

# Influence of the media in forming negative body image among females

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We set out in this paper to explore the influence of the media in forming negative body image among females. In the course of the research, we also looked at the influence of media—primarily TV watching—on males just to compare the two groups and their responses to media images. Our findings reveal that although distortions in body image are growing among both males and females, females are especially vulnerable to body-image messages and respond to them with distorted behaviors around dieting and with lowered self-esteem or self-image.

These conclusions are supported further by some of the work of Garner, Garfinkel, and Olmstead (1983) who claim that media exposure to stereotypes of very thin women models and reinforces the association between thinness and the characteristics such as physical attractiveness, desirability, personal self-worth, and success. This can lead to internalization of a thin ideal stereotype by females, which can result in distortion of the mental image of themselves (Downs & Harrison, 1985; Ogletree, S.

M. , Williams, S. W. , Raffeld, P. , Mason, B. , & Fricke, K. , 1990; Salmons, Lewis, Rogers, Gotherer, & Booth, 1988). Indeed, Myers and Biocca (1992) claim that only 30 minutes of TV watch a day can alter a young woman's perception of body shape. Why is this important? First, of all the effect of pervasive media influence, such as extensive TV watching and the reading of women's magazine which are full of diet programs, are distorting the image of females' perceptions of their ideal body image.

Whereas, in some eras in history a " Rubenesque" or plump figure was considered a favorable body type, in this period of time the ideal type is an

emaciated look. This distortion can lead to behaviors that create unhealthy dieting and exercise patterns that have the potential to seriously affect a young woman's long-term health outlook and can lead to diseases such as Anorexia nervosa and Bulimia. A second consideration is the role of self-image. It appears as something of a chicken-and-egg issue. That is, do media images cause lowered self-esteem and lead to unhealthy dieting and exercise behavior.

Or does the practice of consistently unhealthy behaviors that don't lead to the distorted image that is imagined by some women cause lowered self-esteem? In an article on the Media Awareness Network, it is claimed that all this media barrage leaves the message that women are always in need of adjustment so that whether it starts with the chicken or the egg the woman is going after a mostly unattainable goal of extreme thinness and thus can't win and will ultimately end up with a lowered self-image.

The third point is that the media benefit from the constant message that women are inadequate. The article on the Media Awareness Network cites the fact that the diet, cosmetic, and plastic surgery industries are direct beneficiaries of women's feelings that their body images are inadequate. They state that, " By presenting an ideal difficult to achieve and maintain, the cosmetic and diet product industries are assured of growth and profits. And it's no accident that youth is increasingly promoted, along with thinness, as an essential criterion of beauty.

Such women are more likely to buy beauty products, new clothes, diet aids, and memberships to health clubs. Obviously, this is a situation where a need

is created, a consumer is convinced of the need, and services and products are introduced to fill the need. What are some of the considerations that exist that are trying to address and disrupt this unhealthy contract? The article on the Media Awareness Network states that “ There have been efforts in the magazine industry to buck the trend.

For several years the Quebec magazine Coup de Pouce has consistently included full-sized women in their fashion pages and Châtelaine has pledged not to touch up photos and not to include models less than 25 years of age. ” There was also significant attention to the models for Dove cosmetic products, who were average-sized women. These ads appeared in magazines and on TV. An informal scan of TV ads and programs might show some average-sized women, but they are still few and far between. Our unfortunate conclusion is that the fantasy image of a super-thin woman still sells products.