THE EFFECT OF MEDIA AWARENESS SKILLS ON BODY PERCEPTION PRODUCED BY MEDIA



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THE EFFECT OF MEDIA AWARENESS SKILLS ON BODY PERCEPTION PRODUCED BY MEDIA

A Senior Comprehensive Project
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Abstract

With the growing rates of magazines and other media sources using image editing techniques in order to make models look thinner, taller, more muscular, tanner, ect. There is a growing rate of body dissatisfaction among women. Since these features are physically unobtainable there will be no improvement unless something is done to counterbalance these images the media are portraying. A possible solution to this problem is to teach media awareness skills in order to help individuals detect when the media is manipulating them. In order to test this, the researcher compared the results of participants who watched a film about Photoshoping techniques, compared to participants who watched a clip from the 2013 Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. From previous studies done it seems that females who receive the media awareness are less likely to have negative effects on their body image perception when compared to peers who have not received media awareness, it is expected that this study will show similar results.

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The Effect of Media Awareness Skills on Body Perception Produced by Media

Today women face many societal pressures to obtain the ideal body image. Women should be more concerned with their own happiness and healthiness with their own body, instead of the skinny, ideal image. Through media awareness women can be taught to be happy with their own body by showing them the unreality of the skinny images presented via the media. The media is constantly present; society is frequently being presented with images of things that should make people happy. One thing that remains constant is a beautiful body image. Many studies have been done that show the negative effects of constantly being presented with these images. Women are just as likely to compare themselves to the thin models they see in advertisements as they are there everyday peers (Myers, Ridolfi, Crowther, & Ciesla 2012). This shows another aspect of a drive for thinness and that it could not only just be from other types of media influences.

Another study compares the effects of media's portrayal of body ideal and eating disorder symptoms. This was a longitudinal study so researchers could see the effects of media images over time. This brings up an interesting question: How much exposure is needed for the negative body image/ depression to start to take effect. The impact of media exposure on body image depends on the time length of exposure. While short exposure to media may not cause much of an effect on self-body perception, constant exposure over time can cause an effect. (Hausenblas, H. A., Campbell, A., Menzel, J. E., Doughty, J., Levine, M., & Thompson, J. K. 2013). An interesting question would be how long does exposure to media need to be in order to see the negative effects on perceived body image.

Exposure to thin models increases a drive for thinness and an increase in body dissatisfaction. However if a participant is shown images of average or plus sized women there

in no perceived drive for thinness or body dissatisfaction. (Tucci, S., & Peters, J. 2008). Using this idea, it would seem that exposure to average sized or even plus sized models could prevent much of the body dissatisfaction seen in society today. When participants are presented with images from the media they can often been seen as unrealistic. Many women who have a positive body image describe Photoshoped images in magazines as "them as unnatural and unrealistic, and criticizing media for only showing those consistent with the ideals and having underlying intentions with doing so" (Holmqvist, K., & Frisen, A. 2012). Adolescents with a positive body image are skeptical with the images they are seen being produced via entertainment and the media based on previous studies done it seems that females who receive the media awareness are less likely to have negative effects on their depression rates and body image perception when compared to peers who have not received media awareness.

The ideal body by today's standards has a body weight that is less than 15% the healthy weight. (Owen and Spencer 2013). As such, one can conclude that the current idealized female body portrayed in the media is an unhealthy body weight for most women based on the recommended BMI for healthy women". These images are portrayed constantly in the media through means of television, magazines, and photos. For this reason I would like to use a Figural Rating scale to figure out exactly how women perceive their own body and the "ideal" body image; "Participants' self-adjusted body ideal was significantly larger following viewing of healthy weight models than that reported following viewing thin models. This effect was greatest in those individuals with the high levels of baseline anxiety. These individuals also had significantly more positive affect after viewing healthy weight models than after viewing thin models". This relationship would be valuable in trying to come up with preventative measures for things such as eating disorders that are brought up by unobtainable images in the media.

Models presented in the media today, especially those seen in beauty and fashion magazines are presented as being flawless. Their skin is flawless; every hair is in place, is a size zero, perfectly tan, and has a thigh gap. (Jung 2006). The advertising industry is to blame for the unrealistic body images portrayed. They use tools such as Photoshop to enhance the model's thus making their product more appealable to consumers. This can be seen in the new beauty campaigns issued by Dove. Other beauty movements have come about saying that is should be necessary for companies to put disclaimers on images that they have Photoshoped.

Much of this research goes off of the idea of social comparison theory this is the "tendency to compare one's appearance and figure to other people's has been shown to play an important part in the etiology of body dissatisfaction, with increased tendencies associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction" (Rogers, Sales, Chabrol 2010). This is an important aspect of understanding why body images in the media have so much affect on those watching. While watching shows women compare their own body images and body types to those who are shown on the shows and those women in the advertisements.

Media Portrayal of Female Bodies

More than 60% of Playboy centerfolds are more than 15% below their expected weight. This is a concern because a body weight less than 15% or more below expected is one of the criteria for anorexia nervosa. This is an issue because women can do harm to their bodies in attempts to make their body the unobtainable body standard: "over 80% of women in college settings reported body dissatisfaction […] These high prevalence rates are problematic because body dissatisfaction is associated with several negative psychological consequences including depression […], social anxiety […], sexual dissatisfaction […], and reported suicide attempts"

(Myers, Ridolfi, Crowther, & Ciesla, 2012). Some of these "side effects" can be harmful and detrimental. This side effect is not only found in college women. 42% of 1st-3rd grade girls want to be thinner (Collins, 1991).

Body Dissatisfaction

"In the United States, 20 million women and 10 million men suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder at some time in their life, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, or an eating disorder not otherwise" (National Eating Disorders Association, 2013). With the United States current population is about 3.2 billion people, so while this number is not very large in comparison it is still very substantial. What has caused so many individuals to be so dissatisfied with their current body image? One of many factors is the media.

Research Questions

Does being more aware of techniques that the media uses to alter images lessen the negative effects of media on body perception?

Hypothesis

Females who receive the media awareness video will choose the number that correlates the best to their actual body type, and that their ideal body type will be a healthy body type, a 3 or 4 on the Figural Rating Scale, in comparison to the females who watch the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 30 female Allegheny College students ranging in age from 18-21. Participants were recruited from all majors and minors. Out of the 30 participants, only 29 were analyzed due to one participant's uncompleted data. Participants were divided into two groups based on the video they watched, a video of the finale of the 2012 Victoria's Secret Fashion Show and a news story on a popular Photoshop tutorial. Out of the 29 participants 24 identified as being White, 1 identified as being Black, and 3 identified as being Asian.

Research Design

This study is an experiment design. This study manipulates the level of media awareness that each participant receives. There are two separate media groups.

Procedure

Participants will be recruited both from classroom visits from researcher and a written invitation on SONA, the colleges study participation website. When participants arrive at the testing location they were given an informed consent form explaining the basics of the study. Then participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire form demographic variables such as age, year, and major. After filling out this test the participant will be randomly assigned to watch one of two short films.

The first film consisted of a small portion of the Victoria's Secret Fashion show, a media event that is centered around skinny, female body image, while the second is a short clip on how the media manipulates images, though Photoshop, that are seen in the media. Then participants

will be asked to fill out a Figural Ratings Scale (Bhuiya, Srinivasen, Benson 2003) and a few open-ended questions concerning their perceived body images and those shown in the media. Participants will then be asked to voluntarily give their height and weigh themselves on a scale, in private, in order for the researcher to calculate the participants' BMI. The participant's will then be dismissed. Those who participated in the study for class credit were given credit via SONA. After all data is collected, comparisons were done between females who have viewed the short film about manipulation in the media and those who watched a portion of the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. This will allow a building upon the previous knowledge that body images presented in the media can have negative affects on the viewer. This study hoped to find a way to counter these negative affects.

Measures

Participants will fill out two forms; one of which is an informational form created by the researcher (See Appendix A), and then the Figural Ratings Scale with a few open ended questions about body images and the participants height and weight, which will be used to calculate BMI (Appendix B).

Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS (version 19.0) software.

The informational form created by the researcher was analyzed to find differences in the participants based on the information provided. The researcher was interested in any other possible factors that the participants would have had (such as how much tv they watched on

average, their race, of if they had ever taken a Woman's Studies or Communication Arts class) and how that would affect both their perceived body and their ideal body.

On the Figural Rating Scale, the researcher looked at the relationship between the participant's perceived body and their ideal body, their perceived body and their actual body, and the ideal body to their actual body. What video the participants watched was also looked at for all these categories. The participant's actual body type was calculated using the participant's height and weight, which were taken on a volunteer basis, and then calculated to find the participants BMI. The researcher then assigned a number based on the Figural Rating Scale to each participant. Participants receiving a 1 or a 2, were considered underweight and had BMI of less than 15 and 15.1-18.5, respectively), participants who received a 3 or 4 are at a healthy weight (BMI of 18.6-21.75 and 21.76-24.9, respectively), participants who received a number 5 were classified as slightly overweight (BMI of 25.0-26.7), participants who received a 6 or 7 are moderately overweight (BMI of 26.8-28.3 and 28.4-29.9, respectively), participants who were an 8 or 9 were classified as obese (BMI of 30.0-35.0 and 35.1 and greater, respectively).

Results

None of the hypotheses were supported by the research. The hypothesis was, females who receive the media awareness video will choose the number that correlates the best to their actual body type, and that their ideal body type will be a healthy body type, a 3 or 4 on the Figural Rating Scale, in comparison to the females who watch the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. The researcher looked at the difference of the number that the participant thought related the most to their body and the figure that matched their ideal body type. The researcher analyzed this data using a t-test. For the Photoshop group (N=16) the mean was 1.56 (SD=1.263), for the

Victoria's Secret Fashion Show (N=13) the mean was 1.54 (SD 1.1983), there was no difference between these groups. When looking at the number of the figure that was the most closely related to the participants body for the Photoshop group (N=13) the mean was a 4.94 and while looking at the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show (N=16) the mean was 4.93, there was no difference between the two groups (t(27)=.026, p=.979). In regards to both groups, the researcher looked the mean number that most closely related to the participants body. The mean score was a 4.93 (N=29), this relates closely to a BMI of 25, which is classified as being slightly overweight. When looking at the number related to the figure most closely related to the participants ideal body for the Photoshop group (N=13) the mean was 3.38 and for the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show group (N=16) was 3.38, the two showed no difference (t(27)=-.035 p-.973). There was no statistical difference between the groups in any of the areas that the researcher looked at.

The researcher then looked at how the amount of TV affected the difference between the participants perceived body and their ideal body. The researcher ran a one-way ANOVA in order to compare the data. For participants who watched 2-3 hours of television in a given week (N=8), the mean difference between perceived body and their ideal body was M=1.63. For participants who watched 3-4 hours of television in a given week (N=7), the mean difference between perceived body and their ideal body was M=1.57. For participants who watched 5-6 hours of television in a given week (N=5), the mean difference between perceived body and their ideal body was M=1.40. For participants who watched 7+ hours of television in a given week (N=5), the mean difference between perceived body and their ideal body was M=1.64. Four participants were removed from this data analysis due to the data not being significant.

Discussion

While the results were not statistically significant, the researcher did find some useful information. This research has shown that if a female is exposed to a negative for a short period of time, it does affect neither her perceived body nor her body ideal. This could be due to some of the ideas that were presented in the Photoshop video being around for a few years. Recently new campaigns have come out focused on true bodies and wanting to make it a required disclaimer if the imaged has been altered via Photoshop. Dove's Real Beauty campaign has been around for 10 years, so the ideas presented in the video is not exactly a new idea. Also with the rise of sites such as upworthy.com and buzzfeed.com many of these types of articles have been shared on blogs or on Facebook. Most recently, Arie has launched a new campaign where they will be using no Photoshop retouching at all. Also, this campaign uses "real women" and features no super models. This new campaign wants to let their costumers know that "the real you is sexy". Leaving this women untouched allows females to see bodies that look like theirs, not just the same weight and proportions, but Arie has also left things such as birthmarks and tattoos to allow women to see women just like them being represented.

Limitations

One of the contributors to unexpected results was the uneven amount of participants in the two groups. The Photoshop group had 16 participants, while the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show had only 13. One of the participants had to be removed from some of the data analysis because of incomplete data.

Another limitation is the female Allegheny College population is very similar and forward thinking. Allegheny College teaches its students to question what is presented to them. Also the majority of participants were members of Greek life and mostly came from the same

sorority. While these women are very much different, they all have similar ideals and qualities, which could cause them to answer the questions in the same way.

Conclusion

The findings in this research have the potential to show that some of the media implications (such as Arie's "The real you is sexy" campaign) are already showing a positive impact on the ideal female body in today's society. While this may be the case it could also be due to the short amount of exposure each group had to there given video (each video was about 2.5 minutes in length.) While there was no difference in participant's ideal body figure between participants based on how much television they watched in a given week, this could be due to the fact that each of these participants have had a lifelong exposure to these body ideals. The media industry should still move forward in using women who have real, healthy, figures as opposed to models who are underweight. The industry should also have to use disclaimers if they use Photoshop on models or not be able to use it at all.

Further research on this topic would be ideal. Especially due to the uneven participant groups and the smaller than ideal participant groups, it is hard to generalize if these results would apply to a larger population. If more females were studied, who came from more diverse backgrounds, a better comprehensive of these results could occur.

The overarching goal of this study was to see if there was a relationship between media awareness skills and perceived body image and ideal body image. It was found that this relationship does not exist. Participants in both the Photoshop group and the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show had almost identical perceived and ideal body types. Ultimately, this study

achieved its goal in determining whether there was a relationship between media awareness skills and perceived and ideal body image.

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APPENDIX A

Media Awareness Skills

Megan Frennier
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Experiment ID #: _____

Age: _____

Year in School: _____

Major/ Minor: _____

Race: _____

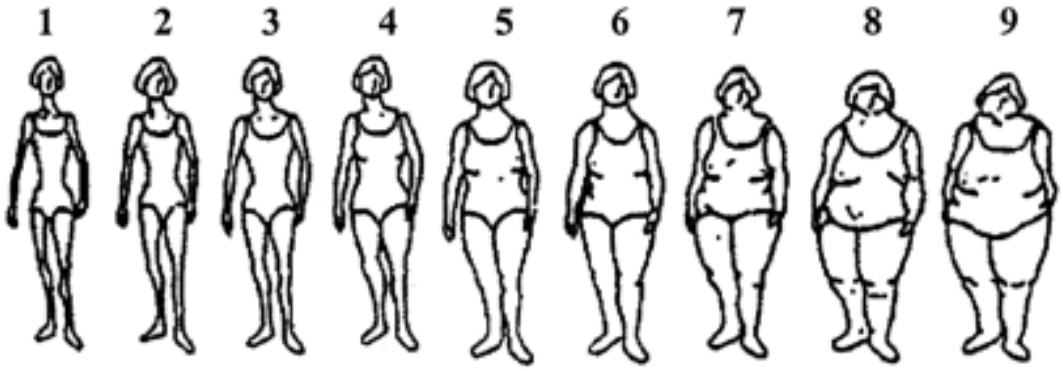
How often do you watch tv in a given week:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2 hrs	3-4 hrs	5-6 hrs	7+ hrs

Have you taken any Communication Arts or Women Study Classes:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+

APPENDIX B
Figural Rating Scale



Which figure do you believe most closely represents **your** body? _____

If different, which figure most closely represents your **ideal** body? _____

Please circle what video you watched:

Photoshop Victoria's Secret

Please put your *height* in feet and inches here: _____

Please put your *weight* here:

_____

Figures

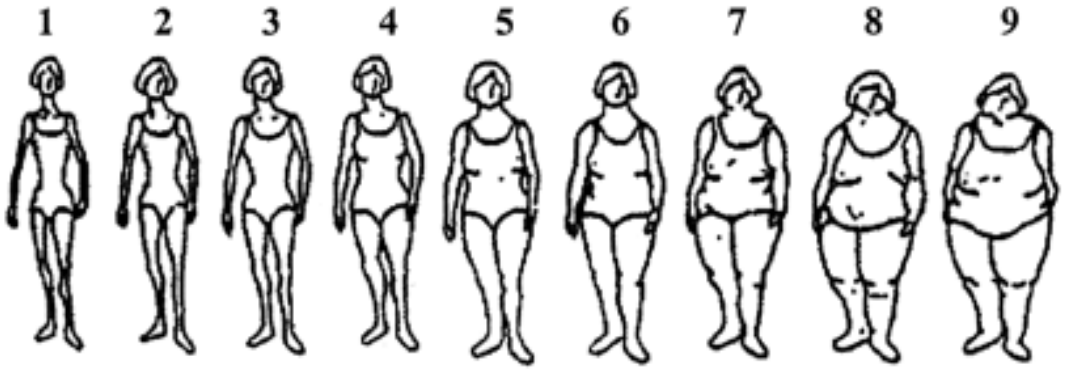


Figure 1. Images from the Figural Rating Scale. Figures 1 and 2 are underweight (BMI of less than 15 and 15.1-18.5, respectively), images 3 and 4 are at a healthy weight (BMI of 18.6-21.75 and 21.76-24.9, respectively), image 5 is slightly overweight (BMI of 25.0-26.7), images 6 and 7 are moderately overweight (BMI of 26.8-28.3 and 28.4-29.9, respectively), images 8 and 9 are obese (BMI of 30.0-35.0 and 35.1 and greater, respectively).