
Media's Influence On Body Image And Eating Disorders

The media over the past 20 years has changed and evolved consistently with new and advanced forms of communication. The media today is far more powerful than the media of past times. Once ago the media reported what was mainly happening, however, in today's society the media influences and chooses what it reports. The media has exposed us to many different ideas of thoughts and functions as a society and thus has changed what is acceptable and what is not. The media operates under several sub-entities that are used to reach and portray specific groups of people. These sub-entities include the print media, electronic media and, the new age media. According to Thompson, J, (1995) some characteristics of media include: it divides contextual relation between the making and the receiving of information, it involves the commodification of symbols and includes both technical and institutional ways of production and distribution. Moreover, the increase of the use of media has given it even more influence and power. It influences our dress, our morals and values, societies economic growth, worldviews and even our diets. In this paper, I will attempt to prove that the media does cause eating disorders by portraying false beneficial diets, models that show bodies of acceptance and the notion that males and females of particular body types are most successful in life.

On many commercials, billboards, ads and posts on social media there is always portrayed a misconception of the ideal body weight. There is always a new diet being advertised and the effects are always a smaller waist, leaner arms and thighs and or a larger gluteus maximus. In regards to men, abs, broad shoulders, muscular legs and arms are what is portrayed as accepted. Often times after such content there is also a new beauty line of products also advertised. These things usually become perceived as the norm or influence social reality in society. They often do not work for all body types and normally do more harm than good. When persons are not satisfied, they resort to extreme forms of becoming what is ideal and this is usually by participating in bad eating habits. These habits eventually turn into eating disorders. According to Thomas et al (2004) by Bell, B (2011) Dittmar (2011), the socio-cultural theory explains the viewing the body negatively is as a result of the belief that it is necessary to conform to what is culturally defined as beauty. This perception has a direct link to a negative body image. The cultivation theory coined by George Gerbner also sides with the Socio-cultural theory in the sense that it suggests that looking at or being exposed to something like television can indeed contribute or change a person's view of reality.

Such negative body image and perception undoubtedly causes the occurrence of eating disorders. Body dissatisfaction causes persons to seek unsafe alternative measures. Thus, agreeing with the statement "The concept of the 'ideal' body image depicted in the media increases eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia and orthorexia) in adolescents and young adults." Measures include the smoking or marijuana, causing oneself to be addicted to dangerous practices binge dieting. Adolescence blame themselves for not being good enough in the eye of society and this causes the dissatisfaction that leads to eating disorders such as bulimia, anorexia and orthorexia. Recent sensations of "Big Girls' being beautiful also encourages bulimia because it eliminates the health risk and encourages viewers to eat to make themselves happy. They also make food much more appealing as well as easily accessed. In the case of Orthorexia which can be linked to anorexia is caused by the promotion of certain body types as mentioned above.

On the contrary, many researchers believed that in order to link body dissatisfaction with body image as being caused by the media, we must recognise previous dissatisfaction of the individual. In an article by Ferguson (2014), Muñoz, M (2014), Garza, Adolfo (2014) & Galindo, M (2014). They made discover that eating disorders can come from other things even more so than the media. They said eating disorders can come from parenting styles, an adolescences perception of affection, life satisfaction, anxiety and verbal and mental illnesses. They emphasize their belief that body dissatisfaction is influenced by the media, only if this dissatisfaction was present before. Therefore, the influence of the media only feeds the feelings and emotions already present. Thus, arguing that it is not a cause but probably one of the leading influences for eating disorders and negative body image.

In light of the argument presented above, I still hold fast to the premise that media influences body and causes eating disorders. During my life span I have seen how at one point only 'slim' girls were worth of dating. After which I experienced the influence of one song entitled Rolly Polly redefining what was acceptable. For E.g. The lyrics of the first verse read as follows: Years gone by, only meagre girls, getting the buy, lord, so then me sit and me wonder. And me ask myself, self why, All right, and every model got a shape, Like ah Cocoa Cola bottle, Why, but this year I you back on me mind, Fat girl me want tackle, So let me tell dem. Immediately after the release of this song in 2014, there was a huge interest in girls with larger waist, breast, and buttocks. This was done as a way of promoting big girls and plus sizes not as humans but as sex objects. However, this also caused many girls to desire gaining weight to be accepted as this was perceived as the better body type then. Barratt, K (2015) says that she sees this song as a mockery but Mr. Killa claims he is promoting Bigger girls. Similarly, if an ideal body isn't presented to the public or adolescence then a dissatisfaction would not occur. As a result, this influence by the media has caused some adolescence to engage in binge eating.

The media's concept of body image does indeed cause eating disorders in adolescence. Exposure to the different media forums contour the minds of adolescence to believe what is seen. Reinforcement of images and concepts reform social reality and it is this that causes several eating habits among adolescence. Although, some may believe that a pre existing body satisfaction is evident the opposite is quite evident. Without projection a presumption cannot be made. There is therefore an association between the media, body image and eating disorders.

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