

The role media plays in the perception of women

Media



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Today's world of media is full of thin attractive models. From fashion magazines, advertisements, movies, and television shows; the images of the women in the spot light are young, attractive, and at a weight that is below the average "real-life" size. Many of the images within the media set beauty expectations that are unrealistic. The development of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction in women is on a rise as the media continues to focus on the "ideal" woman. In the much of the world there is value in the idea that thinness in women is considered beautiful.

Many women partake in unhealthy dieting and dangerous surgical procedures just to become the symbol of beauty. By the young age of six or seven more than 40% of young girls say they are happier when on a diet, by the age of seventeen 78% of young women are already at a point in their life where they say they "hate their bodies" (Baran, 2012). Mothers do not teach young girls that fat is bad and being thin is good. The perception of women through media is what is embedded into children's minds at such young ages.

Heroines in many of movies children watch, or the love interests of the hero, are portrayed as tall, beautiful, and thin (Baran, 2012). These images stick into the conscious, or unconscious, minds of young women at the young tender ages. Researchers that study adolescents state that the media contributes to the image that many view as "beautiful." Researchers will argue that the media gives very few healthy examples to young girls about what is truly healthy beauty. Only 8% of female athletes appear in print and 6% in television coverage (Baran, 2012).

However, celebrity images such as Heidi Montag, who has had 10 cosmetic surgeries in one day, and almost died, graces the cover of magazines, and is featured on various television series; sending the message to young girls and women that in order to be beautiful one must have surgery. The media exposes young women to the unrealistic vision that thin is beautiful. This results in unhealthy eating habits in the hopes that their bodies will be like the models displayed within media images.

In the United States alone, there are approximately 5-10 million girls and women that struggle with eating disorders (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004). With the amount of exposure the female population has to T. V. advertisements, magazine ads, and bulletins on the street the images of thin models are inevitably hard to miss. Cultivation theory suggests that with consistent representations on T. V. of the portal of what is “ reality” viewers will begin to adopt that this “ reality” is valid (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004).

Female body perception in the media is not limit to just body size. The media images of tan women also affect women’s attitudes toward tanning. Each year there are between 2 and3 million cases of skin cancer diagnosed worldwide (Mahler, Beckerley, & Vogel, 2010). Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. The reports of skin cancer account for more than 50% of the cancer diagnoses each year (Mahler, Beckerley, & Vogel, 2010). Prior to the 20th century tan skin was not desirable. Tan skin represented the working class such as outdoor laborers; fair skin was associated with wealth.

The suntan became popular in the 1920s when CoCo Chanel, a French designer, integrated a tanned appearance with her clothing designs (Mahler, Beckerley, & Vogel, 2010). At that time it became a fashion statement and mass media exposure played a major factor in spreading the word. According to Mahler, Beckerley, & Vogel (2010), "previous studies have demonstrated that visual media play an influential role in transmitting and promoting cultural beauty ideas". Magazines are accessible everywhere and have become one of the more effective forms of advertisements for beauty products.

In the United States 60% of girls ages 10 to 14 that regularly subscribe to fashion magazines report that magazines are an important source for beauty and fitness (Mahler, Beckerley, & Vogel, 2010). Studies done on the effects of media on the female body perception show that exposure to thin models leads to greater body dissatisfaction than if the women were not consistently exposed to media images (Krahe, & Krause, 2010). A study done in 2007 reported that women ate less after viewing thin models. Women have the tendency to evaluate their bodies on the basis of what they view as normal and attractive.

A women's body perception of what is considered normal comes from her ability to match the prevailing standards of beauty. With the average media model being thin and below the average weight, much of the body perceptions are unrealistic. The average American woman wears a size 14, compared to the average model only being a size 2. Media is sending dangerous messages to women; the message that being thin, tan, and beautiful is what is important. Health issues such as eating disorders, and

skin cancer are on the rise because more and more women are trying to meet up to the media images of women that they view on a daily basis.