

Influence of Media on Eating Disorders

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The mainstream media has an astounding effect on individual lifestyle. Nowadays, mainstream media is used by corporates and other business entities to market their products and services due to the capability of reaching out to millions of target customers. Western media in precise has been propagating a strong message that having a thin and abled body is adorable and desirable (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). In the long run, teenagers and young adults are striving to achieve the perfect body size and shape. Each year, companies in the food industry spend millions of dollars in the quest to market their products and services. The images, videos, and messages that teenagers and younger adults see every day have a profound impact on their eating habits. A constant barrage of these messages can cause eating disorders in the quest to change appearance and realize the desirable body shape and size. This paper will assess the impact of mainstream media on eating disorders by exploring studies conducted by other researchers and scholars on the same topic.

The degree to which the mainstream media contribute to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders remains a hotly debated topic. Ferguson and his colleagues set out to explore this correlation and therefore conducted a study with a total of 237 research participants. The sample population was made up of girls of Hispanic origin. The research was aimed at examining the impact of watching the TV, use of social media and peer competition on body displeasure, life satisfaction, and eating disorders. Among the 237 research participants, 101 were later reassessed as a follow-up exercise (Ferguson et al., 2014). The findings of the research showed that watching TV and use of social media did not have an adverse outcome on body displeasure and eating disorders. However, the use of social media led to increased peer competition which in the long run had an indirect effect on the body dissatisfaction. Individuals who were dissatisfied with their body sizes and shape resulted in abnormal eating behaviors. In a nutshell, the study

revealed that the use of social media and other networking sites had a profound impact on how females perceive their body. Unfortunately, the data used in the research was correlational and therefore could not be used to make certain inferences. This setback emerged to be the major limitation of the study. Additionally, the sample population was tiny and could not be used to make generalized conclusions. The findings of the research are aligned with those made by other researchers regarding the nuanced impact of social media on body dissatisfaction among females.

Adolescents are more vulnerable to eating disorders unlike any other group because they experience tremendous body growth and development. According to Harrison (2000), most eating disorders are manifested during the adolescent stage. Harrison conducted research that encompassed respondents from three distinct age groups. The first lot was made up of 6th graders with an average age of 11.5 years while the second group was composed of 9th graders with an average age of 14.6 years. The third lot was made up of 12th graders with an average age of 17.8 years. The three groups represented the lower, middle and upper high school learners. The total number of research participants was 366 with females accounting for 49.7% (Harrison, 2000). The research participants were exposed to a variety of personalities in TVs and the print media. They were exposed to fat, thin and athletic-bodied characters in the TV and print media to determine their reaction and their perception regarding body size and shape. The findings of the research revealed that the older females were affected by the exposure more than their male counterparts. This can be attributed to the fact that women mind their body size and shape more than men. In a nutshell, the research emphasized on evaluating the impact of age and gender on the topic of study. However, the major limitation of the study was that the researchers did not

assess whether the sporting activity had an impact on body appearance and eating behaviors. The inconsistency of the findings can be attributed to the implementation of controlled exposure.

In 2015, a group of researchers set out to determine whether the sexual minority youth with various eating disorders are more affected by what they see on the media as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The research participants were composed of a group of adolescents who had been diagnosed with an eating disorder. Their ages ranged between 12 and 19 years but their mean age was 16.2 years, and the two primary independent variables were sexual orientation and gender (Salas-Humara et al., 2015). Research participants were questioned about their views on the impact of media exposure on body image. Statistical tests were used to determine the correlation between the research variables. The total number of research respondents was 164, and only 21 were males. The findings of the research revealed that sexual minority youth did not record adverse outcomes. Instead, heterosexual youth were affected by the study. Each gender in a heterosexual group will attempt to prove their attractiveness to the other gender. They will, therefore, be very conscious about their body size and shape. Most of those in the heterosexual group expressed interest in attaining the bodies of those personalities that they watch on TV and any other mainstream media. Additionally, more females were affected by the research as compared to their male counterparts. The primary limitation of the study is researching persons who have been diagnosed with eating disorders. This means that they neglected the other groups and yet they would have been crucial in providing generalized conclusions. Extensive research should be conducted to evaluate the impact of age and gender on eating disorders.

Thompson and Heinberg (1999) researched to evaluate the impact of the media on eating disorders. The duo reviewed the extensive literature regarding the topic in question before

coming with conclusive statements, to sum up, their research. However, their principal point of concern was evaluating how societal pressure regarding the standards of attractiveness may affect body dissatisfaction and eating habits. The study emphasized more on women because they are keener to realize a body size and shape that resembles those of models that they watch on the TVs and fashion magazines. The authors relied on research that was conducted by other researchers, and they were looking forward to integrating these findings to determine the level of correlation between media marketing and eating disorders. After conducting an extensive review of existing literature, the two scholars concluded that print media and television influence how people feel about their bodies. Girls and women who feel dissatisfied with their body size and shape will explore all avenues to ensure that they achieve what they consider the desirable body (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). In the long run, they are forced to change their eating habits which may lead to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa. However, it was unclear whether exposure to media caused the stir or those who felt that they have undesirable changes purposely watched mainstream media with the intention of changing their appearance. The inconsistencies portrayed in the study suggests that extensive research should be conducted to determine the correlation between exposure to media and eating disorders.

According to a 2006 study conducted by Derenne and Beresin, the duo set out to give a historical context of why exposure to media is related to eating disorders. Recently, eating disorders and obesity has become a major health concern all over the world. The authors reviewed the changes in the ideal body size and shape among women over time. What the society considered a perfect body size and shape among women has changed gradually. Nowadays, the society perceives a thin and petite body size as the most desirable body for girls and women. An athletic and masculine body is also considered the perfect body size and shape

among men. The findings of the research revealed that the society has a profound impact in dictating what is the ideal and desirable body size in both genders. The media is a powerful and ubiquitous marketing tool in the contemporary world (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). However, the media is partially to blame for the continued dissatisfaction among men and women who believe that they do not have a desirable body size and shape. Even though the research is about changes in the ideal body size among both genders, the authors place more emphasis on children at the expense of teenagers and younger adults. This a major limitation because an eating disorder is a medical condition that affects children, teenagers, and young adults as well. The inconsistencies experienced in the research pertains to the approach that the researchers used to come up with meaningful conclusions. Parents are advised to review the content that their children watch in TVs and instead necessitate the need to eat healthily and exercise regularly. Adverts should also be aimed at motivating people to live a healthy life.

In conclusion, most researchers and scholars have pointed out that media has a massive influence on eating disorders. The media has become part of the society's fabric where everyone desires to know what is trending. However, corporates have utilized this opportunity to market their products and services. Research shows that media marketing can have adverse effects on an individual's eating habits. After watching television, using social media sites and reading fashion magazines, many people feel dissatisfied by their body sizes. This can be attributed to low self-esteem among individuals who believe that their body size and shape is unappealing. Some of them end up changing their eating habits with the sole intention of attaining the body sizes of personalities that they watch or read about in the mainstream media. The media should be a tool to inform the masses rather than misaligning their views and perceptions about eating habits. The

mainstream media should be on the forefront to advocate for healthy eating and the need to exercise regularly rather than the obsession for attaining a desirable body size and shape.

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