MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

A prolonged distortion of eating or eating-related behaviour that alters food intake or absorption and gravely compromises one's physical or psychological well-being is known as a feeding or eating disorder (DSM- 5).Teenagers nowadays are more susceptible to worry about their weight, shape, size, and body image. As a result, many of them diet to reduce weight. There's little awareness about these body and weight related issues arising. These practices have been put forward as potential contributing factors to the emergence of eating disorders. Numerous studies have proposed that the media may be instrumental in fostering and amplifying the phenomena of body dissatisfaction and, as a result, may contribute to the rise in eating disorders. This study summarises some of the findings on the media's impact on adolescents' development of self-perception, body image, weight control behaviours resulting in eating disorders (eg. anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, pica, rumination disorder and binge eating disorder) and body dysmorphia. It will also discuss the positive impacts of mass media in the lives of adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

The Media's Contribution in Providing a Social Context to Eating Disorders

Kids and adolescents today grow up in a world that is overrun by mainstream media (television, films, videos, billboards, magazines, movies, music, newspapers, fashion designers and the Internet). The media portrays a muscular male body ideal and a slender female body ideal which is linked to a range of psychological symptomatology including body dysmorphia and eating disorders.

Numerous studies have shown the rise in thinness among those held up as the embodiment of beauty, including models, actresses, and beauty pageant contestants. While during the same

period, there has been a significant increase in the weights of women overall thus creating an ever increasing discrepancy between the media ideal and the actual body size of women. Additionally, the societal backdrop that has been created by magazine articles, television shows, and commercials have encouraged body image issues and disordered eating in women and girls. A significant increase in advertisements of diet foods and diet products has also been noted.

The media not only glorifies a thin ideal body, but it also highlights how important it is, as well as how important appearances are in general. According to Naomi Wolf, our culture enslaves women with an unrealistic ideal of beauty(Wolf, 1990). The multibillion dollar beauty industry relies on a significant emphasis on the value of beauty and appearances for women since this promotes a consumption-based culture where buying advertised products for increasing one's look can solve any problem (Wolf, 1990; Kilbourne, 1994; Thomsen, McCoy, & Williams, 2001).

According to a survey, "to lose weight and keep it off" was the top request among females between the ages of 11 and 17 who were offered three magic wishes for anything they wanted (Kilbourne, 1994). More than half of middle-aged women who were asked what aspect of their lives they would most like to improve responded "their weight" in a different survey (Kilbourne, 1994).

When the model Leomie Anderson was interviewed about the effects various forms of social media platforms have on adolescents, she mentioned how she too was bullied and followed around by girls in her secondary school for being skinny and was teased about being anorexic. She then added, "Then there's social media, which definitely plays a major role in insecurities among young women. If it's not a sponsored ad for a waist trainer, it's videos of cosmetic surgery on your explore page. Girls are seeing all this at such a young age and then internalising all these unrealistic standards." She believes in not obsessing over likes and impressions in social media, "Do something that will make you feel good about yourself. Join a Zumba class at your gym, go swimming – just something that gets your heart pumping and feeling energised. Social media breaks are important - log out of Instagram and start appreciating your body for what it is because, honestly, it's beautiful." (Alexander E, 2017, Harper's Bazaar).

The Media's Impact on Causes of Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Eating Disorders

Individuals with body dysmorphic disorder (formerly known as dysmorphophobia) are preoccupied with one or more perceived defects or flaws in their physical appearance, which they believe look ugly, unattractive, abnormal, or deformed. Concerns range from looking "unattractive" or "not right" to looking "hideous" or "like a monster" (DSM- 5).

The individual performs repetitive behaviours (e.g., mirror checking, excessive grooming, skin picking, reassurance seeking) or mental acts (e.g., comparing his or her appearance with that of others) in response to the appearance concerns (DSM-5).

A recent phenomenon known as "Snapchatdysmorphia" has emerged in which patients seek surgical consultation in order to appear as their filtered selves in real life. This study was conducted to evaluate the impact of social media and filters on the adolescent population and their body image and body dysmorphia (Himanshu, Kaur A, Kaur A, Singla G, 2020). In a survey, participants commonly reported that the online photographs they frequently viewed had a detrimental impact on their body image. This caused one to have poor self-perceptions, which sent them into a destructive spiral even though they knew these idealised bodies were unattainable. Each participant displayed knowledge of Photoshop altering software as well as of changed photographs that are frequently shared on social media. There are filters that can be misleading by dramatically altering a person's appearance (such as clear skin, no fine lines, no eye bags, flawless makeup application, and looking slim) (Ahmed Haiqa, 2019)

Women and girls are seen to be more dissatisfied with their bodies as compared to men. The perception of a woman's attractiveness to the other sex determines her sense of self-worth, and her body weight is becoming a more important factor in this perception. Weight was a significant impact in studies asking respondents what characteristics best describe "positive appearance" (HesseBiber, 1996).

A number of studies have analysed a positive correlation between the use of mass media and eating disorder symptomatology. In striving to achieve a cultural mandate of thinness, adolescents mostly start altering their eating habits. Often refusing to eat, exercising compulsively and starving themselves are some of the features of Anorexia Nervosa. Some individuals feel entirely overweight while others may be concerned with some particular body parts. They obsess over their weight and frequently measure their body parts. The self esteem of individuals with anorexia nervosa is highly dependent upon their perceptions of their own body weight and shape and they view gaining weight as an unacceptable failure.There is also energy intake restriction relative to requirement. Individuals with such disorders also exhibit functional limitations like social isolation or not being able to reach full academic or professional potential. Teenage girls often tend to feel bad about themselves when they watch T.V. or look at magazines and start altering their dietary habits. Some even stop eating altogether. They think that they look bad and find it embarrassing going out in public thinking that they are being judged and constantly contemplate whether they should eat or not. At times, girls who want to be super skinny over exercise and end up hurting themselves in some way. They exhaust themselves to an extent that they pass out.

Several episodes of binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behaviours including purging of food by using medicines like laxatives and diuretics or self-induced vomit are symptoms of another eating disorder Bulimia nervosa. Anorexia and bulimia are two different behavioural manifestations of disordered eating, whereas body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, perfectionism, and ineffectiveness are psychological states linked to eating disorders.

Another term, "Normative discontent" is used to describe the wide dissatisfaction among women regarding their weight. According to this theory, feeling unsatisfied with one's weight has become so common that it is now considered a "norm" rather than an exception. The idea of normative discontent has been discussed extensively in literature; yet, there is a stigma that has developed around weight dissatisfaction, along with its correlates of body image issues and eating disorders.

Mitigating The Ill- effects of Media on Adolescents

Although it has considerable appeal, the concept of teaching teenagers to reject unrealistic and irrelevant thin-ideal media stimuli can shield them from negative impacts is sadly a little naive. In a society where body-focused imagery, both fantastic and realistic, is so pervasive, the capacity to separate imagination from reality alone cannot provide appropriate safety. Multiple defence strategies are required.

It is unlikely that efforts to forbid media sources from depicting idealised bodies and faces will be successful because desirable models sell products by encouraging more positive consumer ratings (Reichert &Lambiase, 2003). As a result, even though we would like to advise producers, editors, and advertisers to reduce the quantity of thin, attractive models and actors featured in their offers, a more workable strategy may be to employ exposure to healthy-body media to counteract the influence of thin ideal media. Numerous research imply that such a strategy might be beneficial.

In order to help people understand the information conveyed in the media, media literacy programs teach their audiences how to evaluate those messages (Hobbs, 1998). Programs for media literacy that promote a healthy skepticism of media portrayals of idealised ideals have been shown to be beneficial by research (e.g., Irving, DuPen, &Berel, 1998). For instance, high school sophomores who participated in a media literacy programme meant to encourage teen girls to think critically about media and body satisfaction reported less internalisation of the thin beauty standard and a lower perception of the realism of thin-ideal media images than their peers who were not a part of theprogramme (Irving, DuPen, &Berel, 1998). Thus, initiatives promoting media literacy may be successful independent of how they are implemented.

Positive Effects of Media

Another perspective discovered is about the positive impacts that social media has had on teenagers. Social media has also encouraged and pushed them to work out in the gym, adopt a healthier diet, and generally live healthier lives. Those who idealise celebrities also follow their routines which include waking up early in the morning, going to the gym, eating healthy and early and going to bed on time. Girls who view fitness inspiration pages on social media platforms are often inspired by other women to increase their physical activity.

Another way social media has made a positive impact on body image is introducing a vegan lifestyle which has helped those who follow it reduce body dissatisfaction.

Apart from teen girls, a lot of males have also reportedly benefited from social media. Pictures in media often encourage them to change themselves and adopt a healthier lifestyle. In order to attain a desired body image they work out and be disciplined enough to reach and maintain that goal.

Fitspiration (fitness inspiration) and body positivity quotes and captions have also helped in promoting a more positive body image in today's teens. Other body positivity movements and campaigns have helped in fostering and reclaiming control over one's body image. Any person or movement that works to challenge societal pressures and the construction of body norms and instead advocates for self-love and acceptance of bodies of any size, shape, or appearance including those with rolls, dimples, cellulite, acne, hairy bodies, etc. is considered to be practcing body positivity. Plus sized models have also been given greater importance in advertisements and promotions on media platforms which has further provided acceptance to all body sizes (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this research have provided insights into both negative and constructive effects of media on adolescents. The portrayal of adolescent's understanding of a healthy body image was distorted because of the perfect and unattainable body ideals they have been watching on all forms of media. Hardly any teenagers, especially girls, accept or believe that their bodies are beautiful. Female adolescents do not feel comfortable in their own skin because they continue to find flaws in themselves when they compare themselves with models. It is suspected that many adolescents feel pressured to lose weight by engaging in various dietary plans. A lot of them tend to go about it in the wrong way when they begin starving themselves and develop unusual habits such as exercising compulsively. Teens start perceiving weight loss as an impressive achievement and employ themselves in purging behaviour by consuming laxatives and inducing

vomit. In order to reduce such behaviours, programmes of media literacy that display a healthy body media to mitigate the thin body ideal have been introduced.

This research is limited to the valuable data collected by primary sources and might be filtered through another or a biassed perspective. The data included in the research may be outdated as it was collected in the past.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis reveals that young women pick up on the idea that the desirable ideal weight is substantially lower than what the medical literature suggests is healthy via publications, advertising, fitness centres, and other cultural organisations. The diet, cosmetic, beauty, healthcare, and mass media industries—important structural components of today's capitalism system—are "cultivating" this ultra-thin ideal. However, it is true that not everyone follows or gives in to this ideal to the same extent, if at all. Moreover, these capitalist interests, which are allied with patriarchal interests, have persuaded women that independence means they must improve and exercise self-control in order to maintain the ultra-slender body ideal, which by design or by default leads to the widespread social control of women—their minds, bodies, time, energy, and money.

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