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# An Analysis of Females in the Media

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*In society today, the media plays a major role in our daily lives. With new websites and apps coming out every day, there is continued exposure to social media. With ideal body image being a very relevant topic of discussion and the popularity of social media, it is possible that there could be a correlation. This study explored this possible correlation and went into further detail on the relationship between social media and females and their effect on interpersonal communication.*

## Introduction

The ideal body image is a common topic among young people in society today. Everyone, male and female alike, has their own idea of what the ideal body should look like. Media plays a major role in the way one composes their ideal body image. By seeing these images on TV, in magazines, and on social media, one may feel pressure to look like the slim demographic of people represented in the media; whether this be a skinny female or a physically strong male.

This study focused on how images of females in the media impacted the interpersonal communication and the concept of self of college females at a private university in the Midwest. One of the easiest ways to create an ideal body image for yourself is through the media one is exposed to. By doing a research study on the impact of media on females' idea of how their body should look, researchers discovered the true impact of media on undergraduate females at a private university. While looking through other scholarly studies of the effect of media on youth, there seems to be a trend of unrealistic goals set by youth based on the images they see in the media.

# Literature Review

## Introduction:

In the 21st century, people are bombarded by sounds and images from the media. As time and technology have progressed, these images have become more abundant; found all over. These messages tell them what to do, where to go, and who to be. Some people are more impressionable than others and take what the media says wholeheartedly. The topic of the media influence is highly researched; however, the media is constantly changing and having new effects on consumers.

This study focuses on the how the images of models impact interpersonal communication and young females. While many studies focus on the physical effects that media produces, like body disorders, or mental effects; this study will focused on how the images and messages of females in the media affects communication between young, female college students enrolled at an undisclosed private university in the Midwest. With the types of media that young girls are exposed to, having effects on everyday life is inevitable. There are side effects to bombardment of images that young girls are subjected to. Body dysmorphia and other developmental issues can arise.

## Negative Body Image:

Many societies put a great amount of pressure on females to be perfect. To look exactly like the edited females in magazines and on social media. With these expectations, many young girls and females develop a negative body image. The data suggested this to be a common pattern.

Challenges with a negative body image are not bound to one age group, culture, or place. They are seen in any generation over the world where young females are subjected to media

images that solely focus on unreachable beauty standards. Prieler & Choi (2014) looked at social media and its effects on how culture should be taken into account when looking at the relationship between social media and body image. There are many different cultures affected by the media, however, many studies leave out a number of them. It is important to look at multiple cultures in order to come to conclusive and inclusive results. One cannot generalize from one culture to the next. Therefore, research on many cultures must be done. Social media's effects on the psyche and body image of young females is complex and cannot be understood with the snap of a finger. It must be studied thoroughly and consistently due to the ever changing dynamic of social media.

While media has been growing through different sites, they are growing within those sites as well. Users create content and share it with their followers and thus creates a domino effect of images and messages, both hidden and on the surface. Perloff (2014) discusses social media and how that relates to body image and the gratification young people get from certain types of media. Researchers found that certain campaigns can help change the way that media is teaching adolescents on how they should look. Authors of the article also looked at the connection between certain psyche related problems and the association with other body image problems. The basis of these problems tends to relate to how young females perceive beauty standards to be a thin body. The self-objectification tendencies shown by young females is also looked at as the dangerous habit that it is.

With easy access to different media outlets comes great responsibility. Because access to media outlets is so easy, it is also easy to spend a lot of time taking in the images and sounds seen. The purpose of the study completed by Tiggemann (2006)was to see if there was a positive, negative, or even no correlation between a negative body image and how much time young

females spent looking at different media outlets. The findings of this study by Tiggemann suggest that how much time is spent on different media outlets does have some effect on body image. Ability to process what is seen is more important than how much is seen.

A major reason why children have a negative body image is because they compare themselves to others. Tatangelo and Ricciardelli (2017) examined how children compare themselves with their peers and the media. The results were that young girls compare their appearance more to other girls and boys compare their sports/abilities to other boys. Boys looked at men as inspiring where girls looked at females with more negative emotions. This study helps us look at how girls compare themselves to their peers and those in the media.

**Ideal Body Image:**

Society plays a major role in the way females view themselves. The media surrounding us in our everyday lives creates an expectation that many girls and females aspire to be. The data we collected supports this.

The most important time for young girls to develop a sense of self is in their youth. This is a crucial time to expose girls to positive role models. In the world today that exposure frequently comes from females on TV. The International Communication Association (2012) examined youth girls and boys. Participants were given a survey about how they perceive themselves and their favorite character on TV. They found that increased exposure to media encourages youth to develop motivations to compare themselves to their favorite characters with the goal of improving themselves. This study explored young people's perception of self compared to someone they admire. By comparing themselves with an often fictional character they develop a negative body image, encouraging them to change themselves to become society's ideal body image.

Another study that focuses on the ideal body image was done by Jahaveri and Patki (2016). This study examined the relationship between locus of control, peer influence on dieting, media exposure and body image satisfaction in young adults. The researchers used gave questionnaires to 124 young adults between the ages 19 and 25 years old, 62 males and 62 females. The results from the questionnaires supported that females and media exposure are negatively correlated. It was also more present among females than males. Peer influence on dieting was negatively related to females and their well-being. Lastly, locus of control was positively related to females and peer influence on dieting. It was negatively related to satisfaction. These results are important to our research because they give us a look at how media exposure effects females and where they get the ideal body image from.

For years, media outlets have been expanding their reach towards different kinds of audiences. Media is no longer only impressionable through television shows or movies, but now there is radio, cell phones and apps, games and social media sites. Some different media outlets are more impactful on different groups of people, whether it be due to gender, culture, or ethnicity. Bell & Dittmar (2011) observed different media outlets and seeing if their content creates a different body image young viewers perceive as ideal. They found that magazines were less popular and computer games did not affect the females too much. The different media outlets and the extent of their reach depended on gender. However, because the study was relatively small, there cannot be many conclusions drawn as to what media outlets cause the most damage on young males psyche. This study examines the role of TV in young girls lives. This type of media young girls are getting exposed to at a very young age. Researchers look at how TV helps develop stereotypes about thinness, self-esteem, and weight in these young girls. Parents gave information about their kids TV watching and self-esteem. The results suggested

that media exposure and body image have an effect on girls starting at a young age. This is a great source for our research because it helps us understand when females start being exposed to models.

**Physical and Emotional Effects from Body Image:**

With the pressures to have an ideal body image and many young females having a negative body image, many result to having physical and emotional effects. Much like discussed in a previous article, problems with body image is not only in the United States. These problems affect many different cultures, people, and age groups. It is also not confined to a certain sex or gender. Everyone subjected to media is at risk to be swayed by what they see or hear. Dakanalis, Carrà, Calogero, Fida, Clerici, Zanetti, & Riva (2015) studied media effects on the self-image of 14-15 year olds in Italy. They observed that girls are bombarded with unrealistic body image ideals more than boys, however, both genders are subjected to the mental health issues that come as a consequence to media usage. While this study was conducted in Italy, it is a good example of the idea that the repercussions of negative body ideals brought on by media affects.

Sonmez and Turanci (2017) examined the impact media has on university students decisions on exercising and going on diets. The questionnaire given to participants was based off of the Social Comparison Scale and Self-Esteem Scale. The study found that both genders first compare themselves to people in the media and then try and be like them. The motivation for males is higher to exercise and diet. For females, body comparison with people in the media is more negative. This information will help us look at another age level, undergraduate students.

**Conclusion:**

The media plays a negative effect on the way females view their body. The media displays models and celebrities in a way that is unrealistic to the average female. Being surrounded by images and expectations of the "ideal" or "perfect" female has a major impact on females, young girls especially. Not only does this exposure impact females physically, but also impacts interpersonal communication and concept of self.

**Research Questions/Hypothesis**

This study poses the following research question:

RQ: How do images/messages of females in the media impact the interpersonal communication of young, female college students?

H1: Images in the media of females in the media impact both interpersonal communication of young, college females in an undisclosed private university in the Midwest.

By the conclusion of this study our goal was to have a clear view on the impact images of females in the media have on female college students; not only physically, but emotionally.

**Methodology**

Media has become increasingly popular in the lives of younger generations and has the power to sway the way many people think, act, and feel. Opinions of the ideal female body have become more prominent and have affected the young female population more than ever. This study aimed to look at the effects of media on female undergraduate students at a private institution in the Midwest (units of analysis). Surveys were be emailed to the institution's specific Google email accounts, with a link to the survey. Within the email, researchers introduced themselves and the purpose of the study, as well as gave the survey takers an estimation of how

long the survey should take them (five minutes). It was also important that we ensured them that

their answers were completely anonymous, so that their answers were not swayed by a

possibility of their identity being revealed. This survey was only given out once to participants,

therefore it is cross sectional. The study was field independent. Participants were female

undergraduate students studying at a private institution in the Midwest and given the survey

through email.

The survey did not exceed fifteen questions and did not take long to complete, in hopes

that the female undergraduate students would be more inclined to participate. The questions were

closed questioned, meaning that participants had options of answers to choose from, or skip the

question (besides question one). The survey was self-administered. This was good for this

particular survey because participants were not be swayed one way or another based on the

researchers' close proximity.

The hypothesis for this study is: images of females in the media impact both interpersonal

communication of young, college females in an undisclosed private university in the Midwest.

This produced a two tailed sample through a chi square test. Because the research focused on

communication and social media, a chi square test of association was used. By making the

survey simple, this encouraged honesty from its participants and offered comfort by not applying

any pressure. This survey helped get accurate results, assuming that participants respond with

full honesty.

When observing results, it was important to not only combine all results into one but

observe distinctions between surveys. Separating the results into categories will be important in

supporting the researcher's hypothesis. This distinction could be categorized as:

1. Whether participants see/hear messages of the ideal female/body image

2. Whether the images/messages they see of females in the media changes the way they post to their own accounts, the way they speak, dress, or act.

By separating participants into groups based on their survey results our study got closer to either agreeing or not agreeing with the researcher's hypothesis.

In this study, quantitative observations were crucial. By recording the scale used, other researchers will be able to duplicate this study and get comparable results if looking to use the same age range of females. It was crucial for observers to take field notes, however, they were different because participants took the survey on their own time. Nevertheless, notes were about observations regarding the participants, like gender and age. This study was aimed towards having saturation of the data as a result, considering that as much data as possible was desired. However, given the limited population of undergraduate students, saturation of the data was not guaranteed, but nonetheless, a goal held by the researchers.

## Results

In order to examine the research question posed, the researchers created a survey targeting female undergraduate students at a private university in the Midwest and the effect the media has on their self-image and in turn, whether they communicate these effects from the media. The survey asked participants 14 questions related to females in the media and their perception of the images and messages about females they obtain through their media intake. The results collected from the survey are as follows.

Using the survey tool Survey Monkey, the survey was sent out to all female undergraduate students at a private school in the Midwest . The survey was completed by 384 females giving us a response rate of 24%.

In this particular survey, all questions were optional, except for question one, which asked for the age group of each participant, which shows that the age range with the highest percentage of participants were 23 and older. By keeping the question within groups of two or more ages, it was yet another way for participants' answers to be more anonymous. The second question in the survey, which asked participants if they had any social media accounts. We had zero participants skip this particular question. However, seven participants reported that they did not have any social media. With that in mind, researchers expected that Question Three, which asked participants which social media sites they use, only had one participant skip, however, researcher's expected that seven participants would have skipped that question, because that was the number that reported they did not have social media and question three did not have the option of choosing "None" for social media sites used by participants. These seven surveys were kept in the study because the participants may have realized that they do use social media, but did not realize that the sites they use are considered social media sites. The first two questions may have been skewed, but that would make the rest of them potentially accurate.

Another discrepancy in the answers given by participants comes in questions five and six. Do you compare your image, habits or social life to the females you see on social media/networking sites? If you answered yes to question five, are these comparisons usually: positive, negative, or neither. Of the 382 participants that answered question five, 117 answered that they did not compare themselves to the females they see on social media/social networking sites. However, only forty-six participants skipped question six. Researchers expected that all of the 117 participants that answered "no" in question five to skip question six, considering they reported that they did not make any comparisons to be positive, negative, or neither.

Researchers cross tabulated data from questions five asking, do you compare your image, habits, or social life to the females you see on social media/networking site, to question six, if you answered yes to question 5, are these comparisons usually: positive, neutral or negative. Using a chi-square test of association (at the p-value 0.05), there is a significant relationship between making comparisons to females that are seen on social media and social networking sites and whether that comparison is neutral or negative. This result agrees with the hypothesis of the research question, that images in the media of females in the media impact both interpersonal communication of young, college females in an undisclosed private university in the Midwest.

Researchers cross tabulated data from questions eleven, do you see/hear messages of the ideal female/ideal body images, and thirteen, the way that females are portrayed in the media has an effect on the way I dress. Using a chi-square test of association at the p-value of 0.05, the test gives a chi-square statistic of 13.4975, the *p*-value is .009084, and the results are significant. Research suggests that at this particular private university in the Midwest, there is a significant relationship between whether participants saw/heard messages of the ideal female/ideal body images and whether it affected the way participants dressed.

In conclusion, of the 384 willing participants of this survey, data, with the help of the results from chi-square tests were significant enough to suggest that there was a relationship between factors such as: making comparisons and whether they are positive or negative.

## Discussion

### Communication Privacy Management Theory:

Communication Privacy Management theory argues that disclosure is the process by which we give or receive private information (Petronio & Venetis, 2017). The second aspect of Communication Privacy Management theory delves into the control of private information that a

person has when they decide to share information with another person (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). Within the research question, there are instances where Communication Privacy Management theory can be quite relevant. When discussing images in the media and feeling towards those images one might choose to be more private when expressing their feelings with other females. Question seven on our survey asked participants if they disclosed the private information, about positive, negative, or neutral comparisons between themselves and other females, to their peers. Bateman, Pike, and Butler reported that with the introduction of social networking sites, there is now a change in the means of connection between people (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011). This relates to the information that users share and put on their social media for their followers and fellow users to now obtain and have control over. Kennedy-Lightsey, et. all discuss the disclosure that happens between dyads of friends and the personal information they may share. The researchers of this study about female media images and disclosing whether or not participants talked about making comparisons to other females. This relates to the study by Kennedy-Lightsey, et. all because of how the receiver of the private information takes ownership of what they are told (Kennedy-Lightsey, Martin, Thompson, Himes, & Clingerman, 2012). The survey results suggest that one tends to sometimes talk about their feelings towards images seen in the media with their friends of the same gender. This survey was also anonymous, which may have made the participants more willing to answer the questions truthfully, knowing that we, as researchers, had no way of knowing who submitted what survey, much less what answers were given.

**Image Restoration Theory:**

Image Restoration Theory was crafted to understand the communication options available for those, whether organizations or persons, who face threats to their reputation (Benoit, 2005).

Although, this theory is mainly used to describe a public relations crisis, it also has a place in the discussion of this study. Each person has their own image and brand that is put out online because of their social media profiles. If one's personal brand is under attack or going through a crisis, they may take steps to restore it to its original form, like a company may do after a public relations crisis. An example of a public relation crisis was when well known celebrity, Hugh Grant, was arrested in Hollywood for lewd behavior with a prostitute. (Benoit, 1997) After this occurred he appeared on multiple TV outlets to give reasoning for his behavior. He was attempting to save his image and his career. This can be related to our study because if one's image is damaged they may take steps on social media to repair it.

After analyzing the results from the survey it suggested that images of females in the media can become a threat to other females who view their content. This can be found because of the participants who answered that the images of females they see on social media has an effect on what they post, how they dress, or how they act. Benoit (2015), mentions that our reputation is vital both for our self-esteem and because reputation influences how others will treat us. With social media one creates a reputation of their own with what they chose to share. This could be viewed as a threat to some females and damaging to their self-esteem.

## Limitations

Researchers encountered many limitations throughout the process of this study. The biggest limitation was the adult discount. The age group with the highest response rate was those over twenty-three years old. There is no way to see whether some participants were barely twenty-four or in their forties. It is possible that they have gotten to an age where they realize that some of the images of females in the media are airbrushed or photoshopped, and that particular trait or lifestyle is not typical for the everyday female.

## Suggestions for Future Research

After gathering data and looking at the results, it would be interesting to see how other similar studies compare. A research question that would further research on this topic and give this study something to directly compare to would be if this exact study was done with a male focus. It would be interesting to see if males feel the same way about body images in the media as females do and if what they see and hear affects how they dress, act, and speak, as well as what they post on their own social media accounts.

Potential Research question: How do images/messages of males in the media impact the interpersonal communication of young, male college students?

With this research question being the same as our study, but with males, it would be appropriate to conduct the exact same study. This would include a survey. After results are collected a comparison of the two studies could be done.

Another study that would be fascinating to conduct, related to media, would be the effect it has on young children. Just like adults, children are now being exposed to more and more types of media. This media could be creating an image to young children that might not ever be attainable.

Potential Research Question: What effect does media have on the young children while watching a cartoon?

It is important to continue the study of media because it isn't going anywhere anytime soon. By studying the effects that media has on self-concept of all ages and genders, media companies can develop a way for it to be the most positive experience as possible.

## Conclusion

After gathering results from a survey conducted on Survey Monkey research suggests that images of females in the media do have an effect on young females. Further research could be done involving males instead of females in the same study and then be compared to analyze the effect media has on all people. Overall, the results from this study show the huge impact social media has on a specific demographic, young females.

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