The Ideal Female Body Image: A Q Approach to the Third-Person Effect

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Abstract: *The third-person effect was examined using Q methodology. The participants were asked to sort images of women according to their ideal image and their perception of others' ideal image. The participants' own ideal Q sort loaded on one factor, whereas their Q sort representing their perception of others' ideal image loaded on another. The participants' own body image differed from their perception of others' ideal body image resembling the media's portrayal of ultra-thin models. In addition, an intensive study of a single subject was conducted to examine the influence of social distance on the third-person effect. The results suggest that increased social distance reinforces third-person effects.*

Introduction

The basic concept of the third-person effect is that people tend to overestimate media influence on the attitudes and behavior of others (Davison, 1983). People tend to think others are more vulnerable to media messages such as those in news, television commercials, pornographic images on the Web, obscene lyrics, and violent television shows. The third-person effect has been supported by both survey and experimental studies (Gunther, 1991, 1992, 1995; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Lasorsa, 1989; Perloff, 1989; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997).

The present study examines the third-person effect by using Q methodology. Developed by British physicist-psychologist William Stephenson (1935), Q provides a means to study people's subjectivity. Q identifies the views of groups who share a similar perspective on an idea or a topic by producing several factors of opinions. This study examines whether the third-person effect is observed when people are asked to sort pictures of women according to their ideal body image and their idea of others' ideal body image. If the two images are the same, there is no third-person effect and Q would show people's own and others' views on the same factor; if views differ, the third-person effect is present and several factors would emerge.

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Operant Subjectivity, 2010, 33(3/4): 129–148

Images of thin and over-exposed models are frequently found in the contemporary media, particularly in advertisements. One popular approach to sell products is to emphasize sexuality and the importance of physical attractiveness (Fox, 1996). Messages containing sexy female bodies often place undue pressure on the audience, forcing them to think about ideal appearances. Many people tend to think that others prefer the sexy bodies often presented by the media but that they are not influenced by the same media. In other words, they believe that advertisements and other forms of media content have strong effects on others but not on themselves.

In addition, an intensive study of a single subject was conducted to explore the role of social distance on the third-person effect. Such a role has been verified in other survey studies (Brosius & Engel, 1996; David & Johnson, 1998). One participant was asked to sort the Q items 14 times to determine her perception of the ideal body image of others representing varying degrees of social distance (i.e., one living nearby and another living in a different continent). How those Q sorts factored together illustrates the impact of social distance on the third-person effect.

Theory

The Third-Person Effect

The third-person effect posits that people think others are influenced by the media more than they are (David & Johnson, 1998). The term "third person" is derived from people's belief that a message would not have a lot of influence on "me" (the first person) or "you" (the second person) but on "them" (the third person). People tend to underestimate the media's effect on themselves but overestimate the effect on others.

The third-person effect has been supported by many studies exploring a wide range of topics. In Salwen's (1998) study, people thought that the news media had a stronger impact on others' opinions about the 1996 presidential election than on their own opinions. Regarding the O.J. Simpson trial, many people believed the media coverage did not influence them. However they believed that the coverage exerted considerable influence on others' opinions about Simpson's guilt or innocence (Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). The third-person effect has been observed in advertising messages. Gunther and Thorson (1992) found that people believed that commercials about liquor and household products would have greater influence on others' attitudes and behaviors than on those of themselves. Other studies examining entertaining messages found that people believed that pornography had greater influence on others than on themselves (Gunther, 1995), and that anti-social rap lyrics had more negative consequences on others than on themselves (McLeod, Eveland &

Nathanson, 1997).

Recently, some studies have examined social distance as a moderating variable for the third-person effect. Social distance is typically defined as the degree of similarity between the first person (self) and the third person (others) (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999). The third-person effect has been found to occur more prominently as others become more socially distant from the perceiver (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988). For example, people experience stronger third-person effects as others become increasingly general (e.g., my friends, people in this town, people in this state, people in this country, etc.). An unknown individual is believed to be more vulnerable to the media's influence than acquaintances (Brosius & Engel, 1996). A vague person is also thought to be more vulnerable to the media than a specific acquaintance of the person (Duck & Mullin, 1995).

The third-person effect has been studied by using body images (David & Johnson, 1998). Female students were asked to think about the influence of television programs such as *Baywatch* or commercials containing extremely attractive models. Their estimates of the media's impact on themselves, their classmates, other women on campus, and general U.S. women were measured. As expected, the farther the social distance between the participants and their perceived others, the stronger was the third-person effect observed.

In summary, the third-person effect had been observed through the use of a wide range of topics, including body image. In this regard, one purpose of the present research is to capture people's subjective opinions underlying the third-person effect hypothesis by using Q methodology.

Body Image

Ultra-thin body images dominate the media. The average weight of *Playboy* models was found to be substantially less than that of the general female population of the U.S. (Garner, et al., 1980). The winners of the Miss America pageant during the 1970s weighed considerably less than those of others pageants (Garner, et al., 1980). The prevailing thought has been that females should be portrayed as being much slimmer than the average female shown in the media. Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Eileen (1986) analyzed 33 television shows and reported that 68 percent of female characters were rated as thin and that only five percent were heavy. This was not the case for males. Thin male characters accounted for only 17.5 percent; 25 percent were heavy. Silverstein and colleagues (1986) described the influence of the media on the widespread popularity of a thin female body:

> Present day women who look at the major mass media are exposed to a standard of bodily attractiveness that is slimmer

> than that presented for men and that is less curvaceous than that presented for women since the 1930s. This standard may not be promoted only in the media and it may not even originate in the media, but given the popularity of television, movies and magazines . . . the media are likely to be among the most influential promoters of such thin standards (p. 531).

Another characteristic of female bodies presented in the media is the high level of exposure or disclosure. Kang (1997) found that approximately 31.9 percent of 248 magazine advertisements presented substantially body-revealing clothes (e.g., miniskirts, evening gowns exposing cleavage, short-shorts, see-though clothes, halter dresses, and swimsuits) or nudity (e.g., nude models or those in translucent underwear or lingerie). Soley and Reid (1988) compared the level of nudity in magazines between 1984 with 1964. Six magazines, including *Esquire, Playboy, Redbook, Cosmopolitan, Time,* and *Newsweek,* were examined. They found that the advertisements in 1984 contained more sexually explicit content in which the models were either nude or in a demure, suggestive, or partial dress. In 1964, only five percent of the models were nude, but the figure increased to eight percent in 1984. In men's magazines in 1984, 43.7 percent of the advertisements presented suggestively clad, partially clad, or nude female models.

These thin and over-exposed female bodies in the media have been found to influence the audience's perception of an ideal female body. Myers and Biocca (1992) found that college students shown the media's repeated presentations of thin and exposed female bodies were more likely to change their perceptions of their own bodies and sought to have the ideal bodies portrayed by the media. The students felt that they were also thin while viewing an advertisement presenting a thin and sexy woman. However, when the upbeat feeling induced by the advertisement disappeared, they faced the cold reality in which their own bodies were not congruent with their ideal image. For them, the ideal body image became their desire. Harrison and Cantor (1997) also found a significant correlation between the level of media exposure and the drive for thinness and determined that the intense desire to be thin sometimes resulted in negative behavioral consequences such as eating disorders. Through focus group interviews, Goodman (2002) found that long-term exposure to the media shaped the audience's attitudes to favor thin and sexy female bodies presented by the media and that this sometimes led to certain types of behavioral responses. The expected negative consequences were as follows: dissatisfaction with one's own body (Richins, 1991), dissatisfaction with one's attractiveness (Martin & Kennedy, 1993), and the intense drive for thinness (Harrison & Cantor, 1997). In extreme cases, body-image dissatisfaction or physique anxiety hurts an individual's self-esteem and even leads to eating disorders

(Thompson, 1995; Akan & Grillo, 1995).

Prior research on the ideal body image has determined that people's ideal body image reflects that portrayed in the media. This suggests that, as a consequence of long-term exposure to the media, people believe that the ideal body image is the ultra-thin and sexually seductive super model images portrayed in the media.

This study extends prior research on the third-person effect and body image by examining the research questions through the use of Q methodology. A theory becomes robust when it can withstand tests of various methodologies. Q methodology can capture more intervening factors of the third-person effect that are not easily observable in survey and experimental research. The present study represents one of the very first attempts to test the third-person effect by using image stimuli. Previous studies examining the third-person effect have typically employed survey and experimental methods in which participants are asked to rate the impact of the media on themselves and on others on point scales from non-influence to considerable influence. These methods can sensitize people to what the study is about. Regardless of the order in which questions are asked, people are more likely to claim that they are less affected by the media than others. By asking a participant to sort images, the participant's subjectivity and his or her own uniquely valid views and beliefs regarding body image can be captured more readily with less bias.

Research Questions

RQ1: What types of perceptions exist about an ideal female body?

Previous studies have suggested that the media have an impact on shaping or changing people's perceptions of an ideal female body. A thin, over-exposed body image, dominantly presented by the media, can represent an ideal image for many people who see such media content every day. However, this thin body image is often inconsistent with the realistic body image. Some people may resist this unrealistic influence that the media have on their perception. In this regard, Q methodology can identify the different types of people's perceptions of an ideal female body.

RQ2: Is there any difference between people's perception of an ideal female body and their estimate of others' perceptions? If so, does the difference support the third-person effect?

According to the third-person effect, people believe that the media do not have a substantial impact on them but that others are influenced by the media. That is, people believe that others' ideal image reflects the ultra slim body types suggested by the media but that their own ideal body image is different from that reflected in the media. This indicates

that people's own ideal body image is different from their perception of others' ideal body image

Q methodology groups people's ideas according to the similarity of their subjective opinions. If people are asked to sort Q samples twice (once according to their own ideal body image and another according to their perception of others' ideal image), discrepancies between them and at least two Q factors would support the third-person effect.

RQ3: Does social distance from others influence the individual's estimates of others' perceptions of an ideal female body? Does the social distance influence the third-person effect?

Previous studies have noticed the influence of social distance on the third-person effect. People tend to show a more prominent third-person effect for others who are socially and psychologically distant. In this regard, an intensive Q analysis focusing on a single subject would reveal his or her estimates of various others' perceptions of an ideal female body, where the others represent varying degrees of social distance from the subject.

Method

This study used Q methodology to address the proposed research questions. This approach explores the multi-dimensional perceptions of a subject (an idea or an object) by examining the participants' sorts of cards reflecting the sampled thoughts on the subject. The Q-factor analysis aggregates into the same factor the participants who show a similar sort pattern. Then the multiple factors representing different perceptions are identified, and the nature of each factor is explained (see Kerlinger, 1986; Kinsey, 1993, 1994).

Q Sample

The Q sample refers to the items included in the cards and presented to the participants. They are sampled from a *concourse*, a volume of discussion on an idea or an object. An important criterion for selecting Q-sample items is that the selected items should represent the *concourse.* In other words, the Q sample needs to include all aspects or viewpoints about a given idea or object.

For this study, 36 images of female bodies were sampled. Previous studies have reported that female bodies presented by the media are mostly thin and over-exposed. Using these two dimensions, thinness and exposure, the present study structured the sampling process as follows: four levels of thinness by three levels of exposure. The four levels of thinness include *skinny, slim, normal,* and *heavy;* the three levels of exposure include *much exposure, normal exposure,* and *no exposure.* Figure 1 provides samples of the images selected for each of the 12 cells. The images were collected from various websites containing photos of

Figure 1: Sample Q-sort Items

	Skinny	Slim	Normal	Heavy
Much exposure				
Normal exposure				
No exposure				

Note: The full sample may be viewed in color on the Journal's website; see details at the end of the article

celebrities, models in fashion clothing catalogues, and models in magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* (the swimsuit edition). In terms of thinness, skinny images included the celebrities criticized for being too thin. The models who looked more slender than skinny were included in the slim-body category, and those who seemed to be average were included in the normal-body category. The heavy category included the photos of women in a catalogue featuring plus-size clothes. In terms of exposure, much exposure was defined as women in bikinis or swim suits. Normal exposure referred to women in short sleeves, tank tops, or summer dresses; and no exposure referred to those in formal suits or winter clothes. The women's faces were blurred to prevent the participants from recognizing them or from being attracted by their faces rather than by their bodies.

Participants (P sample)

A total of 23 individuals participated in this study, reflecting a typical number of participants in Q studies. There were 10 males and 13 females. Their age ranged from 23 to 65 and 18 were graduate students at a private university in the U.S. Northeast.

Q-Sorting Procedure

Before the Q sorting, the participants read an article saying that a majority of female figures presented by the media were unrealistically thin and over-disclosed and that this distorted body image influenced people's perceptions of an ideal female body. Because this study examines the effects of popular media on people's formation of subjective opinions, the media's representation of women's body image was provided before presenting the Q sample items. In addition, many third-person effect studies have primed people to think about media messages before asking questions about other people's perception. After the participants read the article, they were asked to sort the Q sample items twice according to their own ideal body image and their estimates of other people's ideal image. The first question/instruction was "what is your view of an ideal female body image? Please rank the photos from the most appealing to the least appealing." After the participants sorted the items, they were given another question: "How do you think other people sort these images?" and asked to sort the items again. All the sorted items were evaluated on a nine-point scale designed to have a forced, quasi-normal distribution. The most appealing images were given +4, whereas the least appealing images were rated –4.

In addition, an intensive Q study was conducted to examine the influence of social distance on the third-person effect. This method asks a single participant to sort the Q items multiple times under different conditions. It reflects the participant's intra-subjectivity about an idea or an object (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). A female Korean student was recruited for the present study. She was born and raised in Pusan and worked in Seoul as a PR practitioner. She came to the United States for her graduate study two months prior to her participation in this research. The social distance for her was defined in terms of two dimensions: geographical distance and gender differences. In terms of the geographical distance, her family members living in Pusan were the closest others. The next were friends in Pusan, colleagues at work in Seoul, and the general public in Pusan, Seoul, an Asian country, and other continents. The other dimension was gender. In general, women feel psychologically closer to other women than to men. Thus, she sorted the Q items 14 times: 7 (geographical distance) by 2 (gender difference). In addition, she performed two additional sorts: her own perception of an ideal female body and her estimate of others' perceptions. This procedure took approximately two hours, during which she sorted 16 times without intervals.

Analysis

The Q-factor analysis was conducted with SPSS (Statistical Package for

the Social Sciences), a statistical software package. The principal component method and Varimax rotation were used. Each of the 23 participants produced two Q sorts, and thus, a total of 46 Q sorts were analyzed. SPSS provided six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. However, many were not loaded on the 4th, 5th, and 6th factors, and most significant loadings in those factors were already captured by the first three factors. Thus, only three factors were chosen as the final Q factors. For the intensive Q study, the 16 sorts of the participant were analyzed, and two factors were identified.

Results

Three factors, Factors A, B, and C, were identified in the first study. The percentage of the total variance explained by each of these three factors was 28 percent, 14 percent and 10 percent, respectively. The correlation coefficients between the three factors were all less than .04. As shown in Table 1, Factor A included seven participants' self-perceptions and 20 participants' estimates of others' perceptions. Factor B included 12 participants' self-perceptions and three participants' estimates of others' perceptions. Thus, Factor B represented the participants' self-perceptions of an ideal female body better than their estimates of others' perceptions. By contrast, Factor A represented the participants' estimates of others' perceptions better than their self-perceptions. Factor C included seven participants' self-perceptions and four participants' estimates of others' perceptions, which was a mixture of the two kinds of perceptions.

A closer analysis indicates that three individuals' self-perceptions of ideal image and their perceptions of others' ideal image loaded solely on Factor A. Three other individuals described others' ideal image on Factor A, whereas their own ideal body image did not load on any factor. Two individuals loaded on Factor C for their ideal image and on Factor A for others' ideal image. Another two loaded on Factor C both for their own ideal body image and for other's ideal image. One did not load on any factor. The factor scores of the Q-sample items for each factor were transformed into nine-point scale scores, which comprised a factor array for each factor. The Appendix shows the factor array for all three factors.

Factor A: Sexy models in the media

To examine the nature of Factor A, this study examined the two most appealing (rated +4) and the two least appealing (rated −4) items from the factor array. The two top-rated images (Items 5 and 6) were from *Sports Illustrated* (the swimsuit edition) and belonged to the category of slim bodies with much exposure. Both of the worst-rated images (Items 12 and 36) depicted heavy bodies. In addition, all six images showing slim and skinny bodies in swimsuits were ranked high, but the images in

Table 1. Three Factors and Loadings

ID		*Factor A*	*Factor B*	*Factor C*	*Sex*	*Age*
1	me	.04	**.69**	**.51**	M	34
	others	**.89**	.15	.20		
2	me	.13	**.60**	.37	F	32
	others	**.67**	.30	.20		
3	me	**.44**	**.68**	.25	M	48
	others	**.68**	.15	.40		
4	me	.33	**.64**	.18	F	29
	others	**.50**	**.50**	.12		
5	me	.28	**.56**	**.49**	M	33
	others	**.82**	.22	.14		
6	me	.28	**.44**	.17	M	25
	others	**.64**	.36	.35		
7	me	**.49**	**.50**	**.62**	M	37
	others	**.63**	.41	**.54**		
8	me	.41	**.54**	.35	F	27
	others	**.48**	**.46**	.36		
9	me	.10	**.46**	.39	F	33
	others	**.59**	.24	.26		
10	me	**.54**	**.69**	-.05	F	33
	others	**.81**	.32	.04		
11	me	.40	**.48**	.20	F	39
	others	**.83**	.13	.21		
12	me	**.70**	.33	.16	M	36
	others	**.53**	**.45**	.21		
13	me	**.66**	.19	.26	M	31
	others	**.69**	.20	.18		
14	me	**.63**	.06	.32	F	28
	others	**.75**	.09	.27		
15	me	**.73**	.33	.24	F	32
	others	**.89**	.12	.26		
16	me	.27	.17	.22	F	26
	others	**.57**	.08	.22		
17	me	.13	.15	.39	F	23
	others	**.67**	-.02	.24		
18	me	.00	.35	.12	F	35
	others	**.67**	.27	.13		
19	me	.29	.43	**.48**	M	36
	others	**.61**	**.49**	.36		

ID		*Factor A*	*Factor B*	*Factor C*	*Sex*	*Age*
20	me	.16	.41	**.44**	F	31
	others	**.45**	.40	**.49**		
21	me	.24	.21	**.85**	M	65
	others	.23	.16	**.86**		
22	me	.29	.17	**.68**	F	62
	others	.40	.01	**.70**		
23	me	.37	.28	.13	F	26
	others	.39	.24	.13		

Note: "me" represents the participant's self-perceptions; "others" represents the participant's estimate of others' perceptions.

the no-exposure category did not rate well. All nine images in the heavy category were rated low regardless of the exposure level. In sum, Factor A represented the perception that an ideal female body should be slim and over-exposed. This image is consistent with that of a number of sexy models presented by the media.

Factor B: Women in the neighborhood

Two images in the category of normal bodies with normal exposure (Items 19 and 21) were rated the best in this factor. By contrast, the two worst-rated images (Items 1 and 3) came from the group of skinny bodies with much exposure. Three images depicting heavy women were rated more appealing (-2) than skinny bodies with much or normal exposure (-3). This indicates that, unlike Factor A, this group of participants disliked thin and over-exposed female bodies. Instead, they liked normal-sized bodies with normal exposure, the image of typical women. Thus, this view was more realistic than that of Factor A.

Factor C: Realistic but sexy women

The top-rated images (Items 7 and 8) were normal-sized but much exposed bodies. This group of participants disliked skinny bodies (Items 1 and 27) but preferred slim women to heavy ones. Noteworthy is that three images of heavy women in swimsuits received moderate scores (0, -1, and -2), indicating that the participants were generous to the exposed heavy bodies. This fact represents a perception that ideal women should have realistic body sizes, not thin ones, and that they should be allowed to expose their bodies to show the beauty of women. This view is a mixture of Factors A and B.

The first research question addressed the types of perceptions of an ideal female body. As noted earlier, this study found three types of perceptions: the preference of thin and over-exposed sexy bodies (Factor A), that of normal-sized bodies with normal exposure (Factor B), and that of normal-sized but over-exposed bodies (Factor C). The first image represents sexy models and celebrities often depicted in the media, whereas the second image represents ordinary women in the

real world. The third image is a mixture of the first and second images.

The second research question addressed the difference between people's self-perceptions of an ideal female body and their estimates of others' perceptions. Factor B best represented the participants' self-perceptions, whereas Factor A their estimates of others' perceptions. Most participants selected normal-sized bodies without much exposure as their ideal female image. However, they thought others would prefer unrealistically thin and sexy bodies, which are dominantly shown by the media. This indicates that the participants thought that the media influenced others and shaped their ideal female image to be identical to the media's portrayal of female bodies. However, they thought that the media did not influence their own perceptions. This finding provides evidence for the third-person effect.

To address the third research question, an intensive Q study was conducted. The female participant sorted the Q sample items 16 times, resulting in two factors. As shown in Table 2, Factor A-I included people in other countries or continents (mostly males) and others in general, whereas Factor B-I included mostly females and "myself." Thus, Factor A-I represented the perceptions of those who were socially distant from the participant, whereas Factor B-I represented the perceptions of those who were socially close to the participant and the participant herself. To determine the nature of these two factors, the top- and worst-rated items were analyzed.

Factor A-I: Sexy models in the media

The most appealing items (5 and 6) described slim-sized bodies with much exposure. The figures in both items were professional models in *Sports Illustrated.* Heavy bodies with no or normal exposure (Items 23 and 34) were rated the least appealing. This perception was similar to Factor A.

Factor B-I: Women in the neighborhood

The top-rated items (21 and 18) presented women with normal exposure. Their sizes were normal or slim. A body with much exposure (Item 4) and a heavy body (Item 36) were considered the least appealing. Thus, this factor represents the perception that women should be normal in terms of size and the level of exposure. Extreme cases were not valued. This image represents ordinary women in casual suits in the real world. This perception was similar to Factor B.

The overall pattern identified in the intensive study provides evidence for the social distance effect. Those close to the participant (both socially and psychologically) were thought to have the same ideal body image that the participant had, whereas those who were more distant (e.g., a male colleague and men living in other countries) loaded on a factor different from her own ideal body image. The pattern is clear.

Table 2. Factors and Loadings for the Intensive Q Study

		Factor A-I	*Factor B-I*
Myself		.250	**.885**
Female	Family members	.262	**.916**
	Friends	.536	**.756**
	Colleagues at work	.454	**.858**
	People in Pusan	.449	**.839**
	People in Seoul	.560	**.761**
	People in an Asian country	**.757**	.567
	People in other continents	**.811**	.486
Male	Family members	.336	**.810**
	Friends	**.803**	.497
	Colleagues at work	**.926**	.247
	People in Pusan	.266	**.812**
	People in Seoul	**.827**	.501
	People in an Asian country	**.885**	.356
	People in other continents	**.945**	.176
Others in general		**.785**	.431

The more socially distant a person is, the stronger the third-person effect will be. The perceived ideal body of those socially distant resembled the ideal body image suggested by the media.

Discussion

This study examined the perception of ideal female body images and the influence of the media's intense portrayal of thin and sexy women on people's perceptions. The comparison between the participants' self-perceptions and their estimates of others' perceptions confirmed the third-person effect. A unique aspect of this study lies in its Q approach. This method allowed the participants to think about their and others' ideal female bodies and to generate structured pieces of their thoughts through an image-sorting process, resulting in multiple groups of thoughts. Previous studies using either a survey or experimental method have typically focused on testing the third-person effect hypothesis, rather than on investigating what people think about a given topic. In this sense, the Q approach provides an in-depth account of people's various perceptions as well as an opportunity to test the hypothesis. The key findings are as follows.

First, three types of perceptions were found. Based on body size and the level of exposure, all the participants' perceptions were grouped into unrealistic sexy models, normal women in the real world, and a mixture

of both. A preference for a heavy body was not captured as one of the general perceptions. This suggests that most people hold one of the three types of perceptions. This finding may be useful for future research; the three types of perceptions can be used for survey questionnaire or manipulated conditions for experimental studies.

Second, based on the three types of perceptions, this study successfully found the third-person effect. Most participants considered the unrealistic sexy models as others' preferred image, whereas their own preferred image reflected normal women. This difference reflects the participants' view that others were influenced by the repeated media portrayal of sexy models more than they were. The participants might have thought that they were not vulnerable to the media's influence and that, even though they were inundated with images of sexy models in the media on a daily basis, they could thus maintain their beliefs or perceptions regarding an ideal female body. In this regard, future research is warranted to extend this finding by examining other consequent variables such as dissatisfaction with their own body, self-esteem, and eating disorder. Such research efforts would require an approach combining Q methodology and an experimental method.

Third, this study demonstrated the influence of social distance on people's third-person perceptions. The intensive Q analysis found a clear difference between the participant's estimate of close others' perceptions and that of distant others' perceptions. The participant thought that distant others preferred sexy models, the ones often presented by the media, whereas she thought that close others preferred normal women, the ones found in the real world. The participant thought that the media had greater influence on the others who were socially distant than on those closer to the participant. As David, Morrison, Johnson, and Ross (2002) suggested, this finding needs to be verified by using more contingent variables such as the specificity and similarity of the groups of others, the perceived likelihood of exposure of the groups to stimuli information, and real-world heuristics.

The Q-methodology study also revealed other notable findings capturing people's subjective opinions. According to the findings, the participants' own ideal image was diverse, whereas their opinion of others' ideal body image was uniform. Two factors, Factors B and C, represented the participants' ideal body image, whereas 20 out of 23 participants loaded on Factor A for others' ideal body image. This has important implications for future research on the third-person effect.

Noteworthy is that three participants did not show any third-person effect. These three individuals loaded on Factor A exclusively for both their ideal body image and their estimate of others' ideal body image. Two participants loaded on Factor C thought that their own ideal image

and that of others were similar. This finding suggests that the third-person effect is not applicable to all individuals.

Some participants showed the first-person effect, which hypothesizes that people think that they are influenced by the media more than others are. As shown in Table 1, one participant's Q sort (ID 12) for his ideal body image loaded on Factor A with higher coefficients (.70) than his Q sort for others' ideal image (.53). His opinion of others' ideal body image was also confounded on Factors A and B. That is, this individual's ideal body image is similar to the ideal body images portrayed by the media, whereas his estimate of others' ideal image was that of ordinary women. Noteworthy is that this individual was a male. Furthermore, the results of the present study suggest that both third- and first-person effects can be found with a same message. According to prior research, people tend to show third-person effects for socially undesirable topics, whereas they tend to show first-person effects for socially desirable topics such as the influence of health information. Thus far, the two effects have been considered to be separate effects generated according to media message conditions.

The results also suggest that demographic variables may influence the third-person effect. Two elderly participants' own ideal body image and their thoughts on others' ideal body image both loaded on Factor C. They were the only two individuals whose Q sorts for others' ideal image were not loaded on Factor A. These elderly individuals, who were less sensitive to media messages, did not show third-person effects.

By employing Q methodology, this study has a number of theoretical implications not observable in survey research. In this regard, additional studies employing Q methodology are warranted to refine and develop other communication theories.

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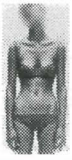
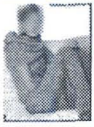
Appendix: Factor Array

		Factor					Factor		
Item	*Image*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*Item*	*Image*	*A*	*B*	*C*
1		3	−4	−4	8		2	−3	4
2		3	−3	3	9		2	1	0
3		2	−4	2	10		−2	−2	−2
4		3	2	−2	11		−3	−2	0
5		4	1	2	12		−4	−2	−1
6		4	3	−3	13		3	−2	−1
7		0	−1	4	14		2	0	−2

		Factor					Factor		
Item	***Image***	***A***	***B***	***C***	***Item***	***Image***	***A***	***B***	***C***
15		1	−3	2	23		−2	−1	−3
16		1	0	1	24		−3	−3	−1
17		0	2	1	25		0	3	−3
18		0	3	1	26		−1	−1	0
19		1	4	0	27		1	1	−4
20		0	−1	0	28		−1	2	0
21		0	4	3	29		−2	−1	1
22		−1	0	−2	30		1	2	1

		Factor					Factor		
Item	Image	A	B	C	Item	Image	A	B	C
31		−2	1	2	34		−3	1	−3
32		−1	0	3	35		−1	0	−1
33		−3	3	3	36		−4	0	−1

Note: Readers interested in viewing full-color version of this Appendix are referred to the Operant Subjectivity's webpage, www.operantsubjectivity.org.