

## Influence of Media on Body Image Satisfaction among Adolescents

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**Abstract** - *The media plays a large role in how teenagers view themselves by shaping images of what teenagers are supposed to be or do. This study focused on the influence of media on the body image satisfaction among adolescents. The study aimed to determine which media influence adolescents most, the level of body image satisfaction of the adolescents, the relationship between media and body image satisfaction, and propose measures to enhance the adolescents' body image satisfaction. The study used the quantitative method of research. It utilized a survey and a questionnaire entitled Body Areas Satisfaction Scale, and all the third year and fourth year high school students of Stonyhurst Southville International School served as respondents. Results revealed and was concluded that the internet is the most frequently used media with the respondents using it often; the level of body area satisfaction of the respondents is mostly satisfied; magazines have the strongest negative relationship with the weight of the respondents; and, measures such as media awareness seminars and screening and balancing of commercials and advertisements on television and magazines are needed in order to balance the effects of media on adolescents.*

**Keywords** - Media, Body Image Satisfaction, Filipino Adolescents

### I. INTRODUCTION

Psychology Today (2013) described adolescence as the teenage years between 13 and 19 and can be considered the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood. However, the physical and psychological changes that occur in adolescence can start earlier, during the preteen or “tween” years (ages 9-12). Adolescence can be a time of both disorientation and discovery. The transitional period can bring up issues of independence and self-identity. During this time, peer groups and external appearance tend to increase importance. That is why a teenager’s body image is such a big concern and issue for himself.

Based on Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory, adolescence is the stage of identity versus role confusion. This is the stage where individuals attempt to find their own identity, struggle with social interactions, and grapple with moral issues. The problem is that an adolescent does not have much experience and find it easy to substitute ideals for experience. Since media is everywhere because it has been an essential part of human lives, adolescents tend to look up to media in order to form their identity. However, media is not a reliable basis in forming an adolescent’s identity since media tends to distort facts and provide something unrealistic.

Brandon (2011) wrote that it is no question that media influences teenagers to a great degree. Adolescents are more impressionable than any other age group. This is because this is a time when they are developing their identities in such a way that society will accept. The media plays a large role in how teenagers view themselves by shaping images of what teenagers are supposed to be or do. How they are supposed to dress, how they are supposed to act: the media shows them this in simple commercials and television shows. While kids view these shows as simple entertainment, they are really being marketed according to their interests.

Mass media is communication—whether written, broadcast, or spoken—that reaches a large audience. This includes television, radio, advertising, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, and so forth. Mass media is a significant force in modern culture, particularly in America. Sociologists refer to this as a mediated culture where media reflects and creates the culture. Communities and individuals are bombarded constantly with messages from a multitude of sources including TV, billboards, and magazines, to name a few. These messages promote not only products, but moods, attitudes, and a sense of what is and is not important.

Kamat (2013) enumerated the five major functions of mass media: surveillance, interpretation, transmission of values, lineage and entertainment. Entertainment is the most obvious function of all media functions. In the past entertainment functions were fulfilled by interpersonal communication. The importance of the entertainment function has grown as the people have gotten more leisure time.

Results of the survey done by A.C. Nielsen Co. (2012) show that ninety-nine percent (99%) of American households possess at least one television and sixty-seven percent (67%) of Americans regularly watch TV while eating dinner.

Statistics of moviegoers from 2010 (Silverstein, 2011) indicated that 222.7 million people went to the movies at least once (in the US and Canada) and the average amount of tickets purchased per moviegoer was 6. 35 million people make up the frequent moviegoers (which is people who go at least once a month.) There were 4.2 million 18-24 year old female frequent female moviegoers compared to 3.3 million male frequent moviegoers. Now clearly young women are going to the male centric movies because those dominate the theatres, but keep in mind that three out of the top ten grossing films of 2010 (Alice in Wonderland, Twilight Eclipse and Tangled), had a female at the center of the story.

According to Manila Bulletin, TNS reported in June, 2011 that 11 million Filipinos access the internet daily. At the same time, GMA News reports that Filipinos spend 10 hours weekly surfing at home (Maranan, 2011).

They no longer give the ethically right message of waiting for the right person to come along to take the plunge but discuss ways and means of attracting the 'hottest' boy in town and how to get him and keep him. All this talk puts a lot of pressure on the teen girls to have a 'guy' who is 'in' with the times and to flaunt him. This leads to a lot of issues with more and more teens trying to imitate the pop stars and celebrities. They yearn for the skinny, emaciated look and diet and a large proportion get anorexic. They worry about a bad hair day and want to miss school if they even have a tiny speck of a zit on their face (Keithlow, 2013).

Planned Parenthood (2013) defined body image as how a person feels and what he thinks when he looks at himself. It is also how he imagines other people see him. How he feels about his body and all of its parts — his build and his legs, nose, stomach, the color of his skin, and the color or texture of his hair, for example — plays a role in his body image.

Having a long-lasting negative body image can affect both a person's mental and physical health. People who have a long-lasting negative body image are more likely than people with a positive body image to: have anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, shame, and trouble concentrating; take risks with their sexual health; cut themselves off from being with other people socially; stop doing healthy activities that require them to show their bodies, such as exercising, having sex, going to the doctor, or swimming; and, suffer from serious mental health problems, such as anorexia, bulimia, over-exercising, or overeating. These disorders can be very serious (Planned Parenthood, 2013).

According to the Center for a New American Dream, children and teens are exposed to over 25,000 ads in a year, and companies spend over \$17 billion a year on marketing toward children and teens. In addition to the general exposure from advertising, the National Eating Disorders Association, in a paper entitled, *The Media, Body Image, and Eating Disorders*, says that at least 60 percent of Caucasian middle schoolers regularly read at least one fashion magazine. Because children and teens are exposed to some many advertisements and magazines, organizations focused on teens believe there must be an effect.

It also says that over 70 percent of articles on weight loss in teen magazines claimed attractiveness as a reason for needing to lose weight. The association also notes that at least one out of every four advertisements sends a message about attractiveness (Zeigler, 2013).

One important factor in relation to potential influences of media body image representations is the extent to which girls make comparisons between themselves and role models featured in glossy magazines. An interview study by Wertheim et al. with 15-year-old girls suggested that print media were seen as a major force in the development of body image dissatisfaction. Girls reported making comparisons between themselves and models seen in teen magazines and their initial dieting experiences were triggered by diets found in these magazines. Elsewhere, it was reported by Levine et al. that over one in five teenage girls in the United States who

regularly read fashion magazines for their age groups also stated they would like to emulate the models in these magazines (Gilmartin, 2009).

Perhaps inevitably then, the statistics pertaining to men and body image are also concerning. It is believed that men's body image dissatisfaction has tripled in the previous 25 years, from 15 per cent to 45 per cent (of all western men). Figures released on [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) reveal: approximately 17 per cent of men are dieting at any given time; one in 10 people with anorexia are male; four per cent of men purge after eating; three per cent binge eat; and an estimated three per cent of adolescent boys use muscle enhancing drugs (including steroids) to help achieve the "ideal" body (Gregor, 2004).

It has been proposed that males have become more muscular and toned in an attempt to be more masculine. Soft and rounded is traditionally seen as the female ideal, while males are the opposite. So by working abdominal muscles to achieve the much desired "six pack" is an attempt to hold this masculine ideal (Henwood, 2002).

In a study published last spring and recently featured in *Seed* magazine, Schooler (2013), then at San Francisco State University, and a colleague looked at 184 male college students. The more media these young men "consumed" — especially music videos and prime-time TV — the worse they felt about those "real" aspects of their bodies, the researchers found.

A comparison of the most popular magazines also revealed that, although many more diet-related advertisements and articles were found in female-targeted magazines, there were significantly more exercise and weight-lifting advertisements in male magazines. Thus, the print media encourages women to control their weight through dieting while urging males to mold their bodies through exercise (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004).

In a study of 548 middle school and high school girls, 59 percent reported that they were displeased with their bodies. And even though only 29 percent of the girls in the study were overweight, 66 percent said they wanted to lose weight. When the researchers investigated the impact of women's fashion magazines on the girls, they found that 69 percent of the girls said that the way the models looked in the magazines impacted their ideal of what the perfect female body should look like (Olson, 2008).

On the other hand, young men with a poor body image and a high drive for muscularity often have corresponding feelings of low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. In addition, they may be more at risk for abusing anabolic steroids, the health consequences of which are well documented and include a greater risk for coronary heart disease, kidney and liver damage, liver cancer, high blood pressure, and reduced immune system functioning. Side effects specific to men include shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, baldness, development of breasts, and increased risk for prostate cancer as National Institute of Drug Abuse found (Silva, 2006).

Nordqvist (2012) defined body image as a reflection of how one feels about his or her body is aesthetically and how attractive he or she perceives himself or herself. Throughout history, humans have regarded the beauty of the human body as important. What people regard as society's standards may not always correspond to one's perception of one's own body. Paul Ferdinand Schilder, an Austrian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, and student of Sigmund Freud, was the first to coin the phrase *body image* in his book *The Image and Appearance of the Human body*.

This study therefore is an attempt to find out the influence of media on the body image satisfaction among adolescents, whether they may be positive or negative that will be basis of substantial recommendations to the concerned agencies. This will also concretize the concert of a student who masters in the field of psychology.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study intends to identify the influence of media on the body image satisfaction of adolescents. Specifically, it determines which media form (television, movies, magazines and internet) influence adolescents most, the level of body image satisfaction of the adolescents, test the relationship between media and body image satisfaction, and propose measures to enhance the adolescents' body image satisfaction.

## III. METHOD

### Research Design

This research used the quantitative method wherein the aim is to determine the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and another (a dependent or outcome variable) in a population. This method is used in order to determine the relationship between media and body image satisfaction among adolescents.

### Participants

The participants were Upper School 3 and 4 (3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year high school) students of Stonyhurst Southville International School. There were a total of 43 respondents; 16 students from Upper School 3 and 27 students from Upper

School 4. 26 out of 43 respondents, or 60%, were females, and 17 out of 43 respondents, 40%, were males. The ages of the respondents range from 13 years old to 18 years old with the mean age of 15.5.

### Instruments

The first part of the instrument was a survey about the frequency of the adolescents' media use and the influence of each media. The second part was the questionnaire Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS), adapted from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) by Thomas F. Cash. BASS consisted of nine body areas wherein the respondents need to rate their satisfaction level for each body area.

### Procedure

Respondents were chosen based on their ages (13 to 18 years old) which are within the age range given for adolescents by Psychology Today (2013). A letter asking for permission to conduct the survey and a copy of the questionnaire was sent to the principal of Stonyhurst Southville International School. Once it was approved by the principal, the researcher informed the advisers of the respective classes about the survey to be conducted in their classes. During the assigned time for each class, the researcher explained the study and its purpose to the respondents and assured them of the confidentiality of their answers. Then the questionnaire was distributed and collected soon after the respondents finished answering.

### Data Analysis

The weighted mean, a measure of central tendency, was used to determine which media is most influential and which body area were the respondents very satisfied with thus reflecting their body image satisfaction. Pearson Correlation was used to test the relationship between media and body image satisfaction.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After one hundred percent of the population answered and returned the questionnaires, the researcher is able collect the needed information for the study.

**Table 1. Influence of Media on Adolescents**

Movies	W.M.	V.I.	Rank
1. I watch more than nine movies in a month.	2.91	Often	2
2. I imagine myself being the actor/actress in a movie that I have watched.	2.74	Often	3
3. I copy an actor's/actress' clothes, hairstyle, and/or lines in the movie because it would make me look cool or feel good.	2.47	Sometimes	4
4. I like a movie because the actor/s and/or actress/es in that movie look exceptionally good.	3.07	Often	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>2</b>
Television			
1. I watch TV every day.	2.98	Often	1

2. I immediately try any new product that I saw in a commercial.	1.81	Sometimes	3
3. I use the products endorsed by my favorite actor/actress.	2.09	Sometimes	2
4. I feel upset after seeing handsome/beautiful personalities on TV.	1.81	Sometimes	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 1. Influence of Media on Adolescents (CONT.)**

<b>Internet</b>			
1. I spend more than nine hours in a week online.	3.51	Always	1
2. I search tips, advices and/or procedures from the Internet that would improve my outward appearance.	2.84	Often	3
3. I edit my solo pictures to make me look better before posting them online.	2.42	Sometimes	4
4. I feel handsome or beautiful when my solo picture gets a lot of likes.	2.93	Often	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Magazines</b>			
1. I read more than four issues of magazines in a month.	1.09	Never	4
2. I follow a lot of beauty, fashion and/or fitness advice that I read from a magazine.	1.60	Sometimes	2
3. I believe that I can be as good looking as the models that I see on magazines.	1.79	Sometimes	1
4. I feel unhappy about my weight after seeing a model from a magazine.	1.42	Never	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.48</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 1 shows the weighted mean, the verbal interpretation and the ranking for each media. For movies, the statement 'I like a movie because the actor/s and/or actress/es in that movie look exceptionally good' ranked first with the weighted mean of 3.07. This means that most of the respondents appreciate a movie not because of its plot or the morals it teaches, but because of how the actors/actresses that portray the characters' look. This goes to show that most of the respondents give precedence to physical appearances than anything else.

On the other hand, the statement 'I copy an actor's/actress' clothes, hairstyle, and/or lines in the movie because it would make me look cool or feel good' got the lowest mean of 2.47, verbally interpreted as 'sometimes'. This means that a number of the respondents only copy a movie actor/actress sometimes. So, even though most respondents find physical characteristics of a movie actor/actress important, they do not go overboard and copy whatever these movie actors/actresses wear, do or say.

All in all, movies ranked second with a weighted mean of 2.80, verbally interpreted as often. This means that movies are the second most frequently used and most influential media among the respondents. This somehow relates to the statistics quoted by Silverstein (2011) that indicated a significant number of moviegoers among Americans and Canadians. Silverstein mentioned that the average number of tickets purchased in a month was 6 which is very near to the number of movies watched by the respondents (nine per month).

For television, the statement 'I watch TV every day' garnered the highest weighted mean of 2.98, verbally interpreted as 'always'. This result shows that most of the respondents always watch TV in a daily basis. As what the website goodintentionsbook.com (2013) pointed out, TV has been a part of people's daily life and is the most popular and widespread mass media. Nevertheless, even the frequency of usage for TV is quite high, its influence is not so significant since the respondents just sometimes use products endorsed by their favorite actor/actress, try any new product that they saw in a commercial and feel upset after seeing handsome/beautiful personalities on TV.

In total, television has a weighted mean of 2.17 which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> in ranking. Again, this goes to show that despite of the respondents watching TV every day, it is not that influential to the respondents. The respondents are just sometimes convinced by commercials to try a new product unless it is a product endorsed by their favorite actor/actress which garnered a higher possibility.

Internet is the most frequently used media as seen in the weighted mean of the statement 'I spend more than nine hours in a week online' which is 3.51. This is a very close number to the statistics that Maranan (2011) reported that Filipinos spend 10 hours a week surfing at home. The statement 'I feel handsome or beautiful when my solo picture gets a lot of likes' got the second highest weighted mean with 2.93. This is due to the popularity of social media nowadays, such as Facebook and Twitter that adolescents get a boost to their body image just because of the number of button clicks their solo picture garnered.

Among all the media forms, the internet got the highest total weighted mean of 2.92. Again, with the boom of social media nowadays partnered with easy access to World Wide Web, either by laptop, tablet or even mobile phone, it is no wonder that this media is the most frequently used and the most influential.

Magazines, with the total weighted mean of 1.48, are the least used media among the four. This can be due to the fact that print media, like books, hold little appeal to teenagers nowadays, who prefer to spend their time online. At the same time, magazines issues are released every month, and with the fast-moving age now present, teenagers find little patience to wait for four weeks to get a new magazine issue.

**Table 2. Body Image Satisfaction of Adolescents**

Body Area	WM	VI	Rank
Face	2.86	MS	2
Hair	2.86	MS	2
Lower Torso	2.74	MS	4
Mid Torso	2.65	MS	5
Upper Torso	2.81	MS	3
Muscle Tone	2.65	MS	5
Weight	2.60	MS	6
Height	2.65	MS	5
Overall Appearance	2.98	MS	1

*MS – Mostly Satisfied; WM – Weighted Mean; VI- Verbal Interpretation*

Table 2 shows the results of the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale. Among the nine body areas given, the overall appearance has the highest weighted mean of 2.98. This means that most of the respondents are mostly satisfied with their overall appearance and that they do not find anything in their bodies that require any drastic changes, like plastic surgery. This also means that, despite of being adolescents who undergo a lot of physical changes, the respondents are

mostly satisfied with their overall appearance because they are fully aware of the physical changes that are occurring and that they have accepted the fact that these drastic and sometimes awkward changes will continue until they have reached young adulthood.

Face and hair are tied in second rank with the weighted mean of 2.86. This is quite surprising due to the fact that the most noticeable, and awkward, change that happens during the adolescent years is found in the face. This is in the form of pimples, acne, whiteheads and blackheads, and since the face is the first part of the body evident to anyone, these changes can cause negative body image to any adolescent. But then, with the given respondents, they do not find it as such. They are mostly satisfied with their face as well as with their hair.

Third in rank is the upper torso, which includes the chests or breasts, shoulders and arms, with the weighted mean of 2.81. Fourth is the lower torso, which includes the buttocks, hips, thighs and legs, with the weighted mean of 2.74. Tied in fifth rank are height, mid torso (waist, stomach) and muscle tone with the weighted mean of 2.65.

Last in rank is weight with the weighted mean of 2.60. This is quite disconcerting since one of the popular effects of negative body image is eating disorders (Planned Parenthood, 2013), which is also a growing concern not only for adolescents but also for young women. And if ever these respondents were exposed to magazines more frequently, then the higher the possibility that they would feel more negative about their weight since 70 percent of articles on weight loss in teen magazines claimed attractiveness as a reason for needing to lose weight (Zeiger, 2013).

Nevertheless, the overall result of the BASS is mostly satisfied which means that the respondents have positive body image, that they are confident with what their bodies are right now and that they do not see anything wrong with their bodies that would need any drastic change.

**Table 3. Relationship of Media and Body Image Satisfaction (N=43)**

Variables	$r_{xy}$	p-value	Interpretation	Rank
Internet & Lower Torso	-.318*	.038	Moderate negative relationship	3
Magazine & Face	-.303*	.048	Moderate negative relationship	5
Magazine & Lower Torso	-.319*	.037	Moderate negative relationship	2
Magazine & Weight	-.480**	.001	Strong negative relationship	1
Magazine & Height	-.308*	.045	Moderate negative relationship	4

Table 3 shows the relationship of media and body area satisfaction. Among thirty-six possible variable combinations (four media and nine body areas), only five have significant correlation based on the alpha value of 0.05. Among the five combinations with significant correlation, magazine and weight has the highest correlation of -.480 and the lowest significance of .001 which is interpreted as strong negative relationship. This means that magazine is the media that has the strongest negative effect on weight. This is because 70 percent of articles on weight loss in teen magazines claimed attractiveness as a reason for needing to lose weight (Zeigener, 2013). Also, Gilmartin (2009) cited that girls reported making

comparisons between themselves and models seen in teen magazines and that their initial dieting experiences were triggered by diets found in these magazines. Gilmartin also said that girls who regularly read fashion magazines said they would like to copy the models in these magazines. On the other hand, Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn (2004) said that there were significantly more exercise and weight-lifting advertisements in male magazines. So, while girls are encourages to control their weight through dieting, boys are to mold their bodies through exercise. Nevertheless, magazines, whether be it for boys or girls, encourage their readers to improve their weight either through dieting or

exercise thus giving a negative effect on this particular body area of adolescents.

It can also be noted in Table 3 that the media that has negative relationship with most body area is the magazine. It has negative relationship not only on weight but also on face, lower torso and height. This is despite of the result from Table 1 that magazines are the least frequently used media. This just goes to show that even if magazines are the least frequently used, print media still has the strongest effect on its audience, whether be it positive or negative. This is true because print media is stationary, unlike television or movies, and adolescents can look at it for as long as they want, giving them more time to analyze and compare themselves against the models used in the magazines.

#### **Proposed Measures to Enhance Body Area Satisfaction among Adolescents**

Media awareness seminars can be organized by schools and guidance counselors for the parents and adolescents. In these seminars, both parents and adolescents will be given the current statistics of media, like the number of movies produced in Hollywood, the number of advertisements related to beauty products or the number of billboards along EDSA, just to serve as eye-opener as to how media works into our daily lives. These seminars will also tackle about the different effects, both positive and negative, that media provide for their audience. With this kind of seminars, both parents and adolescents can reflect on how much of their perception, ideals, and beliefs are influenced by media and come up with their own plan on how to act on it.

Television and magazine corporations as well as agencies responsible for ratings and reviews of media, like the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board or MTRCB, screen commercials, advertisements and even shows and series and analyze how much of these can affect an adolescent's body image. After this, they can balance these commercials and advertisements as to how often should they be shown or how much of it should be printed. For example, in every seven TV commercials, only two should be about beauty products or any commercial that relates to physical improvement. In magazines, advertisements with stick thin models should be lessened to a considerable rate. This way the minds of adolescents could be less saturated by commercials and advertisements that pertain to physical improvement or show models who have unrealistic and unattainable physical appearance.

#### **V. CONCLUSIONS**

The internet is the most frequently used media by the respondents. Respondents are generally mostly satisfied with their body areas. Among the media forms, magazines have the strongest negative relationship with the body area satisfaction on the weight of the respondents. Measures such as media awareness seminars and screening and balancing of commercials and advertisements on television and magazines are needed in order to balance the effects of media on adolescents.

#### **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Adolescents are recommended to balance their time with regards to their media use, such as internet and television. In this way, their minds would be less saturated by the content of any media. Parents are recommended to monitor their son/daughter's use of different media, starting from the one that they frequently use. This way they can screen the contents of the media and see which is beneficial and which is not. Schools, teachers and guidance counselors need to conduct surveys at least every three months about the adolescent students' body image such as weight in order to monitor their perceptions. Proposed measures may be implemented and evaluated to produce more satisfactory results. Follow up studies may be done achieve desired outcome to be utilized by both the respondents and psychology practitioners and researchers.

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