

# Media influences on plastic surgery and body weight essay

[Health & Medicine](#), [Obesity](#)



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## **Introduction**

The media is a powerful force in today's world. The media has the ability to persuade people to think in a certain manner. Businesses and huge corporations have had their reputation marred by adverse media reports. The media has been able to have such a huge influence as families spend majority of their time glued to television sets. People have mobile phones where they browse and see the latest news in online forums. Young people spend hours on the internet reading about celebrities and watching the latest movie reviews. The media is able to influence the culture of a country. It can make unusual occurrences seem like the norm. It can distort the world's perception on certain topics. One area where the media has exerted a huge influence is on the people's perception on the definition of the beautiful woman. What should be her facial physical attributes? What is the perfect weight range? This paper will discuss the impact of the media on the women and their perception of beauty. The focus will be on television programs, fashion magazines and advertising and the way it affects the woman's self-esteem and body satisfaction. What are the steps women take

after being exposed to such programs or magazines? The research results of different organizations will also be discussed.

## **Cosmetic Surgery and Body Weight**

The fascination with the thin female body began in the 1920's. The fashion houses started designing the flapper dresses that are suited for the flat boyish figure. In the 1960's there was a return to the curvy figure with Marylyn Monroe wearing size 16 dresses (Derenne & Beresin, 2006).

This era was short-lived however as the fashion industry again was fascinated by the Twiggy size six. This new ideal figure showed the women the power of dieting vis-à-vis the use of undergarments. The emergence of the bikini garments also contributed to the fascination with the thin figure. In the society today the ideal female is tall, thin and long-legged. At the same time such a woman should have voluptuous breasts.

These are physiological measurements that are not achievable. In the last twenty years, the media has been portraying the ideal woman figure thinner and thinner than the average female size in the society. The size of the playboy women in the magazine has been decreasing for the period 1959 to date. Over the same period, there was a surge in the number of diet articles in the magazines. Thirdly, the size of the Miss American Contestants has been decreasing in the last twenty years. This is in contrast to the increase in weight in the average body size of the female over the years in the American society. These distortions are dangerous to the young women.

Most of the women cannot attain the physical size unless they engage in extreme diets and exercises.

In America, research has found out that watching television is the most popular activity after sleeping among children and adolescents or teenagers. Majority of the college women read fashion magazines during their free time (Tiggeman & Pickering, 1996). Furthermore, the adolescent girls view the women celebrities on the magazines as role models. Research has even indicated that for the adolescent girls, their favorite actresses are the characters who are slender or thin.

Teenagers with higher exposure to television exhibited higher body dissatisfaction. Furthermore the girls with higher dissatisfaction were the ones who watched soap operas and music videos. The danger in the media portrayal of the perfect female is that the women have a tendency to compare themselves with these women in the television. Since physical appearance is important to individuals, when they do not have an objective measure to evaluate beauty, they end up using sources of information to evaluate their own beauty (Markey, 2010). The media uses social comparison to show the people the definition of beauty which people end up believing.

The majority of the media advertising and messages result in negativity for the women as the ideals shown cannot be maintained or achieved by the women (Markey, 2010). Research has shown that women with greater media interaction have varying levels of low self-esteem and eating disorders.

There are even women who will not suffer from low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction or eating disorders. There are women who are more vulnerable to negative self-comparison leading to actions that endanger their health. The adolescent women are more vulnerable than the adult women. In the adolescents, the girls that are mostly affected are those with heavier bodies. The women with body dissatisfaction have reported to be significantly concerned with their body size after reading the fashion magazines.

A study in Psychology Today showed that over 70% of women felt guilty and ashamed when they looked at fashion magazines for over three minutes. The fashion media is contradictory though as one can see the figure of a thin lady next to dinner parties and cookbooks. In short the woman is expected to provide great food but not indulge in it.

The truth is they are cosmetic and diet companies in the industry who are benefitting and gaining so much money as women strive to make themselves look better or more beautiful. Since the female body ideal is elusive, it continues being highly attractive motivating the women to strive to achieve it even more (Franco, 2008). In the olden times, clothes were customized to an individual. However with the emergence of mass production came standardization where the designers focused on making clothes for small women. The American Designer, Calvin Klein categorically said he did not women that are more than size 12 wearing his clothes. The women now are fascinated with becoming thin so that they can wear the

right clothes. The best clothes are deemed to be the clothes made for thin women.

Fashion designers see huge costs in designing clothes for women of different sizes. Women who enter fashion boutiques to shop are finding a hard time getting anything that fits them. One wonders who the clothes in the boutique are meant for since it is clear they are not for the average American woman. Instead of the woman seeing the clothes not being her size, it becomes the reverse where the woman sees that her body is not the right size for the clothes.

There has also been the media fascination with celebrities in the western world. Most of the celebrities are ultra thin. For a long time the fascination was with desiring to be like them but now the motivation is higher as we can be like the woman next door who did a plastic surgery and now looks great and beautiful.

The women in the society get the message that the celebrities are sexy, beautiful and wanted. The celebrities are highly visual women who the women in the societies want to emulate. The fact of the matter is that the celebrities have access to personal trainers and make-up professionals unlike the average woman. Secondly these women in the magazines have been applied on make-up and there are techniques that the photographers and the designers use to conceal a stomach that is not totally flat or a face that is not completely free from blemishes. There is no mention of the

photographic techniques of soft-focus cameras, editing and filters  
(Thompson & Heinberg, 1999)

The media has a huge influence on people and influences their desires and wants. Previously, there were photographs of supermodels with thin figures on the billboards. Now there has been a wave of reality programs on the media that have caused women to alter their bodily features with an aim of achieving the standard of beauty portrayed by the media. There are two categories of programs influencing women and their view of the perfect body image. The first category is the weight reduction programs. Such programs are the Biggest Loser and Overhaul in Australia and Supersize vs Superskinny and Superslim Me in the United Kingdom. The second category of programs is the cosmetic surgery programs. In the UK, there are programs such as Supersize Surgery and Make Me Perfect while in US, there is the Swan and I Want a Famous Face. These programs have contributed to higher cases of eating disorders in the country. There are now many women with body insecurities that want to have cosmetic surgery in order to have self-confidence.

In America, the number of the young people having cosmetic surgeries has increased (Sperry, 2007). Research has shown that for four out of five patients who perform plastic surgery, their decision to have surgery was influenced by the reality media programs. The public gets to see what is considered an ugly body or face. If she has what is considered an ugly body, she undergoes surgery then is transformed into a beautiful swan. Plastic

surgery has now become a normal thing without the people thinking of the health repercussions of having surgery (Lauerman, 2004).

It is no longer celebrities in Hollywood conforming to the stereotype body image. When women see other normal women with normal lives going for surgery they are further influenced to embrace plastic surgery as the norm. The media has totally disregarded the huge persuasive influence they have on the people. In the American household, terms such as Botox, liposuction and gastric bypass have become the usual talk. The media has made these processes appear like a minor surgery. The rush towards surgery is unwise since for some women, an exercise and a good diet can help them lose excess body fat. Furthermore, the programs stresses on the aspect on perfection. This causes teenagers to fear becoming fat. The anorexic bulimic teenager eats and ends up vomiting the food as she does not want to be fat. She perceives herself as fat which is a lie since the true picture is that she is quite thin. Along with plastic surgeries and eating disorders, there is also the issue of depression and suicide among teenagers as they strive to achieve the perfect body image.

The media can no longer continue denying its negative influence on the cultural perceptions of beauty. Where the women are getting plastic surgeries to correct facial deformities such as foe cleft lips, it is okay. The issue is the women's relentless pursuit of cosmetic surgery for beauty purposes and the perception that it helps improve a person's lifestyle. The programs do not show the swelling, the pain and the recovery time taken by



the participants. The people should be shown how to take care of their bodies not how they can alter their bodies.

The greatest increase in plastic surgery for the last few years has been in the area of anti-ageing procedures such as facelifts and eyelids surgery. Dentists have also reported an increase in dental procedures from their patients who watch the large number of reality shows. In these programs, the complications, failed procedures and infections are never mentioned. One gets the impression that their occurrences are rare. Furthermore the programs focus on those individuals who have experienced the most dramatic changes. This tends to over exaggerate the positive outcomes to the public (Petrie, Fassie & Fuhrmann, 2008).

The media has been consistently showing plastic surgery as a method which is convenient, affordable and appropriate for people of all ages. The women no longer want to lose weight in order to be healthier. The women's desire for losing weight is so that they can be considered more beautiful. The media therefore works towards the Cultivation Theory. This is where as a person continues watching the television, the more someone tends to believe that the images shown and what the presenters are saying is true.

There has been a reported increase in the number of people who exercise in the gyms for the period 1990 to 2001 (Mathe, 2008). The aspect of weight-loss promotion programs is everywhere. There are now pills, supplements, fasts, diets and support groups to assist with weight loss. There is a misconception that being thin is being powerful, sexy and even healthy.

However they are people who are emaciated or malnourished all in the name of being healthy. There is an exploitation that is taking place of the women. From the companies that sell weight loss programs, fashion, cosmetic products and the companies the physicians engaged in cosmetic surgery.

There are many women caught up in a cycle of diets that prove to be fruitless. The lady is not able to maintain the set lifestyle so she ends up gaining the weight that she had lost. Furthermore the use of diet pills to lose weight is not recommended. It is an unnatural way to lose weight. The use of diet pills is dangerous as they can be misused or abused. In the women's circles, the talk is about the latest diet and the book accompanying the diet.

The talk of the women has also been influenced. One will hear someone speaking of how her weight has increased or decreased. Now a woman will proclaim how she has been bad since she has eaten dessert or cake that day. Women have come to congratulate or admire women who have lost considerable weight in order to become thin. There is also the perception that being thin will make someone happy or successful. All these are myths that should be disregarded.

The media should be ethical in its advertising and programs so as not to mislead people with faulty theories. A person may ask someone whether they have lost weight as a compliment. What someone may not realize is that the person has actually developed an eating disorder and such compliments may encourage the person further to vomit what they eat or refrain from eating substantial amounts in the belief they will get fat. The

media has a huge impact due to its nature of high accessibility and universality. The media blurs the line between the fiction and the reality or attainable. The women get depressed that they have not attained the standards perceiving themselves as weak or not motivated enough.

## **Conclusion**

The media and the advertising industry will have to curb the trend and move the country towards a positive body image for the women. The media will have to steer away from defining the society's standard of people. The people may have to push the media to reform their ways through lobbying or pushing for the airing of certain programs in a responsible manner. The society may have to actively educate the youth and the young people on the media realities and fiction. The eating disorders and low body satisfaction as a result of media influences has to be addressed. There may be need of shows that show the diversity of the sizes that the female body in the society.

Fashion designers and television producers have to work together with the society to encourage healthy living. The fashion industry may have to start looking at designing clothes for large women in a different way. All this work to dispense the myth that when one is thin she will be happier and living a better lifestyle.

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