

Objectifying Media and Preadolescents' Media Internalization: A Developmental Perspective

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Abstract : The current study sought to explain pre-adolescents' differential susceptibility to the internalization of mediated appearance ideals, using a three-wave panel survey of preadolescent girls and boys (N = 973, Mage = 11.14). Based on the premises of objectification theory and sexual script theory, we proposed a double role for pubertal timing and cross-sex interactions in preadolescents' media internalization. More specifically, we expected pubertal timing and cross-sex interactions to (a) trigger higher levels of media internalization, directly and indirectly via body surveillance, and (b) positively moderate the relationship between objectifying media exposure and girls' and boys' media internalization. A first cross-lagged model tested whether the pubertal timing and cross-sex interactions could trigger preadolescents media internalization and body surveillance. Structural equation analysis indicated that pubertal timing (Wave1) positively predicted body surveillance and media internalization (both Wave3). Cross-sex involvement (Wave1) was positively linked to media internalization (Wave2), but body surveillance (Wave2) was not associated with cross-sex interactions. Results also showed a reciprocal interaction between media internalization (Wave 2 and 3) and body surveillance (Wave2 and 3). Multiple group analysis showed that the observed relationships did not vary by gender. A second moderated moderation model examined whether (a) the relationship between objectifying media exposure (television and magazines, both Wave1) and media internalization (Wave3) depended on pubertal timing (Wave1), and (b) the two-way interaction between objectifying media exposure (Wave1) and pubertal timing (Wave1) varied depending on cross-sex interactions (Wave1). Results revealed that cross-sex interactions functioned as a buffer against media internalization. For preadolescents who had fewer cross-sex interactions, early puberty (relative to peers) positively moderated the relationship between magazine exposure and the internalization of mediated appearance ideals. No significant relationships were found for television. Again, no gender difference could be observed. The present study suggests a double role for pubertal timing and cross-sex interactions in preadolescents media internalization, and indicate that early developers with few cross-sex experiences are particularly vulnerable for media internalization. Additionally, the current findings suggest that there is relative gender equity in magazines' ability to cultivate media internalization among preadolescents.

Keywords : cross-sex interactions, media effects, objectification theory, pubertal timing

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