It’s Not Just a “Woman Thing”: Gender Stereotyping and Body Image

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DISCUSSION

To stereotype means to think about and refer to members of a group as though they were all alike (Lippmann, 1922). A number of early studies demonstrated that gender stereotypes were widely held, persistent, and highly traditional (Ferber, 1949; Kahlert, 1930; Sherif & McEve, 1947). An emerging stereotype of women has been that they are psychologically dissatisfied with their physical appearance. The term “normative discontent” (Reden, Silberman, & Stretj-Moore, 1994) reflects the notion that body image dissatisfaction has become so common for women that it is the “norm” for women to feel poorly about their physical selves. The extent to which people have adopted this stereotype of women is unknown, and the personal characteristics (e.g., gender-type) associated with possessing a normative discontent stereotype have not been identified. In addition, it is unclear whether increasing rates of body dissatisfaction among men is leading to similar stereotypes regarding men’s body image.

This study sought to determine the extent to which the “normative discontent” stereotype exists and to explore relevant gender differences. In addition, this study was designed to ascertain how gender type, body image, and eating disturbance may affect body image and eating related stereotypes.

METHODS

Participants and Procedures
- n=472 undergraduates (137 females, 155 males) were recruited from classes at a large metropolitan southeastern university
- mean age was 20.46 years (SD = 3.23)
- Ethnicity
  - Caucasian 70.6%
  - Latin/Hispanic 9.1%
  - Asian 8.9%
  - African-American 3.0%
  - Other 4.2%
- Measures
  - Attitudes Toward Women Scale (ATWS; Spence & Helmreich, 1978)
  - Sex Role Inventory (BRIE; Bem, 1974)
  - Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI - Bulimia (BUL), Drive for Thinness (DFT) and Body Dissatisfaction (BD); Gianoulakis, 1985)
  - Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ; Brown, Cash, & Mikulka, 1990)
  - Physical Appearance State and Trait Anxiety Scale (PASTAS; Reed, Thompson, Brannick, & Sacco, 1991)
  - Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire (Heatherton, Thompson, & Stormer, 1995)
  - Strength of Stereotypic Views of Women (SSVW)
  - Strength of Stereotypic Views of Men (SSVM)
  - Women’s Body Mass Related Questionnaire (WBMQR; male participants only; Edwards & Laub, 2000)

RESULTS

A large percentage of male and female participants believed that more than half of American men and women possess the following body image and eating-related attitudes and behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT-AQ</td>
<td>r (330)=.344**</td>
<td>r (124)=.217*</td>
<td>r (351)=.251**</td>
<td>r (127)=.300**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBSAQ</td>
<td>r (.98)=.256*</td>
<td>r (.99)=.324**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDI-BULIMIA</td>
<td>r (332)=.171**</td>
<td>r (330)=.016</td>
<td>r (353)=.015</td>
<td>r (352)=.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDI-DTHESS</td>
<td>r (330)=.244**</td>
<td>r (330)=.016</td>
<td>r (353)=.115*</td>
<td>r (330)=.211*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDI-BODY DIS</td>
<td>r (330)=.171**</td>
<td>r (330)=.016</td>
<td>r (353)=.047</td>
<td>r (353)=.188**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASTAS-Body Anxiety</td>
<td>r (333)=.307**</td>
<td>r (330)=.016</td>
<td>r (354)=.100</td>
<td>r (352)=.378**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBSRQ 1</td>
<td>r (332)=.018**</td>
<td>r (353)=.119</td>
<td>r (353)=.117*</td>
<td>r (331)=.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBSRQ 3</td>
<td>r (330)=.154**</td>
<td>r (353)=.113</td>
<td>r (353)=.085</td>
<td>r (352)=.086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, two-tailed. ** p < .005, two-tailed.

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