Adolescent Females Acceptance of the Media's Standard of Beauty as Influenced by Culturally Specific Media Images

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Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage in the development of one’s perception of self. Researchers are beginning to recognize the effects of body image on the development of one’s self-perception. What is being discovered is that body image is particularly important to the perception of “the self” for young women. A poor body image can have many disastrous consequences including the onset of eating disorders, smoking, suicide, drug usage and the engaging of early sexual activity.

The development of a healthy body image then, becomes critical in regards to the profession of social work. This study attempts to closely inspect the issue of body image and more specifically explore factors that contribute to the high rates of young women whom are developing poor body images.

The literature review will examine the issues of body image and how it relates to the mass production of a standardized female body type. It will also include discussion on eating disorders and how body image and media influences precipitates the onset of these disorders.

Literature Review

“If I weighed five pounds less I’d be closer to perfect. I’d also respect myself more,” states a fifteen-year-old female in Francis Berg’s Afraid to Eat, her 1997 groundbreaking analysis of children and their feelings about food, body size and self-esteem.
The issue of body image is a serious one in a culture where the average six year old understands what fat is, and it is commonplace for a fourth grade student to be on a diet (Kilbourne, 1995). The issue becomes even more serious as children move into adolescence. Two-thirds of high school girls diet, one-half are undernourished and one-fifth take diet pills (Berg 1997). A recent survey found that the top wish of eleven to seventeen-year old girls was to lose weight (Wolf 1997).

In high school the issue moves from serious to deadly. Researchers have found that poor body image has major links to suicide. A 1995 Youth Risks Behavior Survey found that 30% of the girls and 18% of the boys had seriously considered suicide within a twelve-month period (Berg, 1997). The same survey also found that 21% of girls and 14% of boys had made a suicide plan within a twelve-month period. It must be noted that these numbers are self-reported and could be under or over-estimating the true scope of the issue.

Poor body image is also linked to eating disorders and overall poor self-esteem. Body image has become so crucial to our feelings of self-esteem and self-worth, that they often overshadow qualities and achievements in other aspects of our lives. A wide variety of factors contribute to this, media are only one; however, it is an extremely powerful one, especially to the female adolescent.

Body image is a complex issue that is affected by many outside factors. There is a close relationship between body image and the four types of eating disorders. A discussion of each
element will be made in an attempt to more soundly understand the issue. Finally, treatment and prevention will be discussed as well as cultural implications and future predictions about the trends of this issue.

Media Representations

Media pressure on young women's body image is said to be stronger now than at any point in history. There is exceeding pressure on young women to be thin. The mere fact that 90 to 95% of people with eating disorders are young women strongly suggests that the meaning of femininity in modern American culture has something to do with the high rates of eating disorders among adolescent females (Levine 1987).

In Reviving Ophelia, Mary Pipher (1996) calls our society a culture that poisons girls. She goes on to state that girls have to sacrifice parts of themselves that the culture sees as masculine. They shrink their souls down to "petite" sizes. This is clearly evident in the fact that the self-esteem of young women plummets at the onset of puberty (Kilbourne 1995). This does not occur with boys at the same age.

The image of women in media has become an aberration of reality. The "ideal" female body now excludes ninety-five percent of women. This subsequently makes the normal, abnormal. The average model is 23% thinner than the average woman, setting the standards of beauty unachievable (Wolf 1995).
The image of the "ideal" woman is so pervasive in this society that it has even crept into children's stories. One study of children's books in America found that the illustrations of young girls have become progressively thinner over the past 80 years. There has been no such change in the illustration of boys (Wolf, 1997).

Perhaps the most damning evidence of media's impact on the body image of young women comes from the young women themselves. In a recent issue of Current Health 2 (1999), a young woman stated, "All I see are models in magazines who look so perfect, and that's how I want to be." Another young woman stated in the same issue, that she finds it impossible to be satisfied with her body. It makes no real difference how much weight she has lost; she still feels the need to be thinner and thinner.

A recent study in Fiji examined body image and the effect of television on Fijian adolescent females (Becker 1998). What makes the Fiji study interesting is the relative newness of television and western culture in Fiji. In 1995, before television was introduced to the island, there was only a 3% rate of adolescent females whom reported vomiting to control weight (Becker, 1998). However, 38 months after television came to Fiji the number dramatically increased to 15% (Becker, 1998).

Dr. Anne Becker of Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts implemented the study. She interviewed sixty-three girls in 1995 and 1998 for the study (Becker, 1998). In the 1998 survey, 74% of the Fijian girls reported feeling too big or too fat. This is a marked difference from times prior to western and
television influence. Fijian culture has traditionally attributed very different meanings to weight, size and shape (Becker, 1998).

"Your social position is based on how well you can feed other people," says Becker. During Fijian mealtime, one is expected to eat as much as they can. Their society has also been one that is hyper-vigilant about people who under-eat. "Macake" is a culture specific illness that is essentially an individual who is not eating enough (Becker, 1998). Only recently has thinness been looked at in a positive light in Fijian culture. Many of the young girls that Becker surveyed expressed a desire to look more like the women that they saw on programs such as Beverly Hills 90210, Melrose Place and Xena Warrior Princess.

Becker speculates that these relatively new changes in body image could indeed be directly linked to the infusion of television and western culture on the Fijian adolescents. However, she is also quick to point out that eating disorders and negative body image have many precipitating factors, and the combination of media and western influence is just one.

Influences on Women of Color:

Another aspect of this issue are the collective weight-related attitudes of black women and other minorities. What researchers have found is that minority groups, especially black women, tend to have much more positive beliefs and attitudes regarding their own body image. A recent study by the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that black women are less preoccupied with weight reduction than their white
counterparts. In addition, they found that black women are less negative about being overweight than white women are. This suggests that perceptions of obesity may be culturally defined and not equally stigmatized in all cultures (Kumanika, Wilson, & Guilford- Davenport, 1998). Although black women may still be concerned with weight, they are more likely to still view themselves as attractive if overweight. This issue is an interesting and complex one that could add great insight into the issue. Unfortunately, not much research on the perception of body image in women of color has been done; hence, there is little understanding about the reasons to as why black women and other minorities report more positive body images.

Eating Disorders:

Frances Berg states that there are four categories of dysfunctional eating. They are: 1.) Eating disorders 2.) Dysfunctional eating 3.) Size prejudice and 4.) Over-eating. There has been speculation among health care professionals that dieting is a risky behavior that may in fact develop into an eating disorder. An eating disorder study has showed a marked prevalence among normal dieters whom subsequently advance into pathological dieting (Berg 1997).

The most common types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. However, some eating disorders do not fit neatly into the criterion for anorexia or bulimia. They may include features of the two but also involve other behaviors. This behavior may include repeatedly chewing and spitting out
food, but not swallowing, large amounts of the food (Levine 1998).

Excessive exercise is another dysfunctional behavior and does not necessarily fit into the confines of anorexia or bulimia. Many anorexic and bulimic individuals will also struggle with some form of exercise dependency. Excessive exercise aimed at weight loss is usually seen as a secondary dependency. This disorder is characterized by the individual’s insatiable need to exercise, and takes precedence over anything else in that person’s life. This type of disorder is especially prevalent among young men and can lead to steroid usage.

The majority of individuals afflicted with eating disorders often are white females. Females make up to 90 to 95% of anorexics and bulimic. The two most common types of eating disorders are defined below:

A.) Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa has been defined as a "relentless pursuit of thinness." This disorder usually begins innocuously and the future anorexic is often only slightly overweight, or not at all. Unlike most dieters, the anorexic-to-be relishes the opportunity to regulate food intake and body weight and thereby controls the self. At first the anorexic is able to suppress the appetite with relative ease. However, after a period of time, “dieting” gives way to an extreme fear of losing control of eating and a compensatory need to rid the body of any "fat." An acknowledgment of hunger is interpreted as an extreme sign of weakness (Levine, 1998).
B.) Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia nervosa is defined as an individual who has recurrent episodes of binge eating followed by an attempt to rid the body of the food through vomiting or the usage of laxatives. There are two types of this disorder, 1.) The purging type and 2.) The non-purging type. The purging type uses regular purging behavior such as vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, and enemas. The non-purging type uses other inappropriate behaviors such as fasting or excessive exercise but does not regularly engage in purging.

An individual is bulimic if they have at least two binge episodes per week. As the disorder progresses it develops into a complex lifestyle that is increasingly isolating, with depression and low self-esteem.

Physical consequences of binge and purge activities include hair loss, fatigue, insomnia, muscle weaknesses, dizziness, sore throat, stomach pain or cramping, bloating, bad breath and blood shot eyes. Cardiac arrhythmia affect 20% of bulimic persons and require emergency treatment.

Treatment and Prevention of Eating Disorders

Treatment for suffers of eating disorders can be difficult. Often times doctors will treat anorexics and bulimic with prescription drugs and psychotherapy (Chang, 1998). One reason why treatment of eating disorders is so difficult is due to the
many factors that are involved in the engaging of the behaviors. Sadly, many statistics regarding treatment of eating disorders are not promising. The American Anorexia and Bulimia Association states that every year one million women become anorexic or bulimic. Anorexia and bulimia have the highest death relates of any mental illness (Wolf, 1995). This is also often due to another sad fact that many insurance companies do not always cover hospitalization costs for acute cases of anorexia and bulimia (Kilbourne 1995). Thus, many young women in desperate need go untreated at crucial stages.

New developments and theories are being made, but the statistics remain fairly grim. For this reason many professionals are now looking at preventive measures. The new thinking seems to be that we need to stop behaviors before they begin.

Preventing Eating Disorders

The most promising prevention programs address eating disorders, body image, self-esteem, size prejudice and more (Berg, 1995). Preventive measures have the freedom of being more inclusive and for that reason, they have the ability to be more successful. Frances Berg (1995) has one of the most developed and comprehensive models for prevention. Berg advocates that we must replace the old model of weight and eating, with a new paradigm. In this new paradigm we must deal with all the interrelated issues in a healthy and positive way.

A unified health approach must focus on self truth and empowerment, normal eating balanced by active living, normal
growth for children, stable weight for adults, self-acceptance and self-respect, and an overall appreciation of size diversity, tolerance, and respect for others.

Media Literacy

Our study examines a powerful force in the development of poor body image in adolescent females: the media. It is estimated that the average person views four hundred to six hundred advertisements in print, television and billboards every day (Kilbourne 1995). It has been further documented that one in eleven of these advertisements contains a direct message about beauty (Kilbourne 1995). A recent report by the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women cited advertisements, including print and media, as being the number one perpetrator of depicting women as sex symbols and second class citizens (Kilbourne 1995).

The advertising industry has become a major contributing factor to the cultural definition of beauty. Many American may not realize the impact, however, such marketing has become lucrative business.

Currently, there are several programs that are beginning to collectively and individually work on ways to combat mass media imaging and foster the healthy development of body image in adolescent females. One example is the Media Education Foundation. MEF was founded in 1991 by Sut Jhaly and will soon be celebrating their tenth anniversary. The foundation was created in order to counter media images of violence against women. More
recently they have begun to broaden their efforts and are now also focusing on the representation of women in advertisements. At their tenth anniversary celebration speakers such as: Noam Chomsky, Jean Kilborne, Mary Pipher, Jackson Katz, and Sturat Hill will discuss this issue at length. Among the major issues they will be discussion, there will be discussion regarding raising the general public’s awareness of media literacy.

Media literacy focuses on educating the public so one would have the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate messages put out by a wide variety of media forms (Hobbs, 1998). Media awareness has been described as a protective factor against media bombardment. Many media literacy programs utilize impact mediation which organizes around several specific problem areas. These problem areas often include body image as well as sexual stero-typing, violence against women and several other social issues.

Media literacy programs have not yet begun in schools although there has been much discussion over the need for these programs in K-12 classrooms around the nation. Smaller scaled media literacy prgrams have sprouted in after-school prgrams that prefer hands-on learning with emphasis on experience, reading and writing over more conventional methods. The programs claim to give young people the tools to decipher media images in a more realistic light while at the same time raising skills and competency levels. The programs have garnered some success however, little is still known about the longer-term impacts on body image.
Jean Kilbourne (1995) advocates for the social lobbying against major advertisers of a generalized standard of beauty. Kilbourne and others advocate for organized efforts against major advertisers that publicly denounces the standardized images of female beauty.

Many organizations have begun programs to show their distaste with current standards of beauty. The Girls, Women, and Media Project have begun an event they call The National "Girlcott" which encourages women and girls of all ages and backgrounds to not attend movie theaters throughout the month of November. The point of the "girlcott" is to send a message to the movie industry regarding stereotypical images of women and standardized images of beauty. The Girls, Women and Media Project was founded just last year by public interest attorney and activist Tamara Sobel. The project focuses on research, education and commentary to spread messages of awareness regarding issues of women’s portrayal in media.

One example of a program that combines medial literacy, social awareness and strengths building is the locally based and founded New Moon Magazine for girls. New Moon Magazine was founded by Nancy Gruver for adolescent females and focuses on building strengths and positive esteem in developing adolescents. New Moon Magazine in partnership with several other organizations petitioned Gov. Jesse Ventura to declare May 16th as, "Turn Out Beauty Day."

Turn Out Beauty Day was created in response to the standardized media imaging of women. The magazine focused on
celebrating inner beauty in several ways. They spotlighted twenty-five young girls who range in ages from eight to fourteen. The twenty-five were chosen from one hundred and fifty nominees who come from all parts of the country and world. Each nominee has actively participated in some type of project that focuses on developing positive and healthy images of young women and at the same time, rejects the standard media images. The magazine also sponsored a march on the same day at Miller Hill Mall. The intent of the march was to bring more public awareness to the issues of body image and the impact that the media's depiction of women has on the development of healthy body image for adolescent females.

All of these programs are looking at and focusing on ways to aid the healthy development of young women's body image through programs that challenge mass produced images of women. This type of social activism is very important and should be combined with efforts on more individualized levels.

It is also extremely important that parents, teachers and others who work and are in frequent contact with young women look at ways to develop and maintain healthy body images in young women. Accepting one's body is the most vital factor in development of healthy body image and in self-esteem. Generally, when a young woman dislikes her body, she dislikes herself as well (Tschirhart-Sanford & Donovan, 1984). Working at self-acceptance is the first step one should take in efforts to increase positive body image.

Daily affirmations are one strategy to utilize in effort to increase self-acceptance for young women. Young women are
encouraged to use affirmations such as; "I like myself," "I am improving everyday," "I feed myself healthy food," "It is safe to feel my feelings," and "My body uses the food it needs" (Levine, 1994). These kinds of affirmations are best when used regularly and are stated simply and positively. Writing and/or saying affirmations to oneself each day can help one to begin to feel more positively about the self (Solomon 1990). Experts also encourage young women with eating and body issues to attend support groups to reach out to each other with similar issues (Solomon 1990).

Our society is filled with messages that come from television and print media. Many studies have shown the impact that they have, especially on the young who are still forming ideal and beliefs. Our study has also shown the effects of this impact. But, even in the mist of a media blitz it is possible to foster healthy body image in adolescent females. Programs such as New Moon Magazine and The Women, Girls and Media Project work for change on a broad level. Individually parents and educators can work with young women to improve body image and self-esteem that is essential for healthy social and mental development.

Significance to Social Work Profession

This topic is extremely important to the role of social work. The profession of social work call for sensitivity and commitment to populations that are vulnerable to developing poor body image. The research has also shown that the development of poor body image has serious effects on the emotional, mental and
physical well-being of affected girls. For this reason, it is important that social workers become aware of the special influences that relate to the conceptualization of body image in adolescents. We must work to construct positive body images in order to aid young women in the process of developing positive body images that will allow them to become physically, spiritually and mentally healthy.

Hypothesis

Viewing culturally specific media images of women influences adolescent females to accept the media’s standard of beauty.

Method

Population and Sample

The population for this study were adolescent girls from the Lincoln Park School seventh and eighth grade classes. Lincoln Park School is located in the west end of the city of Duluth. Currently there are approximately sixty-seven female students enrolled in each of these grade levels. All sixty-seven were invited to participate in the study. However, the sample included only sixteen due to requirements of parental consent and child assent forms. Twenty-three percent of the total sixty-seven percent participated in the study.

The ethnic background of the study population is mainly European American with a small number of Native American and African American females. The majority of the population that
surveyed come from families that live at or below poverty level. Permission was granted by the school principle to administer our survey to the seventh grade and eight grade females attending Lincoln Park School for the purpose of the study.

The issue of race and ethnicity were not addressed in this study due to the low minority rate of the students at Lincoln Park Elementary School. For purposes of this study, it was felt that asking a question pertaining to race and ethnicity would be obtaining information that would not be utilized. It would be important to emphasize that race and ethnicity does play an important role in understanding the issue of body image acceptance by adolescent females and should be included in a larger research study.

Research Design:

For this study we will use a one group pre-test post-test research design. All female students in the seventh and eighth grades, who had given consent, were asked to complete the survey. Participants were asked to respond to statements on a survey using a 7-point Likert scale scoring system. The survey was distributed, and one week later the participants were asked to view photographs of thin women who appear in the media. After viewing the photographs, they were then asked to take the original survey once again.

Operational Definitions and Data Collection:
The research question contain two variables, the independent variable, viewing of media images of female beauty and the dependent variable, young women's acceptance of the media's portrayal of beauty. In order to measure the variable of this study, a survey instrument developed by Judith Rabak-Wagner that has demonstrated both reliability and validity. A previous study that used the same instrument used a test-retest method to assess the instrument for reliability and found a reliability coefficient of .8228 (Rabak-Wagner, Eickhoff-Shemek, Kelly-Vance, 1998). Questions on the survey are aimed to determine if adolescent girls are satisfied or dissatisfied with how they perceive their own body.

The study defines media image of female beauty as women who are extremely thin. We selected photographs from magazines of the women who appear regularly on television commercials or in print advertisements.

In order to participate in the survey, females in seventh and eighth grades were required to obtain permission from their parents. A consent form was sent home with each female student invited to participate in the survey and was required to have the form signed by both the student and their parent/guardian. The consent form identified the name of the research study and gave detailed information regarding the purpose of the study.

To ensure confidentiality of the participants, all surveys were coded. We anticipated that some participants of the study would not be available both times the survey is distributed; in that event that survey response was taken from the study.
For the purpose of compiling the results due to low response rate of sixteen out of one hundred and thirty; strongly agree and agree have been combined. The same was done for disagree and strongly disagree. Survey respondents were asked to complete a pre-test survey and then one week later asked to take the same survey after viewing photographs of women in the media. The following table illustrates survey responses in percentage and frequency for each statement on the survey.

Results

Table 1
**Respondents Percentages and Frequencies of Pre-Test Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree (%)(n)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)(n)</th>
<th>No Opinion (%)(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult models have ideal body size</td>
<td>68%(11)</td>
<td>18%(3)</td>
<td>12%(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would be more attractive if they looked like models</td>
<td>31%(5)</td>
<td>49%(8)</td>
<td>18%(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men would be more attractive if they looked like models</td>
<td>37%(6)</td>
<td>24%(4)</td>
<td>37%(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be good for my health if I looked similar</td>
<td>49%(8)</td>
<td>43%(6)</td>
<td>6%(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be more satisfied if I looked like a model</td>
<td>62%(10)</td>
<td>30%(5)</td>
<td>6%(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements influence people</td>
<td>68%(11)</td>
<td>12%(2)</td>
<td>18%(3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

**Respondents Percentages and Frequencies of Post-Test Survey**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult models have ideal body size</td>
<td>62% (10)</td>
<td>24% (4)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would be more attractive if they looked like models</td>
<td>49% (8)</td>
<td>37% (6)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men would be more attractive if they looked like models</td>
<td>55% (9)</td>
<td>18% (3)</td>
<td>25% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be good for my health if I looked similar</td>
<td>56% (9)</td>
<td>30% (5)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be more satisfied if I looked like a model</td>
<td>68% (11)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
<td>18% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements influence people</td>
<td>62% (10)</td>
<td>24% (4)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of respondents who agreed that models have an ideal body size dropped by 8% at the post-test. After viewing the 20
photographs there was an increase of 18% in the number of respondents who felt women would be more attractive if they looked like models. Eighteen percent more respondents at the post-test were also more likely to agree that men would be more attractive if they looked like models. There was an increase of 7% in the post-test survey when asked if it would be good for their health if they looked similar to the women in the photographs. A 6% increase occurred in the post-test survey when respondents were questioned about personal satisfaction if they looked like women in the photographs. There was a decrease in pre-test to post-test response when asked if they felt advertisements have an influence on people. This was a decrease of 6% from pre-test to post-test. The other decrease occurred in response to the question of adult models having ideal body size.

Table 3 summarizes the results of t-tests comparing pre and post test scores for each item. The data does not indicate a significant difference in pre-test to post-test responses on any item. However, looking at the responses from pre-test to post-test per individual statement on the survey, there was an increase following the viewing of photographs. The increase in percentages moves in the direction of supporting the hypothesis that viewing culturally specific media images of women influences adolescent females to accept the media's standard of beauty. Table 3 shows pre-test and post-test results through the use of standard deviations and mean scores. This table will also show the one tail significance of each statement on the survey. There
is a need to emphasize that the mean scores do not move in the expected direction in most instances.

Table 3

**Calculated Mean Scores, Standard Deviations & One Tail Significance**

(n)= 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Test</th>
<th>Post-Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult models have ideal body size</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women would be more attractive if they looked like models</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men would be more attractive if they looked like models</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be good for my health if I looked similar</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be more satisfied if I looked like a model</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements influence people</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The definition of statistical significance is .05 according to social work standards for analyzing research data (Weinbach and Grinell). Using this criteria, our hypothesis was rejected for each individual statement. With the one tailed significance being above the required amount of .05 the data analysis results of our survey can not be considered to show a significant difference.

The statistical significance of the one tail test does not support our hypothesis that media does influence the weight-related attitudes of adolescent females. However, looking at individual responses one can see that an apparent change took place in the expected direction from pre-test to post-test when over all levels of agreement and disagreement were examined. Although our data analysis does not support our hypothesis, previous research projects on this topic have shown a significant correlation between media influence and body image. We contribute the contrast in data findings to the difference of our population size and sample in relation to similar surveys previously conducted on this topic.

The most startling aspect of the data strongly aligns to the findings in previous studies in respect to the percentages of adolescents that already agreed to media perception statements in pre-testing. For example 68% or eleven out of sixteen respondents agreed to the statement that adult models have the ideal body
size. Almost all statements from the pre-test showed almost half of the respondents agreed to statements of acceptance about the media's portrayal of attractiveness. It is our opinion based on the literature on this topic that this is because young women are already showing the effects of media imaging in the pre-testing phase; therefore the post-test change would not be significant.

The literature also examined the issue of vulnerability in regards to the acquirement of beliefs given by the media. Many of the young women showed their vulnerability by agreeing to pre-test statements in significantly high percentages. Several other young women showed their vulnerability by shifting from disagreeing to the statements in the pre-test and agreeing after viewing the photographs.

In most of the statements there was a relatively low "no opinion" response rate. However, one question did receive a much higher rate of "no opinion" responses than any other question. This statement was different from the others as it pertained to the attractiveness of males rather than females. This question also showed one of the lower agreement response rates. Based on the high rate of "no opinion" responses to a male oriented question, it seems apparent that females are more concerned about their own body perception.

Limitations

There were several limitations to our study. One of the first limitations relates to the small size of our study sample. Our low response rate occurred for several reasons. We theorize
that a low response rate occurred due to the requirement of parental consent and child assent forms that each respondent needed to bring back to their teacher in order to participate in the study. Forms were given to the possible participants a week prior to the date of the study. We also theorize that a higher response rate may have occurred if there would have been some kind of incentive given.

Another limitation, in retrospect, may have been due to the economic class of the respondents families. Literature on this topic shows that weight-related beliefs shift in accordance to the economic class of survey participants. Women from wealthy and middle class backgrounds tend to report more dissatisfaction with their bodies and more readily accept views given to them from the media than their lower-class counterparts (Wolf, 1992). Our sample was taken from a school that has lower economic status students.

A final limitation relates to the fact that we had no control group. All of our respondents are already living in an environment that is heavily influenced by media depiction’s of women. The images we showed them may not have had a drastic effect at that moment as they are not images that are unusual for them to view. Several studies have been able to show significant changes as they have been able to successfully create control groups in their studies. We were unable to create this comparison due to cultural factors and therefore this was a weakness of the study. Having only one week in between testing periods may have also influenced testing responses.
Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be offered from an assessment of the literature as well as results from our study. To begin, it is recommended that parents and educators work in partnership to emphasize strengths of adolescent females. It has been discussed previously in our literature review that a marked decline in body image and overall self-satisfaction occurs at the onset of puberty. This then becomes a particularly crucial time for strength building to begin. Parents and educators can build strengths by encouraging adolescent females to participate in healthy activities they enjoy such as: writing, drama or sports.

It is also recommended that adolescents are educated on how to decipher and interpret the images that they are in constant view of from the media. The literature discussed several programs including the Media Education Foundation (MEF) and The Girls, Women and Media Project. These initiatives and others like them are attempting to give young women the tools that they may need to understand that media representations may not necessarily show reality.

Focusing on individual strengths in partnership with media education can be an effective tool in efforts to establish and maintain positive body and self-image in adolescent females.
Summary and Conclusion

The issue of weight-related attitudes is crucial at the onset of puberty that can potentially result in low self and body image and precipitate individual engagement in many risky behaviors. This study attempted to examine the effect that the mass media has on the attainment of weight-related attitudes in adolescent females. The study and its researchers recognized the cultural climate of today's media industry, which is often described as extremely pervasive. For that reason, this connection was examined. Our study did not show a significant one tail data result. However what the study did show was important. The study did demonstrate that a high percentage of the respondents agreed to statements that may indicate individual respondent difficulties in weight-related attitudes. This supports the need for further studies on this topic.