” and seven is “love it.”

1. Action shows (Criminal Minds, Bones, House)
2. Comedy shows (Big Bang Theory, Glee, How I Met Your Mother)
3. Drama shows (Grey’s Anatomy, Desperate Housewives, Gossip Girl)
4. Reality shows (Jersey Shore, America’s Next Top Model, Real Housewives)
5. News (20/20, 60 Minutes, Dateline NBC)
6. Soap operas (As the World Turns, Days of Our Lives, All My Children)

Additionally, please rate how often you watch the following television shows, where one is “never” and seven is “as often as possible”.

- a. Criminal Minds
- b. Bones
- c. House
- d. NCIS
- e. The Mentalist
- f. Castle
- g. CSI
- h. Nikita
- i. The Good Wife

- j. Dexter
- k. Big Bang Theory
- l. Glee
- m. How I Met Your Mother
- n. Two and A Half Men
- o. The Office
- p. Chuck
- q. Modern Family
- r. Californication
- s. Saturday Night Live
- t. Community
- u. Grey's Anatomy
- v. Desperate Housewives
- w. Private Practice
- x. Off the Map
- y. Smallville
- z. Gossip Girl
- aa. Vampire Diaries
- bb. 90210
- cc. One Tree Hill
- dd. Supernatural
- ee. American Idol
- ff. Jersey Shore
- gg. America's Next Top Model
- hh. The Bachelor
- ii. Dancing with the Stars
- jj. Girls Next Door
- kk. Bad Girls Club
- ll. The Real Housewives of Orange County
- mm. Keeping Up With the Kardashians
- nn. Jersey Shore
- oo. 20/20
- pp. Dateline NBC
- qq. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart
- rr. 60 Minutes
- ss. Entertainment Tonight
- tt. 48 Hours
- uu. Good Morning America
- vv. The O'Reilly Factor
- ww. TMZ
- xx. The Today Show
- yy. Days of Our Lives
- zz. The Young and the Restless
- aaa. General Hospital

- bbb. All My Children
- ccc. The Bold and the Beautiful
- ddd. One Life to Live
- eee. As the World Turns

**Media Consumption:** Please indicate how much you like each of the following genres of magazine where one is “hate it” and seven is “love it”.

1. Women’s (Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, InStyle)
2. News (Time, Newsweek, US News)
3. Fitness (Shape, Women’s Health, Self)
4. Entertainment News (People, OK!, US Weekly)

Additionally, please rate how often you read the following magazines, where one is “never” and seven is “as often as possible”.

- a. Marie Claire
- b. Cosmopolitan
- c. InStyle
- d. Glamour
- e. Allure
- f. Time
- g. Newsweek
- h. National Geographic
- i. The New Yorker
- j. US News
- k. Shape
- l. Women’s Health
- m. Self
- n. Fitness
- o. Health
- p. People
- q. OK!
- r. US Weekly
- s. In Touch
- t. Rolling Stone

**Media Influence on Social Attitudes Regarding Weight and Body Shape:**

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, where one is “strongly disagree” and seven is “strongly agree”.

1. I believe that clothes look better on women who are in good physical shape.
2. In our society, fat people are regarded as attractive.

3. Attractiveness is very important if you want to get ahead in our culture.
4. It's important for people to look attractive if they want to succeed in today's culture.
5. Most people believe that a toned and physically fit body improves how you look.
6. People think that the more attractive you are, the better you look in clothes.
7. In today's society, it's not important to always look attractive.
8. People with well-proportioned bodies look better in clothes.
9. A physically fit woman is admired for her looks more than someone who is not fit and toned.
10. People find individuals who are in shape more attractive than individuals who are not in shape.
11. In our culture, someone with a well-built body has a better chance of obtaining success.

**Upward comparisons with media figures:** How often do you compare yourself to your favorite models/actresses...

(Please rate how often you compare yourself, with one being "never" and seven being "always".)

1. In general?
2. In terms of career success?
3. In terms of eating habits?
4. In terms of exercise habits?
5. In terms of happiness?
6. In terms of intelligence?
7. In terms of physical appearance?
8. In terms of popularity?

**Peer influence on social attitudes regarding weight or body shape:** Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, where one is "strongly disagree" and seven is "strongly agree".

My friends believe that...

1. Clothes look better on women who are in good physical shape.
2. In our society, fat people are regarded as attractive.
3. Attractiveness is very important if you want to get ahead in our culture.
4. It's important for people to look attractive if they want to succeed in today's culture.
5. Most people believe that a toned and physically fit body improves how you look.
6. People think that the more attractive you are, the better you look in clothes.
7. In today's society, it's not important to always look attractive.
8. People with well-proportioned bodies look better in clothes.
9. A physically fit woman is admired for her looks more than someone who is not fit and toned.
10. People find individuals who are in shape more attractive than individuals who are not in shape.

11. In our culture, someone with a well-built body has a better chance of obtaining success.

**Upward comparisons with peers:** Please rate how often you compare the following aspects of your body to other individuals of the same sex, where one is “never” and seven is “always”.

1. Nose
2. Lips
3. Hair
4. Teeth
5. Upper arms
6. Shoulders
7. Chest
8. Back
9. Waist
10. Stomach
11. Buttocks
12. Thighs
13. Hips
14. Muscle tone of upper body
15. Overall shape of upper body
16. Muscle tone of lower body
17. Overall shape of lower body
18. Overall body

Now, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements, where one is “strongly disagree” and seven is “strongly agree”.

19. When I compare myself to others, I compare their degree of muscle tone to my muscle-tone.
20. When I am with others, I compare my weight with theirs.
21. When I compare my weight with others, I feel that I am overweight.
22. I compare my physical appearance to the physical appearance of others.
23. When I see people who are overweight, I compare my body size to theirs.
24. I compare the attractiveness of my facial features with the facial features of others.
25. I compare how thin or overweight someone is more than I compare how muscular and in shape they are.

**Parental influence on social attitudes regarding weight and body shape:** Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, where one is “strongly disagree” and seven is “strongly agree”.

1. My mother is concerned about whether I weigh too much or are too fat or might become too fat.
2. It is important to my mother that I am thin.

3. My father is concerned about whether I weigh too much or are too fat of might become too fat.
4. It is important to my father that I am thin.
5. My father is on a diet to lose weight.
6. It is important to my father that he be as thin as possible.
7. My father's physical appearance (shape, weight, clothing) is important to him.
8. My mother is on a diet to lose weight.
9. It is important to my mother that she be as thin as possible.
10. My mother's physical appearance (shape, weight, clothing) is important to her.
11. My father made comments or teased me about my appearance.
12. My mother made comments or teased me about my appearance.
13. My parents often comment on each other's weight.
14. My parents often encourage each other to lose weight.
15. My parents often talk about weight or dieting.
16. My parents often worry about their weight.
17. My parents worry about what they eat.
18. My parents often diet.
19. My parents take a lot of notice of each other's weight and shape.
20. Weight and shape are important to my parents.

**Self-Esteem:** Please rate your level of agreement with each statement, where one is “strongly disagree” and seven is “strongly agree”.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

**Internalization of the thin ideal:** Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements, where one is “strongly disagree” and seven is “strongly agree”.

1. Thin women are more attractive.
2. Tall women are more attractive.
3. Women with toned bodies are more attractive.
4. Slim women are more attractive.
5. Women who are in shape are more attractive.
6. Slender women are more attractive.
7. Women with long legs are more attractive.



8. Curvy women are more attractive.
9. Shapely women are more attractive.
10. Women who are taller are more attractive.

**Body Dissatisfaction:** Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements, where one is “strongly disagree” and seven is “strongly agree”.

1. I think that my stomach is too big.
2. I think that my thighs are too large.
3. I think that my stomach is just the right size.
4. I feel satisfied with the shape of my body.
5. I like the shape of my buttocks.
6. I think my hips are too big.
7. I think that my thighs are just the right size.
8. I think my buttocks are too large.
9. I think that my hips are just the right size.

## **APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA0000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Kristen Van Vonderen and William Kinnally**

Date: **March 22, 2011**

Dear Researcher:

On 3/22/2011, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Addendum/Modification Request Form  
Modification Type: Revised Survey  
Project Title: Mass Media Effects and Body Image  
Investigator: Kristen E Van Vonderen  
IRB Number: SBE-10-07098  
Funding Agency: None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 03/22/2011 02:06:03 PM EST

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janice Turchin".

IRB Coordinator

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