

Abstract

The study examined the effects of the media on self body image. We wanted to explore to what extent media influences self-body image? Body image is closely linked to self-esteem. Low self-esteem in adolescents can lead to eating disorders, early sexual activity, substance use and suicidal thoughts. Undergraduate female and male students from the Psych 100 lecture (N=45) were split up into two groups and tested by taking two surveys; One about self esteem and one about self-body image. Firstly, a distractor survey about self-esteem was given to the participants. After students were split into two groups, the first group saw images of celebrity and athlete bodies and the second group saw images of random pictures for a length of thirty seconds. Lastly, after seeing images for thirty seconds, a survey which measured self body-image was taken. We found that after seeing pictures of models and photoshopped people which portrayed the media, participants who saw images of celebrity and athlete bodies would be more likely to answer in a negative way about their self body image.

The Affect of Media on College Students' Self-Body Image

58% of college-aged girls feel pressured to be at a certain weight. Images of the body are everywhere. In today's world, the media seems to tell society what "pretty" is and what "ugly" is. But do these photoshopped images of celebrities that are on almost every cover on a magazine affect the way people view themselves? And is it possible photoshopped media images have an affect on men as well? By doing research, we wished to explore more to what extent does media influence self-body image? That was what our current study sought to examine: the relationship between media images and self-body image.

The variables, self-body image and the media were tested. Another study which explored the same variables done by Jaehee Jung and Sharron Lennon pursued these questions. In their study college women were divided into two groups in which one group were shown attractive images and the other group was not shown any images. In this study they found out that neither exposure to the media images or no exposure at all affected the response on body image, self-esteem and mood (Jung, & Lennon, 2003). Although there was no effect on body image of women by media, our study looked to show two groups a different set of images so both groups will have something to look at prior to taking the survey.

In a two part study done in 2003, researchers found out that exposure to slim images of women caused female participants to consume less food (Strahan, 2003). The images of slim women caused a decrease in food consumption. Women consumed less food possibly because they had the desire to appear slim and skinny like the images they viewed. This study focused on media effect on women's food consumption whereas our study was done on the media effect on self body-image.

In another study men were tested rather than women. Viewing the media's ideal physique for men resulted in notable decreases in muscle and body fat satisfaction (Strong, 2005). For men, there were decreases in muscle and body fat satisfaction was expected. In our study we showed mixed images of ideal body types of models and athletes. Some images were muscular and some images were slightly less muscular. Viewing both ideal body type images could have possibly affected muscle and body fat satisfaction.

Another study done tested the effects of exposure to ideal body images and test a young adults' eating behavior. Women were shown slides of female models with 4 conditions: no text,

irrelevant text, relevant text, and just slides. They also tested men in the same 4 conditions.

Among women exposure to images alone and images with relevant text led to a decrease in the amount of food eaten in front of their female friends. Among men, slides with just images and images with relevant text led to an increase in the amount eaten in front of male peers (Harrison, & Marske, 2006). Text has an effect on men and women. Just as text was incorporated in this study, we used magazine pages with text as well in our posters of images.

In a more recent study, researchers have found out that the more time men and women watch television, the higher their reported drive for muscularity (Cramblitt, & Pritchard, 2013). In this study, media is being measured by television shows and commercials. The more television shows and commercials seen, the more men and women wanted to get fit. Perhaps watching people on television causes people to become fit just as simply seeing images in magazines cause men and women to have a lower self-body image and want to change it.

In our study, we hypothesized that the group who viewed body images of celebrities and athletes from the media would have a significantly lower self-body image than the group who viewed random images from the media. This was because based on previous research studies done, we felt that there is an effect on people, especial young people, when they hear or see something from the media. This is because we have been raised to understand that appearance is very important in today's society. There are many indirect claims from the media that if you look good, you will feel good and ultimately be happy. This can be shown on covers of magazines, television shows, and even in today's music. This is why we hypothesized that he group who viewed body images of celebrities and athletes from the media would have a significantly lower self-body image than the group who viewed random images from the media.

Method

Participants

Participants included 45 undergraduate students in the Psych-100 class. (31 females, 14 males), during our lecture time. All participants were students from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Their ages ranged from 17-21 years of age. Their class standings ranged from freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Materials

Self-Esteem was a “distracter” variable in which participants believed we were asking about self-esteem. However, self-body image was the variable being tested and it was measured by a survey that consisted of questions about appearance and being pressured by magazines to look a certain way. Media was operationally defined by the visual posters created by the research group. There were two posters; 1 poster consisted of random magazine images such as makeup and cologne and the other poster consisted of images of celebrities and athletes who have been photoshopped. Half of the participants would be seeing one poster and the other half of the participants would be looking at the other poster. Two posters were created because the random image poster was used as a control group whereas the other poster consisted of images of mostly photoshopped bodies. We wanted to see if there was a significant difference of the group who saw the body images.

Measures

Self Esteem. Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess self-esteem. Participants were given sentences in which they had to rate from 1-5 if they agree or disagree. 1 is strongly

disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Sentences consisted of statements such as “On the whole I am satisfied with myself” or “I certainly feel useless at times”.

Body Image. The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance is an adaptation of our scale for self-body image (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). This survey also had a 1-5 scale in which 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. Statements in this survey consisted of sentences such as “I do not care if my body looks like the body of people who are in magazines” and “I’ve felt pressure from magazines to diet”.

Procedure

At the start of our meeting with the participants, we gave informed consent. Each consent form was signed and handed back in to us. Students were then split into two groups and split up. In both Group 1 and Group 2 a survey about self-esteem was given. The self-esteem survey will take about 5-7 minutes to complete. After the self-esteem survey was completed by the participants, we showed a poster for 30 seconds to them. Group 1 saw the random images poster and Group 2 saw the photoshopped images of celebrities and athletes. After the 30 seconds are complete, the participants were given another survey regarding self-body image. Students had 5-7 minutes to complete the survey. After they completed the survey, students handed in their completed surveys and then they were debriefed.

Media Influence on Self-Body Image Findings

The analyses of Group A and Group B are presented in two major sections. In each of the two sections, we examined the influence of different types of media on self-body images. Group B, the group who was shown random images prior to taking the self-body image survey scored significantly lower than Group A, the group who was shown images of celebrities and models

which emphasized their bodies. In our hypothesis we tested the hypothesis that participants who saw the poster of celebrity and athlete bodies would have a high body image number meaning they have a low body image. As expected, in our hypotheses, people who saw the celebrity and athlete bodies poster, have a low body image. (see Figure 1). Specifically, people who saw the images of the celebrity and athlete poster ($N = 19$, $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.12$) and people who saw the random images poster ($N = 24$, $M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.79$) did differ with regard to the number they scored on the body image survey. The higher mean was seen by people who saw the poster of celebrity and athlete body images ($t(2.19)$, $p = 0.04$, $d = 0.65$). Thus, college students who saw the images of celebrity and athlete bodies prior to the self-body image survey had higher scores meaning they had a lower self-body image.

We first hypothesized that the group who was shown images of celebrity and athlete bodies would have results of a lower body image. We also predicted that random images would not affect the participants as significantly as the effect it had on participants who had seen the random images.

In figure 1, the two groups are displayed on the y-axis and the numbers on the x-axis represent self-body image. The higher the number is on the graph, the lower self-body image a person is projected to have. Consistent with our hypothesis, images presented in the media strongly influence self-body image and Group A had higher self-body image numbers. Group B had significantly lower self-body image numbers meaning they had a better projected self-body image.

Discussion

In our study, we hypothesized that the group who views body images of celebrities and athletes from the media will have a significantly lower self-body image than the group who views random images from the media. We believed this would happen because the media has a very powerful affect on the society today, especially on the youth.

Confirming our hypothesis, we in fact found that media exposure plays a role in one's self-body image. Just thirty seconds of media exposure is enough to make a significant difference on men and women's body image. We live in a society where appearance is emphasized very greatly. And media exposure is a huge part in influencing how people think of themselves. There are many media exposure examples everywhere. At the mall there are many posters of photoshopped men and women. Even on television there are many airbrushed actors and actresses on television shows and commercials. There are magazines that contain many photoshopped images which are sold in every grocery or drug store. These images are constantly being looked at by people. Media exposure and self-body image are very important because having a low self-body image could lead to several disorders such as bulimia and anorexia.

However, the study that explored the same variables as in our study done by Jaehee Jung and Sharron Lennon found out that neither exposure to the media images or no exposure at all affected the response on body image, self-esteem and mood (Jung, & Lennon, 2003). Although there was no effect on body image of women by media, our study had a different set of images so both groups will have something to look at prior to taking the survey and this made the difference. We found a significant difference possibly due to having two sets of images rather than one set of images.

In the study done in 2003 by Strahan, researchers found out that exposure to slim images of women caused female participants to consume less food (Strahan, 2003). The images of slim women caused a decrease in food consumption. Women consumed less food possibly because they had the desire to appear slim and skinny like the images they viewed. Similar to our study slim and skinny images did affect men and women and the way they think about their self-body image.

In the study where men were tested rather than women, men had a notable decrease in muscle and body fat satisfaction (Strong, 2005). In our study we showed mixed images of ideal body types of models and athletes. Some images were muscular and some images were slightly less muscular. Viewing both ideal body type images in our study could have possibly affected muscle and body fat satisfaction.

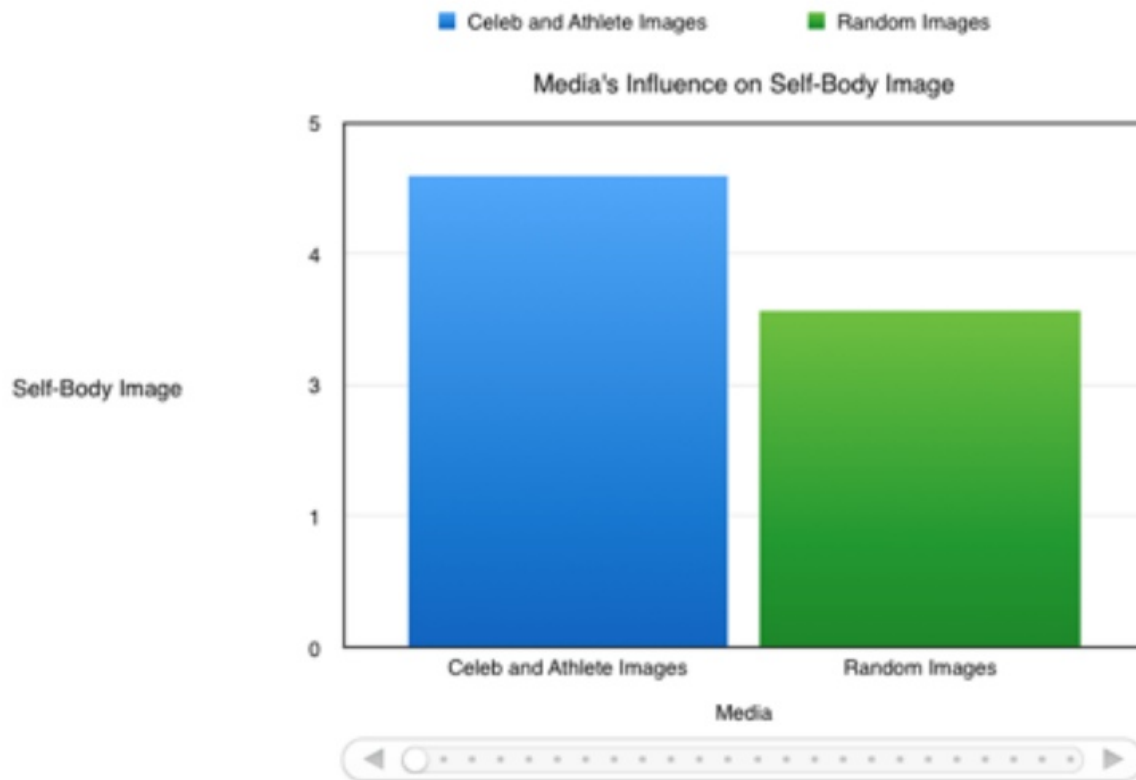
Although we found a significant difference in our study, there were many things we could have improved. Limitations included the environment, the temperature, fatigue, and a short amount of time. We only had 15 minutes to conduct our study on multiple people. We also had to take everyone from the lecture hall to the outside of the lecture hall where it was very hot. Because of the weather and fatigue from taking so many surveys, our results may have been affected in this way. To better our study for future research, we would like to conduct our study in a closed and quiet setting and take each participant one at a time to look at the poster. In this way, we can eliminate social desirability.

We would also like to examine the difference between how males and females answered our surveys. Are males less likely or more likely to have a better body image than women? We could conduct an experiment in which we split males into one group and females into another

group. From there we could split the groups further, creating two male groups and two female groups. We could then show them the one male and one female group the poster with random images and the other male and other female group the poster of celebrity and athlete bodies. We can then give a survey which measures self-body image.

We would also like to examine the length of time of media exposure and how it affects men and women. How long does it take to affect men and women's survey results? Does it take 10 seconds, 20 seconds, or more? We could create an experiment in which we split participants into 3 different groups exposing them to the same set of images but for different times (10 seconds, 20 seconds, and 30 seconds). After viewing the images we can give out a survey which will measure self-body image. We can then examine what kind of results

I would also like to further our research by understanding if all types of media affects men and women in the same way. Do videos make a bigger difference than just images on a magazine? We could have two groups in which one group views a video of celebrities and athletes in movement. The other group can view the same celebrities and athletes but instead as images. We could then give the participants the survey which measures self-body image and analyze the results. These are some directions we could go into for future research regarding media exposure and self-body image.



In Table 1, the two Groups are displayed on the y-axis and the numbers on the x-axis represent self-body image. The higher the number is on the graph, the lower self-body image a person is projected to have. Consistent with our hypothesis, images presented in the media strongly influence self-body image and Group A had higher self-body image numbers. Group B had significantly lower self-body numbers meaning they had a better projected self-body image.

References

- Jung, J., & Lennon, S. J. (2003). Body image, appearance self-schema, and media images. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 32(1), 27-51. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077727X03255900>
- Strahan, E. J. (2003). Selling thinness: How media images increase importance of weight and beauty as a basis of women's self-esteem and decrease their body satisfaction and eating. (Order No. AAINQ77246, Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, , 996. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/620249418?accountid=14523>. (620249418; 2003-95016-001).
- Strong, S. M. (2005). The role of exposure to media-idealized male physiques on men's body image. (Order No. AAI3145804, Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, , 4306. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/621042663?accountid=14523>. (621042663; 2005-99004-333).
- Harrison, K., Taylor, L. D., & Marske, A. L. (2006). Women's and men's eating behavior following exposure to ideal-body images and text. *Communication Research*, 33(6), 507-529. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009365026293247>
- Cramblitt, B., & Pritchard, M. (2013). Media's influence on the drive for muscularity in undergraduates. *Eating Behaviors*, 14(4), 441-446. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2013.08.003>
- Rosenberg, M (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.