

Research proposal on social implications that influence younger people to want to...

[Media](#), [Interview](#)



Introduction

Society dictates that people, in general, should always look good where the definition of looking good means an individual is skinny, slim, or someone who maintains a healthy weight. This thinking has influenced the youths of today to adapt the same philosophy and opinions that they apply to themselves as well as to others when it comes to defining beauty, confidence, body image, body satisfaction, and self-esteem, among others. Tiggemann and Pickering (1996) assert that mass media contribute to the formation of opinions about what an ideal woman looks like, thus, affecting how the younger generation view the subject as well. Because people have direct access on television and other forms of mass media, including newspapers, magazines, books, and online resources, a false understanding of beauty has emerged.

Much has been written about how older men and women perceive thinness as a measure of beauty, but not much on how and where younger people get their preconceived notions about thinness. Now, based on researches done on adolescents, including young girls below the age of 10, it appears that the issues older people have when it comes to thinness are also being felt by the younger generation. Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) claim that body dissatisfaction, which was once heavily associated among women and adolescent girls, is now an issue among younger girls as well as it cause them to want to lose weight through dieting (p. 929). The question that arises is why are these youngsters too obsessed at the idea of being thin at their young ages? Based on studies, a number of factors reinforce the idea of thinness as a measure of beauty that includes media, social media, peers,

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and parents.

Media marketing has been proven to negatively affect how adolescents regard themselves in view of what they see and hear around them.

Adolescents emulate movie celebrities and are considered as role models and fashion icons as these people are easily intertwined in their lives through the youths varied interests such as music, entertainment, and fashion. Most of the time, differentiating between reality and fantasy becomes difficult as various models and icons present their own meaning to the term beauty.

Movies and TV shows often portray successful men and women as fashionably slim which results to the viewers wrongfully equating beauty and success with thin people. TV commercials also do the same thing where products that supposedly help in enhancing one's beauty are often promoted by actors and actresses who are skinny.

Social media sites have also contributed to the way adolescents perceive body image. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace are full of images that promote ideas pertaining to beauty and body image. This is even extended to various gaming sites and virtual worlds including Sims, Second Life, and Club Penguin. YouTube and personal blogs also offer a doorway for entertainment and communication, which further mar the youths' ideas pertaining to self-esteem and beauty (Bell, Lawton, & Dittmar, 2007, p. 138). These portals provide avenues for adolescents to “ seek out images of what they want to look like, a place for women to search for diet and exercise advice, as well as an outlet through which women can perform outward comparisons with their peers and celebrities” (Klein, 2013, p. 13).

What is common among all studies done on the subject is that the measure

of beauty is changing and it is becoming loosely based on the physical appearance of the individual. As a result, the person's body image suffers as body dissatisfaction increases. Additionally, this dissatisfaction further leads to increases in incidences of eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia. Environmental factors do not cause these eating disorder problems alone, but the social pressures for thinness as society place a high value on being thin, which is the message most men and women are predisposed at a very young age. Happiness and success are often equated with being thin and fit. When adolescents enter shopping malls, they are often surrounded by skinny or muscled mannequins. Thin women and buff men appear on fashion magazines that teenagers see and idolize. As a result, teenagers resort to crash dieting in order to achieve what they think society considers as the norm or the ideal figure.

Tucci & Peters (2008) acknowledge that because female models are reed-thin or below the average weight, women in society are mistakenly represented. There is the impression that society sends the message that “certain physical attributes are unacceptable in today's society” (cited in Tucci & Peters, 2008, p. 521). As models in magazines are shown with unrealistic standards of beauty, that is, tall, long and thin thighs and legs, and narrow hips, adolescents do not realize that most images are digitally-enhanced, especially now due to advances in information technology. The truth that beauty and success cannot be simply tied to the size of the individual's body is lost in how media portrays and defines beauty. The reality is a large number of young people are not satisfied with their bodies and are obsessed with staying thin or slim. Those who find themselves in a

situation that does not allow them to lose weight or stay slim are often beset with body issues, emotional problems, and psychological torments that push them to resort to unnecessary cosmetic enhancements (Tucci & Peters, 2008, p. 522).

This is all because of the way media has resorted to setting and framing how people should see beauty and success. By deliberately controlling the way people think through news and entertainment media around them, media was able to dictate what is good or bad, what is beautiful or not, what is sexy and what is not. Through all the information and images young people are fed in various social media sites and media entertainment, they have developed a clear image of what beauty is as influenced by media, their peers, their surroundings, and their families. The definition of sexy continues to change as sexiness is often associated with thinness or slimness of the individual. Music videos, ads, and even computer games now use images of sexy and thin individuals as they romp around the game videos.

Consequently, an unspoken standard for adolescents to want to have a lean and thin body has erupted among the teenagers now. Sanders (n. d.) concedes that media channels dictate that thinner and slimmer body frames are ideal for women and thus, this puts the idea on youngsters minds that thin is beautiful. As a result, an increasing number of these young adolescents are unsatisfied with their bodies and develop unhealthy and negative body image. With the thousands of available material online and in print, idolizing celebrities and wanting to be and look like them is becoming the norm.

Media clearly has an obvious influence on how young people react to their

bodies. Gender does not limit who is more susceptible to or affected by the images. In the end, young people want to look like the images they see on television, in movies, and in print magazines. As young people see lean, muscular actors and sexy, slim models on television, they will feel the need look thin in order to look beautiful and successful. Society continues to brainwash young people into believing that being thin or slim is essential to beauty and success especially that in television programs and movies, larger sized characters are often ridiculed. Additionally, as young people spend more time in social media sites, they gain another environment, which is open for opportunities for self-comparison (Groskop, 2013).

Research Purpose

The rationale behind this study is to examine the social implications that make young people want to stay slim regardless of their gender. In the past, studies and researchers were plenty when it came to the topics of weight, body image, and body satisfaction, among others. However, the focus then was mostly on older women and not on the younger people. The study concerning the age group has not been explored much in the past. The study may appear to cater or concern girls alone, however, in these changing times, boys have been found to share the same sentiments as girls when it comes to self-image, body dissatisfaction, and weight issues. Thus, the study cannot be completed and solely be based on one gender aspect only as it should also consider the views of both boys and girls in relation to body image perceptions.

The researches that have already been reviewed earlier recognize that girls

are more predisposed and conscious of their body and self-image issues, but it is not to say that boys do not experience the same level of insecurities or encounter the same issues as the girls. Instead, by studying both genders, the results of the research will be more conclusive as to why young people are too mindful about their body weight and being slim. The purpose of this study is to determine what social factors influence young people today in developing such ideas about staying slim, including the positive and negative effects of such ideas. As the number of young people now consider thin and slim as the true measures of beauty and success, understanding how to improve and increase their self-esteem and promote positive self-image is a timely and important study topic. The study will be conducted in a local community school composed of male and female students from ages 15 to 20 years old who have access to television, the internet, reads magazines and newspapers, watch videos on YouTube, MTV, and other similar channels as they can provide a variety of responses that will offer insight into the subject.

In particular, there are three research questions that this study seeks to address:

Are adolescent boys and girls easily influenced by media and social networks in wanting to stay thin and slim?

What influences do celebrities have on young people?

Do parents and other family members contribute to the reasons why young people have a positive or negative self-image?

Methodology

The methodological approach of this study will be based on a grounded

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theory approach. Essentially, the study might appear that it is primarily geared towards women only, but the focus of the analysis of the data is both young males and females in relation to their self-image and their views about staying thin or slim. The study's objective is to raise awareness on the social impact of media on young people's self-image and how this issue can be resolved.

In considering how both young male and female students will respond to the research questions and the impending results, this study opts for the grounded theory approach (What Is Grounded Theory, n. d.), which is in line with the research method that undergoes the whole process of seeking and discovering information relating to the research topic and generating a theory based on the researched facts. The results of the study is beneficial to young people and their family and friends in understanding the value of having a healthy self-image and self-esteem so that they realize beauty and success should not be associated with being thin or slim.

In relation to the grounded theory, qualitative data gathering will aid in coming up with facts and data required in the study. As a result, interviews will be set up both individual in nature and in groups. One-on-one interview sessions will be set up to allow the interviewee a chance to express oneself especially since the topic may be considered a bit sensitive for some. Having a negative self-image is often brought about by personal dissatisfaction or as unconsciously sent out as messages seen through entertainment media and personal relations. Therefore, creating a relaxed atmosphere for the interview can help the interviewee open up more.

One of the reasons why having an unstructured, informal interview setup is

effective is it eliminates the hierarchical structure common in interviews as it creates a relaxing environment between the interviewer and the participant. As a result, the participant experiences greater control on how the interview will take place. Additionally, an unstructured interview makes way for a free-wheeling discussion on why young people opt to stay slim and what factors influence them to think that way. This strategy complements the grounded theory approach as it encourages participants to be more open about the topic.

Interview sessions will also be held in group scenarios where participants are clustered depending on their gender. This method aims to allow participants of the same gender to interact and interface with each other as they observe and react based on one another's feedback on the topic. Considering that they will be discussing the topic together, it would be interesting to note how they will react and interact among each other and observe the dynamics happening among the participants. This shared experience will hopefully encourage the participants to become more open about their thought and feelings towards the subject.

Another focus group will be created which is a mixture of both genders. The aim of this method is to see the dynamics between the two sexes and observe if their responses and behaviors are the same as when the discussion is composed of people of the same sex. This will also determine whether the opposite sex has an effect on why young people are easily influenced by media or not. All throughout the interview sessions, especially for the ones involved in the one-on-one sessions, confidentiality will be handled with utmost care in order to protect the interviewees' privacy.

Data Collection

Access to the participants need not be difficult because participants will be coming from local community colleges and within the neighborhood aged 15-20 years old. A maximum of 50 students will be interviewed individually, while the group interview will be for at most, 10 group interviews consisting of five interviewees per group. Initially, participants will be asked to answer a questionnaire to gather demographical information prior to the actual interview. One-on-one interviews will be about 30 minutes long, while group interviews could last for about two hours. When interviewing, the focus of the discussion will be on the three research questions. During the interview itself, it helps if the interviewer spent enough time preparing the questions ahead of time in order to maintain a certain level of control on the subject. It is important that the interviewer maintains a level of connection with the participant in order to make the interviewee comfortable, which would induce more responses from the interviewee (Martin, 2014).

All throughout the interview sessions, notes or memos should be noted down to ensure that during the Data Analysis phase, there is enough information to work on in coming up with the final theory (What is Grounded Theory, n. d.). Considering the number of responses expected from the interviews, responses will be tallied appropriately and summary of the responses will be presented.

Data Analysis

In coming up with the final analysis of the data, all results will be tallied, including the interview notes to come up with the theory, which is the basis

of the grounded theory methodology (What is Grounded Theory, n. d.). The steps in data analysis involve collecting data such as observance of behavior of participants during the interview, gathering images that are related to the topic, and accumulating online or printed materials that can help in the discussion, among others, apart from the interview notes themselves. Next is to open coding, which means “ coding everything for everything” (What Is Grounded Theory, n. d.). This is hugely tied up with the note taking, which will aid in the development of the theory later on. When writing notes or memos, data gathered during the interview will be co-related with other codes to determine what relationships each one has over the other. After determining the various codes and themes gleaned from the notes, selective coding and theoretical sampling is next where these data are then compared with one another and against academic research related to the themes. Then, the results are ready to be finalized and organized, especially when a theory is ready to be formed.

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