

## Effects of Appearance-Related Social Comparisons to a Hypothetical Roommate in Undergraduate Women

VITALIYA YEGOROVA  
University of Iowa

Upward appearance-related social comparisons occur when an individual compares him- or herself to someone believed to be thinner and more attractive. Past research supports that these comparisons result in a decrease in mood and body satisfaction, as well as an increase in thoughts of dieting and exercising. The present study looked at the effects that appearance-related social comparisons to a hypothetical roommate have on 145 undergraduate females. Surveys were administered to address mood, body image satisfaction, eating, and exercise habits of the participants before and after meeting their roommate. Participants received a photo of either an underweight, thin, fit, or overweight roommate. Results support the idea that making an appearance-related social comparison to a roommate, regardless of body type, affects participants' desire to change eating and exercise habits. These findings suggest that comparisons to a roommate may result in positive outcomes for undergraduate women.

*Keywords:* social comparison, body dissatisfaction, roommate, women

La comparaison sociale ascendante se produit lors d'une comparaison à une personne perçue comme plus mince et attrayante. Des recherches antérieures soutiennent qu'elle produit une baisse d'humeur, de satisfaction corporelle, ainsi qu'une augmentation de pensées reliées aux régimes et à l'exercice. La présente étude examine les effets des comparaisons sociales en lien avec l'apparence d'un colocataire hypothétique sur 145 femmes de premier cycle. Des questionnaires concernant l'humeur, la satisfaction de l'image corporelle, l'alimentation et l'exercice des participantes furent administrés avant et après la rencontre avec le colocataire. Les participantes reçurent une photo d'un colocataire en sous poids, mince, en forme, ou en surpoids. Les résultats confirment qu'une comparaison sociale liée à l'apparence d'un colocataire, indépendamment du type corporel, peut influencer le désir de changer les habitudes alimentaires et l'exercice. Ces résultats suggèrent que les comparaisons à un colocataire peuvent entraîner des résultats positifs pour les femmes de premier cycle.

*Mots-clés :* comparaison sociale, insatisfaction corporelle, colocataire, femmes

Sociocultural pressures to be thin magnify a woman's preoccupation with her body and physical appearance (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011). Women are constantly exposed to media, whether through television or magazines, that feature thin models (Krones, Stice, Batres, & Orjada, 2005). The thin and slender body type has become the standard of beauty that women strive for, yet few can achieve (Lin & Kulik, 2002), because the thin-ideal woman portrayed in the media is typically 15% below the average weight of women

(Hawkins & Richards, 2004). Constant exposure to such media causes women to internalize the thin ideal, and become increasingly dissatisfied with their own bodies when such a body type is unattainable (Krones et al., 2005; Leahey, Crowther, & Mickelson, 2007). Rodin, Silberstein, and Striegel-Moore (1984) have coined the term "normative discontent" describing the commonality of women who are unhappy about their physical appearance and become preoccupied with their weight and body shape. The present study will extend previous research on this topic by examining situations in which such discontent may arise in college women.

---

This work was part of an honors thesis project completed by the author under the direction of an honors thesis advisor, Irwin Levin, at the University of Iowa. The author would like to thank Mr. Levin for all the guidance throughout the project. Additionally, the author would like to thank the staff at JIRIRI for their time and support. Please address correspondence to Vitaliya Yegorova (email: vita-yegorova@uiowa.edu).

## Background

Body dissatisfaction and preoccupation with weight and shape are especially common in a college setting and have been reported in about 80% of college women (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011). Because body dissatisfaction is considered a risk factor for eating disorders in college (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Stice, 2002), the present study focuses on undergraduate college women. In college, women often base their self-concept on their physical appearance (Bailey & Ricciardelli, 2010; Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986). Consequently, women frequently make appearance-related social comparisons (Myers & Crowther, 2009) to assess their weight and shape (Wasilenko, Kulik, & Wanic, 2007). Being surrounded by and interacting with women, a college setting provides an environment where women can frequently make appearance-related social comparisons (Lindner & Hughes, 2008).

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) is relevant here because it describes the process people use to compare themselves to similar others in order to gain information about themselves. By making appearance-related social comparisons, women are able to subjectively assess their personal appearance and level of attractiveness (Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). Festinger (1954) distinguished two types of social comparisons. An upward comparison is made with someone believed to be better off, and a downward comparison is made with someone believed to be worse off (Festinger, 1954). Researchers have shown that upward appearance-related social comparisons are associated with negative effects such as an increase in body dissatisfaction and negative affect, decrease in self-esteem and positive affect, and increase in disordered eating behaviors (Leahey, Crowther, & Ciesla, 2011; Lindner & Hughes, 2008; Myers & Crowther, 2009; Stormer & Thompson, 1996; Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, & Buote, 2006; Thompson, Coovert, & Stormer, 1999; Thornton & Maurice, 1999). The present study will include both types of comparisons.

Because college women often make appearance-related social comparisons (Lindner & Hughes, 2008), they begin to realize that there is a discrepancy between what they look like and the thin ideal they want to look like, further increasing body dissatisfaction (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Harrison, 2001; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggests that discrepancies occur when an individual does not meet an important standard (e.g., thin-

ideal body type). When a discrepancy occurs, the individual feels distress and engages in behaviors that will reduce the discrepancy (Harrison, 2001). Attempting to reduce this discrepancy can lead women to engage in restrained eating, excessive exercise, or develop other disordered eating habits (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Harrison, 2001). Activating self-discrepancies through appearance-related social comparisons could be further explained by the tendency of women to objectify themselves and other women (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011).

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) explains that a woman's body is treated as an object to be looked at and that her body defines who she is as a person. Women learn to objectify themselves through self-objectification, in which they take on an observer's view of their own body. Self-objectification manifests in the act of body surveillance, or constant checking and monitoring of one's body in order to compare oneself to a thin ideal (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). McKinley and Hyde (1996) proposed that by engaging in constant body surveillance, women realize there is a discrepancy between their own body and those of ideal others, further increasing the likelihood of making appearance-related social comparisons. Thus, appearance-related social comparisons, self-discrepancies, and self-objectification are thought to work together to increase body dissatisfaction and thin-ideal internalization (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Lindner, Tantleff-Dunn, & Jentsch, 2012).

Ample research provides support for the negative effects of appearance-related social comparisons to thin-ideal women in the media (Irving, 1990; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Stice & Shaw, 1994). For example, Hawkins and Richards (2004) found that women who were exposed to thin-ideal media images showed an increase in body dissatisfaction and negative mood states compared to those in the control group. Furthermore, Irving (1990) experimentally manipulated exposure to the thin ideal and found that participants who viewed images of thin models reported lower levels of self-esteem and body satisfaction than participants who viewed images of overweight models or no models.

## Social Comparisons to Peers

Research provides support that women will compare themselves to thin-ideal peers as much as they

compare themselves to thin-ideal women in the media (Strahan et al., 2006). In the current study, participants compared themselves to a hypothetical roommate. A roommate comparison target was chosen because appearance-related social comparisons with peers, rather than media images, are more frequent due to daily interactions (Wasilenko et al., 2007). Additionally, roommates are important figures to undergraduate women in college, yet have received little attention in the literature. According to Festinger (1954), individuals are more likely to make comparisons to similar others to gain the most accurate information about themselves. Cash, Cash, and Butters (1983) noted that participants are more likely to compare themselves to attractive similar others than to attractive dissimilar others, such as professional models. According to Kronen et al. (2005), comparing oneself to an attractive peer might make the thin ideal more attainable than comparing oneself to a professional model.

To date, there has been little research conducted on the effects of appearance-related social comparisons to peers. In one study, Lin and Kulik (2002) experimentally manipulated exposure to a thin or overweight peer to look at the effects of social comparisons on body satisfaction. In their design, participants compared themselves to a peer in a context of a dating game. They found that participants who compared themselves with a thin peer showed an increase in body dissatisfaction, yet comparison to an overweight peer had no statistically significant effect. Similarly, Kronen et al. (2005) exposed participants to a thin-ideal peer or an average size peer with whom they would be competing for a potential date. Their results indicated that comparison to the thin-ideal peer statistically significantly increased participants' body dissatisfaction.

### Current Study

The nature of the social comparisons in the Kronen et al. (2005) and Lin and Kulik (2002) studies were competitive, meaning that participants were essentially competing with a peer for a date. In the current study, the nature of the social comparisons was cooperative because the hypothetical roommate would become the participant's friend and living partner. To our knowledge, no studies have manipulated roommate body type to consider the effects of appearance-related social comparisons to a roommate. The present study will add to the literature by examining the possible effects of appearance-related social comparisons to roommates with different body types such as under-

weight, thin, fit, or overweight. It was believed that roommate body type would have an effect on the mood, desire to change eating and exercise habits, and body image satisfaction of the participant.

As previously mentioned, upward appearance-related social comparisons, as opposed to downward comparisons, are associated with negative mood and body dissatisfaction (e.g., Leahey et al., 2007). If a discrepancy occurs when making the comparison, then an individual will engage in behaviors to reduce that discrepancy (Harrison, 2001). Because the present study deals with a range of possible comparisons, separate hypotheses were generated for upward and downward comparisons, as different results were expected. It was hypothesized that participants exposed to an underweight, thin, or fit peer would make an upward appearance-related social comparison. As a result, they would experience a decrease in mood and body image satisfaction, and indicate a positive change in eating and exercise habits. For participants exposed to an overweight roommate, it was hypothesized that they would make a downward appearance-related social comparison. Thus, participants with an overweight roommate would experience an increase in mood and body image satisfaction, and indicate a positive change in eating and exercise habits.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants ( $N = 150$ ) were recruited from various dormitory residences from the University of Iowa. Participants were all females, ages 18-23 ( $M = 19.2$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ). The majority of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian ( $n = 120$ ). Five participants were excluded from data analysis because they did not complete the second half of the survey needed to measure changes in the dependent variables. A total of 145 participants were included in the final data analysis. All participants gave informed consent prior to beginning the study. Participants completed the survey packet and demographics questionnaire.

### Materials

The survey packet contained questions that assessed mood, eating and exercise habits, and body image satisfaction. The packet was put together in the following order: first survey, picture of hypothetical

roommate, second survey. The packet was a self-report instrument and was kept short in order to recruit participants to the study. For this purpose, commonly used scales for body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology (e.g., Drive for Thinness, Eating Disorder Inventory) were not included in this study.

Specific survey questions were chosen and grouped in clusters based on mood, body image satisfaction, eating habits, and exercise habits. The composite scores for each dependent variable were computed by summing the responses from the individual questions in that category to create a reliable measure. In the reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha, the mood questions (3 items;  $\alpha = .92$ ), eating related questions (3 items;  $\alpha = .81$ ), exercise related questions (3 items;  $\alpha = .86$ ), and body image satisfaction questions (3 items;  $\alpha = .94$ ) were found to be reliable.

Each question was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*). An example of a mood-related question is "What kind of mood are you in *right now*?" An example of a body image-related question is "I see myself as someone who is..." with a response given on a Likert scale indicating 1 = *overweight* to 5 = *underweight*. An example of an eating-related question is "I would like to eat healthier (e.g., more fruits and veggies, drink more water)." Finally, an example of an exercise-related question is "I would like to be more active and get in shape." Following the first survey, a description and photo of an underweight roommate, thin roommate, fit roommate or overweight roommate was presented. Each packet only displayed one image of a hypothetical roommate, so each participant only viewed one roommate body type. After the presentation of the photo, a manipulation check was included that asked the participant to "Rate your new roommate's physical appearance" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *overweight* to 5 = *underweight*. Then, the second survey featured the same mood, eating, exercise and body image related questions as previously described. Finally, a demographics page was included to assess the participants' age, height, weight, year in school, and ethnicity. Height and weight was reported and used to calculate the participants' BMI (Body Mass Index; National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, 2012) as an objective measure of body type.

### Research Design

The independent variable, which was the roommate's body type, has four levels: underweight, thin,

fit, and overweight. The dependent variables include changes in mood, changes in eating and exercise habits, and satisfaction with body image. Each dependent variable was measured before and after seeing a photo of a hypothetical roommate. An increase in scores from the first (before photos shown) to the second (after photos shown) survey indicates a positive mood, a desire to positively change eating and exercise habits, and satisfaction with one's body image. A positive change in eating and exercise habits refers to the participants wanting to engage in more health conscious behaviors such as eating more fruits and vegetables, and exercising multiple times a week. A decrease in scores from the first to the second survey indicates a negative mood, a desire to negatively change eating and exercise habits, and dissatisfaction with one's body image. A negative change in eating and exercise habits refers to the participants wanting to engage in more unhealthy behaviors such as frequently eating fast food and not exercising multiple times a week. Analysis consisted of repeated measure MANOVA. Assumptions for MANOVA were not violated.

### Results

A manipulation check was included after participants viewed a photo of their hypothetical roommate to confirm that they believed she was underweight, thin, fit, or overweight. Participants perceived the underweight roommate as underweight (96% agreement). Participants perceived the thin roommate as nearly underweight (95% agreement). Participants perceived the fit roommate as fit (86% agreement). Finally, participants perceived the overweight roommate as overweight (96% agreement). Participants' responses indicate that they classified their hypothetical roommate as intended by the researcher.

A repeated measure multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare the effect of roommate body type on participants' change in mood, desire to change eating and exercise habits, and body image satisfaction. The MANOVA revealed that across the dependent variables, there was a statistically significant main effect of change in responses from the first survey (before photo) to the second survey (after photo), Wilk's Lambda = .97,  $F(1, 141) = 4.10$ ,  $p = .046$ . However, there was no statistically significant interaction found between the roommate body type and time of measure, Wilk's Lambda = .97,  $F(1, 141) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .225$ , indicating that the roommate conditions did not differ from each other. The

## SOCIAL COMPARISON TO ROOMMATE

Table 1

*Summary of Mean Scores for All Roommate Conditions Across Each Dependent Variable From the First Survey to the Second Survey (With Standard Deviations in Parentheses)*

	Mood		Eating		Exercise		Body Image	
	1st Survey	2nd Survey						
Roommate	<i>M (SD)</i>							
Underweight	11.25 (1.94)	11.39 (2.01)	11.07 (1.59)	10.86 (1.51)	12.07 (1.68)	12.29 (1.84)	7.68 (1.70)	7.93 (1.90)
Thin	11.13 (2.24)	11.37 (2.19)	10.77 (1.93)	11.08 (1.77)	11.42 (1.93)	11.70 (1.99)	7.82 (1.56)	7.96 (1.49)
Fit	11.64 (1.54)	11.12 (1.91)	10.93 (1.56)	11.21 (1.79)	11.86 (1.76)	12.00 (1.47)	7.86 (1.43)	7.75 (1.53)
Overweight	11.21 (2.24)	11.07 (2.37)	9.62 (1.90)	9.97 (1.82)	11.10 (1.70)	11.55 (1.82)	7.52 (2.01)	7.48 (1.98)

*Note.* Participants in each roommate condition are as follows: underweight ( $n = 28$ ), thin ( $n = 60$ ), fit ( $n = 28$ ) and overweight ( $n = 29$ ).

two-way interaction between time of measure, dependent variable, and roommate condition was not statistically significant, Wilk's Lamda = .929,  $F(1, 141) = 1.16$ ,  $p = .318$ . A detailed look at the responses from participants in each roommate condition is shown in Table 1.

To uncover which dependent variable statistically significantly differed from the first to the second survey, repeated measures  $t$  tests were conducted. A Bonferroni correction was applied to correct for the multiple  $t$  tests, changing the alpha level from .05 to .0125 (Norusis, 2008). It was found that the desire to positively change exercise habits was statistically significantly different from the first survey to the second survey across all roommate body type conditions,  $t(144) = -2.60$ ,  $p = .010$ . Additionally, analysis revealed a marginally statistically significant positive change in eating habits from the first survey to the second one across all roommate body type conditions,  $t(144) = -1.76$ ,  $p = .081$ . Change in mood from the first survey to the second survey was not statistically significant across all roommate body type conditions,  $t(144) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .942$ . Change in body image satisfaction from the first survey to the second survey was also not statistically significant across all roommate

body type conditions,  $t(144) = -1.24$ ,  $p = .215$ . Summary of the responses on each dependent variable across all roommate body type conditions are shown in Table 2.

### Discussion

The present study tested whether appearance-related social comparisons to a roommate would have an effect on undergraduate women's mood, desire to change eating or exercise habits, and body image satisfaction. The results reveal that participants' showed a statistically significant change in responses from the first survey to the second survey. Specifically, participants expressed a desire to engage in more health conscious exercise habits. Contrary to the hypothesis, this was seen for participants' with an underweight roommate, thin roommate, fit roommate, and overweight roommate. Because the statistically significant positive change occurred in all roommate conditions, roommate body type did not have a differential effect on a participant's desire to change their exercise habits.

In between the first and second survey, participants viewed a photo of a hypothetical roommate. The present findings indicate that comparison to a roommate, regardless of the roommate's body type, results in a desire for positive behavioral changes such as a desire to exercise more frequently. These findings shed light on important considerations for the field. First, comparisons to various body types may have similar effects in undergraduate women, but for different reasons. For example, participants in all roommate conditions expressed a desire to engage in more exercise. For those participants with an underweight, thin, or fit roommate, this desire may be attributed to wanting to look like their roommate, because undergraduate women are influenced by sociocultural pressures to be thin (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). In line with self-discrepancy

Table 2

*Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for Responses on Mood, Eating, Exercise and Body Image Variables From First to Second Survey Across All Roommate Conditions*

Variables	First Survey		Second Survey	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mood	11.27	2.05	11.26	2.12
Eating	10.63	1.85	10.84	1.78
Exercise	11.57	1.82	11.84	1.84
Body Image	7.74	1.65	7.82	1.68

*Note.* A higher score from first to second survey indicates a better mood, positive change in eating and exercise habits, and satisfaction with body image.  $N = 145$ .

theory, participants were made aware that their body did not look like their roommate's body after viewing the roommate photo. To reduce the discrepancy, participants indicated a desire to exercise more in hopes of attaining a thinner body type (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011; Harrison, 2001). This explanation is consistent with the desire to be thin among undergraduate women (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011).

For those participants with an overweight roommate, the desire to engage in more exercise may be attributed to not wanting to look like their roommate. For example, Wasilenko et al. (2007) observed the effects of social comparisons to a fit or unfit peer in a college recreation center. It was found that women exercised for a longer time when an unfit peer was within their view, suggesting they were motivated to avoid looking like the unfit peer (Wasilenko et al., 2007). Perhaps appearance-related social comparisons to an overweight roommate increase salience of the thin ideal by reminding the woman of what not to become (e.g., overweight).

Second, undergraduate women make appearance-related social comparisons to their roommates. Unlike most studies on appearance-related social comparisons (e.g., Lin & Kulik, 2002), the present study used a roommate as a comparison target. Previous research on appearance-related social comparisons required participants to compete with a thin or attractive peer for a hypothetical date (Krones et al., 2005; Lin & Kulik, 2002). This scenario is potentially threatening to the participant, who risks losing a dating partner on the basis of her looks and body type (Lin & Kulik, 2002). Such instances may require a woman to critically compare herself to the other, resulting in a pattern of decreased mood and body satisfaction that is seen within the appearance-related social comparison literature. In the present study, however, participants were presented with a hypothetical roommate who they would be living with. Sharing an apartment or dorm room does not require one female to win over the other, allowing for a non-competitive scenario. The findings indicate that comparisons to a roommate can lead to positive changes in participants, such as a desire to eat healthier or exercise more. Thus, the effects of appearance-related social comparisons may depend on who the comparison target is. The importance of these findings is that appearance-related social comparisons to a roommate may lead to positive outcomes in undergraduate women, not negative consequences that are traditionally seen with comparisons to other peers or women in the media (e.g., Ir-

ving, 1990). It appears that comparisons to a roommate are not detrimental to undergraduate women, yet comparisons to other peers are, as shown by the available literature. The present study adds to the area of appearance-related social comparisons by suggesting that comparisons to roommates may have positive outcomes for undergraduate women.

In light of these findings, it is important to consider their importance to the area of eating pathology in undergraduate women. Because the negative consequences that are typically associated with appearance-related social comparisons have been shown to lead to disordered eating (Stice et al., 1994), insight into lessening or eliminating these negative consequences may help the young women who are at risk. Further examination of appearance-related social comparisons to roommates is warranted, as well as addressing various body types in such comparisons.

### Limitations

This research has some limitations. First, the stimuli set used for the hypothetical roommates was not standardized. Although the images intended to portray a different body type, which is an important feature of the study, the face and clothing varied for each roommate. Therefore, it is possible that participants reacted to features other than body type when making an appearance-related social comparison. Additionally, it is possible that the roommate photos did not effectively distinguish between the different body types. Although the manipulation check confirmed that participants believed their hypothetical roommate was underweight, thin, fit, or overweight, the participants may have used other characteristics of the roommate's photo in their comparison. This limitation may explain why there was no interaction involving roommate body type found during analysis. Lin and Kulik (2002) used computer software in their experiment to create images of a thin and overweight peer that had an identical face. This technique controlled for the possible confound of facial attractiveness and should be considered in future research. Second, the sample used in this study was undergraduate college women so the results may not be generalized to other populations. However, because college-aged women display high rates of body dissatisfaction and are likely to engage in social comparisons, studying this group is justified. A final limitation of the study is that the survey did not explicitly ask participants if they felt better off, or worse off, in appearance compared to their roommate. Although participants indicated their level of

happiness with their physical appearance, this information is not enough to conclude whether an upward or downward comparison occurred. A possible survey item to include in future studies is “I have a better body shape compared to my roommate,” with responses given on a Likert-type scale that ranges from agree to disagree. Including this measure would provide insight into the direction of the appearance-related social comparison and help explain why participants in all roommate conditions expressed a desire to positively change their exercise habits.

### Future Directions

As indicated by the present findings, appearance-related social comparisons to a roommate may result in positive outcomes for undergraduate women. Future studies should investigate this unique interpersonal relationship to understand the differences between comparisons made to roommates and comparisons made to other types of peers. Also, the degree to which undergraduate women rely on body type in appearance-related social comparisons to roommates versus comparisons to other types of peers should be addressed. Although unpredicted, roommate body type did not influence participants’ responses from the first to the second survey on any of the dependent variables. The area of appearance-related social comparisons to roommates is largely unexplored, and comparison targets used in previous studies do not vary in body type. Therefore, no conclusion can be drawn as to why roommate body type had no apparent impact. One explanation is that comparing oneself to a roommate does not impose threat or competition. As previously explained, this type of comparison target may result in less critical social comparisons. Since no differences between participants were found across the roommate conditions in the present study, replication of these results would provide support that participants focus less on body type when making an appearance-related social comparison to a roommate. Additionally, future researchers should use various body type photos, rather than concentrating only on the thin ideal, so that they don’t mistakenly believe the changes observed are unique to a single body type.

### Conclusion

Research on social comparisons and body dissatisfaction has focused on comparisons to thin peers or thin women in the media. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects that occur from appearance

-related social comparisons to a roommate. Roommates are an important figure in a college environment, yet have received little attention in the literature. In the present study, we exposed participants to roommates with different body types, which allowed for manipulation of the roommate’s physical appearance. Using a wide range of body types was an important feature of the study. Since roommates in university housing can be any shape or size, the manipulation of roommate body type represented a real world occurrence for undergraduate women. Although roommate body type did not have an effect on the participants’ responses, results indicated that comparisons to a roommate could result in positive outcomes for undergraduate women. We suggest that the effects of appearance-related social comparisons depend on who the comparison target is. In contrast to previous social comparison research, our roommate comparison target was presented in a non-competitive scenario. Thus, we did not see the pattern of a decrease in mood and body satisfaction that is reported within appearance-related social comparison literature. This unique roommate relationship warrants further research as appearance-related social comparisons to roommates may benefit young college females.

### References

- Bailey, S. D., & Ricciardelli, L. A. (2010). Social comparisons, appearance related comments, contingent self-esteem and their relationship with body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance among women. *Eating Behaviors, 11*, 107-112.
- Cash, T. F., Cash, D. W., & Butters, J. W. (1983). “Mirror, mirror, on the wall...?”: Contrast effects and self-evaluations of physical attractiveness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 9*, 351-358.
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*, 117-140.
- Fitzsimmons-Craft, E. E. (2011). Social psychological theories of disordered eating in college women: Review and integration. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*, 1224-1237.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women’s lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21*, 173-206.
- Harrison, K. (2001). Ourselves, our bodies: Thin-ideal media, self-discrepancies, and eating disorder symptomatology in adolescents. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 20*, 289-323.

- Hawkins, N., & Richards, S. P. (2004). The impact of exposure to the thin-ideal media image on women. *Eating Disorders, 12*, 35-50.
- Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review, 94*, 319-340.
- Irving, L. M. (1990). Mirror images: Effects of the standard of beauty on the self- and body-esteem of women exhibiting varying levels of bulimic symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 9*, 230-242.
- Krones, P. G., Stice, E., Batres, C., & Orjada, K. (2005). In vivo social comparison to a thin-ideal peer promotes body dissatisfaction: A randomized experiment. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 38*, 134-142.
- Leahey, T. M., Crowther, J. H., & Ciesla, J. A. (2011). An ecological momentary assessment of the effects of weight and shape social comparisons on women with eating pathology, high body dissatisfaction, and low body dissatisfaction. *Behavior Therapy, 42*, 197-210.
- Leahey, T. M., Crowther, J. H., & Mickelson, K. D. (2007). The frequency, nature, and effects of naturally occurring appearance-focused social comparisons. *Behavior Therapy, 38*, 132-143.
- Lin, L. F., & Kulik, J. A. (2002). Social comparison and women's body satisfaction. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 24*, 115-123.
- Lindner, D., & Hughes, A. (2008). Eating pathology and social comparison in college females. *North American Journal of Psychology, 10*, 445-462.
- Lindner, D., Tantleff-Dunn, S., & Jentsch, F. (2012). Social comparison and the 'circle of objectification'. *Sex Roles, 67*, 222-235.
- McKinley, N. M., & Hyde, J. S. (1996). The objectified body consciousness scale: Development and validation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 20*, 181-215.
- Myers, T. A., & Crowther, J. H. (2009). Social comparison as a predictor of body dissatisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 118*, 683-698.
- National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (2012). *Calculate your body mass index*. Retrieved from <http://www.nhlbhsupport.com/bmi/>
- Norusis, M. J. (2008). *SPSS 16.0 guide to data analysis*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Rodin, J., Silberstein, L., & Striegel-Moore, R. (1984). Women and weight: A normative discontent. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 32*, 267-307.
- Stice, E. (2002). Risk and maintenance factors for eating pathology: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*, 825-848.
- Stice, E., Schupak-Neuberg, E., Shaw, H. E., & Stein, R. I. (1994). Relation of media exposure to eating disorder symptomatology: An examination of mediating mechanisms. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 103*, 836-840.
- Stice, E., & Shaw, H. E. (1994). Adverse effects of the media portrayed thin-ideal on women and linkages to bulimic symptomatology. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 13*, 288-308.
- Stormer, S. M., & Thompson, J. K. (1996). Explanations of body image disturbance: A test of maturational status, negative verbal commentary, social comparison, and sociocultural hypotheses. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 19*, 193-202.
- Strahan, E. J., Wilson, A. E., Cressman, K. E., & Buote, V. M. (2006). Comparing to perfection: How cultural norms for appearance affect social comparisons and self-image. *Body Image, 3*, 211-227.
- Striegel-Moore, R. H., Silberstein, L. R., & Rodin, J. (1986). Toward an understanding of risk factors for bulimia. *American Psychologist, 41*, 246-263.
- Thompson, J. K., Coovert, M. D., & Stormer, S. M. (1999). Body image, social comparison, and eating disturbance: A covariance structure modeling investigation. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 26*, 43-51.
- Thornton, B., & Maurice, J. K. (1999). Physical attractiveness contrast effect and the moderating influence of self-consciousness. *Sex Roles, 40*, 379-392.
- Wasilenko, K. A., Kulik, J. A., & Wanic, R. A. (2007). Effects of social comparisons with peers on women's body satisfaction and exercise behavior. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 40*, 740-745.

---

Received September 30, 2012

Revision received January 4, 2013

Accepted January 23, 2013 ■