
How Does Media Affect On Our Self Esteem

For years, the media has promoted certain body types as being socially ideal and desirable. The media emphasizes a "... thin female body as a primary form of the visual message; and concentrate on the explicit representation of the ideal image of thinness" (Sohn, 2009, page 20). Body image has affected the self-esteem of adolescents, teenagers, and adults. The rapidly growing technological industry has provided models of what the optimal weight, height, shape, and color a person should be. There is more research done on women and their level of self-satisfaction than there is for men. Additionally, men share nearly an equivalent amount of media showing fit, lean, and muscular bodies in their faces as women do with models walking down runways showing their size 0 bodies. Advertising an unrealistic, computer-modified body to television viewers and magazine readers has a negative effect on self-esteem.

Literature Review

Self-esteem affects everyone: adult men and women, adolescent boys and girls, and so on. Body image "refers to an individual's thoughts and feelings about their body and physical appearance" (Morgan & Arcelus, 2009, page 435). The biggest influence on self-esteem and body image is the media. There hasn't been much research done on men and the influence the media has on their self-esteem, but Sohn (2009) suggests that the media does indeed have a negative effect on body perception and satisfaction. The article fails to go into depth with the amount of influence the media has and the consequences it can cause men. Dittmar (2005) on the other hand, explains the ramifications low self-esteem has on men. These consequences can sometimes go unseen, such as excessive dieting and working out. Since there is more research on young girls and females, articles such as *Body Image and Self-Esteem Among Adolescent Girls: Testing the Influence of Sociocultural Factors* are extremely useful. This article emphasizes the importance media has on youth, but influences girls more than boys. One study in the U.K. done on girls aged 11-16 had lower body satisfaction when viewed pictures of ultra-thin or average-sized magazine models (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005).

Acute exposure to idealized thinness has an immediate impact on women. Women feel more insecure and have a lowered self-esteem when exposed to thin models in the media. Since there is very small amount of research done on the immediate effect the media has on men, the overall results still lead to negative consequences like body dissatisfaction (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009). Giving an experiment and its results on social comparison, Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2009) provide sufficient information and valid sources, like all other articles reviewed.

Introduction

The Female Body and Self-esteem

The media falsely represents what an average woman looks like. They fail to expose that the body types Victoria's Secret models have and the beauty of many actresses and singers possess are unattainable. "... media images represent an undemocratic sample of Americans" (Sohn 2009, page 20). Existing research has proven women and female teenagers suffer

negative consequences such as eating disorders, low self-esteem, low self-worth, and depression because “the mass media produces unrealistic images of the ideal body shape” (Nezlek, 1999). Research in the past on body image and eating behavior has chiefly been on women. There were valid reasons as to why research narrowed in on women: “body dissatisfaction and disordered eating are disproportionately higher in women, appearance is more central to their self-concept and evaluations by others, and the female sociocultural beauty ideal is so ultra-thin, that it is both unattainable and unhealthy” (Dittmar 2005, page 1082).

Media publicizing female body image generates favorability of the thin body model. This portrayal of the ideal body shape causes “... social comparison, which is defined as a process in which people compare themselves and significant others to other people who they perceive to represent ideal and realistic goals” (Sohn, 2009, page 20).

Men Have Feelings Too

“As reported by Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, and Zavoina (1999), women’s bodies were focused on three times more so than men’s in magazine advertisements” (Sohn, 2005). Though females may be more prone to low self-esteem due to media than men, body image isn’t gender-specific. There has been growing research on the way men view themselves due to the media. Just like women, men can gain negative consequences from low self-esteem and low self-worth. Media portrays the ideal male to be lean, yet muscular. Though it is easier for men to gain muscle and lose weight than it is for women, every body is different. Poor body image can lead to men adopting health-threatening behaviors, “such as use of steroids, ephedrine, and deleterious dieting strategies” (Dittmar 2005, page 1082). Women are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their weight and wish to be thinner versus men who would usually report having dissatisfaction in muscle size and shape. One research concluded that media exposure of the ideal bodies for men and women have a different effect on each gender. When some men are shown what the ideal body type is, they endorse the desired body type and take action to mold themselves into it. “A study by Morrison, Morrison, and Hopkins (2003) also shares a similar perspective by stating that male participants’ exposure to media containing idealistic images of the male body are positively associated with the intensity of their drive for muscularity” (Sohn, 2009, page 21).

Not only are heterosexual men left behind in self-esteem research, but gay and bisexual men are as well. “Recent studies demonstrate much higher prevalences for eating disorders among gay and bisexual men than their heterosexual counterparts.” (Morgan & Arcelus, 2009, page 435). In a research done by Marsden, Karagianni, and Morgan, they tested 8 straight men and 7 gay men and asked what their ideal body image was. Though in general, men report an importance of looking healthy, straight men reported to be more muscular and the gay men reported to be muscular, but leaner. In conclusion, men emphasize an importance of being muscular and healthy, rather than an “average joe.”

Media Exposure in Adolescents

Media is the number one channel for expressing thinness and muscularity as desirable characteristics to possess. Media not only exhibits ideal body types for adult women and men, but can, and have, shaped the way adolescents view their bodies. Girls’ self-esteem declines

during middle adolescence. Watching television shows and reading magazines about their favorite celebrities slowly shapes their views on beauty. From 12 years old to 17 years of age, a dramatic drop of self-esteem occurs. This progressive decline in self-esteem in young girls could be explained with the fact that girls are conditioned into believing physical appearance is above all other characteristics. They get this idea from television shows, movies, magazines, advertisements, and music videos. It's enforced in the media that a female's self-worth relies on the shape of her body. According to a recent content analysis of TV sit-coms, they found that "76% of female characters were below average weight. The body size of women in the media is often more than 20% underweight..." (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005, page 452).

Showing growing children that they're not good enough until they lose a certain amount of weight and fit into a certain size of jeans can cause serious psychological and quite possibly, physical damage to the child. Growing up, kids idolize skinny mini Barbie dolls and enlarged bicep and tricep G.I. Joe action figures. From the very beginning of life, society is shaping girls to believe that smaller is better and boys to believe muscles are important. Then as they get older, the media shoves 110 pound, 30 year olds (who looks like they're 20), beautiful models in their faces and muscular men naked with women laying over their private parts in their faces. "A longitudinal study of 12–15-year-old girls has confirmed that such bodily changes are associated with increased concerns about weight and eating. In another study, adolescent girls described their ideal as 5 ft 7 in., 100 lb, and size 5—an ultra-thin, if not anorexic, body size" (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005, page 453). Sadly, this isn't a surprise to researchers.

Is It Even Real?

Taking into consideration the awfully large amounts of editing done to photos in the media today, it's almost impossible to attain the body that these models have. Genes can play a huge role in body type. For some people, it's just not in their biological chemistry to be a size 2. Photos of celebrities such as Beyoncé, Zendaya, Kylie Jenner, Candice Swanepoel, all receive airbrushing, digital alteration, and for some people, cosmetic surgery to further increase the unrealistic nature of media images of women as standards for self-evaluation (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005).

Men and women view this overworked photos of nearly perfect human beings and expect to look like them if they diet a little bit, lift weights for a while, or spend thousands of dollars on cosmetic surgery. The media has served viewers with comedy, horror, action, and unbelievably beautiful celebrities who pay hundreds of dollars every day to maintain their waist size, muscle size, and clear skin. What the media has yet to serve viewers is the hard truth about where beauty comes from.