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Megan A. Vendemia
Chapman University, vendemia@chapman.edu

Melissa J. Robinson
Penn State Fayette

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Megan A. Vendemia[1] & Melissa J. Robinson[2]

Chapman University[1]

Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus[2]

Corresponding Author

Megan A. Vendemia, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
School of Communication
Chapman University
1 University Drive
Orange, CA 92866
Email: vendemia@chapman.edu

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Abstract

Through two experiments ($N = 497$), we documented how distinct portrayals of women in stories can impact readers' engagement in social comparisons and influence important aspects of their self-concepts. Specifically, this research investigated the effects of character body size (thin vs. large), body esteem (low vs. high), and story ending valence (sad vs. happy) with two distinct storylines. Results indicated that high (vs. low) body esteem characters are not only rated more aspirational, but also led readers with greater self-discrepancy to report lower state body image, suggesting upward social comparison processes are at play. Further, results indicated that reading about characters with large (vs. thin) bodies can positively affect readers' body image; however, this positive effect may be explained by downward social comparison. Findings highlight the complexities of body appearance and confidence. Strategies for effectively promoting body positivity via text-based interventions are discussed.

Keywords: body positive; body positivity; social comparison; self-discrepancy; media effects; narratives

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1. Introduction

Body image scholarship has long established that how women are portrayed in the mass media can impact how individuals feel about themselves. Often, this research has focused on how visual representations of thinness can lead women to internalize this body type as superior and negatively affect their own body satisfaction (Grabe et al., 2008; Want, 2009). In response, the body-positive movement has pushed back against the thin ideal (Sastre, 2014), urging to change the dominant (unrealistic) beauty standards and encourage appreciation of marginalized bodies. Recent research has examined how body-positive messages on social media influence body image (e.g., Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2022; Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019; Vendemia et al., 2021), and the results have generally been positive, demonstrating improved mood, as well as psychological and social well-being among women (e.g., Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019; Stevens & Griffiths, 2020).

Despite these advances, there are several areas that warrant further attention, addressed in the current study, to better understand the efficacy of body-positive content. First, although research demonstrates exposure to larger bodies is linked to favorable outcomes (Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019; Stevens & Griffiths, 2020), it is important to consider the processes explaining such effects (see Rodgers et al., 2022). It could be that women, socialized to embrace the thin-ideal, are downwardly socially comparing to women with larger bodies to feel better about themselves (see Holmstrom, 2004), possibly complicating the intents of the body-positive movement. Second, the body-positive movement has come under scrutiny for still focusing attention on appearances and imagery that only slightly deviate from traditional mainstream

beauty ideals (e.g., thin, conventionally attractive women; Cohen, Irwin, et al., 2019; Lazuka et al., 2020), rather than promoting body appreciation and esteem (i.e., positive body image). Body esteem is a cornerstone of body positivity (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015); however, it is difficult to disentangle or highlight body esteem with appearance-centric imagery.

Further research is needed to understand not only how exposure to women living in larger bodies (compared to the thin ideal) can influence readers' evaluations of others and their own self-concepts but also the stories they tell in terms of projecting confidence and success. A key challenge for body image scholars and practitioners is that it is difficult to convey an individual's psychological state, innermost thoughts, and experiences through imagery (see Green et al., 2008). One way to overcome possible confounds with imagery and critiques regarding the body-positive movement's focus on specific appearances is through books (i.e., textual narratives), which have received limited attention (e.g., Kaminski & Magee, 2013). Thus, the present study considers how narratives can be used to promote body positivity through protagonist portrayals that emphasize acceptance of larger body sizes and body esteem. The following sections review relevant research on body positivity and then introduce social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) as possible explanatory frameworks for effects of body-positive content.

1.1. Body-Positive Content and Body Positivity

The body-positive movement and body-positive content seek to deconstruct dominant beauty ideals in efforts to promote positive body image. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) define positive body image as a multifaceted construct characterized by body appreciation (i.e., functionality), body acceptance and love, broad conceptualization of beauty (e.g., personality, self-confidence), self-care, inner positivity (i.e., projecting happiness), and protective filtration of

body-related information (e.g., media messages). Having a positive body image includes expressing favorable opinions about one's body weight and shape, engaging in healthy behaviors to respect the body, and rejecting thin-ideal messages. Positive body image is also linked to enhanced mental and physical health (see Tylka, 2019).

Some recent work has employed body-positive captions or text accompanying images to portray the inner feelings of targets. For example, Davies et al. (2020) found that body-positive captions on fitspiration (i.e., inspirational fitness messages) social media images led to greater weight esteem and overall body esteem, relative to fitspiration and neutral captions. Another study by Tiggemann et al. (2020) investigated body-positive captions on social media images featuring thin and average-sized women and found that exposure to thin (vs. average-sized) women resulted in greater body dissatisfaction and less body appreciation; however, body-positive captions did not directly influence participants' body image. Interestingly, a moderating effect was found such that women high in thin-ideal internalization reported greater body appreciation viewing average-sized women with body-positive captions but also indicated lower body appreciation viewing thin-ideal images with body-positive captions.

This line of work suggests that women with average-sized or larger bodies expressing favorable views about themselves may be more effective in combatting negative body image effects, compared to thin women expressing similar views. Moreover, several experiments have examined how exposure to different body sizes affects women's body image (Bissell & Rask, 2010; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004), particularly with recent research on social media (e.g., Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2020; Hendrickse et al., 2020; Tiggemann et al., 2020). Most research establishes that images of larger bodies are effective in promoting body satisfaction and psychological well-being, with few studies focusing specifically on text-based interventions

(e.g., narratives, captions, comments; Kaminski & Magee, 2013). For instance, one experiment found that exposure to Instagram images of women with larger bodies (referred to as "body positive") increased participants' mood, body satisfaction, body appreciation, and attitudes toward body-positive content (Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019). Another experiment found women who viewed plus-size models in advertisements experienced greater body satisfaction than women who viewed thin models (Hendrickse et al., 2020).

Collectively, experimental findings and content analyses (Cohen, Irwin, et al., 2019; Lazuka et al., 2020) indicate that body-positive content is oftentimes illustrated through larger body sizes and by espousing favorable views about one's body (i.e., body esteem), regardless of size. Thus, it is important to consider the extent to which character portrayals that align with the purported aims of the movement (i.e., inclusion of larger bodies and expression of body esteem) are effective in promoting body positivity.

H1: Large (vs. thin) characters will be rated higher in body positivity.

H2: Characters with high (vs. low) body esteem will be rated higher in body positivity.

Although research suggests that exposure to women with larger bodies and body esteem can result in more favorable psychological consequences (e.g., Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019), the processes through which these effects operate has garnered less attention. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) offer possible explanations for how body-positive content influences one's self-concept.

1.2. Social Comparisons and Self-Discrepancies

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) are two frameworks that explain how people relate to others and how relations with others affect their self-concepts. Self-concepts can be broadly defined as individuals' perceptions of

themselves, influencing how they behave, and in turn, how they view themselves. These self-perceptions are shaped by the media, including body-related messages (Strauman & Glenberg, 1994). Social comparisons are common ways in which individuals evaluate their own behaviors and appearances (Mussweiler, 2003), encompassing their emotional and physical self-concepts (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Self-discrepancies further elucidate social comparisons by considering differences in the extent to which one possesses a particular attribute (actual or current self) and desires an attribute (ideal self), ultimately shaping whether an attribute seems attainable. Social comparison research has demonstrated that individuals compare not only with similar others but also with individuals they think are better or worse off than themselves (Wood, 1989). In fact, a meta-analysis of over 60 years of social comparison studies revealed that individuals tend to compare with others they think are better off than themselves, generally leading to negative mood and reduced ability in the dimension of interest (Gerber et al., 2018). Whether the resulting effect is positive or negative depends on the comparison direction (lateral, upward, downward), motivation (self-evaluation, self-improvement, self-enhancement), and perceived attainability of the attribute.

1.2.1. Body Size Comparisons and Discrepancies

Social comparisons and self-discrepancies are routinely cited in body image scholarship to explain why women experience aspirational and detrimental effects from exposure to idealized depictions of other women (Want, 2009). Though the vast majority of body image research has focused on the negative effects of exposure to the thin ideal (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010), social comparison directions and motivations aid in explaining why individuals may also experience positive effects (Veldhuis et al., 2017). For example, Halliwell and Dittmar (2005) induced self-evaluation motives and self-improvement motives with written instructions

(e.g., “please evaluate aspects of this advert in relation to yourself” vs. “please consider aspects of the ad in relation to how you could become more like the person you would ideally like to be”) and then asked participants to view images of thin models. Results indicated that self-evaluation motives with thin models increased body-focused anxiety, whereas self-improvement motives did not. Likewise, another study exposed participants to images of thin women in fashion and fitness magazines across five days, measuring if participants engaged in self-evaluation (lateral) comparisons or self-improvement (upward) comparisons (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015b). From this study, participants who engaged in more self-improvement comparisons reported greater body satisfaction during this period, but those who engaged in more self-evaluation comparisons reported reduced body satisfaction. The authors argue that the positive effect of self-improvement on body satisfaction is likely explained by perceived attainability.

In essence, exposure to thin targets can be harmful or deflating to one’s body image under certain conditions, particularly if the attribute is desired and seems unachievable (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Alternatively, because thinness is a powerful, prevailing Western sociocultural ideal (Weeden & Sabini, 2005), it may also be considered aspirational and attractive (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015b). In considering more diverse body sizes, one meta-analysis indicated that exposure to images of women with larger bodies may improve body image through downward social comparisons with targets (Holmstrom, 2004). For instance, an experiment demonstrated that viewing plus-size (vs. thin) models resulted in fewer appearance-based social comparisons and increased body satisfaction (Clayton et al., 2017). However, a limitation to this line of research examining larger bodies is that it does not assess the underlying

motivations and discrepancies. The positive effects of exposure to larger bodies may be explained by individuals' engagement in downward social comparisons with targets.

Although previous research establishes the effects of lateral and upward social comparisons with thin women, experimental studies are limited in directly examining how individuals compare themselves to targets with larger bodies. It is possible that individuals may still gravitate toward thin targets if they deem this body type aspirational (ideal), engaging in upward social comparisons; at the same time, they may also feel worse about the current (actual) state of their bodies and physical attractiveness if they fall short in this particular domain. If people compare themselves with others that they perceive to be less fortunate or worse off than themselves, they are more likely to feel better about their own circumstance. Larger bodies may be considered more attainable or even less desirable, explaining the positive effects on body image via downward social comparisons.

H3: Large (vs. thin) characters (a) will be considered less aspirational and (b) result in higher post-exposure body image.

Though research explains the potential direct effects of body size on individuals, our work seeks to understand the degree to which individuals compare themselves to targets of different sizes and how perceived discrepancies may moderate these effects (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Bissell & Rask, 2010; Vartanian, 2012). For instance, Bessenoff (2006) found that women with high body-related self-discrepancy were more likely to engage in upward social comparisons and experience negative psychological consequences from exposure to thin-ideal advertisements. Alternatively, as individuals feel more intense discrepancy with larger women, they are likely to reap more positive psychological consequences (e.g., body image) via downward socially comparison processes.

H4: Readers' attractiveness discrepancy moderates the effects of character body size on (a) aspiration and (b) state body image such that greater attractiveness discrepancy with the large (vs. thin) character will result in lower aspiration and higher state body image.

1.2.2. Body Esteem Comparisons and Discrepancies

In line with research on body positivity and its purported benefits, it is also predicted that characters who exude body esteem should inspire readers to improve upon their own body esteem, regardless of body size. One experiment explored body esteem with thin and average-sized women in stories and found that reading stories about characters with low body esteem heightened readers' weight concern relative to a control group with no mention of body size (Kaminski & Magee, 2013). Hence, we anticipate that learning about individuals with elevated body esteem may reduce preoccupation with appearance-related concerns and serve as an inspiring example for readers.

H5: Characters with high (vs. low) body esteem (a) will be considered more aspirational and (b) result in better post-exposure body image.

Given that perceived attainability determines the extent to which individuals experience positive or negative effects from exposure to inspirational or idealized portrayals (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015b), individuals may feel especially inspired by characters who seem to love and appreciate their bodies; however, it may also be the case that for those who substantially deviate in their own feelings of self-worth, high body esteem characters may highlight a deficit in themselves and may result in a deflating effect.

H6: Readers' subjective well-being discrepancy moderates the effects of character body esteem on (a) aspiration and (b) state body image such that greater subjective well-being

discrepancy with the high (vs. low) esteem character will result in higher aspiration and lower state body image.

1.3. Literary Genre and Story Ending

Beyond body size and esteem, a methodological advantage of narratives is that they can illustrate the tribulations and triumphs of individual actions within a storyline, and a broad body of research has demonstrated how narratives impact individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in a variety of areas (see Braddock & Dillard, 2016). Chick literature, or "chick lit," is characterized as a contemporary romance novel genre about single women in their 20s or 30s seeking a life partner and balancing a demanding career (Montoro, 2012). A distinguishing feature of chick lit is access to the character's most intimate thoughts and worries (e.g., weight, appearance, emotions; Rochelle, 2006). This focus on body image and weight concern has drawn criticism from scholars (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006) as to the possible negative effects it could have on readers' own body image. Thus, chick lit stories provide an ideal, naturalistic context to explore body-related factors and messages of body positivity.

In particular, story ending might influence aspects of readers' self-concepts (Richter et al., 2015), including aspiration and body image. It is expected that reading about a character who experiences success in their career or romance life domain would be judged more favorably or skilled than someone who fails. However, happy endings may negatively impact how participants view themselves and their own lives relative to the thriving character, considering findings from relevant research (e.g., Kennard et al., 2016; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2014). For example, one experiment, in which participants read either magazine excerpts on beauty (depicting the thin ideal), career, or family topics, demonstrated that exposure to the career and family topics produced more negative concerns regarding participants' future career prospects

and balancing family life, than exposure to beauty ideals (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2014). Interestingly, exposure to beauty ideals resulted in more appearance-related concerns, but they were less frequent than career and family concerns. Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2014) concluded that although there is a push in the media to depict strong feminine role models, women may still prefer traditional representations of the beauty ideal as they produce less concerns about their futures.

H7: Happy (vs. sad) story ending (a) will be considered more aspirational and (b) result in lower post-exposure body image.

Finally, we sought to broadly examine how different stories and characters are evaluated. Narrative persuasion research suggests character liking is an important factor influencing message processing in narratives (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Moreover, given the variability that can exist within stories, we considered how different popular storylines—specifically, career and romance—might impact our hypothesized outcomes in efforts to document the robustness of effects across distinct topics.

RQ1: Does body size (thin vs. large), body esteem (low vs. high), or story ending (sad vs. happy) result in different ratings of character liking?

RQ2: Does the context of the story influence outcomes differently?

Accordingly, the present work used the experiences of protagonists in narratives to understand how readers may socially compare and are affected by distinct portrayals of women in stories. Specifically, we empirically investigated how character body size (thin vs. large), body esteem (low vs. high), and story ending valence (sad vs. happy) influence readers' self-concepts, particularly related to body image. In order to demonstrate robustness of effects, two

experimental studies were conducted featuring a career scenario (Study 1) and a romantic scenario (Study 2).

2. Method

2.1. Research Design Overview

We conducted two 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects online experiments in which participants were randomly assigned to read a version of a story about a character and then responded to a series of measures that assessed their perceptions of the character and themselves. The character's body description (thin vs. large), body esteem (low vs. high), and story ending valence (sad vs. happy) were varied. Procedures for Study 1 and Study 2 are reviewed.

2.2. Study 1: Career/Workplace Narrative

2.2.1. Procedure

All procedures and materials were approved by Chapman University's Institutional Review Board. The recruitment materials explained the goal of the study is to understand what readers think about characters in stories. After providing consent, participants were instructed to read a short fictional story about a woman. They were randomly assigned by Qualtrics online survey software (Qualtrics.com) to one of eight experimental versions of the story. Participants then completed an online questionnaire. They were compensated $2.50 in exchange for their participation through CloudResearch at the conclusion of the study.

2.2.2. Sample

We restricted our recruitment to only include U.S. adult women, ages 18 to 40 (M = 31.42, SD = 5.20), to align with the target demographic of the literary genre (Montoro, 2012; Rochelle, 2006) and research on body image across lifespan (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). A sample of 250 women was recruited for Study 1. One participant's data were excluded from

analyses for failing to meet the inclusion criteria for the study; thus, the final sample included 249 participants. All participants passed a single-item attention check. The majority of our sample included cisgender women (97%); six identified as non-binary and one preferred not to indicate their gender identity. Participants identified as White (69%), Black/African American (10.8%), Asian (6.8%), Hispanic/Latinx (5.2%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.4%), Other (1.2%), and Multiracial (6.4%). Their body mass index (BMI) ranged from 16.14 to 65.18 (M = 26.89, SD = 7.88); one participant failed to provide adequate BMI data.

2.2.3. Stimulus Materials

The narrative stimuli for Study 1 were adapted from narratives previously used by Kaminski and Magee (2013) and based on the novel, *Something Borrowed* (Giffin, 2005). Example experimental stimuli can be found in our supplemental file. The narrative topic focused on career success. The character works for a newspaper and is waiting to hear if she got a promotion. She is preparing to meet with her editor and provides the reader with her innermost thoughts and feelings, including her body size and weight. The narrative details how the meeting with her editor goes. Different versions of the narrative were approximately 1,020 words in length and took approximately five minutes to read (M = 4.71, SD = 2.98).

With respect to body size (thin vs. large), the character's height, weight, and clothing size were included in the story. The thin character was 5'4", 105 pounds, and a size zero, whereas the large character was 5'4", 235 pounds, and a size 24. Body size manipulations were based on the average woman's height in the U.S. and calculations of underweight and overweight/obese weight based on BMI (Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). In terms of body esteem (low vs. high), these narratives also featured four body esteem comments. For the low body esteem comments, the character expressed unhappiness with

her body and specific body parts (e.g., legs, stomach). For the high body esteem comments, the character expresses pride in how her body looks and certain body parts. In addition, the story included a sad or happy ending. In the happy ending version, the character receives the promotion. In the sad ending version, the character gets bad news that she is being laid off.

2.2.4. Measures

2.2.4.1. Manipulation Checks. Three scales were used to determine the success of the experimental manipulations. *Perceived body size* was measured by asking participants to rate the body size of the character using the Female Photographic Figure Rating Scale (Swami et al., 2008). The single-item scale includes 10 images of women ordered by increasing body size. Participants were asked to select the figure they felt most closely resembles the character (1-10). *Perceived body esteem* was measured with three seven-point semantic differential items about the main character with the following endpoints: Not very confident in her body/Very confident in her body; Dissatisfied with her appearance/Very satisfied with her appearance; and Ashamed of her body/Proud of her body ($\alpha = .99$). *Story ending valence* was assessed with three seven-point semantic differential items about the story ending with the following endpoints: Sad/Happy; Negative/Positive; and Depressing/Uplifting ($\alpha = .98$).

2.2.4.2. Aspiration. How aspirational participants found the character was measured via two Likert-style items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) adapted from Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2020): "I would like to experience the same scenario as the woman in the story," and "I would like to be just like the woman in the story" ($r = .77$).

2.2.4.3. Subjective Well-Being and Attractiveness Discrepancy. Inspired by the Life Role Salience Scales (Amatea et al., 1986) and Knobloch-Westerwick et al.'s (2020) Possible Future Selves (PFS) measure, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they

believed the character possessed three qualities of *subjective well-being* (happiness, success, life satisfaction; α = .93) and *attractiveness* on visual analogue scales (VAS) ranging from 0 to 100 (0% = *not at all*; 100% = *completely*). Participants also rated themselves on these same qualities. Composite subjective well-being and attractiveness discrepancy scores were then created by subtracting the ratings of the character from participants' ratings of themselves (i.e., Self – Character = Discrepancy) as a proxy for social comparison. All scores were converted to positive values ranging from 0 to 100 with higher scores reflecting greater discrepancy between oneself and the character.

2.2.4.4. State Body Image. How participants were feeling about their bodies after reading the story was measured with eight Likert-style items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) adapted from Heatherton and Polivy (1991), Homan (2016), and Mendelson et al. (2001). These items focused on appearance self-esteem, weight and shape satisfaction, and body appreciation. Due to high intercorrelations among items, they were subjected to factor analysis that revealed a single factor explaining 79.68% of the variance with factor loadings ranging from .77 to .94. Example items are: "I am very pleased with my appearance," and "I appreciate the different and unique characteristics of my body" (α = .96).

2.2.4.5. Body Positivity. Two Likert-style items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) were created to gauge the extent to which readers thought the story and character promoted body appreciation and acceptance, based on conceptualizations of body positivity (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Items include: "The story promotes body appreciation and acceptance," and "The main character is body positive" (*r* = .87).

2.2.4.6. Character Liking. Character likeability was measured with three Likert-style items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) from Robinson and Knobloch-Westerwick (2017). For example: "I liked the main character very much" (α = .93).

2.3. Study 2: Romance/Dating Narrative

We replicated Study 1 with a different topic to see if these effects are robust across storylines. Study 2 followed the same procedures and used the same measures.

2.3.1. Sample

Another sample of 250 women was recruited for Study 2. Two participants did not meet the inclusion criteria; thus, the final sample included 248 participants. Similar to Study 1, the vast majority of our sample included cisgender women (98%) and five identified as non-binary. Ages ranged from 19 to 40 (M = 31.29, SD = 5.22). Participants identified as White (70%), Asian (10.1%), Black/African American (6.5%), Hispanic/Latinx (6%), and Multiracial (7.7%). Their BMI ranged from 16.36 to 66.17 (M = 26.76, SD = 7.15); one participant failed to provide adequate BMI data.

2.3.2. Stimulus Materials

For Study 2, the narrative was also adapted from stimuli used by Kaminski and Magee (2013) and based on the novel, *Dreaming in Black and White* (Jensen Walker, 2005). Experimental stimuli can be found in our supplemental file. The topic focused on romantic success. In this narrative, the character goes on a date, detailing her excitement and preparation for her date, as well as how the date goes. This narrative included the same experimental manipulations as Study 1 but varied the context. In the happy ending version, the character explains the date was successful concluding in a romantic kiss and excitement about future plans. In the sad ending version, the character experiences an awkward "goodbye" without a kiss and

explains that the date never reaches out again. Consistent with Study 1, different versions of the narrative were approximately 1,125 words in length and took about five minutes to read (M = 5.19, SD = 4.25).

3. Results

SPSS Statistics (Version 26) was used to test our hypotheses and research questions. Reading time was used to identify any outliers in the data. Six participants in Study 1 and seven participants in Study 2 were three standard deviations above the mean. Their responses were initially inspected separately but did not distinctly deviate from the sample on any outcomes. All responses were retained in our analyses. Post-hoc power analyses indicated our sample achieved sufficient statistical power for detecting effects unless noted otherwise (see Tables 2 and 3).

3.1. Data Analysis Plan

First, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run to test the success of the experimental manipulations for each study. Next, we used ANOVAs to test the direct effects of each experimental factor on their posited outcomes for Study 1, followed by the same analyses for Study 2 to see if a consistent pattern emerged with a different story topic. We then conducted moderation analyses to examine the conditional effects of body size and body esteem on outcomes. Table 1 includes zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for key variables. Tables 2 and 3 provide the one-way ANOVA results organized by experimental factors. Tables 4-7 contain the conditional effects of the experimental factors at values of the moderator.

Although we did not make a priori predictions about interactions among experimental factors, two- and three-way ANOVAs were used to detect any interaction effects. These analyses revealed only significant interactions between experimental factors on ratings of body positivity; however, these effects were marginal across both storylines. All other interactions were not

significant. A summary of descriptive statistics and significant mean differences by experimental condition are reported in a supplemental file.

3.2. Study 1: Career/Workplace Narrative

3.2.1. Manipulation Checks

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to test the effectiveness of character body size (thin vs. large), body esteem (low vs. high), and story ending (sad vs. happy) manipulations with the career story. Participants believed the thin character (M = 2.33, SD = 1.70) had a significantly smaller figure on the Female Photographic Figure Rating Scale (1-10) than the large character (M = 8.56, SD = 1.34), $F(1, 247) = 1034.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .81$. Participants rated the high body esteem character (M = 6.46, SD = 0.96) as possessing more body confidence than the low esteem character (M = 1.30, SD = 0.75), $F(1, 247) = 2227.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .90$. Lastly, participants felt the happy story ending (M = 2.77, SD = 1.54) was more positive and uplifting than the sad ending (M = 6.61, SD = 0.80), $F(1, 247) = 609.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .71$. Thus, all experimental inductions were successful.

3.2.2. Character Body Size

We hypothesized that the large (vs. thin) character would be rated higher in body positivity (H1). Supporting H1, participants rated the large character (M = 3.96, SD = 2.36) higher in body positivity than the thin character (M = 3.12, SD = 1.97), $F(1, 247) = 9.50$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 04$.

We expected that the large (vs. thin) character (a) would be considered less aspirational and (b) result in higher post-exposure body image (H3). Supporting H3a, participants found the large character (M = 2.59, SD = 1.57) less aspirational than the thin character (M = 2.95, SD = 1.78), $F(1, 247) = 2.90$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$. However, reading about the large (M = 4.33, SD =

1.48) or thin (M = 4.24, SD = 1.57) character did not yield differences in post-exposure state body image, $F(1, 247) = 0.21$, $p = .65$ (H3b). H3 was partially supported.

We predicted that readers' attractiveness discrepancy moderates the effects of character body size on (a) aspiration and (b) state body image such that greater attractiveness discrepancy with the large (vs. thin) character would result in lower aspiration and higher state body image (H4). A set of moderation analyses was conducted using the PROCESS macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2022) with 95% confidence intervals.

The first moderation analysis considered the effects of character body size (X; 0 = Thin; 1 = Large) with participants' attractiveness discrepancy as a moderator (W) on aspiration (Y). The moderation was not statistically significant, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p = .09$ (see Table 4). H4a was not supported.

The second moderation test considered the effects of character body size (X; 0 = Thin; 1 = Large) with participants' attractiveness discrepancy as a moderator (W) on state body image (Y). The moderation was statistically significant, $\Delta R^2 = .10$, $p < .001$. The Johnson-Neyman technique was used to further examine significance regions at different values of the moderator. Significance was detected at higher values of attractiveness discrepancy such that those who had greater attractiveness discrepancy with the large character reported higher state body image. However, those who reported smaller discrepancy with the large character reported lower state body image (see Table 5). The moderation is cleaved given the relationship changes in valence at different values of the moderator (Holbert & Park, 2020). H4b was supported.

3.2.3. Character Body Esteem

We hypothesized that readers would rate the high (vs. low) body esteem character higher in body positivity (H2). The high body esteem character (M = 5.23, SD = 1.58) was considered

more body positive than the low esteem character (M = 1.79, SD = 1.15), $F(1, 247) = 358.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .61$. H2 was supported.

We expected that the high (vs. low) body esteem character (a) would be considered more aspirational and (b) result in better post-exposure body image (H5). Supporting H5a, participants found the high body esteem character (M = 3.32, SD = 1.74) more aspirational than the low body esteem character (M = 2.21, SD = 1.44), $F(1, 247) = 30.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$, as anticipated. Moreover, those who read about the high body esteem character (M = 4.49, SD = 1.53) reported better state body image than those reading about the low esteem character (M = 4.07, SD = 1.49), $F(1, 247) = 5.02$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$ (H5b). H5 was supported.

We predicted that readers' subjective well-being discrepancy moderates the effects of character body esteem on (a) aspiration and (b) state body image such that greater subjective well-being discrepancy with the high (vs. low) esteem character will result in higher aspiration and lower state body image (H6). Another set of moderation analyses was conducted using the PROCESS macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2022).

The first moderation analysis considered the effects of character body esteem (X; 0 = Low; 1 = High) with participants' subjective well-being discrepancy as a moderator (W) on aspiration (Y). The moderation was significant, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p = .01$. Using the Johnson-Neyman technique, significance was only detected at certain values of subjective well-being discrepancy. As subjective well-being discrepancy increased with the high esteem character, the more aspirational they found the character to be. However, no significant effects were detected at very low values of discrepancy (see Table 6). The moderation is contingent given the relationship is significant only at specific values of the moderator (Holbert & Park, 2020). H6a was supported.

The second moderation test considered the effects of character body esteem (X; 0 = Low; 1 = High) with participants' subjective well-being discrepancy as a moderator (W) on state body image (Y). The moderation was statistically significant, $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .001$. Significance was detected at low and high values of subjective well-being discrepancy, indicating a cleaved moderation (Holbert & Park, 2020). Those who reported lower subjective well-being discrepancy with the high esteem character reported higher state body image; whereas those who reported greater discrepancy with the high esteem character reported lower state body image (see Table 7). H6b was supported.

3.2.4. Story Ending Valence

We posited that the character experiencing the happy (vs. sad) story ending (a) would be considered more aspirational and (b) result in lower state body image (H7). Supporting H7a, participants found the character more aspirational in the happy ending ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.72$) than the sad version ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 247) = 63.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$. However, reading the happy story ending ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.59$) or sad story ending ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.46$) did not yield differences in state body image, $F(1, 247) = 0.20$, $p = .65$ (H7b). H7 was partially supported.

Finally, we asked if differences exist in character likeability across the versions (RQ1). Participants found the large character ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.48$) more likeable than the thin character ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.63$), $F(1, 247) = 8.90$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$. They also liked the high body esteem character ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.40$) more than the low esteem character ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.60$), $F(1, 247) = 29.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Participants did not significantly differ in their ratings of character likeability whether they read the happy ending ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.59$) and sad ending ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.57$), $F(1, 247) = 1.57$, $p = .21$.

3.3. Study 2: Romance/Dating Narrative

We further asked if story context influences outcomes differently (RQ2). The following section outlines replications and distinctions between Study 1 (Career/Workplace Narrative) and Study 2 (Romance/Dating Narrative). All experimental inductions were strong and successful. Please see Table 3 for ANOVA results by experimental factor.

3.3.1. Character Body Size

Effects of character body size replicated in Study 2. Although not supported in Study 1, character body size in the romance story significantly influenced participants' state body image (H3b), such that reading about the large character (M = 4.38, SD = 1.59) resulted in better state body image than the thin character (M = 3.82, SD = 1.60), $F(1, 246) = 7.73$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$. H3 was fully supported in Study 2.

In addition, moderation analyses revealed participants' attractiveness discrepancy (W) significantly moderated the effect of character body size (X; 0 = Thin; 1 = Large) on aspiration (Y), $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .001$ (H4a). Specifically, significant effects were only detected at higher values of the moderator such that those who had more intense attractiveness discrepancy with the large character reported lower aspiration (see Table 4). H4 was fully supported in Study 2.

3.3.2. Character Body Esteem

Effects of character body esteem largely replicated in Study 2; however, the effect of character body esteem on state body image did not replicate in Study 2 (H5b): High body esteem (M = 3.97, SD = 1.60) and low body esteem (M = 4.22, SD = 1.63) characters did not result in differences in state body image, $F(1, 246) = 1.57$, $p = .21$. H5 was partially supported in Study 2.

3.3.3. Story Ending Valence

Effects of story ending replicated in Study 2; however, one difference emerged between storylines. Participants reading the happy ending (M = 3.91, SD = 1.61) reported slightly lower state body image than those who read the sad ending (M = 4.28, SD = 1.61), $F(1, 246) = 3.20$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (H7b). H7 was fully supported in Study 2.

Replicating Study 1, participants found the large and high body esteem character more likeable than the thin and low body esteem character (RQ1), with no differences in character likeability between story endings in Study 2.

4. Discussion

Through two experiments, we investigated how character body size (thin vs. large), body esteem (low vs. high), and story ending valence (sad vs. happy) influenced readers' self-concepts. Broadly, these studies documented that large characters who exuded favorable views about their bodies were considered more likeable and effective at promoting body positivity. At the same time, thin characters with high body esteem who experienced positive life events (i.e., happy ending) were deemed most aspirational. Moderation analyses further elucidated these relationships, suggesting readers' discrepancy ultimately explained the effects of character body size and esteem on readers' body image: greater subjective well-being discrepancy with high body esteem characters resulted in lower state body image; greater attractiveness discrepancy with large characters resulted in better state body image. The vast majority of findings replicated across story topics demonstrating the robustness of these effects. Interestingly, the high (vs. low) body esteem character in the career story and the large (vs. thin) character in the romance story yielded more favorable effects on state body image, illustrating the relative importance of context. We discuss theoretical and practical implications of this work, as well as highlight some limitations and offer recommendations for future research.

4.1. Implications

Large and high body esteem characters were considered more body positive and likeable than thin and low body esteem characters across both storylines. Our findings are largely consistent with recent research using captions and text to communicate psychological states of women in imagery (Davies et al., 2020; Tiggemann et al., 2020). Women with larger bodies expressing favorable views about themselves may be more effective in combatting negative body image effects, compared to thin women expressing similar views. Notable critiques of the body-positive movement are that appearance is still central and media representations are frequently dominated by average-sized women (Cohen, Irwin, et al., 2019). Women who substantially diverge from the thin ideal, like the large characters in our narratives, may be better advocates for the aims of the movement, consistent with extant research on the positive effects of exposure to larger bodies (Cohen, Fardouly, et al., 2019). Future work should also continue to determine the specific reasons why people like individuals with larger bodies and consider other forms of diversity and inclusion (e.g., race, disability). One possibility is that these targets are less threatening, consistent with downward social comparison processes (Willis, 1981); another plausible explanation is that these sources are traditionally less represented in the mainstream media and result in a positive expectancy violation (Burgoon, 1993).

Further considering the effects of body size, thin characters were considered more aspirational, even though exposure can be more harmful to individuals' current body image. Past experimental research documents how those with high body-related self-discrepancies are more likely to engage in upward social comparisons with thin-ideal imagery and experience negative psychological consequences as a result (Bessenoff, 2006). Our experiments extend social comparisons and self-discrepancies to understand the effects of larger bodies, finding that higher

values of discrepancy with larger women resulted in more favorable psychological consequences. Our results mostly fall in line with established body image research regarding body size (Holmstrom, 2004): Although individuals tended to experience more favorable effects from exposure to larger women, this finding may also mean that individuals are engaging in downward social comparisons with large characters as they (a) did not find these characters as aspirational and (b) experienced the most favorable body image effects at higher values of discrepancy. It appears, then, that society still has more work to do in loosening the grips of thin idealization. On the surface, downward social comparisons with targets can be beneficial and protective, enhancing one's mood and feelings about oneself. However, if larger women are judged as less desirable, this self-serving enhancement effect may result in derogation, prejudice, and reinforcement of weight stigma (Vartanian & Silverstein, 2013; Willis, 1981). Future studies should consider other factors (e.g., individual differences) that influence gravitation toward particular media portrayals and their subsequent effects of individuals' self-concepts.

Notably, our work identifies some context-specific effects of body size and esteem on body image. The high body esteem character in the career story and the large character in the romance story yielded more favorable effects on state body image. Perhaps body size is deemed a more important factor in romance than career success, consistent with magazine excerpts on beauty ideals generating more appearance-focused concerns than parenting and career portrayals (Kennard et al., 2016), and esteem is more influential in a professional context. Future work should continue to consider distinct storylines and literary genres in which appearance may be more or less central to the context. In considering the relative influence of experimental factors, the effects of body esteem were more pronounced and influential on impressions of body positivity and aspiration than body size. Consistent with body image work examining self-

improvement social comparisons with more successful comparison targets (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015b), characters with high body esteem were considered more aspirational. Nonetheless, greater discrepancy with high body esteem characters resulted in lower state body image, in line with research examining social comparisons and relevant self-concepts (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020). Body image scholarship indicates women traditionally are conditioned to express normative discontent with their bodies (Rodin et al., 1984); however, these results shed light on the increasing pressures to espouse favorable views toward one's body and its possible inadvertent damaging effects on others.

In general, our findings have implications for fostering positive body image and healthy self-concepts using a text-based approach. From a practical standpoint, this work could inform media literacy interventions and campaigns promoting body positivity in a more effective manner. Indeed, some researchers suggest even moving past body positivity toward "body neutrality" approaches in which individuals are not forced to love their bodies but accept them for how they are (Cohen et al., 2020; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Mainly, it is crucial that the body-positive movement shifts away from imagery and appearance-centric content and puts greater emphasis on psychological well-being, in line with recent critiques (Cohen et al., 2020). Our work finds that messages framed as endorsing favorable views about one's body and body confidence can be inspirational. Books and other forms of textual narratives (e.g., blogs) can be attractive vehicles to convey feelings and understand the lived experience of others in absence of visual information.

4.2. Limitations and Future Directions

Although this work provides insightful empirical findings, it is not without a few limitations, including the posttest-only and forced exposure experimental design that cannot

account for baseline characteristics and story genre preferences. The Selective Exposure Self- and Affect- Management Model (SESAM; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015a) explains how individuals maintain their self-concepts, and associated affect, through media selection and social comparisons. Future research should implement a selective exposure quasi-experimental design in which individuals select their preferred messages to understand how currently activated self-concepts influence media selection and subsequent effects on the individual. To enhance ecological validity, more prolonged and longitudinal experimental designs are needed to account for the long-term, enduring effects of such media exposure. Further, a more diverse sample with respect to race and ethnic background is necessary as social comparison processes and body image concerns may differ based on these characteristics (Evans & McConnell, 2003). Finally, future studies may wish to include an average-sized target or control group that removes weight-related information to explore the effects of body esteem in isolation. Despite these limitations, the current work highlights the complexities of body appearance and confidence in media messages, as well offers guidance for body image scholars and practitioners.

4.3. Conclusion

Guided by social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory, the goal of this research was to understand how exposure to different portrayals of women varying in body size, esteem, and the stories they tell can influence readers' self-concepts. Witnessing confident, successful women can inspire others to improve upon themselves. Although exposure to women with larger bodies can have less detrimental effects on body image, the effects may be explained by the extent to which individuals feel discrepant and potentially downwardly social compare with these sources. If women believe they are better off than others on the grounds of body size, this could result in further perpetuation of stigma, undermining the aims of the body-positive

movement, and raising other concerns about feeling better about oneself at another's expense. More research is needed that accounts for individuals' discrepancy between themselves and others (e.g., media figures) to enhance explanatory power in body image scholarship, especially with the push for more diverse and realistic representations of women.

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Table 1

Zero-Order Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Body Positivity	--	.14*	-.05	-.01	.40**	.53**
2. State Body Image	.04	--	-.15*	-.07	-.05	-.01
3. Attractiveness Discrepancy	-.08	-.24**	--	.41**	-.08	-.16*
4. Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	-.11	-.17**	.53**	--	< .001	-.14*
5. Aspiration	.29**	-.11	.03	-.04	--	.47**
6. Character Liking	.41**	.08	-.11	-.13*	.30**	--
Study 1 – Career/Workplace Narrative (N = 249)						
M	3.53	4.29	23.97	19.76	2.77	4.68
SD	(2.21)	(1.52)	(23.80)	(19.67)	(1.69)	(1.58)
Study 2 – Romance/Dating Narrative (N = 248)						
M	4.04	4.10	25.85	22.55	2.73	5.01
SD	(2.03)	(1.62)	(25.55)	(22.97)	(1.60)	(1.41)

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01 (two-tailed). Career/Workplace Narrative (Study 1) correlations are above the diagonal; Romance/Dating Narrative (Study 2) correlations are below the diagonal. Discrepancy scores ranged from 0-100. All other measures were on seven-point scales.

Table 2

Study 1 – Career/Workplace Narrative – ANOVA Results by Experimental Factor

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(1, 247)	η^2
Character Body Size	Thin (*n* = 126)		Large (*n* = 123)			
Manipulation Checks						
Perceived Body Figure	2.33	1.70	8.56	1.34	1034.27***	.81
Body Positivity (H1)	3.12	1.97	3.96	2.36	9.50**	.04
Aspiration (H3a)	2.95	1.78	2.59	1.57	2.90**	.01†
State Body Image (H3b)	4.24	1.57	4.33	1.48	0.21	--
Character Liking (RQ1)	4.39	1.63	4.98	1.48	8.90**	.03
Character Body Esteem	Low (*n* = 123)		High (*n* = 126)			
Manipulation Checks						
Perceived Body Esteem	1.30	0.75	6.46	0.96	2227.60***	.90
Body Positivity (H2)	1.79	1.15	5.23	1.58	385.91***	.61
Aspiration (H5a)	2.21	1.44	3.32	1.74	30.11***	.11
State Body Image (H5b)	4.07	1.49	4.49	1.53	5.02*	.02†
Character Liking (RQ1)	4.16	1.60	5.20	1.40	29.89***	.11
Story Ending Valence	Sad (*n* = 124)		Happy (*n* = 125)			
Manipulation Checks						
Story Ending Valence	2.77	1.54	6.61	0.80	609.32***	.71
Body Positivity	3.54	2.13	3.52	2.29	0.01	--
Aspiration (H7a)	2.01	1.26	3.53	1.72	63.61***	.20
State Body Image (H7b)	4.33	1.59	4.24	1.46	0.20	--
Character Liking (RQ1)	4.55	1.57	4.81	1.59	1.57	--

Note. †Indicates insufficient observed statistical power based on conventional values.

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

Table 3

Study 2 – Romance/Dating Narrative – ANOVA Results by Experimental Factor

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(1, 246)	η^2
Character Body Size	Thin (*n* = 125)		Large (*n* = 123)			
Manipulation Checks						
Perceived Body Figure	2.18	1.51	8.39	1.58	999.24***	.80
Body Positivity (H1)	3.39	1.85	4.70	2.00	28.35***	.10
Aspiration (H3a)	2.92	1.72	2.53	1.46	3.81*	.02†
State Body Image (H3b)	3.82	1.60	4.38	1.59	7.73**	.03
Character Liking (RQ1)	4.65	1.57	5.37	1.13	16.74***	.06
Character Body Esteem	Low (*n* = 123)		High (*n* = 125)			
Manipulation Checks						
Perceived Body Esteem	1.51	0.74	6.46	0.95	2096.09***	.89
Body Positivity (H2)	2.70	1.54	5.36	1.53	185.20***	.43
Aspiration (H5a)	2.34	1.36	3.11	1.74	14.95***	.06
State Body Image (H5b)	4.22	1.63	3.97	1.60	1.57	--
Character Liking (RQ1)	4.83	1.41	5.18	1.40	4.01*	.02†
Story Ending Valence	Sad (*n* = 123)		Happy (*n* = 125)			
Manipulation Checks						
Story Ending Valence	2.25	1.25	6.45	0.82	979.49***	.80
Body Positivity	3.93	2.09	4.15	1.97	0.73	--
Aspiration (H7a)	2.24	1.49	3.20	1.57	24.29***	.09
State Body Image (H7b)	4.28	1.61	3.91	1.61	3.20**	.01†
Character Liking (RQ1)	4.97	1.47	5.04	1.36	0.14	--

Note. †Indicates insufficient observed statistical power based on conventional values.

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

Table 4

Conditional Effects of Character Body Size (X) and Attractiveness Discrepancy (W) on Aspiration

Study 1 – Career/Workplace Narrative (N = 249)				
	Aspiration (Y)			
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Body Size (X)	0.01	0.30	0.04	.97
Attractiveness Discrepancy	0.002	0.01	0.36	.72
Body Size x Attractiveness Discrepancy	-0.02	0.01	-1.71	.09
Model Summary: R^2 = .17, F(3, 245) = 2.44, p = .07				

Study 2 – Romance/Dating Narrative (N = 248)						
	Aspiration (Y)					
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*		
Body Size (X)	0.36	0.28	1.27	.21		
Attractiveness Discrepancy	0.01	0.01	2.57	.01		
Body Size x Attractiveness Discrepancy	-0.03	0.01	-3.74	< .001		
Model Summary: R^2 = .26, F(3, 244) = 6.00, p < .001						
Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Attractiveness Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
1.00	0.33	0.28	1.18	.24	-0.22	0.88
17.50	-0.16	0.21	-0.77	.44	-0.58	0.25
25.41	-0.40	0.20	-1.97	.05	-0.79	0.00
56.00	**-1.31**	**0.32**	**-4.12**	**< .001**	**-1.93**	**-0.68**
100.00	**-2.62**	**0.63**	**-4.16**	**< .001**	**-3.86**	**-1.38**

Note. Character Body Size is dummy coded as: 0 = Thin; 1 = Large. Moderator values and significance regions were determined using the Johnson-Neyman technique. Bold-faced values are significant at values of the moderator.

Table 5

Conditional Effects of Character Body Size (X) and Attractiveness Discrepancy (W) on State Body Image

Study 1 – Career/Workplace Narrative (N = 249)

	State Body Image (Y)			
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Body Size (X)	-0.87	0.26	-3.38	< .001
Attractiveness Discrepancy	-0.03	0.01	-5.60	< .001
Body Size x Attractiveness Discrepancy	0.04	0.01	-5.34	< .001

Model Summary: R^2 = .36, F(3, 245) = 11.80, p < .001

Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Attractiveness Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
1.00	**-0.83**	**0.25**	**-3.29**	**.001**	**-1.33**	**-0.33**
11.47	-0.40	0.21	-1.97	.05	-0.81	0.00
30.46	0.37	0 .19	1.97	.05	0.00	0.74
50.00	**1.17**	**0.27**	**4.34**	**< .001**	**0.64**	**1.70**
98.00	**3.13**	**0.59**	**5.26**	**< .001**	**1.96**	**4.30**

Study 2 – Romance/Dating Narrative (N = 248)

	State Body Image (Y)			
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Body Size (X)	0.52	0.27	-1.93	.05
Attractiveness Discrepancy	-0.03	0.01	-6.01	< .001
Body Size x Attractiveness Discrepancy	0.04	0.01	4.98	< .001

Model Summary: R^2 = .40, F(3, 244) = 15.61, p < .001

Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Attractiveness Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
1.00	-0.49	0.27	-1.82	.07	-1.01	0.04
17.50	0.14	0.20	0.69	.49	-0.26	0.54
23.85	0.38	0.20	1.97	.05	0.00	0.76
56.00	**1.60**	**0.30**	**5.27**	**< .001**	**1.00**	**2.20**
100.00	**3.27**	**0.60**	**5.43**	**< .001**	**2.08**	**4.45**

Note. Character Body Size is dummy coded as: 0 = Thin; 1 = Large. Moderator values and significance regions were determined using the Johnson-Neyman technique. Bold-faced values are significant at values of the moderator.

Table 6

Conditional Effects of Character Body Esteem (X) and Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy (W) on Aspiration (Y)

Study 1 – Career/Workplace Narrative (N = 249)

	Aspiration (Y)			
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Body Esteem (X)	0.56	0.29	1.96	.05
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	-0.02	0.01	-2.32	.02
Body Esteem x Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	0.03	0.01	2.71	.01

Model Summary: R^2 = .37, F(3, 245) = 12.75, p < .001

Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
0.04	0.56	0.29	1.97	.05	0.00	1.12
2.00	**0.62**	**0.27**	**2.28**	**.02**	**0.08**	**1.15**
13.33	**0.94**	**0.21**	**4.46**	**< .001**	**0.52**	**1.35**
41.00	**1.72**	**0.30**	**5.73**	**< .001**	**1.13**	**2.32**
95.00	**3.25**	**0.81**	**4.00**	**< .001**	**1.65**	**4.86**

Study 2 – Romance/Dating Narrative (N = 248)

	Aspiration (Y)			
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Body Esteem (X)	0.36	0.28	1.29	.20
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	-0.01	0.01	-1.73	.09
Body Esteem x Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	0.02	0.01	2.02	.045

Model Summary: R^2 = .27, F(3, 244) = 6.42, p < .001

Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
2.61	0.41	0.26	1.54	.12	-0.11	0.93
6.64	0.48	0.24	1.97	.05	0.00	0.96
15.00	**0.62**	**0.21**	**2.98**	**.003**	**0.21**	**1.04**
43.11	**1.12**	**0.27**	**4.21**	**< .001**	**0.59**	**1.64**
100.00	**2.11**	**0.70**	**3.02**	**.003**	**0.74**	**3.49**

Note. Character Body Esteem is dummy coded as: 0 = Low; 1 = High. Moderator values and significance regions were determined using the Johnson-Neyman technique. Bold-faced values are significant at values of the moderator.

Table 7

Conditional Effects of Character Body Esteem (X) and Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy (W) on State Body Image (Y)

Study 1 – Career/Workplace Narrative (N = 249)						
	State Body Image (Y)					
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*		
Body Esteem (X)	1.22	0.26	4.60	< .001		
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	0.02	0.01	2.36	.02		
Body Esteem x Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	-0.04	0.01	-4.10	< .001		
Model Summary: R^2 = .30, F(3, 245) = 7.96, p < .001						
Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
2.00	**1.14**	**0.25**	**4.53**	**< .001**	**0.64**	**1.63**
13.33	**0.69**	**0.20**	**3.53**	**< .001**	**0.30**	**1.07**
21.41	0.37	0.19	1.97	.05	0.00	0.74
46.67	-0.63	0.32	-1.97	.05	-1.27	0.00
95.00	**-2.55**	**0.75**	**-3.38**	**< .001**	**-4.04**	**-1.07**

Study 2 – Romance/Dating Narrative (N = 248)						
	State Body Image (Y)					
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*		
Body Esteem (X)	0.23	0.28	0.81	.42		
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	0.001	0.01	0.10	.92		
Body Esteem x Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	-0.02	0.01	-2.66	.01		
Model Summary: R^2 = .25, F(3, 244) = 5.57, p = .001						
Moderator:	Conditional Effects of X on Y at Values of Moderator					
Subjective Well-Being Discrepancy	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI
2.61	0.17	0.27	0.63	.53	-0.36	0.70
15.00	-0.12	0.21	-0.58	.57	-0.54	0.30
26.95	-0.40	0.20	-1.97	.05	-0.80	0.00
43.11	**-0.78**	**-0.27**	**-2.90**	**.004**	**-1.31**	**-0.25**
100.00	**-2.11**	**0.71**	**-2.98**	**.003**	**-3.51**	**-0.71**

Note. Character Body Esteem is dummy coded as: 0 = Low; 1 = High. Moderator values and significance regions were determined using the Johnson-Neyman technique. Bold-faced values are significant at values of the moderator.

Author Contributions Statement (CRediT)

Megan A. Vendemia: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Resources; Data Curation; Writing – Original Draft; Writing – Review & Editing; Supervision; Project Administration

Melissa J. Robinson: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Writing – Original Draft; Writing – Review & Editing; Supervision; Project Administration

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