



Does Appearance-Based Exercise Advertising Affect Exercise Attitudes and Body Dissatisfaction?



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Background

Berry and Howe (2004) reported that research on the effects of appearance-based exercise advertising is limited, and that a connection is still to be discovered between exercise in the media, body image, and exercise behavior preceding these items. The current study, which was derived from Berry and Howe's work, was conducted in order to determine the effects of appearance-based exercise advertising, specifically emphasizing thinness, on women's attitudes towards exercise and body dissatisfaction. Due to Berry and Howe's findings that nonexercisers who watched an appearance-based exercise advertisement had fewer positive attitudes towards exercise and that appearance-based exercise advertisement impacted body image negatively, it was hypothesized that participants in the appearance-based condition would have less positive attitudes towards exercise and more body dissatisfaction (due to the ad exposure) than those in the control condition. In addition, based on Berry and Howe's finding that exercisers had greater positive attitudes towards exercise than nonexercisers, it was hypothesized that physically active participants from either condition would have greater positive attitudes towards exercise than non-physically active participants. It was also hypothesized that physically active participants from either condition would have less body dissatisfaction than non-physically active participants.

Methods

Participants

74 female volunteers, between the ages of 18 and 30 (median=19), from a state university in East Texas participated. Participants were recruited through the SFA-Sona System. Three participants' data were omitted due to incompleteness of surveys.

Design

This study was a 2 (ad exposure: appearance-based, non appearance-based) X 2 (physical activity: active, non-active) between-subjects design. The quasi-independent variable consisted of being active or non-active, and the second independent variable was a manipulation of viewing or not viewing the appearance-based advertisement. The dependent variables were the participants' attitudes towards exercise and the participants' degree of body dissatisfaction.

Materials

- Physical Activity Survey (PAS) determined if physically active or non-active
- Contour Drawing Rating Scale (CDRS) measured body-size dissatisfaction
- Exercise Benefits/Barriers Scale (EBBS) measured attitudes towards exercise
- Television Commercials Survey (TCS) used as filler task
- The Commercial Questionnaire (TCQ) measured commercial enjoyment
- 2 sets of five pre-recorded commercials:
 - Appearance-based = appearance/exercise-promoting advertisements (e.g., exercise equipment advertisement, advertisements showing woman on treadmill and/or thin woman in swimsuit, etc.)
 - Non-appearance-based = not related to promotion of appearance/exercise (e.g., Visa advertisement, car advertisement, Home Depot advertisement, etc.)

Procedures

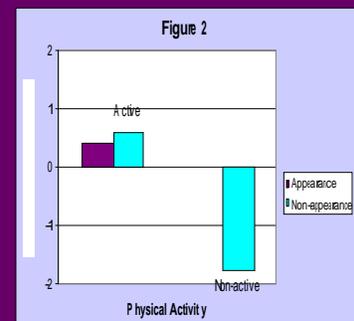
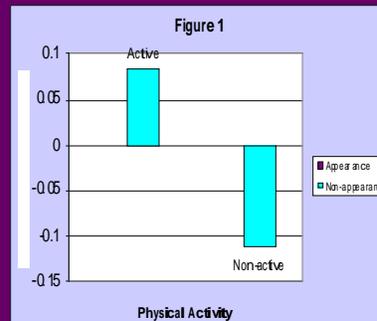
All participants were given an informed consent form, which stated that the study was investigating attitudes on college students' activities. Participants completed the PAS, which asked them to choose whether they were active or non-active. They then completed the CDRS, which asked them to rate their current and ideal figure. All participants completed the EBBS, which asked them to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement related to exercise by circling one of the four response choices: SA, A, D, SD. Participants completed the TCS, which asked them to circle yes, no, or sometimes in response to questions related to commercials and college students' activities. The order of these surveys (CDRS, EBBS, and TCS) was changed each time to prevent an order effect.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions based on their response to the PAS, and these conditions were counter-balanced across sessions. Participants in one condition, either the non-appearance-based condition or the appearance-based condition, were asked to leave the room while participants in the other condition watched and rated five commercials (TCQ). The latter participants were then asked to leave the room while participants in the other condition watched and rated five commercials (TCQ). All participants were asked to enter the room and to complete the three surveys (EBBS, CDRS, and TCS) again.

Participants filled out the demographics form, which asked for the participant's age, race/ethnicity, height, weight, and how many minutes per week they spend watching television. Participants were then given a debriefing form, thanked, and allowed to leave. The study took, on average, about 25 minutes to complete.

Results

Three 2 (ad exposure) X 2 (physical activity) between ANOVAs were performed. Based on the hypotheses that a change in body dissatisfaction and attitudes towards exercise would occur due to participants' ad exposure, the post-test scores on the CDRS and the EBBS were subtracted from pre-test scores to find a difference score for each, and these were the data analyzed. Any difference score other than 0 on the CDRS reflected body dissatisfaction. Any positive difference score on the EBBS reflected an increase in negative exercise attitudes, while any negative difference score reflected a decrease in negative exercise attitudes. For body dissatisfaction (CDRS difference scores), there were no significant main effects or interactions. See Figure 1. For attitudes towards exercise (EBBS difference scores), there were no significant main effects or interactions. See Figure 2. For the exploratory variable of enjoyment of commercials (The Commercial Questionnaire mean scores), there were no significant main effects or interactions; however, there was a slight trend showing that participants in the appearance-based condition enjoyed the commercials they watched more than participants in the non-appearance-based condition, $F(70) = 2.33$, $p = 0.13$.



Discussion

The current study did not support Berry and Howe's (2004) findings that physically active participants would have greater positive attitudes towards exercise. The hypothesis that physically active participants would have less body dissatisfaction than non-active participants was not supported. The hypothesis that participants in the appearance-based condition would have less positive attitudes towards exercise and more body dissatisfaction than those in the control condition was also not supported.

This study's results suggested that appearance-based exercise advertising may not be the catalyst for an increase in body dissatisfaction. Results suggested that appearance-based exercise advertising can negatively affect physically active persons' attitudes towards exercise, and that being physically active is not necessarily associated with having more positive exercise attitudes. Being non-active is not necessarily associated with having more negative exercise attitudes, and in addition, appearance-based exercise advertising may not affect non-active persons' attitudes towards exercise at all. Results also suggested that appearance-based exercise advertising may be more enjoyable to watch than non-appearance-based advertising.

References

- Berry, T.R. & Howe, B.L. (2004). Effects of health-based and appearance-based exercise advertising on exercise attitudes, social physique anxiety, and self-presentation in an exercise setting. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 32(1), 1-12.