MASS MEDIA AND BODY SATISFACTION IN YOUNG WOMEN

An Exploration of Impacts

by

Amy Marshall

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling (MC)

City University of Seattle
Vancouver BC, Canada site

November 27, 2017

APPROVED BY

Scott Lawrance, Ed.D, R.C.C., Thesis Supervisor, Counsellor Education Faculty
Dr. Laleh Skrenes, Ph.D., R.C.C., Faculty Reader, Counsellor Education
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how the objectification of women’s bodies in mass media has impacted adolescent women’s body image, self-esteem, and social comparison in the hope that this exploration may assist in curbing this influence, as well to better support young women. The research questions were centered on the purpose: How does mass media impact body satisfaction in young women? How does internalization of media messages affect self-esteem and disordered eating patterns? What are the ways in which objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media impact body image and social comparison in young women? Aspects of objectification in advertisements in the history of mass media since the 1950’s to the present day are explored and social learning theory is presented. The ways in which exposure to mass media has affected women’s eating habits, negative body image, body dissatisfaction, and body dysmorphia are also explored. Implications for scholarly and professional action are offered. Scope and limitations of this study are also covered.

Keywords: media, advertisements, body image, body dissatisfaction, objectification, self-esteem
Dedication

This thesis was created in the hopes that this work may contribute to the improvement of mental health for young women. For all the women who are underestimated and given limitations, I believe you can make a difference in this world.

For my Mother and Father, your love and gentle souls are unmatched. This work would not be possible without you. Your support and faith in me has encouraged me to chase my dreams.

For Kelly, I would like to express special gratitude for your undying support, flourishing love, and affection. Your dedicated partnership for success in my life fills my soul. My love for you is timeless.
Table Of Contents

Abstract 2
Dedication 3
Chapter One: Introduction
   Introduction 6
Scholarly Content 6
Objectives 10
Research Questions 10
Organization of the Study 10
Definitions 11
Assumptions 11
Significance 12
Chapter Two: Representation of the Female Body in Mass Media 13
   Introduction 13
   Importance of Media 13
   Objectification of Women’s Body in Advertisements 14
   Body Positive Movement 19
   Sexual Objectification of the Female Body 20
   Internalization of the Thin Body Ideal 23
Chapter Three: Effects of Exposure to Mass Media 25
   Standard of Attractiveness 25
   Self-Esteem 27
   Eating Disorders 28
   Children’s Programming 31
   Body Dissatisfaction 32
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Four: Exploration of Theories</th>
<th>38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning Theory</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Comparison Theory</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification Theory</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratification Theory</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation Theory</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Media Exposure</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic Interventions</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Therapy</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoeducation</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Chapter Five: General Conclusion   | 59 |
| Reiterating Study Purpose and Meaning | 59 |
| Summary of Findings                 | 60 |
| Recommendations for Professional Action | 62 |
| Children and Adolescents with Anorexia Nervosa | 62 |
| Clinical Practice Recommendations   | 63 |
| Implication for Counselling Field  | 63 |
| Recommendations for Scholarly Action | 64 |
| Limitations of this Study          | 66 |
| References                          | 68 |
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter will present the general introduction to this thesis. The introductory chapter explores scholarly context for the study, introduce purpose and relevance statements, define key terms and phrases, and offer an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Scholarly Content

The consumption of mass media in Western society has increased drastically over the last decade. Recent literature states that Americans spend up to 10 hours a day consuming mass media content through television programming, internet, and phone applications (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). The overconsumption of mass media has had immense psychological effects. Children who spend more than three hours a day on social networking sites are more likely to develop delayed social skills and acquire mental health issues (Anh, 2011). These adverse effects have been a main societal and scholarly focus in recent times. Tiggemann and McGill (2004) address the numerous scholarly articles that explore the existing ideals that Western media tend to portray how such ideals have impacted identity formation. The average North American views 3000 to 5000 advertisements per day (Barve, Sood, Nithya & Virmani, 2015). Both body satisfaction and self-esteem have been reported to be negatively affected by the existing contents advertised and portrayed in the media and social networking sites. It is
therefore essential to understand the specific role of the media and the potential impacts on one’s overall health and well-being (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Once the damaging effects and impact of the media is well understood, then it is possible to find ways of reducing the potential damaging effects and helping the young women affected.

The objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media has created major impacts on adolescent women’s body image, pathological eating behaviors, self-esteem and social comparison. Internalization of these harmful media messages may decrease self-esteem, which is common in individuals suffering from eating disorders (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Body image is the construct and perception of one’s body and is highly associated to self-esteem (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). Body image is a mental representation that includes the attitude and perception towards one’s body. This construct contributes to an individual’s mental and physical health (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). For instance, low body confidence, poor self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction has reached normative levels among North American females (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Close to half of American undergraduate women had reported being dissatisfied with their individual bodies after being exposed to the content in the mass media (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Grabe, Ward, & Hyde (2008) suggest these types of perceptions develop relatively early, emerging from girls who are as young as 7 years old, and appear to occur across diverse body shapes and ethnicities. These perceptions and beliefs are never inconsequential; they have been linked to serious psychological, emotional and physical
health-related problems such as low self-esteem, depression, and emergence of disordered eating (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Groesz, Levine, and Murnen (2002) concluded that both longitudinal and prospective designs have recognized body dissatisfaction as one of the most indicative risk factors for eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa. Body dissatisfaction is an influential predisposing factor to depression, obesity and low self-esteem among females in Western society. Thus, the objection of women’s bodies in mass media platforms results in the emergence of mental and physical health issues.

One of the most important reasons why women are greatly dissatisfied with their bodies, regardless of their weight, is the ever increasing thin ideal that is promoted and reinforced through mass media platforms and social networking sites. Across a myriad of advertising platforms in print, television programs, movies, and online, there is consistent emphasis on beauty and thinness. Thin females are overrepresented and idolized in the media while women who are overweight are underrepresented and scrutinized (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Almost 90% of females represented in the media are clinically underweight (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Grabe, Ward, & Hyde (2008) concluded that the images of women presented in media platforms across Western society are currently much thinner when compared to the images of women that were presented in the past. These females and models represented in the media are thinner than the average population of females in North American society and meet health criteria for the medical diagnosis of anorexia nervosa (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). The average measurements for a fashion model is 5’10 and 110 lbs which is drastically different when compared to the
measurements of the average woman which is 5'5 and 145 lbs (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). The weight and body shape of women presented in the media and advertisements such as the models, actresses, and television personnel have drastically decreased over the past few decades. Tiggemann and McGill (2004) state the difference between the model and average woman’s body weight and size is larger than ever. Putting more emphasis on detrimental images portraying extremely thin models as a standard of beauty is both unattainable and unhealthy (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004).

Based on the fact that the media’s presentation of women’s bodies promotes the thin ideal, adoption of this reality has resulted in reduced self-satisfaction with one’s body and an increase in struggle to achieve these physical ideals (Harper & Tiggemann, 2008). Harmful eating behaviors like purging, bingeing, dieting and skipping of meals are very common among female adolescents and women who are trying to attain this ideal body shape. Objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media affects body image, social comparison and the onset of eating disorders (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Stice and Shaw (2002) state that over 100 studies indicated evidence and concluded that poor body image predicts disordered eating behaviors. Internalization of these thin ideals and beauty standards lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating symptomatology (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999).

The social learning theory states that repeated exposure to mass media results in the acceptance and internalization of media portrayals as a true depiction of reality (Tiggemann &
McGill, 2004). Consistent exposure to the thin ideal overrepresented in media results in women accepting this ideal as normative, appealing, and beautiful (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008).

Females are internalizing these ideals and concurring that the models represented in the media help shape their perception of a perfect body shape.

**Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which the objectification of women’s bodies in mass media has impacted adolescent women’s body image, disordered eating patterns, self-esteem, and social comparison in the hope that this exploration may assist in curbing this influence, as well to better support young women.

**Research Questions**

The guiding research questions for this study was: What are the ways in which mass media impacts body satisfaction in young women? How does internalization of media messages affect self-esteem and disordered eating patterns? What are the ways in which objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media impact body image and social comparison in young women?

**Organization of the Study**

The present study seeks to analyze how objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media has affected women’s body image, disordered eating patterns, body satisfaction and social comparison. There are five chapters in this thesis. Chapter one is the general introduction which
introduces this topic, scholarly context, and significance of this study. The introductory chapter states the relevance of objectification of women’s bodies through mass media and the effects it has on Western society. The importance of a deeper understanding of body dissatisfaction and its implications are imperative for health professionals. Chapter two discusses representation of the female body in mass media, pertaining from the 1950’s to present day. Sexual objectification and repercussions of the internalization of the thin ideal is also explored in chapter two. Chapter three explores how exposure to mass media has affected women’s eating disorders, negative body image, body dissatisfaction and body dysmorphia. Chapter four presents the social learning theory, therapeutic interventions, psychoeducation, engagement and narrative therapy. Lastly, chapter five presents the overall conclusion, clinical practice recommendations, implications for the counselling field and recommendations for scholarly action.

Definitions

**Anorexia** Nervosa. A person with AN persistently restricts energy intake, leading to significantly low body weight (in context of what is minimally expected for age, sex, developmental trajectory, and physical health) (American Psychological Association, 2000).

**Bulimia** nervosa. Persons with BN experience recurrent episodes of binge eating. “Eating, in a discrete period of time, an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances" (American Psychological Association, 2000).
**Body image:** The subjective picture or mental image of one's own body.

**Assumptions**

This study is based on the assumption that contemporary media impacts women more than men and that it impacts women’s body image negatively.

**Significance**

Mass media has negatively impacted body satisfaction in young women, which can be seen in women’s eating habits, negative body image, body dissatisfaction, and body dysmorphia. Poor body image predicts disordered eating behaviors. Internalization of these thin ideals and beauty standards lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating symptomatology (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). It is important to explore the impact of media on disordered eating so that we can better prevent or treat women with disordered eating.
CHAPTER TWO: REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE BODY IN MASS MEDIA

Introduction

This chapter will discuss a) importance of media, b) objectification of women’s body in advertisements from 1950’s to present day, c) body positive movement, d) sexual objectification of the female body, and e) internalization of the thin body ideal.

Importance of Media

Happer and Philo (2013) suggest that “the media plays a central role in informing the public about what happens in the world, particularly in those areas in which audiences do not have or are unable to obtain direct knowledge or experience” (p.1). The researchers examined the impact the media has in the construction and establishment of mainstream values, beliefs, and attitudes and its relationship to social change (Happer & Philo, 2013). Happer & Philo’s (2013) study indicate that “media shapes public debate in terms of setting agendas and focusing public interest on particular subjects” (p.1). For example, Happer and Philo’s (2013) work on disability proved a direct connection between negative media coverage of people on disability benefit and an increase of disadvantageous attitudes towards them.

The media is influential in forming attitudes and influencing public behaviors but also limits the context in which audiences understand societal issues and political problems (Happer & Philo, 2013). Media coverage has the eminent ability to limit the public’s understanding of
possibilities of social change dependant on how social issues are presented (Happer & Philo, 2013). The media systematically sets agendas, focuses public interest and tends to construct uncertainty around particular social issues which influences public behavior (Happer & Philo, 2013). This study reveals the comprehensive impact of media on not only knowledge but also by shaping behaviour by reinforcement of media messages (Happer & Philo, 2013).

**Objectification of Women’s Body in Advertisements**

Sexual objectification of women’s bodies is a recurrent theme in advertisements from the 1950’s to present day. During the late 1950’s and throughout the 1960’s, the media emphasized the upper portion of a woman’s body, focalizing and sexualizing women’s breasts (Wood, 1994). In the 1950’s and early 60’s, an ideal woman’s body shape was portrayed as an hourglass figure with a large bust, wide hips, and narrow waist (Bushak, 2015). The most iconic female figures after the war era were Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. Marilyn Monroe was a voluptuous blonde actress who depicted the ideal image of beauty during these post era times. Women were stereotypically portrayed in advertisements as domestic, inferior, and dependent on men (Wood, 1994). Women were depicted through media platforms in harmful ways that limited their potential and focused on their sexuality and incompetence (Wood, 1994). Quiet, traditional, and differential women were idolized and portrayed as good; whereas strong, independent, and confident characteristics were allocated to the role of a bad woman in movie and television programming (Wood, 1994).
Women were pressured to conform and were sexualized through objectification of their bodies in mass media advertisements. Photographs of pin-up girls were being mass-produced and idolized throughout Western culture. The pin-up girl photographs were turned into paintings that were altered and retouched to increase the size of the breasts, minimize the waist, and elongate the legs, which created an unattainable and unrealistic human body (Bushak, 2015). While the ideal woman’s body shape has changed and decreased drastically since the 1950’s, there was still immense condemning, scrutinizing, and altering of original images as there is today (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). More ironically is that during the 1950’s and 60’s, society portrayed thinner woman in a negative light similarly to the way the current mass media shames those who are overweight. Most advertisements during the 1950’s and 1960’s depicted thin women as unattractive and undesirable to men (Bushak, 2015). Advertisements in the 50’s suggested that romantic success was dependent on attaining a curvy body shape. Curvy and voluptuous body shapes were idolized until the early 1970’s when the ultra thin British model Twiggy was introduced to American culture and changed the trend and ideal image for women (Bushak, 2015).

The concept of being ‘fat’ has been a feminist issue across the media for decades. Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn (2004) argues that Western society is very much obsessed with the body size and shape of women such that one’s weight is an influential maker of a woman’s worth. Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2004) draw attention to issues that have been prevalent from the early 1970’s and 1980’s to present society. Models are aspiring to appear younger
and smaller, seeking physical resemblance to teenagers or the prematurely developed body of children. This great idealized notion of the thin body has had major implications on the population; with half of American women currently engaging in a weight loss routine (Kwan, & Fackler, 2008). There are striking similarities in images and products that are still being marketed that were used in the late 1970’s to promote the notion that women need to possess an ultra-thin body size (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). With technological advances and Photoshop software, sexual objectification, minimization, and discrimination of women has become an even bigger, widespread issue than it had been before the wave of feminism.

Objectification of women has been prevalent for a significant portion of recent American history. For instance, within the text Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema of 1950’s, author Laura Mulvey often addressed the male gaze concept in the cinema, a critical description of the phenomena which was widely applied in advertisements (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). Laura Mulvey held the belief that those who were behind the camera were often male. This resulted into a constructed image of male active view and hence, created the female as a passive object that served as ornamental (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). The audience in this case would see the images via the eyes of a heterosexual male and learn to objectify and dehumanize women (Mulvey, 1989). Women presented in cinema played the role of a visual erotic object for the audience to observe (Mulvey, 1989).

Taking into consideration that women’s images in mass media are predominantly framed in similar detrimental ways in the present decade; women too have started viewing themselves
as mere objects, with very disastrous repercussions (Levine & Murnen, 2009).

Self-objectification is said to have occurred when a given individual has heightened awareness of their individual outward appearance and start viewing themselves from a third person perspective (Calogero, 2012). As early as the 1950’s, self-objectifying women would compare their body shape and size to images of women shown in the mass media, criticize their own bodies, and believe that those images were authentic and unaltered (Levine & Murnen, 2009). Women have experienced dissatisfaction with their body measurements and size for over 25 years and this discontent is now considered “normative” (Levine & Murnen, 2009). This may result in the aspiration to attain an appearance that imitates the physical ideal portrayed in the mass media. This may increase negative affect and lead to disordered eating behavior with the intention to resemble the ultra-thin body represented in Western media (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009).

Eating disorders are illnesses defined by abnormal eating behaviors that negatively impact an individual’s physical, emotional and psychological well-being (Shapley & Moore, 2017). Emotional distress regarding body size and appearance is coupled with too little or too much intake of food and can severely deter an individual's life. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and binge eating are common types of eating disorders that can be influenced by psychological or environmental factors (Shapley & Moore, 2017). Eating disorders are ten times more likely to occur in women than men (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006). Eating disorders are often developed as a way to lose weight to conform to a particular body shape and as a form of
control. Shapley & Moore (2014) state that mortality rates is 4% for anorexia nervosa and 3.9% for bulimia (p. 281).

In his writings, Douglas (1995) points out that bulimia and anorexia nervosa could in part be caused by pressure originating from the culture of the consumer. A culture that would dictate that beauty and worth of a woman would be based on her thinness, beauty, and outer appearance can increase social pressure and prevalence of distorted eating behaviors (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006). The widespread act of objectifying women through Western mass media had been associated with the high prevalence of eating disorders among young women born during the 1990’s, who were greatly bombarded with images of overly thin women and often aspire to achieve a similar body shape (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006).

Moreover, since the introduction of technology and changes in economic and social relations, online activism has played an influential role on how women are represented within the various media platforms. It focuses on how women are represented as a sexualized, ornamental object and often objectified to sexualized body parts (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006). In addition, it has also highlighted the news media headlines that often reinforce the prominent value of a subject’s appearance and gender above her individual achievements and abilities.

Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly (2011) states that the societal roles changed for both women and men from the beginning of the 1960’s, when gender roles were being challenged. During the
1960’s images of men in the media were hyper-sexualized with rockstars such as Mick Jagger promoting a thin body shape, long hair and feminine style (Bushak, 2015). Popular and desired women in the media during this decade were extremely thin and had a close to emaciated appearance (Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011). An underweight appearance was considered as fashionable and ideal, copying the ultra-thin model Twiggy and movie star Audrey Hepburn, both influential fashion and beauty icons (Bushak, 2015). Thinness was equated to being beautiful and this notion became a socially constructed fiction (Kwan, & Fackler, 2008).

Farrah Fawcett was a sought-after movie star who was highly popular during the 1970’s and 1980’s, glorifying the aspect of the female body shape appearing fit, tanned, and blonde (Bushak, 2015). Suppose Twiggy had not being waif-like enough, then it is possible to argue that the 1990’s idolized a wave of extremely thin models who exemplified the tall, stick thin, emancipated appearance (Bushak, 2015). An unhealthy obsession of thinness began among young women in the 1990’s, as Barbie like proportions were idolized and overrepresented (Kwan & Fackler, 2008).

**Body Positive Movement**

The culturally constructed thinness myth has been overrepresented for several decades, though in recent years there has been a positive body movement promoting a healthy body shape (Kwan, & Fackler, 2008). The positive body movement aims at overturning harmful and unattainable beauty standards and promotes diverse body shapes and sizes in the media. The
Dove Campaign for real beauty is one of several companies that are presenting commercials that have body positive themes and feature a myriad of models who represent the average woman (Goins, 2016). These body positive adverts support diversity and empower women by breaking and challenging the beauty mold.

However, the problem of sexual objectification and emphasis on the thin ideal by different advertising agencies has remained to be a major problem even after body positive movements were formed. Ellison (2002) illustrates that women are more often portrayed in a sexual fashion when compared to men. For decades in Western society, throughout media, women have been portrayed sexually in provocative clothing, with facial expressions and bodily postures that suggest readiness and desire for sex (Ellison, 2002). Women in advertisements are markedly objectified and portrayed as ornamental objects or as sexual parts of the body rather than as a whole person. Moreover, unrealistic and narrow standards of physical beauty have been significantly idolized and overemphasized on the existing mass media and social networking platforms.

**Sexual Objectification of the Female Body**

The ever increasing sexualization of the female body through advertisements has targeted preadolescent girls. Within the contemporary narratives and culture, the name Lolita has since become a synonym with prohibited love and lust for pre-adolescent and adolescent aged females (Ellison, 2002). A surplus of sexually charged images of young girls have pervaded the music and movie industry making an account for the great transition of
representation of pornography to the present mainstream culture which is becoming commonplace (Allan, 2012). Girls as young as 11 years old are undergoing self-objectification, self-surveillance, and self-monitoring behaviors leading to body dissatisfaction (Calogero, 2012).

Despite the prevalence of these harmful images, recent advertisements in the mass media have begun to emphasize sexual agency and challenge female gender roles by depicting women as independent and active (Gill, 2008). Such type of shift only contrasts the tendencies of advertising being sexist, as the current influential models of femininity still have the expression of a culture which is male-dominated and patriarchal (Gill, 2008).

Gill (2008), analyzed the contemporary constructions of the sexual agency of females in advertisements and reported three figures that are recognizable; the midriff, the vengeful woman, and the lesbian. The midriffs in this case refer to teenage girls and young women, though the term makes references to some specific constellation of attitudes that people have towards the body, gender relations and sexual expression (Gill, 2008). Gill (2008), state that Midriff Advertising has common themes: centrality of the body, female sexual subjectification, autonomy, and empowerment. Having a sexy body and being beautiful within the Midriff Advertising is highlighted as the key source of identity of the woman. Many advertisements during the 1990’s highlighted the importance of a woman’s body and her sexuality while portraying women’s beauty as much more important than her skills, traits, and attributes (Gill, 2008).
The figure of midriff in advertising was notable for generating a new vocabulary of representing women as desiring and active sexual subjects (Gill, 2008). Women were being represented actively with sexual agency and power rather than being victimized or passive objects (Gill, 2008). The vengeful woman is the figure that portrays women as powerful and confident while reinforcing women’s empowerment (Gill, 2008). The vengeful woman reinforces socially constructed gender differences, animosity and competition between men and women (Gill, 2008). The hot lesbian is the midriff figure that is constructed from a male gaze and reinforces heteronormativity (Gill, 2008). The lesbian is presented as extremely attractive, sexual and feminine (Gill, 2008).

Gill, (2008) proposes that these representations of sociocultural ideals in the mass media have played a large role towards the development of dissatisfaction of the body. Majority of body images and eating disorders assign these roles to a number of socio-cultural factors like Western media and advertising. The media has idolized and promoted detrimental and unhealthy physical images of females and this is widespread in many commercial advertisements that are in the public domain (Gill, 2008).

Prior to the 1960’s, the ideal female body and social notion of beauty had been linked to a curvier body shape but this has since shifted as society currently expects women to adhere to unhealthy beauty ideals (Allan, 2012). Models currently weigh 23% less than the average American woman, while 20 years ago there was only an 8% difference (Miller, 2017). Models have becoming thinner over time which is why numerous medical scholars have urged
broadcasters and publishers to have more responsibility with respect to extremely thinning women whom they tend to depict as great role models (Allan, 2012).

Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly (2011) state that the more media exposure, the higher probability that women will show patterns of an eating disorder. Young women who watch entertainment television and consume mainstream media were influential in promoting the thin body ideal and possibly engage in dieting practices to imitate the ideal (Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011).

Within Western society, over the decades, mass media has sent very powerful messages for women to aspire and idolize this narrow beauty ideal (Allan, 2012). Such expectations from Western society have shaped the beliefs that women have about the ideal image of the female body, a struggle that has proved to be very harmful and contribute to poor body image. Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly (2011) conclude that women with negative body image are more likely to suffer from depression, poor mental health, disordered eating, and substance abuse. In the surrounding culture, women are overexposed to what the mass media perceives as the perfect body; which is represented in movies, television, magazines, newspaper and the internet. The media has played a significant role in creating such a perception that an ideal woman must have a thin body and light skin to be accepted in Western society (Ellison, 2002).

**Internalization of the Thin Body Ideal**

Internalization of the thin body ideal and the extent of thinness on the construction of individual identity and self worth is closely correlated to body focused negative affect (Dittmar, Halliwell & Sterling, 2009). Women are physically, emotionally and mentally
struggling to resemble the images overly presented in the media. Internalization of the thin ideal has been suggested as a great contributor to dissatisfaction with one’s body image and eating pathology (Dittmar, Halliwell & Sterling, 2009). Dittmar, Halliwell & Sterling (2009) conclude that internalization is responsible for the existing difference in body image, poor self-esteem and eating disorders. The impact has been influential on women as it has resulted in the struggle to acquire beauty products, diet supplements, and cosmetic surgeries, with the goal of adhering to these narrow beauty standards in order to be viewed as attractive (Ellison, 2002).

Advertisements in contemporary society place great emphasis on the physical attractiveness of women, which usually places pressure on females to focus on their outward appearance (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006). Advertisements have made women fearful of looking unattractive and this has greatly impacted their individual body image, self-concept and self-esteem. The advertising industry relies on negative affect and poor self-concept to sell products aimed at improving their appearance (Dittmar, Halliwell & Sterling, 2009). Internalization of the thin beauty ideal increases self-surveillance and self-conscious behaviors regarding their physicality and obsession with their appearance as an effort of gaining self-worth (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006).
CHAPTER THREE: EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO MASS MEDIA

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how the exposure to mass media has affected women’s eating disorders, negative body image, body dissatisfaction, and body dysphoria. This chapter presents a) standard of attractiveness presented in mass media, b) self esteem, c) eating disorders, d) children’s programming and, e) body dissatisfaction.

Standard of Attractiveness

Mass media is a very powerful tool that has been used by different advertising agencies to illustrate their socio-cultural ideals. One of such ideals that are spread through mass media is the societal ideal of attractiveness and beauty (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). Thin, beautiful women are overrepresented within mass media platforms in Western society. As the influence and impact of social networking and mass media continues to rapidly increase, the immense societal pressure of adhering to such types of ideals become stronger. The standard of attractiveness of women that is portrayed within Western society has since become unattainable (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). For instance, Tylka (2011) argued that the majority of the females portrayed in the mass media platforms are around 18% to 25% below the average and healthy weight of the average woman. This is strong evidence that supports the fact that models and actresses continue to get thinner over time. Women exposed to such mass media contents are pressured to become thin, both for the purpose
of meeting beauty standards, as well as developing positive traits that are associated with the ideal attractiveness of the women’s body (Tylka, 2011)

Women are confronted with an extensive amount of pressure from the media to conform to these unrealistic beauty standards portrayed in Western society. Exposure to media content increased the general concern of women regarding what measures one should go to attain perfection. The media tends to portray that only the thin, beautiful, and light skinned women are popular and accepted amongst men (Tylka, 2011). Women are faced with a number of societal demands, encouraging them to struggle for an unattainable body shape.

However, it is important to note that this societal ideal can be influential when an individual is exposed to and internalizes these ideals. Internalization of the societal ideals of beauty refers to acceptance of the social standards of beauty portrayed in the mass media platforms (Tylka, 2011). High levels of mass media consumption can lead to increased internalization of thin body ideals (Cho & Lee, 2013). When an individual internalizes these beauty ideals, it greatly influences self-esteem and self-concept, and leads to comparisons between societal standards and their individual body.

However, it is important to note that there are a number of adolescents and women who are less affected by the thin-ideal. Some women do not internalize this beauty concept and therefore, their exposure to the media does not impact body satisfaction, self-concept and self-esteem. Cho & Lee (2013) suggest that there are two basic reasons why mass media influence might be limited for some. He argues that when the body is similar in shape and size to those portrayed in media, or when physical attractiveness is not of importance, they tend not to
be as influenced by the beauty ideals portrayed in the mass media (Cho & Lee, 2013). Despite the existence of such women who are minimally affected by the thin-ideal, there is a large percentage of women who are seriously impacted by what they see in the mass media.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a measure on how an individual feels about themselves and their level of confidence and self regard (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Possessing a high level of self-esteem can assist in preventing the potential negative effects of media exposure (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Contrary to that, low self-esteem can lead to high susceptibility of disordered eating behaviors. “Studies have indicated that low levels of self-esteem are highly predictive of weight concerns, when compared to individuals who have high levels of self-esteem” (Cash & Smolak, 2011).

Self-esteem usually impacts the weight concern of individuals, depending on what they have observed and internalized from the media. Self-esteem in itself can be affected by the mass media in which an individual is exposed to (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Cash & Smolak (2011) propose that exposure to mass media can potentially lower the self-esteem of a woman and increase their individual drive and aspirations of becoming thin and beautiful by societal standards.

Self-esteem has also been directly linked to the level of body satisfaction. When there is low self-esteem, there is often low body satisfaction. The self concept and body image is very important in the overall belief a woman holds about herself. Body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem has become normative in Western society, with over 90% of American college
women reporting body and weight dissatisfaction (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). Body dissatisfaction increases as the level of self-esteem decreases.

Based on the fact that body satisfaction and self-esteem are positively related, it is not surprising that media has a strong influence on women’s body satisfaction and self-esteem (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). Media exposure does not only result in body dissatisfaction, but body dissatisfaction can lead to increased exposure to media that reinforce these negative ideals. Self-esteem and body dissatisfaction can be affected by how an individual compares their body image to media images (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013). Thin images of women are not only continuously shown on television, magazines, and advertisements, but have since made their ways into the children and teen programming.

**Eating Disorders**

Mulgrew & Volcevski-Kostas (2012) affirms that overexposure to media has heightened anxiety regarding body concept, which results in negative body dissatisfaction and body dysphoria. If women identify with the thin body, find similarities to the models portrayed in media, and lack comparison by not focusing on the differences between the model and their body, it may generate positive emotions (Mulgrew & Volcevski-Kostas, 2012). It is within the public domain that the thin-ideal internalization presents an important risk factor when it comes to the development of body image and can result in disordered eating behavior (Mulgrew & Volcevski-Kostas, 2012). This confirms the argument that objectification of the woman’s body through advertisements lead to eating disturbances. Riva (2014) affirms the fact that there is a
strong link between the media images and the emotional consequences. Weight-related self discrepancies are usually activated with a number of negative emotional consequences (Riva, 2014).

Female adolescents diagnosed with critical eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia nervosa report that their individual symptoms may be strongly linked to the unreliable media images that they are exposed to (Riva, 2014). Mass media tends to present overweight people as comic relief or ridiculed (Riva, 2014). The heroines and main characters are however, presented as having thinner and smaller body shapes (Riva, 2014). The content analysis of such images shown in the media indicate some forms of biases towards the recommended weight for each age group. As a result, female adolescents who do not resemble these narrow beauty ideals presented by television and movies find themselves struggling to mimic their idolized models (Riva, 2014). Obese or overweight women are regarded as unattractive, lonely, and unappealing in the Western media (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). Overweight women may suffer low self-concept due to their exposure and vulnerability to media content.

Cramblitt & Pritchard (2013) examined the effect that mass media exposure has on body image among adolescents. The study in this case focused mainly on the young female adolescents as they are highly vulnerable to the media influence due to the biological changes that their bodies undergo during puberty. In addition to that, environmental influences of media usually plays a critical role in the development of individual personality, development of identity
and peer pressure as young adolescents are moving from childhood to adulthood (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013).

Shilling (2012) presented a research experiment that was based on the social learning theory. According to the theory, people often rely on external exposure to form their individual self-perceptions. Adolescents were exposed to images of well-known models and average women they would likely meet in real life situations. The participants made upward or downward comparisons depending on whether the exposure to the media made them feel either inferior or superior when they made social comparisons to their own individual body (Shilling, 2012). Exposure to models and celebrities resulted in upward comparisons which can subsequently lead to increased action to imitate the beauty standard (Shilling, 2012). The result of this study demonstrated the kind of despair and depression that young women feel when they fall short of what has been presented in the media. The study concluded that women are usually held to very high standards and would face major criticism when they happen to fall short of the expected thin body weight and shape (Shilling, 2012).

These effects are magnified within young adolescents who receive additional pressure from their peers. Spangler (2003) argues that there are three essential motivations for making self-comparisons with other people; self-improvement, self-evaluation, and self-enhancement. When partaking in social comparison to idolized movie stars, models, and television personals, adolescent females usually rely on all three motivations to meet these beauty ideals (Spangler, 2003).
Children’s Programming

Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry (2013) conducted a research experiment and administered questionnaires to 200 young women who were 13 years old. The young women in this case study were asked to state the overall number of weekly hours they would watch television, surf the internet or play video games. They were also asked to name their favorite media characters. The overall results from the study revealed that 98% of the media characters selected by these study participants all had thin body shapes (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013). When rated based on their individual physical attractiveness, there was a very strong negative correlation that was found between the perceived attractiveness in body shape and those with bigger bodies being classified as less attractive (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013). Further analysis of the results in this case revealed that most young adolescent females were dissatisfied with larger bodies and the respondents were categorical in this case that their body image would influence their dieting behavior as they struggle to become thin and thinner (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013). The researchers proposed a prediction model that demonstrated a link between body image and social comparison (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013). The study by Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry (2013) focused on the favorite television characters and how they negatively impact body image, self concept and self-esteem of adolescent females. Young women are considering plastic surgery, excessive exercise, and extreme dieting to reach these unattainable beauty standards (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013).
Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, (2013) proposed that adolescent females usually rely on television characters to set standards and guide them. When a young girl idolizes media characters, she may be motivated to possess similar physical characteristics, including a similar body shape. The standard of beauty presented in movies, television and video games, have very powerful effects on the self-esteem and dietary behaviors of women (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013). Low self-esteem and high exposure to adolescent’s entertainment programming may result in risky behavior like excessive dieting and/or exercise (Papp, Urbán, Czeglédi, Babusa & Túry, 2013).

Young females who are undergoing biological changes due to puberty are often vulnerable to media pressure and the power that mass media has on an adolescent’s body image (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). Popular and famous media figures play a critical role in promoting the unhealthy eating habits that has detrimentally impacted the health of young girls and women (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004).

Awareness of the risk and effects of presenting unrealistic beauty standards throughout media platforms may lead to possible solutions and therapeutic interventions. While it appears as if there are no existing simple solutions to solve this epidemic, educators need to be aware of the present process of social comparison and promote the aspect of healthier lifestyles to prevent health-related problems.
Body Dissatisfaction

Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2004) have presented that processing bias information regarding body image and eating habits contributes to the high percentage of young women suffering from eating disorders. It is assumed that individuals who have eating disorders would develop some sort of maladaptive self-schema with respect to weight and self concept (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). The maladaptive schema produces a cognitive bias, which is defined as systematic errors in the attention or memory of information related to appearance and body (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). This negatively impacts the thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding body shape and the importance of physical appearance.

The average weight and body shape of models have decreased, while there has been a significant increase in the weight of the average North American over the last several decades (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). Hence, creating some sort of discrepancy between what is shown in the media as the ideal and the real body size of the American woman (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). Television shows, magazine articles, and advertising platforms have created a communal ideology that may result in disordered eating behavior, as well as body dissatisfaction in both adolescent girls and adult women.

Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly (2011) reported a substantial increase in media advertisements for dietary products and diet foods for the years between 1973 and 1990. The media glorifies the slender ideal and weight discrepancies between models and the average woman to sell products and increase sales (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009). Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling (2009)
argues that Western society usually disempowers women by subjecting them to being prisoners of the unattainable standards of beauty. The beauty industry relies on the robust prominence on the actual significance of beauty and a woman’s appearance. This supports the consumption-based philosophy that a beauty product will improve a woman’s appearance which fuels the beauty industry (Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling, 2009).

Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly (2011) suggest that close to 80% of adolescent girls read fashion magazines for at least 4 hours per week. The study reinforces that fashion and beauty magazines significantly impact the process of identity formation, gender role formation, and development of beliefs and values among young girls (Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011). Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly (2011) reported that weight loss and achieving a slim body type was a main priority for adolescent women. Adolescents were requested to highlight what they would change in their lives, and close to 60% stated that they would wish to reduce their body weight and become thin as the women portrayed in the media (Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011). This kind of pervasive body preoccupation has since become a common experience amongst women in America, to a greater extent that psychologists have since devised the word ‘normative discontent’ to create an explanation of the knowledge that it is very normal for a woman to struggle with their body image (Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011).

The struggle to become thin has resulted in high prevalence of body dissatisfaction and dangerous methods of weight control as women continue with their struggles to become thin. Mass media is among the greatest mechanisms that has greatly influenced and shaped cultures
across the globe. A research study by Cramblitt & Pritchard (2013) in Fiji supported the assumption that media usually has a prominent role in body dissatisfaction development, as well as the symptomatology of eating disorders. The society in Fiji had previously been perceived as media-naïve, with very minimal influence from mass media. However, in this research, the eating behaviors and attitudes of the adolescent girls and women were measured before introducing local television and experiencing prolonged exposure to media (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). The findings of the study indicated that following several exposures to the television and other mass media platforms, the adolescents revealed a large increase in assertiveness, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behavior (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013).

The correlation between exposure to the ideal body image shown in media platforms and body satisfaction, negative affect and symptomatology of eating disorders is a topic of societal interest. There is close relation between exposure to the media content, body dissatisfaction and eating pathology. Nonetheless, the strength that such correlation has varied between individual studies and the type of mass media that an individual is exposed to (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013). Hence, in making effort to fully understand the causal relationship that exists between body dissatisfaction, media exposure, and disordered eating; numerous experimental studies had been conducted.

Cramblitt & Pritchard (2013) studied the role that media plays in triggering eating disorders by exposing adolescent girls and women to negative images of slender models, and measuring body dissatisfaction, the drive for being thin, mood, eating abnormality and individual
self-esteem. Results generated from this study discovered the fact that exposure to thin images in the media make women feel dissatisfied with their own body image and increase the prevalence of emotional distress (Cramblitt & Pritchard, 2013).

Cho & Lee (2013) analyzed more than 20 experiments that examined the immediate impact that the thin body ideal had on the general body dissatisfaction and low self esteem of young women. The results from the analysis demonstrated that satisfaction with one’s body is higher before an individual views the media image content and decreases substantially after exposure to the media image contents (Cho & Lee, 2013). This kind of effect supports the social learning theory that states that media often promotes beauty and attractiveness that instills body dissatisfaction.

The results from this study indicate that mass media usually promotes and upholds the idea of normative discontent (Cho & Lee, 2013). The perceived pressure of having to be thin, as generated from mass media is assumed to be the main cause of body dissatisfaction and eating abnormality. Cho & Lee, (2013) suggest that the societal pressure to be thin and beautiful promoted through media platforms is a hazardous factor for eating pathology, and mental health issues.

Content shown in mass media may have an indirect impact on the body image of young women by influencing men’s expectations of women. Men may have a more narrow, rigid and unhealthy expectation of women’s gender role, appearance and personality traits (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006). Exposure to thin images in the media that resulted in body
dissatisfaction has encouraged researchers to evaluate the individual factors that may result in the susceptibility of exposure (Cho & Lee, 2013). The review of meta-analysis by Cash & Smolak (2011) revealed that adolescent girls and women who have adopted the thin body ideal and experience body dissatisfaction are highly vulnerable. The meta-analysis in this case indicated further that adolescent girls who initially had deficits with regards to social support, as well as elevations in the pressure of becoming thin are also very susceptible to the impact that media messages contain (Cho & Lee, 2013).

Cash & Smolak, (2011) propose that group comparison mediates the relationship between exposure to the media and eating disorders, as well as body dissatisfaction. Hence, the impact that the media has on an individual depends on the personal individualities of the woman who is exposed to it (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Cash & Smolak (2011) highlights the general impact that mass media has on the level of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction shows that mass media content is a causative agent for the experience of negative affect and eating disorders. Prospective studies maintains the argument that mass media images contributes directly to the major discontent within the body as experienced by adolescent girls and women in Western society (Cash & Smolak, 2011).
CHAPTER FOUR: EXPLORATION OF THEORIES

Introduction

This chapter presents a) social learning theory, b) social comparison theory, c) objectification theory, d) gratification theory, e) cultivation theory, f) high media exposure, g) therapeutic interventions, h) engagement, i) narrative therapy, j) psychoeducation.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory, as developed by psychologist Albert Bandura represents a theory of behavior that states people learn from others, through imitation, observation and modeling (Maisto, Carey & Bradizza, 1999). Bandura’s theory integrates behavioural and cognitive theories for learning which encompasses memory, attention and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory indicates that people learn from observing the environment and the behaviours and attitudes of others (McLeod, 2011). The theory suggests that most of human behaviors are learned through observation and then performed through imitation (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory explains human behaviors as an interaction between environment, behavioural conditioning, and cognitive influences (Bandura, 1977).

Observational learning involves factors that influence the social learning process (Bandura, 1977). The amount of attention paid to the behaviour influences the degree to which the behaviour is modelled. Bandura (1977) states that environmental and individual personality characteristics affect attention. Once attention has been given, then there is the factor of
retention. Retention is the action of retaining the information that is observed and is dependent on mental images, cognitive organization, and rehearsal (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) states that once attention and retention is achieved, reproduction and performance of the behaviour is imminent. The aspect of reproducing the learnt behaviour is dependent on the motivation to imitate the practices observed through social learning (Bandura 1977).

In a general view, Albert Bandura proposes the concept that environment and exposure of a stimuli impacts the individual’s perceptions and behaviours (Maisto, Carey & Bradizza, 1999). Finley (1987) proposed that Bandura’s study on aggressive behaviour among adolescents assured that the social environment impacts the learning process and consequently their adopted behavior. Social learning theory suggests that personality is influenced by the interaction of behavior, environment and psychological processes (Sincero, 2012).

As discussed in chapter two, body dissatisfaction is rampant amongst American women and adolescents. Grabe, Ward, & Hyde (2008) state that 50% of young women in Western society experience body image disturbance. Body dissatisfaction is an imperative factor in the development of eating pathology. Disordered eating behaviours are becoming more normative, and an attributing factor of social learning theory that has explained such kind of development (Allan, 2012). Young females are vulnerable to the development of eating disorders due to the social pressure presented in media for severe weight loss and adherence of the thin body ideal (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006). Allan (2012) emphasizes that disordered eating habits have diffused through the existing social ties and is socially contagious. Social learning theory explains how body shaming among young women is a social learning process.
Social Comparison Theory

Duah (2016) argues further that the behaviours of young women are influenced by what they witness in advertisements and media. People evaluate their individual appearance and attractiveness by comparing the idealized and altered images in the mass media with their own subjective appearance. Social comparison theory created by Leon Festinger argues that a person's self confidence and self worth is largely based on comparisons to other individuals (Tylka & Sabik, 2010). Individuals engage in self evaluation and compare their traits and characteristics with other significant individuals (Tylka & Sabik, 2010). It is imperative to understand that individuals often compare themselves to those they admire and therefore would like to possess similar characteristics and abilities (Tylka & Sabik, 2010).

Young women frequently self monitor their appearance and actively compare their bodies to other women’s bodies through social interactions and media consumption (Tylka & Sabik, 2010). Most of the comparisons made by young women are in the upward direction and yield negative affect and body dissatisfaction (Spangler, 2003). Upward comparison is where the individual compares themselves to an individual they see as being better and more superior than themselves (Suls & Wheeler, 2012). Upward social comparisons may cause greater body dissatisfaction and poor self-esteem because individuals are often comparing themselves to the socially constructed thin ideal (Suls & Wheeler, 2012). Tylka & Sabik (2010) propose that female adolescents who experience body dissatisfaction are more likely to make upward comparisons and develop eating pathology in attempt to achieve an ideal body appearance.
The readily accessibility of social media makes social comparison more excessive and competitive in contemporary Western society. Online interaction and communication has encouraged the value placed on appearance for social acceptance (Lupinetti, 2015). The social networking sites, Instagram and Facebook, encourage photo sharing, commenting and liking of each others online self presentation (Lupinetti, 2015). Female adolescents may undergo a personal struggle in attempt to imitate popular images online so they can be viewed as socially acceptable and attractive (Lupinetti, 2015). Young women who are unable to achieve these narrow beauty standards may experience psychological effects of low self esteem, body dissatisfaction and poor self concept.

People not only compare themselves to the images posted, but also internalize the social interaction and what others comment on the photos uploaded on the social media platform (Lupinetti, 2015). Social networking applications have enabled people to make critical comparisons with others, judge themselves, and easily receive negative feedback from the online community (Spangler, 2003). Social physique anxiety is feelings of distress and anxiety regarding an individual’s body being criticized and evaluated by others (Lupinetti, 2015). Women may experience poor emotional, and psychological health coupled with disordered eating patterns due to high levels of social physique anxiety stemming from social networking sites (Lupinetti, 2015).

Thomas & Simpson (2014) argue that both weight and social interactions have become very important and salient within college environments. While living in close proximity, it is easy for college aged women who are exposed to media content to focus on their appearance and
make comparisons to their peers living on college campus and others through social networking applications (Thomas & Simpson, 2014).

**Objectification Theory**

Thomas & Simpson (2014) suggests three different schemas that serve as further building blocks to the overall implications and applications of social comparison theory. These schemas are the cultivation theory, gratification theory, and objectification theory. These three theories help in understanding the kind of relationship between female exposure to social media and body dissatisfaction. Exposure to these mass mediated images of the female body may result in the obsession of adhering to the thin ideal and these narrow beauty standards.

When taken together, these three psychological theories point at the fact that individuals with low self-esteem, will perceive their individual body image based on what they have learnt from the mass media (Thomas & Simpson, 2014). For instance, the objectification theory makes the hypothesis that women are greatly affected by the manner in which they see other women portrayed in the media. Objectification theory proposes that body dissatisfaction leads to self-objectification, anxiety, and self-monitoring behaviour (Thomas & Simpson, 2014).

Objectification theory illustrates the fact that women appearing in the media are usually depicted as passive, sexualized objects and discusses the potential implications that such sexual objectifications have on individuals in contemporary society (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Objectification theory suggests that Western society has conditioned young women to internalize and prioritize other’s judgments and perspectives of themselves (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).
This theory focuses mainly on what females learn through the media rather than what they learn through their peers and physical world.

Objectification theory states that sexual objectification of women leads to body monitoring and contributes to mental health problems and eating pathology (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Objectification theory, as generated from the social learning theory, proposes that young girls learn that others are evaluating their physical appearance and will attempt to do their best to try to be accepted and satisfy such societal pressures (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The objectification of women in mass media has led to self objectification and treating oneself as an object to be evaluated based on appearance (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Self-objectification increases the importance of physical appearance and encourages body monitoring behaviours (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Such self-surveillance and self-monitoring include obsessive behaviors like extreme exercise, starvation and intake of laxatives, all which are characterized by eating disorders (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011).

Self objectifications occur in three different ways as per the social learning theory: within mass media that recreates social interactions, general social interactions, and lastly, through mass media that objectify the female body through advertisements (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). All in which the gaze is understood to belong to a man. The social learning theory suggests that women learn to base their individual self-esteem and self concept upon what the society think men consider as attractive (Duah, 2016). Body weight and shape is an extremely important factor with respect to this socially constructed ideal of attractiveness. Women may experience
feelings of discontent and anxiety regarding their body shape, reduced self-esteem, and body shame since their physical appearance is a centre of focus (Duah, 2016).

In contemporary society, women have had their body parts sexualized, and fragmented into fetishized commodities through advertisements in Western mass media (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). The theory of objectification, as derived from social learning theory explains how the media has influenced women's thought processes. Mass media and social networking instills the concept that women's bodies are meant for critiquing by men and that their body shape and size will not be accepted unless they adhere to these unhealthy thin body ideals (Akers, 2011).

Adolescent girls may start to create an understanding of themselves and their peers as sexualized objects whose bodies are greatly valued much more than their personality and individuality. Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr (2011) propose that more time spent self-objectifying leads to higher likelihood of shame, anxiety, low self esteem, depression, disordered eating and pathological thoughts.

**Gratification Theory**

The uses and gratification theory focuses on what people do with media and assist in explaining why individuals are affected differently by media messages (Korhan & Ersoy, 2016). This theory states that the audience is active in choosing how media fulfills their needs (Korhan & Ersoy, 2016). The extent to which a woman is impacted by what she observes in the media differs. Korhan & Ersoy (2016) state the extent to which a woman self-objectifies and self monitors also differs on an individual basis. Women are impacted differently by the thin body
ideal and beauty standards portrayed in media platforms. Some women appear to be more troubled than others by the kind of perfect models depicted on media platforms.

The gratification theory proposes that media usage is goal orientated and the audience is affected differently based on individual differences (Shilling, 2012). The theory states that women with body dissatisfaction and poor self esteem will choose to consume media that reinforces their negative self schema and body image (Korhan & Ersoy, 2016). Instead of blaming media platforms for having manipulated the thoughts of women, the uses and gratification theory is concerned with how women actively use the media and hence emphasizes choice and the individual (Shilling, 2012).

Furthermore, the theory analyzes women exposed to mass media and determines if the exposure will influence a woman's self worth and esteem. The gratifications theory instills the possibility for an audience who are in fact not negatively impacted on by what they see in the mass media (Shilling, 2012) This theory focuses on how individuals choose to consume certain types of medium and the extent to which they act on such kind of interpretations (Shilling, 2012). This theory proposes that women with positive body image will choose body positive media and are less likely to be negatively impacted by the thin body ideal shown in the media (Shilling, 2012).

Contrary to that, when women experience body dissatisfaction they may internalize the thin ideal, make social comparisons, and make a physical attempt to change their bodies to decrease negative body image (Shilling, 2012). Similar to the objectification theory, this theory suggests that women with low self esteem are more likely to be influenced by greater exposure to
objectified images in the media (Shilling, 2012). This is common for women seeking out medium from media platforms as an attempt to sustain the existing negative perception about herself (Shilling, 2012). She will make a decision to consume media that will further reinforce, her negative thoughts about self-image and self concept. Women with body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem are more likely to consume media with images of thin and sexually objectified models which will subsequently impact her negative body image (Korban & Ersoy, 2016).

The social learning theory explains that women who experience negative body image are more likely to be impacted negatively by the advertisements and images portrayed through media platforms. Shilling (2012) states that like-minded females enjoy spending time with their fellow like-minded peers, an indication that women who are highly self-objectified may try to reach out to some other highly objectified women as their peers in the group and hence, escalating the general experience of consciousness on objectified body. It is evident that some women would be attracted to some types of media that encourage their individualized disordered thoughts (Wenger, 2000). They will also tend to surround themselves with peers who have similar beliefs, values, and thought processes. It supports the fact that women are vulnerable to low self-esteem and their body image is negatively impacted through social learning (Wenger, 2000).

In support to this theory, Wenger (2000) argues that women who already experience low self-esteem, as well as body dissatisfaction are most likely to make a choice of engaging with the medium that encourages such kind of upward social comparison, and will subsequently be
impacted on by such kind of negative comparisons. They spend more time admiring photos of bodies that are extremely difficult to attain and hence feel more inadequate (Wenger, 2000).

**Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory is among the three theories that stem from the social learning theory and explains the implications that women are facing as they continue to consume more media images (Reckwitz, 2002). Cultivation theory asserts that media usually expose people to a continuous repetition of some forms of values and images, which, in a powerful way, homogenizes and influences the conceptions of viewers as the true reality of what the ideal body should look like. The long term effects of media exposure suggest that the more amount of media consumed, then the more likely that she is going to understand such images as the true reality, no matter whether the content in the medium was fake or not (Reckwitz, 2002).

Cultivation theory builds on social learning theory by explaining that high consumption of media content leads to the construction and cultivation of a distorted perception of reality (Reckwitz, 2002). The more amount of time women spend consuming media content, the more homogenized and standardized their understanding of social reality will be (Reckwitz, 2002). The more exposure to fashion magazines, the more likely one is to believe these images of women are the ideal which all women should imitate. According to cultivation theory the audience will eventually want to embody what is viewed in the media (Reckwitz, 2002). Women will struggle to attain such images by means of disordered eating, excessive exercise, starvation, and undergoing plastic surgery.
As has already been established in the social learning theory, there is a large percentage of adolescent females who over consume social media via their smartphones and computers. Hence, by applying the concept of cultivation theory, such women end up having no difference between their individual lives and their online presentation. The theory support the arguments put forth by Reckwitz (2002) who states that there are great consequences in the continuous use of social media among women. Based on the fact that social networks are mirages and illusions of virtual life, it is relatively easy for female adolescents and women to consider the online communities as physical realities (Rosenstock, Strecher & Becker, 1988). Such women spent much of their time watching what they perceive as virtual realities found online. There is great focus on self-presentation in the social media, with photographs being chosen very carefully since the users have the desire of presenting themselves in a more positive way (Lupinetti, 2015).

Lupinetti (2015) argues that the users of social networking sites are frequent visitors, with close to thirty percent of them checking their profiles on a daily basis and another twenty five percent visiting the site almost after every some few days. What is shown in the mass media platforms can become an obsession to many women. Such kind of obsession, as per the social learning theory will result in the development of the ideology that what an individual observes within their social network in their virtual world as the truth (Rosenstock, Strecher & Becker, 1988).

Exposure to images presented in the mass media have the possibility of creating misleading and destructive social constructs (Syzmanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). The narrow beauty ideals portrayed through media has an impact on the audience’s thoughts regarding their
own bodies, and contribute to the development of their own body image (Lupinetti, 2015). Social comparison can be influential on self-worth, self-esteem, and body image. Comparing one’s body with models, movie stars, and digitally altered photos presented on photo sharing sites can lead to psychological distress (Lupinetti, 2015). As described in the sub-theories generated from social learning theory, females who have low self-esteem and high media consumption are most vulnerable and influenced by the thin body ideal (Syzmanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). These women may internalize these destructive beauty ideals and idolize an ultra thin body shape.

Women who experience high levels of body dissatisfaction are more likely to seek out images of women who have the thin ideal body shape (Lupinetti, 2015). In further response to that, such women may try feeding their negative body image and struggle to imitate the image they have seen in the mass media platform.

Social learning theory proposes that one can make assertion that majority of the feelings presented by women towards their bodies are greatly influenced by what is presented and emphasized in social networking sites and mass media platforms (Reckwitz, 2002). Through the mediated images via mass media, historically, women have been encouraged to acquire a thin physique and to focus on their body shape and size as the most important aspect of their individual persona. Women who are overexposed to the media may suffer discontent if they do not physically represent the ideal body shape (Syzmanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Such kind of discontent and dissatisfaction with their bodies, as per the social learning theory, can result in adverse psychological outcomes, anxiety, mental health problems, self-objectification and self-surveillance.
High Media Exposure

Females who experience negative body image and partake in high media exposure, may take part in upward comparisons to reinforce and internalize their body dissatisfaction (Syzmanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). High media consumption can cause women to develop a distorted social reality. However, it is important to note that women who already have negative body image tend to be more vulnerable with the internalization of the concept of ideal body shape (Syzmanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Therefore, those suffering from poor body image may seek out a high number of thin ideal photos so that they can easily make upward comparisons and subsequently make exercise and diet decisions to further their individual struggles in replicating the ideal (Syzmanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011).

The increased consumption of mass media has played a direct role in women’s poor body image and the increase of upward social comparisons (Tylka & Sabik, 2010). Social networking sites increase accessibility to create a virtual self-presentation and promote social comparisons. Social comparisons that involve in person interaction Tiggemann & McGill (2004) make an argument that college campuses usually offer a kind of environment that lead the female students to actively participate in social comparisons. Increased access to mass media and social networking applications and the average college campus environment both interact to heighten unfavourable consequences of partaking in upward social comparisons (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). This supports the argument that mass media heightens the phenomenon of social
comparison. Women are active participants when choosing their media and may consciously choose to physically alter their body to mimic these ideals.

Wenger (2000) states that some women use behavioral avoidance to cope with the negative social comparisons and anxiety of admiring thin bodies (Wenger, 2000). Behavioral avoidance involves physical removal of stressors and triggers from an individual's life (Wenger, 2000). One’s ability to avoid mass media has however, become more difficult. The blend of social anxiety, social learning theory, and the increased usage and high prevalence of mass media exposure have revealed the kind of dangers that females are facing with respect to dissatisfaction of the body and what they see in the mass media (Wenger, 2000).

Wenger (2000) suggests that there are a number of personality types and psychological predispositions that influence a female's low self-esteem, there exists altogether, commonalities among the mass media and internet users. Wenger (2000) proposes that scholarly research has shown that there are some types of personalities that have high chances of becoming addicted to or rather heavily relying on mass media to foster relevant relationships. The addiction to images shown in the mass media has been reported to be directly related to shyness, low self-esteem, loneliness and depression (Wenger, 2000). For instance, worrisome and anxious college students usually rely on mass media to inform their body image more that those who are more emotionally stable (Wenger, 2000). There are clinical predispositions and personality traits that increase the influence of online content on an individual. When an individual who is predisposed to body image distress has high exposure to media content than it is very likely for the onset of psychological distress (Tylka & Sabik, 2010).
Bentley, Church, Harrison, Lyons, & Rafalow (2015) states that young women spend almost three hours in a day on either Facebook or Twitter. This is only with reference to one social network platform. For those who spend the majority of their time on social networking sites and mass media platforms, the corporeal obsession with thin body image becomes something of great reality (Bentley, Church, Harrison, Lyons, & Rafalow, 2015). With easy accessibility to photos of other celebrities and friends, what women come across in the virtual world is transformed very quickly into what they will eventually consider as reality (Bentley, Church, Harrison, Lyons, & Rafalow, 2015). Smartphones have become an integral part of our lives so women have constant access to photos where they can make social comparisons between their own bodies and the images presented in the media (Bentley, Church, Harrison, Lyons, & Rafalow, 2015). Exposure to mass media fails to create any new phenomenon, but builds on social learning theory with respect to social psychology of adolescent girls and women (Thomas & Simpson, 2014).

**Therapeutic Interventions**

There is little proven evidence regarding effective psychological therapy modalities, yet psychological therapy is pivotal in addressing the underlying behaviours and cognitions (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004). “There is also no uniform or agreed approach to the psychological treatment or management of anorexia nervosa in adults, either in terms of types of treatment offered, their duration, intensity or the setting in
which treatment is provided” (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004, p.1). Pettersen, Rosenvinge, & Wynn (2011), argue that many people suffering from eating disorders do not want nor seek professional help due to ambivalence to symptom change.

In the treatment of anorexia nervosa and bulimia in children and youth, the immediate family is often involved throughout the duration of therapy (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004). The approaches used vary in style and not all of them will resemble the evidence-based family interventions (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004). “There is limited evidence that family based approaches that focus explicitly on eating disorders help younger people, but it is possible that conjoint (i.e., person affected and parents meet together) or separated forms of family based therapy (i.e., therapist meets patient and parents separately) is effective” (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004, p.1). More research needs to be done to confirm this.

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for those suffering from eating disorders, low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and pathological thoughts (Pike, Walsh, Vitousek, Wilson & Bauer, 2003). CBT focuses on identifying and replacing negative and harmful thoughts with a healthier way of thinking. A study completed by Pike, Walsh, Vitousek, Wilson, & Bauer (2003) found that cognitive behaviour therapy was more effective than nutritional counselling in relapse prevention and decrease of symptomatology.
Cognitive behavior therapy is an empirically supported therapeutic intervention for those suffering from body image difficulties and body dissatisfaction (Cash & Hrabosky, 2003). Cash & Hrabosky (2003) conducted a case study that involved participants attending a 3 week CBT and psychoeducation program that included self-surveillance, and self-monitoring. Body image and psychosocial functioning were monitored in the 25 participants who had low self-esteem and elevated body image concerns. After completion of the 3 week CBT intervention, the participants had improved satisfaction with their appearance and reduced body image dissatisfaction (Cash & Hrabosky, 2003). Results of the case study indicated improved eating attitudes, increased self-esteem, decreased anxiety, and less body dysphoria (Cash & Hrabosky, 2003). Self-monitoring and daily diary completion was highly associated with a decrease in body image dissatisfaction (Cash & Hrabosky, 2003).

A treatment plan that involves medical professionals, mental health professionals, and dieticians is beneficial for individuals suffering from anorexia nervosa and bulimia (Treasure & Schmidt, 2013). The main goal of the treatment plan should be to normalize eating patterns, reduce pathological thoughts regarding eating habits, and help the client return to a healthy weight (Treasure & Schmidt, 2013).

Cooper & Shafran (2008) propose that low self-esteem and poor self-concept is common amongst patients suffering from eating disorders and evidence indicates that low self-esteem leads to a weak response to therapeutic treatment. It is imperative to further understand the reasons for treatment failure and ways in which treatment is successful and effective (Cooper & Shafran, 2008).
Engagement

“Given the ambivalence inherent in this disorder, engagement and efforts to motivate the person are helpful in maximising commitment and adherence to treatment” (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004, p.7). Indeed, many clients are resistant to therapeutic interventions and relapse rates are quite high (Scott, Hanstock, & Kane, 2013). Many females with anorexia nervosa find it difficult to acknowledge that they have a problem and many are ambivalent about change, which can cause reluctance to seek treatment and therapeutic intervention (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). According to The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2004), a precondition for successful psychological treatment is the effective engagement and commitment of the client. Building therapeutic rapport and therapeutic alliance with the client (and possibly her caregivers through family-based therapy) is very important—it is an essential element of the care offered (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). A client’s motivation can change over the course of treatment and the therapist needs to remain sensitive to this (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). The client's’ perception of a healthy body shape and size will impact motivation and desire for symptom reduction. Special challenges in the treatment of anorexia nervosa include the client's attachment and positive value placed on some of their symptoms (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004).
Client’s denial of the potentially life-threatening nature of their disorder and their symptoms may pose as a challenge also (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004).

**Narrative Therapy**

As mentioned before, eating disorders have proven resistant to therapy with high relapse rates and poor therapeutic effectiveness. Scott, Hanstock, and Patterson-Kane (2013) suggest that “enhanced cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT-E) is the favoured treatment of choice despite the similar emphasis it puts on controlling eating behaviour as the psychopathology it tries to address” (p.307). In contrast, narrative therapy focuses on creating new patterns and the development of an anti-eating disorder lifestyle, healthy behavior, and body positive values (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013). Narrative therapy helps clients re-envision and rewrite their relationship with the eating disorder by depicting separation and detachment between the client and the disorder (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013). Throughout the duration of narrative therapy, the client creates an anti-eating disorder script that helps create an alternative story, externalize the disorder, and increase the individual’s sense of personal control (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013).

Narrative therapy encourages collective responses for individuals to read and share personal stories and literary works from those affected by eating disorders. A sense of
community and connectedness may increase by acknowledging the hardships and experiences of eating disorder survivors (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Narrative therapy strives to change people’s relationships to problems and collectively enables people to address social issues (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

Evidence for the narrative therapy approach primarily consists of informal case study material due to lack of research (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013). Scott, Hanstock, and Patterson-Kane (2013) “conducted a case study with a 28-year-old woman with a recurring history of anorexia nervosa, who self-referred to a university psychology clinic, due to fears of imminent relapse” (p.1). She received 10 sessions of narrative therapy and through therapeutic intervention she made significant progress while decreasing pathological thoughts (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013). Narrative therapy helped her externalize her eating disorder and reduce the ascetic values underpinning it (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013). She developed as well as expressed her non-eating disorder character, healthy behaviors and values (Scott, Hanstock, & Patterson-Kane, 2013). This case study findings can not be generalized due to it being a study with one participant, however it reveals the potential of narrative therapy.

**Psychoeducation**

Celio, Winzelberg, Wilfley, Epstein-Herald and Springer (2000) looked at an intervention to reduce body dissatisfaction and negative body image in young female students. “They used a controlled trial format to compare Internet based (Student Bodies [SB]) and classroom-delivered
(Body Traps fBT]) psychoeducational interventions for the reduction of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours and attitudes” (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000, p.650). A total of 76 female students from a private university took part in the case study, and they were randomly assigned to SB, BT, or a wait-list control (WLC) condition (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). Measures of body image, attitudes toward food, and eating behaviours were measured at baseline, post-treatment, and after four-months (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). At post-treatment, participants in SB had significant reductions in weight and shape concerns and disordered eating attitudes compared with the individuals on the waitlist (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). At follow-up, disordered eating behaviours were also reduced (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). No significant physical or psychological effects were found between the BT and WLC conditions (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). The Internet-delivered intervention programme had a significant impact on reducing risk factors for eating disorders and increasing awareness (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). This study shows the power of psychoeducation, and findings could have implications for parents, teachers, and school counsellors. Findings suggested that technological and educational interventions decrease body dissatisfaction, harmful attitudes, and disordered eating patterns (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000).

A psychoeducative programme that does not alleviate or change symptoms but instead represents a preparation stage for future therapeutic work facilitates the healing process and reduces symptoms (Pettersen, Rosenvinge, & Wynn, 2011). A psychoeducative programme that thematically focuses on education, empowerment, health promotion, and moving the client from
victim to an active agent in changing their life elicits positive therapeutic change (Pettersen, Rosenvinge, & Wynn, 2011). Body image psychoeducation and self-monitoring may increase metacognitive awareness which significantly enhances awareness that negative thoughts regarding body image are not reality based facts (Cash & Hrabosky, 2003).

Nutritional education should be implemented in educational environments to increase awareness of the importance of healthy eating. Nutritional counselling is psychoeducational and helps repair the relationship with food, increase nutritional fact based information, and discourage negative eating behaviors (Pettersen, Rosenvinge, & Wynn, 2011). Promoting healthy body image and self esteem by implementing strategies that decrease appearance based bullying is beneficial for students (Satter, 2014). A psychoeducative programme that focuses on body image and self-esteem can help create a school environment that decreases eating problems and promotes acceptance (Satter, 2014). Emphasis on healthy eating patterns, the importance of physical activity, and promotion of a healthy body shape while celebrating individual differences will support children’s overall health.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Reiterating Study Purpose and Meaning

The purpose of this study was to explore the objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media in advertisements and the impact this has had on adolescent women’s body image, self-esteem, and social comparison in the hope that this exploration may assist in curbing this influence, as well to better support young women. The research questions were centred on the purpose: How does mass media impact body satisfaction in young women? How does internalization of media messages affect self-esteem and disordered eating patterns? What are the ways in which objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media impact body image and social comparison in young women?

Summary of Findings

This study explored the impact of objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media on Western society. Exposure to mass media and internalization of harmful images of idealized body shapes affects women’s body image, disordered eating patterns, body dissatisfaction and social comparison. The thesis was divided into five chapters. Chapter one offered a general introduction and overview of current research on this topic. The guiding research questions and significance of this study was presented in the introductory chapter. Chapter two discussed representation of the female body in mass media, pertaining from the 1950’s to present day.
Objectification and sexualization of women through advertisements have been prevalent for the majority of North American history. Physical, psychological, and emotional health is negatively impacted through internalization of idealized images presented in the mass media. Chapter three explored how exposure to mass media has affected the incidence of women’s eating disorders, poor self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and body dysmorphia. Chapter four explored the social learning theory, therapeutic interventions, psychoeducation, engagement, and narrative therapy. Lastly, this chapter presents the summary of findings, implications for the counselling field and recommendations for scholarly action.

Overall, findings indicate that the objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media impacts adolescent women’s body image, disordered eating patterns, and social comparison—more than half of the adolescent population in America experience dissatisfaction with their body shape and size (Tylka, 2011). Pathological eating behaviours like purging, bingeing, dieting and skipping of meals are common among young girls and women.

Body dissatisfaction and poor body image has led to emotional distress, depression, and low self-esteem, especially after the 1950’s when mass media platforms started exemplifying underweight and ultra-thin images of models. A number of behaviors associated with this include changing eating patterns, undergoing plastic surgery, excessive exercise and above all, dissatisfaction with one’s body size and image, resulting in decreased mental health and low self-esteem.
The perception of thinness appears to develop relatively early in life, emerging from girls who are as young as 7 years old (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). Such change in perceptions has been escalated by exposure to the objectification of women’s body image in the mass media. One study confirms that one of the most important reasons why women are greatly dissatisfied with their bodies, regardless of their weight is the ever increasing thin ideal that is currently being promoted through mass media platforms.

In various advertising platforms in movies and television programs, there is great emphasis on thinness and thin characters are overrepresented in the media while women who are overweight are underrepresented and scrutinized (Riva, 2014). Due to the fact that presentation of the media of women bodies are very much skewed, adoption of this reality has resulted in reduced satisfaction with an individual woman’s body and the struggles aimed at achieving these unrealistic ideals. The struggle in this case has been accompanied by a number of behaviors which include; changing the eating patterns, undergoing plastic surgery, doing excessive exercise and above all, being dissatisfied with their current body size and image, resulting in decreased mental health and low self-esteem.

**Recommendations for Professional Action**

Therapies to be considered for the psychological treatment of anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and body dissatisfaction include cognitive analytic therapy (CAT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT), focal psychodynamic therapy and family-based interventions (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). Where
appropriate and possible, care and preference should be taken into account in deciding which psychological treatment is to be offered to the client (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000).

The aims of psychological treatment should be to reduce risk, encourage weight gain and restore healthy eating (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). The goal of therapeutic intervention should be to reduce other symptoms related to an eating disorder, and to facilitate psychological and physical recovery (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000).

Psychological treatment that involves inpatient care at a long term residential treatment center has proven to be more effective than outpatient care (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). Psychological treatment is often a key element of an inpatient stay but evidence for what type of therapeutic approaches to treatment is most effective is very limited and more research is needed in this area (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000).

**Children and Adolescents with Anorexia Nervosa**

Special considerations are needed in the treatment of children and adolescents, particularly regarding the involvement of families and other caregivers (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). Epstein-Herald et al. (2000) suggest that the therapeutic involvement of siblings and immediate family members should be considered in every single case because of anorexia nervosas impact on the whole family. Support from education and peers may also be important in
the recovery of children and youth, and clinicians may need to collaborate with schools, for example about involvement in physical education and nutritional counselling (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). Educative programmes should be incorporated into school curriculum to increase awareness, improve self-esteem, and foster healthy eating habits.

**Clinical Practice Recommendations**

People suffering from eating disorders should be medically assessed and receive therapeutic and medical treatment at the earliest opportunity (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000). Treatment is especially crucial for those with or at risk of severe emaciation and these clients should be prioritised for therapeutic treatment (Epstein-Herald et al., 2000).

**Implication for Counselling Field**

Women have been conditioned to see their bodies not as personal and respectful, but rather sexual and ornamental objects meant for male pleasure. The struggle of becoming thin has led to psychological distress, low self-esteem, poor body image, eating disorders, depression, and problems alike (Tylka, 2011). Counsellors and therapists need to reach out to females, and educate them on the reality of these unrealistic beauty standards, and sexual objectification that continuously prevails. Teaching young women about these societal pressures will increase awareness and therefore encourage adolescents to be proactive.

Moreover, counsellors and medical professionals need to educate young girls and women on the importance of self-compassion. Women should be encouraged to develop
compassion-focused therapy that helps protect them from the impact associated with
self-objectification. Counsellors should discourage women from internalizing the images
shown in the mass media platforms. Moreover, female adolescents should also be discouraged
from associating with those who promote these unhealthy, thin images shown in the media.
The treatment of self-objectification should focus on helping individuals cultivate the attitude of
self-acceptance, self-compassion, empathy and non-judgment so as to inoculate and protect
young women against any form of alarming effects that they are likely to experience from
objectification of women’s body by the mass media. Women must be encouraged by
counsellors to develop self-compassion through activities that facilitate and teach compassion,
confidence, affection, and kindness.

**Recommendations for Scholarly Action**

While psychological therapy is crucial for the treatment of eating disorders, there is little
evidence regarding which psychological therapy modality is most effective (The British
Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004). Narrative approaches,
Motivational Interviewing, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and CBT are popular therapeutic
interventions for treatment of eating disorders, however more research is needed to establish
which specific approach is optimal for treatment of anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

More research is also needed to establish a better sense as to duration, intensity or the
setting for the most effective treatment (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College
of Psychiatrists 2004).
Lastly, while family based therapy is popular in the treatment of eating disorders in young people, there is limited evidence that family based approaches that focus explicitly on eating disorders help these young people. More research is needed in this particular area. As well, more research needs to be focused on conjoint and separated forms of family based therapy to establish which form is most effective and successful (The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2004).

Further research should focus on ways to solve the negative impacts that are associated with objectification of women’s bodies in the mass media. Such research should address the steps that need to be taken by different stakeholders in managing the potential impact that objectification of women’s body might have in Western society on women and adolescent females. Moreover, such further studies should involve multiple data collection tools, paying close attention to both primary and secondary tools of data collection (Pettersen, Rosenvinge, & Wynn, 2011). A research study needs to be carried out, involving wide range of stakeholders and seeking their views on how the negative impacts that is associated with media objectification of women’s body can be resolved. There needs to be further research regarding the effectiveness of treatment incorporated with psychoeducative programmes (Pettersen, Rosenvinge, & Wynn, 2011).

Limitations of this Study

This study was based on secondary sources only. No persons with anorexia nervosa, or bulimia were interviewed, and thus no lived experience data are included. In-depth conversations
with people who suffer from these disorders would have thickened the data. No individuals suffering from low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and distorted body image were interviewed for this study. Secondly, some of the research reviewed in this work is based on a relatively small sample size, which makes results not generalizable to the wider public.
References


American Psychological Association, (2000). *Anorexia Nervosa*


Mass study media young the of image, qualitative opinions models. on and body everyday A people: C., C., the (2011). P. Diedrichs, & Lee, M. Kelly, Seeing beauty undergraduates. doi: http://dx.doi.org.proxy.cityu.edu/10.1017/S1352465808004736


doi: http://dx.doi.org.proxy.cityu.edu/10.1017/S1352465808004736


Lupinetti, Victoria Michelle, "Self-presentation and Social Media: A Qualitative Examination of the Use of Instagram by Amateur NPC Female Figure Competitors" (2015). Master's Theses. 4550.


http://ellynsatterinstitute.org/htf/providedontdepriveatschool.php


