**Understanding Adolescent Girls’ Vulnerability to the Impact of the Mass Media on Body Image and Restrained Eating Behaviour**

http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/39670/1/Bell,\_Beth\_Teresa.pdf

The mass media’s role in young women’s body image and eating behaviour disturbances is believed to stem from its prolific over-representation, objectification, and idealisation of female models that homogenously adhere to an unrealistic and artificial body and beauty ideal – the *‘body perfect’* (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999, 2000; Martin & McCracken, 2001; Spyeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004; Wallis, 2011). This aligns with the Agenda Setting Function theory where the prolific images of the perfect female body frame the terms of reference for female beauty

A substantial body of psychological research has demonstrated that both acute and habitual exposure to such biased media depictions of female models may lead girls to experience a combination of both pressure and desire to conform to it (Thompson & Stice, 2001).

The unrealistic nature of this ‘body perfect’ ideal makes it impossible for the majority of girls and women to attain, leading them to experience negative feelings towards their own bodies and also to engage in strategies aimed at modifying the appearance of the body, including dietary restraint (Keery, van den Berg, & Thompson, 2004; Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Stice, Ziemba, Margolis, & Flick, 1996).

Adolescent girls are bombarded by images of body perfect models. The typical teenager spends at least one third of their day engaging with some form of media (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005), and furthermore, the types of media that adolescent girls typically engage with - including fashion and beauty magazines, TV teenage drama series, and music videos - are saturated with images of idealised body perfect female models (Englis et al.,1994; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; 2000; Martin & McCracken, 2001; Spyeck et al., 2004; Wallis, 2011). Research has suggested that adolescent girls may be particularly vulnerable to the mass media’s negative impact on body image and eating behaviour (Groesz et al., 2002

**Media Effects on Body Image: Examining Media Exposure in the Broader Context of Internal and Other Social Factors**

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While it has been observed that media are connected to internalization of the thin-idea land body dissatisfaction in women, other external environmental factors should also be considered The Reinforcement Theory proposed by Joseph Klapper suggests that people’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviour was more likely to be influenced by their family, schools, communities and religious institutions. He argued that the only time the media could influence people was when the media introduced a new idea or concept. This Theroy would believe it important to examine the influence of peer and parental attitudes regarding weight to better understand how these might resonate with media messages

Social comparison theory has been useful for exploring peer influence on body dissatisfaction. If women embrace the mediated thin-ideal but do not meet that standard and have friends that do, they may engage in upward comparisons and potentially experience body dissatisfaction (Jones, 2001;Krones, Stice, Batres, &Orjada, 2005).

Peers are also an important influence on body image attitudes. Krcmar, Giles, and Helme (2008) found that young women whose peers considered thinness to be an important quality were more likely to value thinness. 2001;Krones, Stice, Batres, &Orjada, 2005). and have lower self-esteem. They also observed that peers can reinforce the mediated thin ideal, making it more likely that these women will embrace it as reality. Peer influence can have a significant impact on what is considered to be desirable or normal regarding body weight and shape. McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001) observed that women who have high body dissatisfaction were more likely to have felt peer pressure about weight, particularly in the form of criticism for weight gain, and praise for weight loss. Hohlstein, Smith, and Atlas (1998) noted that these sources often emphasize the importance of thinness, which plays a role in the internalization of the thin ideal.

Besides the impact of peers, it is important to consider the relationship between parental attitudes and body image attitudes, because parental influence is one of the most important factors associated with body attitudes during a child’s development (e.g. Ata, Ludden,&Lally, 2007; Krmcar, Giles, &Helme, 2008; Rodgers, Paxton, &Chabrol, 2009). Krcmar, Giles, and Helme (2008) noted that parental comments about children’s physical appearance convey body image norms that could lead to negative associations with body shape. It has been suggested that parental influence is a primary influence on body dissatisfaction. For example, Levine, Smolak, Moodey, Shuman, and Hessen (1994) observed that parents who place an importance on dieting and other weight control behaviors can have a negative impact on body satisfaction. If parental attitudes toward body shape and weight resonate with those of the media, they may also be linked to internalization of the thin ideal.

Kristen Vonderen conducted a detailed study examining Media Exposure in the Broader Context of Internal and Other Social Factors surveyed over 400 female between 17-37 and the findings indicated it was not possible to find the exact origin of body image attitudes. Instead it may be more useful to consider that the variables serve to reinforce one another and strengthen existing attitudes, despite where they originate.