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The Effect of Sociocultural Factors on Body Image and Social Physique Anxiety

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that the relationship between body image is influenced by parents, peers, and media (Rodgers et al., 2011). However, those studies did not distinguish whether family, peers, or media are significantly more influential in people's body image or propensity for social physique anxiety. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to determine whether family, peers, or media have a greater influence on body image and social physique anxiety in college students. We surveyed 943 college students (693 female, 250 male), ranging in age from 18 to 29 years of age ($M = 19.03$, $SD = 1.59$). Media pressure was the primary predictor of social physique anxiety, followed by family pressure, internalization of the thin ideal, internalization of the athletic ideal, and peer pressure. Internalization of the thin ideal was the primary predictor of the drive for thinness, followed by media pressure, family pressure, and peer pressure. Treatment providers should be aware of the importance of media influence, and its consequences (i.e., internalization of media ideals) on college students' body image and social physique anxiety. Students should be encouraged to think about the ways they are using media and how it might affect them.

The Effect of Sociocultural Factors on Body Image and Social Physique Anxiety

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INTRODUCTION

- Social relationships among a person and their peers, family, and media may influence the development of social physique anxiety or body image dissatisfaction (Rogers et al., 2011).
- Research suggests that the relative influence of peers, family, and media may change as we get older (Story, 2022).
- Importantly, people who constantly use social media get exposed to a multitude of information that can lead to higher levels of dissatisfaction and anxiety (Samari, 2022).
- While there are studies that explore the relationship between body image and parental, peer, or media influences on their own, those studies do not analyze how social physique anxiety and sociocultural factors interact. Additionally, studies have not sought to distinguish whether family, peers, or media are significantly more influential in people's body image or propensity for social physique anxiety.
- The purpose of this study is to find a statistically significant difference in the influence of family, peers, and the media on social physique anxiety and drive for thinness.



PRESENT STUDY

This study investigated the following hypotheses:

- Family, peers, and media pressure are statistically significant concerning an individual's likelihood to develop social physique anxiety or drive for thinness.
- There are statistically significant differences between family, peer, and media pressure on their effect level on social physique anxiety and drive for thinness.
- Among differences between the effect of family, peer, and media pressure on social physique anxiety and drive for thinness, peer pressure will have a greater impact.
- Social media usage is positively correlated to an individual's likelihood to develop social physique anxiety and drive for thinness.

METHOD

Participants:

We surveyed 943 college students (693 female, 250 male), ranging in age from 18 to 29 years of age (M = 19.03, SD = 1.59) from University of South Alabama and Boise State University.

Materials:

As part of an omnibus study, participants responded to the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4; Schaefer et al., 2014), the EDI-1 Drive for Thinness subscale (Garner et al., 1983), and the Social Physique Anxiety Scale (Hart et al., 1989), the Social Media Appearance-Related Preoccupation scale (Hawes et al., 2020), the Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness Scale (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION

- Social physique anxiety was significantly related to all of our variables except for internalization of the athletic ideal.
- The drive for thinness variable was significant across all the categories.
- These findings support the hypothesis that immediate social circles (family and friends) and media are possible factors leading to social physique anxiety and a higher level of drive for thinness.
- Media pressure was the primary predictor of social physique anxiety, followed by family pressure, internalization of the thin ideal, internalization of the athletic ideal, and peer pressure. Internalization of the thin ideal was the primary predictor of drive for thinness, followed by media pressure, family pressure, and peer pressure.

Conclusion:

Treatment providers should be aware of the importance of media influence, and its consequences (i.e., internalization of media ideals) on college students' body image and social physique anxiety. Students should be encouraged to think about the ways they are using media and how it might affect them.

RESULTS

	n	M	SD	Time Spent	SMARP	ASMC	DFT	SPAS	Family Pressure	Media Pressure	Peer Pressure	Internalization of Thinness	Internalization of Athletic Ideal
Time Spent	922	143.1	139.0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SMARP	940	21.3	8.46	.098*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ASMC	939	4.31	1.62	.092*	.641***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DFT	939	5.71	6.06	.161***	.598***	.502***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
SPAS	943	38.3	9.96	.107***	.738***	.583***	.627***	1	-	-	-	-	-
Family Pressure	942	10.1	4.59	.138***	.393***	.262***	.388***	.411***	1	-	-	-	-
Media Pressure	942	13.6	4.87	.058	.702***	.591***	.528***	.594***	.371***	1	-	-	-
Peer Pressure	942	8.44	4.02	.098*	.427***	.258***	.371***	.399***	.486***	.386***	1	-	-
Internalization of Thinness	942	13.4	4.01	.097*	.574***	.485***	.625***	.505***	.343***	.579***	.371***	1	-
Internalization of Athletic Ideal	942	16.2	5.17	-0.27	.144***	.148***	.177***	.054	-.003	.165***	.131***	.352***	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

