

Replications and Refinements

Under this heading are brief reports of studies providing data that substantiate, disprove, or refine what we think we know. These notes consist of a summary of the study's procedure and as many details about the results as space allows. Additional details concerning the results can be obtained by communicating directly with the author.

Associations Between Having a Boyfriend and the Body Satisfaction and Self-Esteem of College Women: An Extension of the Lin and Kulik Hypothesis

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NEARLY UNIVERSAL BODY DISSATISFACTION among young Western women has often been attributed, at least in part, to the ubiquitous portrayals of extremely thin models in Western media (e.g., Gordon, 2000; Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). Lin and Kulik (2002) suggested that young women with boyfriends might be less likely to unfavorably compare themselves with these thin media models and consequently have less body dissatisfaction and higher self-esteem than those without boyfriends. Although Lin and Kulik's study of exposure to thin and heavy models did not support this hypothesis, their hypothesis is consistent with Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In

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addition, it seems likely that the hypothesized effect would be stronger in the natural environment that is saturated with media portrayals of extremely thin female models than in an artificial and restricted laboratory setting. This possibility and Long's (1983) finding that college women with steady boyfriends had higher self-esteem than did other women indicate that Lin and Kulik's hypothesis merits additional study.

In the present study, we examined the association between (a) having a boyfriend and (b) body satisfaction and self-esteem. Participants were 84 single women who were 18–22 years old ($M = 20.36$ years, $SD = 0.99$ year) and in social-science classes at a small private midwestern university. We embedded a dichotomous grouping item—"Do you have a regular boyfriend?"—into a series of standard demographic items. After completing these items, the participants completed the Stunkard, Sorenson, and Schlusinger (1983) Figural Rating Scale (FRS). That scale presented line drawings of nine female bodies that ranged from extremely slender to very heavy. Through that scale, we asked participants to indicate which figure most closely represented their own body (Body 1), the body that they would prefer (Body 2), the body that other women would prefer (Body 3), and the body that men would prefer (Body 4). Participants also completed the Franzoi and Shields (1984) Body Esteem Scale (BES). That scale asked participants to express their positive or negative feelings about 35 body parts or functions on a 5-point Likert-type scale. That scale produced three factor-analytically derived measures of body satisfaction. Participants also completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). We informed participants in writing and again in oral instructions of their right to decline to participate or to discontinue their participation at any time. We collected data during regular class periods. We debriefed participants informally during a subsequent class period. There was no formal debriefing of the participants.

After a significant multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), Wilks's $\Lambda = .831$, $F(3, 80) = 5.53$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .169$, we performed a separate univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the three ideal body measures from the FRS. Women with boyfriends ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.72$) selected a larger female body as preferred by men, $F(1, 82) = 7.54$, $p = .007$, partial $\eta^2 = .084$, than did women without boyfriends ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.56$). Results for the other two body ideals were not significant.

We computed three body dissatisfaction scores by subtracting the value of each of the three figures representing the participant's body ideals (for Body 2, Body 3, Body 4) from the value of the figure representing the participant's own body (Body 1). After a significant MANOVA, Wilks's $\Lambda = .819$, $F(3, 80) = 5.89$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .181$, on the body dissatisfaction measures, we performed separate univariate ANOVAs for each of the three self-ideal measures. Women with boyfriends ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 1.35$) had a smaller discrepancy between the figure that they selected to represent their own body (Body 1) and the figure that they selected to represent the body preferred by men (Body 4), $F(1, 82) = 5.80$, $p =$

.018, partial $\eta^2 = .066$, than did women without boyfriends ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 1.01$). The ANOVAs for the other two self-ideal discrepancy scores were not significant.

After a significant MANOVA, Wilks's $\Lambda = .887$, $F(3, 80) = 3.69$, $p = .022$, partial $\eta^2 = .113$, we performed separate univariate ANOVAs for each of the three measures from the BES. A significant ANOVA for the BES Sexual Attractiveness Scale indicated that women with boyfriends ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.61$) were more satisfied with their sexual attractiveness, $F(1, 82) = 9.57$, $p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .105$, than were women without boyfriends ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.48$). Similarly, a significant ANOVA for the BES Weight Concerns Scale indicated that women with boyfriends ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.02$) had fewer concerns about their weight, $F(1, 82) = 4.84$, $p = .031$, partial $\eta^2 = .56$, than did women without boyfriends ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.86$). The ANOVA for the BES Physical Condition Scale was not significant.

An ANOVA indicated that women with boyfriends ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 0.92$) did not differ, $F(1, 80) = 3.07$, *ns*, from women without boyfriends ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.06$) on the RSES. Although these results did not replicate Long (1983), the direction of the means was consistent with her results.

In the present study, using two of the most common measures of body dissatisfaction, we found that having a boyfriend was associated with less body dissatisfaction in college women. These results are consistent with the hypothesis of Lin and Kulik (2002). But it is important to note that the present results do not indicate a causal relationship between having a boyfriend and body satisfaction. For example, it is possible that women with high body satisfaction engage in behaviors that are more likely to lead to having a regular boyfriend. It is also important to recognize that in the present study, the associations with having a boyfriend were relatively modest and limited to those variables that are most closely associated with having a romantic relationship: sexual attractiveness, body size preferred by men, and satisfaction with weight. There were no associations between a woman's having a boyfriend and the woman's own preferred body size, the body size she perceived as preferred by other women, or the perceived difference between her own body and these two body ideals. It is also important to recognize that women with boyfriends, just like women without boyfriends, scored below the neutral midpoint on the BES Weight Concerns Scale. This indicated a general dissatisfaction with their weight. Although among young women, having a boyfriend was associated with a limited and selective attenuation of body dissatisfaction, it was not associated with the elimination of body dissatisfaction among them, a dissatisfaction that is so ubiquitous that Rodin, Silberstein, and Striegel-Moore (1984) described it as a "normative discontent" (p. 267).

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Received January 29, 2005
Accepted September 15, 2005

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