The Effects of Education on Implicit Attitudes of Ideal Thinness and Self-Esteem
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Introduction

Western society’s ideal image of a woman’s figure is thin, unrealistic, and harmful

- Created and reinforced by the media

These effects can be mitigated through education

- Critiqued magazine images (Tiggeymann et al., 2000)
  - Viewed magazine ads
    - While viewing participants were asked to EITHER compare self against model or fantasize about being the model
    - Reported how many ads had unrealistically thin models
    - Those who compared felt worse about themselves
    - Those who were prevented from fantasizing felt better about themselves

- Showed movie about the harmful effects of the media’s portrayal (Chambers & Alexander, 2007)
  - Viewed or read “Slim Hopes” – a video about the harms of media
  - Given follow-up quiz and Body Image Scale (Fallon & Rozin, 1983)
  - Were able to verbalize harm of the media on body image which represents an external (verbalized) attitude
  - BUT, no change in ideal body image which reflects an implicit (personal desire) attitude

Thus, education might teach us what the right things to say are, but may not change our desire for unrealistic thinness

Purpose

- To test whether or not implicit attitudes towards thin idealization can be changed through more personalized education
  - Personalized education refers to tying the educational material directly to the participants own specific behavior and eating

Hypothesis

- Education in general will increase self-esteem (explicit)
- Personalizing education will change one’s ideal body image (implicit feelings)

Method

Participants

- 33 Women (10–13 per group)
  - Average Age: 20.8 years
  - Average BMI: 25.19

Materials

- Demographic survey to collect the following information on participants:
  - Age
  - BMI (chart provided)
  - Relationship status
  - Amount of weekly exercise
  - Exposure to media
  - Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
    - 10 questions
    - 4 point Likert Scale
    - Normal range: 15–25
    - Body Image Scale – BIS (Fallon & Rozin, 1983)
      - “See below for scale

Procedure

- Completed demographic sheet
- Completed BIS and Rosenberg scale before and after
- Viewed an hour long educational presentation
  - “Traditional” program (Viewed Slim Hopes)
  - “Personalized” program
- Presentation on sex roles (not weight) as control

Personalized Education

- Powerpoint presentation on healthy eating and dieting:
  - Shown testimonials on weight loss
  - A full day’s calorie allotment for 7 mos
  - To lose this amount of weight in a healthy way, it would take a little over 2 yrs at 1600 calories a day
  - However, today’s women expect it should take 7 months to lose 180 lbs
  - Participants were shown the amount of calories one could consume to lose 180 lbs in 7 months – 550 calories (2 snicker bars)
  - Viewed own calories for context on Calorie Counter (http://calorie.count.about.com)

Discussion

No changes in ideal thinness in any of the groups

- Hypothesized education, in general would increase self-esteem
  - Findings in current study did not support hypothesis
  - May be due to participants who scored high on self-esteem during the pre-test (ceiling effect)

- Hypothesized that “personalized” education would change ideal body image
  - Findings in current study did not support hypothesis
  - Perhaps thin ideal image is resistant to change
  - In addition, participants were already thin; half either had a normal BMI or below average BMI

Results

Future Research

- Get more participants
  - May have been difficult due to duration of study
  - Look at broader group of participants with more normal distribution of body size
  - Test over time; see if effects take time to “sink in”
  - More extensive training; have participants log their daily food intake over a period of time