

Influence of Media on Body Image

Rashmi Purohit^{1*} and Vinita Sharma²

¹Guru Nanak Girls' P.G. College, Udaipur- (Rajasthan) INDIA

²Govt. Meera Girls' College, Udaipur- (Rajasthan) INDIA

Abstract

Body image is a person's perception of the aesthetics or sexual attractiveness of their own body. In psychology body image refers to a person's emotional attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of their own body. The issue of media images and its effects on body image has attracted a substantial amount of attention from researchers in various disciplines. In terms of the cause, researchers now have reached to a consensus that mass media are at least partially responsible for chronic states of bodily discontent and unhealthy attitudes toward eating wide spread especially among women.

Research shows that negative body image leads to other health problems such as depression, obesity, low self-esteem, disordered eating and poor quality of life. The objective of this review paper is to understand the concept of body image influence of media on body image. It reveals that different studies on the body image still require establishing relation of some other aspects of media with body image. The review also reveals that a little emphasis has been given to the study on media influence on college girls' body image in India.

Keywords

Body image, Media, Beauty ideals, Body dissatisfaction

1. Introduction

Body image has been determined by various factors, including politics and media [1]. The most powerful conveyors of socio cultural ideals are the mass media and therefore play an important causal role towards the development of body dissatisfaction [2]. Body perfect ideals are communicated by the media to us from an early childhood stage; there is therefore a desire to have a thinner body from such a young age, after exposure [3]. Media is the most wide spread and influential conveyor of socio cultural values regarding ideal body size and shape, which creates an understanding of the ideal man and woman

[4]. The media promotes a certain physical image of males and females, and this can be seen in commercial advertisements, TV and magazines. Today's advertisers generally emphasize the importance of physical attraction, which often puts pressure on men and women to focus on their appearance. These advertisements often have adverse effects on men and women, women particularly, who often have fear of being unattractive or old [4].

Mass media (TV, movies, magazines and internet) pervade the everyday lives of people and undoubtedly one of the effects of such media saturation is the pervasive transmission of societal beauty ideals [5]. Body image has also risen as an important aspect of mental and physical wellbeing. Body dissatisfaction or negative body image can be acknowledged as the thing that comes before negative self-perception, negative emotional states and unhealthy body related behaviors.

2. Influence on Children

Children's body image and eating behaviors are in fact being negatively affected by socio-cultural influences, specifically media [6]. Kiefner A. E. studied media exposure and body image in 6-9 year old girls. Internalization of the thin ideal and perceived realism of media was also examined as individual difference variables and their relationship to body image attitudes is reported. No media exposure or preference variables directly impacted participants' body image attitudes [7]. Swiatkowski and Krijnen studied about impact of social media on body image and found that children who are active online worry a lot about how they're perceived [8].

3. Influence on Adolescents

Media images may be part of social comparison and reflected appraisal processes in young girls [9]. To predict adolescents' body-image disturbance and thin ideal endorsement, Botta conducted a study with high school girls. It was found that media variables accounted for 15% of the variance for drive for

thinness, 17% for body dissatisfaction, 16% for bulimic behaviors, and 33% for thin ideal endorsement [10].

Vulnerable adolescents, characterized by initial elevations in perceived pressure to be thin and body dissatisfaction and deficits in social support, were adversely affected by exposure to media-portrayed thin-ideal images [11]. Daniel C. et. al. studied body image and self-Esteem among adolescent girls by comparing exposure to images of ultra-thin models, average-size models, or no models (control), with body satisfaction and self-esteem as dependent variables. Experimental exposure to either ultra-thin or average-size magazine models lowered body satisfaction and, consequently, self-esteem. Self-esteem was also less among older than among younger girls [12].

Achtenberg B. studied influence of mass media on the adolescent mind. The results reveal that the media does influence adolescents (some more than others) with regard to their body images and it is usually in a negative way [13]. Dinc B. and Alisanoglu F. studied effects of television on the body image on the basis of adolescents' opinions. The results of the study revealed that most of the adolescents compared themselves with the ideal body images on television and they sometimes experienced disappointment and pessimism. Mass media strengthens the thin beauty ideal, its importance, and how to attain it [14]. Repeated exposure to media and pressure from media to become thin, constitute risk factors for body dissatisfaction, concerns over weight and disordered eating behaviors in adolescent girls [15].

Media exposure does not affect body image in adolescent girls in contrast to older populations. This may be due to that young children may adopt the persona of attractive characters with whom they identify rather than comparing themselves to the characters [16]. Also, adolescent girls have habitual tendency to identify with media models, is a more potent vulnerability factor within the mass media and body image relationship, than media type. The acute music video exposure had a more potent negative impact on girls' body image than still media images [17].

Bell B. T. and Dittmar H. studied the role of identification in adolescent girls' media consumption and the impact of different thin ideal media on body image. The study shows that neither type nor amount of media use was related to body dissatisfaction [18]. Body image disturbances may appear when an adolescent girl's self-evaluation of her appearance interferes with her physical and mental health [19]. Low self-esteem is pervasive in adolescent females, when a girl bases her identity on comparisons with the current standard for women's beauty as portrayed

in the mass media [19]. Influence of media on body image satisfaction among adolescents (ages between 13 to 18 years) was studied by Genesis M. J. Results show respondents were generally mostly satisfied with their body areas. Among the media forms, magazines have the strongest negative relationship with the body area satisfaction on the weight of the respondents [20]. Role of peers as well as individual predispositions is important in view of understanding how thin ideal media images may impact adolescent girls' body image concerns [21].

Carolyn P. studied the impact of social media on body image. The study shows that media plays an eminent role in eating disorder in young adolescents. Results reveal that social media plays a negative role on body image of adolescents. Girls are not satisfied with their body image. Use of smart phones and networking, family and friends also plays an important role in body image satisfaction [22]. Media marketing plays an active role in influencing young adolescents what is *fashionably cool* and what is *in* and *out* of style. No matter what the opinion of adolescent girls is, the media impacts their lives in a multitude of ways [22].

4. Influence on College Students

Media images of the unattainable thin body can be found almost anywhere among university/College students. Jayadevan S. et. al. studied media influence on the body image among college students in UAE. Results reveal that 28% of the sample reported media to be the most influential factor on perception of appearance, of which internet was found to be the most influential medium on body image, followed by television. Media were not as important as *attitude of family* (37.4%), *attitude of the opposite sex* (36.9%) or *attitude of friends/peers* (34.7%) which ranked highest among the most influencing factors. Media were considered moderately influencing (37.4%), with the other factors having almost equal importance. However, internet was the most influential media for both males and females [23]. College age American females are more influenced by the media's images than males. Students engage in behaviors to reach the body shape and size of the culture's thin and buff ideals [24]. College females of Latina have less positive evaluations of their appearance and less body satisfaction after viewing the commercials [25].

Kim J. H. and Sharron J. L. examines whether the level of exposure to mass media is related to self-esteem, body image, and eating disorder tendencies of female college students. Significant positive relationships between exposure to fashion or beauty magazines and (a) overall appearance dissatisfaction and (b) eating disorder tendencies were found [26]. Kristen E. and Kinnally W. examine the media

effects on body image of female undergraduates. Peer comparisons and self-esteem are observed as the strongest indicators of body dissatisfaction among female undergraduates. Body dissatisfaction has been connected to media as sources women turn to for information about their physical appearance, and thin models and actresses are ostensibly the standard in current media [27].

Priyadarshni V. conducted a study among college girls aged 16-18 years. It was found that young females perceive healthy and attractive weights to be lower than current weight, and that media influence contributes pressure to be a certain weight [28]. Shrader M. worked on the influence of magazines on college age (aged 18 to 24 years) females' body image. The study revealed that approximately forty three percent 43% of the respondents feel that female models in magazines have the ideal body shape and size. Seventy three percent rarely or never feel that it would be good for their health if their body size and shape were similar to those of fashion models, fifty five percent would feel more satisfied if their body looked more like a magazine model [29].

Individuals who viewed the media images of women felt less attractive about their looks than those individuals who did not view the media presentation [30]. Women believe that the ideal body image in the media is not a realistic model for the average woman, but still feel motivated to alter their bodies to meet it [31].

5. Influence on Men and Women

Media images affect males and females, and there is a significant difference between influences [32]. There are gender differences such that women exhibit greater actual v/s desired body weight discrepancy, body size dissatisfaction, and internalization of cultural appearance ideals [33]. Russello S. investigated the impact of media exposure on self-esteem and body satisfaction in Men and Women (18 to 29 years). Results revealed that men were more satisfied with their bodies than women, and they internalized ideals less. Self-esteem and social comparison levels were similar for both men and women. In addition, exposure to physical-ideal advertisements did not appear to effect body satisfaction, self-esteem, or internalization. Also, the level of internalization increased as the level of social comparison increased [34].

Shelly Get. al. studied the role of the media in body image concerns among women. The study suggests that exposure to mass media depicting the thin-ideal body may be linked to body image disturbance in women. The exposure to media images depicting the thin-ideal body is related to

body image concerns for women [35]. Mask L. and Blanchard C. M. studied the effects of 'thin ideal' media on women's body image concerns and eating-related intentions. The study found that trait body dissatisfaction predicted more negative affect and size dissatisfaction following exposure to the 'thin ideal' video among women [36].

Hogan K. investigates the influence that the media has on self-objectification across women of different ages. The analysis revealed that older women are more affected by body surveillance than younger women. The analysis also revealed that there was no significant relationship between body image and self-esteem [37]. Sasi Rekha V. and Maran K. studied advertisement pressure and its impact on body dissatisfaction and body image perception of women in India. It was found that around 30% of the women respondents have stated that they are pressurized by advertisements. Further it was found that the women are overestimating their present body size and idealize a thinner image. Thus, the culture of thinness in advertisements may lead to body dissatisfaction of women and which may further manifest to eating disorders [38].

Body image, media, and eating disorders were studied by Jennifer L. D. and Eugene V. B). The result shows Current mass media is ubiquitous and powerful, leading to increase body dissatisfaction among both men and women [1]. Christine D. evaluated the effects of mass media on body image. This study examined the relationship between media consumption and body image. It was found that magazines have more effect on body dissatisfaction than television. Fashion, beauty, health and fitness magazines were found to have the most powerful effect. Women have been found to be less satisfied with their bodies and to have higher rates of eating disorders than men [39].

There is a relationship between the recent surge in disordered eating and high consumption of social media. Social media websites result perhaps in a wider and more detrimental impact to the body image concerns of women than advertising or the media generally [40]. Perloff R. M. investigated social media effects on young women's body image concerns. The study suggests that social media, working via negative social comparisons, transportation, and peer normative processes, can significantly influence body image concerns [41]. Negative reflection of body image was studied by Behan E. The focus was on how social media affects body image satisfaction in Irish females. It was found that the Irish females (aged 18 to 25 years) felt negative body image satisfaction when viewing images online through Facebook and Instagram [42].

Jasmine F.et. al.experimentally investigated the effect of Facebook usage on women's mood and body image. Participants who spent time on Facebook reported being in a more negative mood than those who spent time on the control website. Furthermore, women high in appearance comparison tendency reported more facial, hair, and skin-related discrepancies after Facebook exposure than exposure to the control website [43] .

Krawczyk R. studied on influence of media on individuals' body image. The study found that such exposure is a significant risk factor for body image disturbance and disordered eating [33]. Adults are not immune from negative attitudes towards body image either, with about 60% of the public feeling ashamed of the way they looked [44].

6. Suggestions

Teachers should teach students to be their own person and not be influenced by the media in such a way that is detrimental to their health and well-being [13]. Parents need to limit children's exposure to media, promote healthy eating and moderate physical activity and encourage participation in activities that increase mastery and self-esteem. Funding for high quality, visible advertising campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles may increase awareness [1]. There is a need for improved measures of media exposure and the importance of understanding how young girls internalize the thin ideal portrayed in the media [7]. Given its popularity, more research is needed to better understand the impact that Facebook and Whatsapp has on appearance concerns.

7. Conclusion

It can be said that the media is the most wide spread and influential conveyor of socio cultural values regarding ideal body size and shape, which creates an understanding of the ideal man and woman [4].Media appears to be the main factor impacting on a woman's body concern, and most powerful influence on body image perception .Newspaper, magazines, television and internet have been demonstrated to play a strong role in creating a current perception of the ideal man and woman. Media portrays images that promise social acceptance for men and women, therefore these body types become desirable, especially by women. Today's advertisers generally emphasize the importance of physical attraction, which often puts pressure on men and women to focus on their appearance. There is a question of whether the body perfect ideal in the mass media is a core risk factor for negative body image for men and women, particularly in women. Studies have confirmed that one's body dissatisfaction or negative body image can be acknowledged as the thing that

comes before negative self-perception, negative emotional states and unhealthy body related behaviors. It is therefore important to have a general knowledge of the risk factors of body dissatisfaction.

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