

Media thinness and teenagers

[Media](#)



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The following paper will present a counterargument to the idea that body image is shaped by attitudes in the media. Part of this counterargument will rely on the fact that thinness is cultural problem and not a media problem as will be examined using the peer reviewed article Ingrassia & Springen wrote *The body of the beholder*, which examines attitudes of race in regards to body thinness and how Caucasian women are more strict on their bodies while African American women, due to culture, perceive their normal bodies to be normal.

The other argument being presented in this paper will be on how models do not warp young girls' minds to the ideas of thinness but rather it is an individual perspective that allows women to feel as though they are not thin enough. Thus the paper's main idea will be that media does not present a too thin body but rather it is in the perception of the culture that does this.

Part A

Body image in the media is used to represent a product and to sell that product, like coca-cola or something else. The media giants choose thin models not as them saying to how women should look but rather as a way to how they want their product to appear to the audience; thus, the scope of this problem comes from teenagers, girls, who buy into the marketing media of supermodel thinness, and then become anorexic to fit this ideal.

The idea of thinness is misconstrued on the idea that women's bodies are too thin and thus those too thin bodies present to the advertising world what their body should look like, but this is not true. Thinness is in the eye of the beholder, " When individuals evaluate their appearance, they can either

concur or disagree with other evaluators. If dissensus occurs its direction can be either self enhancing or self-denigrating" (Levinson 1986; 330).

Women and men are sensible enough to know what is too thin to be realistic; often times media transform their model's bodies and digitally improve or reduce the model's body thus presenting a false image. This is not done in order to tell young girls that their bodies should be thin but in keeping in mind with the best possible way to present the product of the advertisement, therefore the problem is affecting a mass amount of people, especially in the western society since marketing is targeting these countries. The fact that such images are digitally 'improved' in one way or another is no secret and therefore the good reason that such images produce too thin body ideals does not hold against the argument that they indeed do,

I mean we can alter that body shape definitely...I mean the computer can pretty much do anything. You can alter it...they don't tend to ...but its kind of up to the model editor...You make 'em...sort of squish them together to make them look thinner (Milkie 2002; 851).

Another argument against the too thin body image presented in the media is that this is more of a cultural attitude. In The body of the beholder the author stresses that more often than not Caucasian women have poor images of themselves while African American women do not; this is due to culture and not to media; in other words, the body image is in the eyes of the beholder and not in the eyes of the media, " Quite commonly researchers restrict samples to white subjects or ignore race as an independent variable in their designs. However, existing anecdotal and case studies report that

blacks assign positive qualities of well-being and power to heavy-women” (Levinson et al. 1986; 331).

Part

B

Culture teaches that thinness is the ultimate ideal; but whose culture? The argument of this paper now becomes mingled with the fact that American culture is imitating African American culture in dress, song, and literature. Rap, Hip-Hop and Gansta Rap are all becoming the values by which the culture focuses its appearance right down to cars, jewelry, clothing, and body image. It is now considered normal to have grills on one’s teeth, to wear ‘bling’ and to copy in whatever capacity possible the African American culture and nowhere is this seen more often than in suburban neighborhoods as rap sales are more than half sold to young white audiences.

With this new found cultural thing alive in the American culture the other argument evolves into one that also mirrors the body image of African American women which is voluptuous

The minority respondents, in sharp contrast, did not emulate these images nor compare themselves as negatively with the models. Even though most of the black girls occasionally read the mainstream publications, they considered the images less relevant, belonging to ‘white girls’ culture and not part of a reference group toward which they oriented themselves...The black girls indicated that they did not relate to the images and did not wish to emulate the rigid white beauty ideal (Milkie 1999; 200).

African American women present to culture their body image as counter to waiflike, with curves and in fact African American women are more content

with their body image than white women and this goes against the media portraying real, curvy women. Adolescence will impersonate whatever they see as 'cool' or popular and right now there are two conflicting things that arise; the ideal of the waiflike woman, and the ideal of the more voluptuous woman as seen in African American culture.

An adolescent will turn to whatever is deemed as cool in their social clique. This leads to the fact that since American culture has included into its 'cool' factor the images of African American women that soon the idea of thinness will be counter culture and African American women's standards will be the normal standard, "...there's growing evidence that black and white girls view their bodies in dramatically different ways.

The latest finding come in a study to be published in the journal Human Organization this spring by a team of black and white researchers at the University of Arizona. While 90 percent of the white junior-high and high school girls studied voiced dissatisfaction with their weight, 70 percent of African-American teens were satisfied with their bodies" (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66).

This study goes on to state that even when overweight black teenagers were interviewed they still viewed themselves and described themselves as happy. This source of size in fact is somewhat of a source of pride, the study further emphasized other different facets by which white and black girls viewed themselves, " Asked to describe women as they age, two thirds of the black teens said they get more beautiful, and many cited their mothers as examples. White girls responded that their mothers may have been beautiful—back in their youth. Says anthropologist Mimi Nichter, one of ht <https://assignbuster.com/media-thinness-and-teenagers/>

study's coauthors, ' In white culture, the window of beauty is so small' (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66).

Part

C

Thus, the problems of thinness arrive from the culturally dishonest. Black and white girls are exposed to the same media but their sense of self identity as seen in that media is quite different as the above statements have proven. Thus, the ideals of beauty are the main contributors of what is considered to be normal. White girls see 5 foot 7 inches and between 100 to 110 pounds to be normal while African American girls describe their ideal size as exhibiting full hips, thick thighs, and basically in the words of Sir Mix-A lot ' baby got back' (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66). These African American teens also described ideal beauty has having the right attitude.

...African American mothers must teach their daughters how to negotiate between two often conflicting cultures: Black and white and must prepare daughters to cope with the racial and sexual dangers in the realities of the world that Black women must confront...Black mothers also play an important role in mitigating the dominant culture's devaluing messages by providing more positive messages and alternatives to the white middle class ideal to their daughters to offset the negative reflections they see of themselves in the eye of the dominant culture (Lovejoy 2001: 253).

This study only further exemplifies the argument in this paper that it is not the media that perpetuates the cult of thinness but rather this false ideal is found in the fact that perception is the ingredient in thinness. Culture is the curse from which thinness arises,

Underlying the beauty gap are 200 years of cultural differences. " In white, middleclass America, part of the greatAmerican Dreamof making it is to be able to make yourself over," says Nichter. " In the black community, there is the reality that you might not move up the ladder as easily. As one girl put it, you have to be realistic-if you think negatively about yourself, you won't get anywhere." It's no accident that Barbie has long embodied a white adolescent ideal-in the early days, she came with her own scale (set at 110) and her own diet guide (" How to Lose Weight: Don't Eat").

Even in this post-feminist era, Barbie's tight-is-right message is stronger than ever. Before kindergarten, researchers say, white girls know that Daddy eats and Mommy diets. By high school, many have split the world into physical haves and have-nots, rivals across the beauty line. " It's not that you hate them [perfect girls]," says Sarah Immel, a junior at Evanston Township High School north of Chicago. " It's that you're kind of jealous that they have it so easy, that they're so perfect-looking." (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66).

Thus, the black ideal can be argued to be less limiting, and less focused on something that is unrealistic. Since white culture stresses the make-over then black culture stresses selfrespectand being happy with ' you'. In Ingrassia & Springen's article they quote Tyra Banks, a supermodel who had said that in high school she was the envy of her white friends when she would repeatedly say that she wanted thighs like her black girlfriends; the split of culture is clearly found in this fact.

The media centers on selling a product through presentation of an ideal body. However, the media world is being taken over by Black culture from BET to Fox. The ideals are changing with regards to body image. The <https://assignbuster.com/media-thinness-and-teenagers/>

strongest signal that is competing for body image is peer pressure. Since groups of teens are influential with their friends the black community is able to reiterate their ideals of body image to their friends and since they do not emulate the waiflike figures of supermodels so common in culturally white media (which is diminishing) they are more able to disregard the unrealistic image presented to them in advertisements.

White girls however are suffering from their own culture and the reiteration of this culture not only through media at times but through the concept that has been taught to them that their mothers are always on a diet. White culture has taught these girls more than the media has that their daddies eat and their mothers are on diets (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66).

Ingrassia & Springen further emphasize that white culture teaches that it is okay and even normal to have an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia, but in black culture these are even more of a phenomenon as black girls do not succumb to this masochism since their culture does not present it as a strong factor to be considered normal, " Black teens don't usually go to such extremes. Anorexia and bulimia are relatively minor problems among African-American girls.

And though 51 percent of the black teens in the study said they'd dieted in the last year, follow-up interviews showed that far fewer were on sustained weight-and-exercise programs. Indeed, 64 percent of the black girls thought it was better to be " a little" overweight than underweight. And while they agreed that " very overweight" girls should diet, they defined that as someone who " takes up two seats on the bus." (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66).

Ingrassia & Springen state in their study that 90% of white girls have some dissatisfaction with their bodies and that 62% of them are on a diet within the past year. The study further states that 70% of black girls are happy with their body image and 64% say that it is better to be a little overweight than a little underweight (Ingrassia & Springen 1995; 66).

This paper has stated that the media's norms are changing with the introduction and focus on black culture that presents different body images. The paper further stated that media was not the only device by which white girls receive their dissatisfied approach to their own bodies but with their mother's influence of dieting thinness became an ideal. It is with the changing cultural norms of switching focus from white culture to black culture that new media images will begin to filter into society as is exemplified through programs on television such as Queen Latifah whose body image though overweight by white culture standards is considered to be beautiful with black cultures. Thus, the focus of a more voluptuous body, with curves, and a larger 'booty' is becoming the American standard.

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