

Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal

Volume 1 | Issue 4

Article 2

5-2006

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Recommended Citation

Kulow, Shera and Menne, Candice (2006) "Media & Self Perception," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 4 , Article 2.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/psych_journals/vol1/iss4/2

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Media & Self Perception

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There has been previous controversial research pertaining to self perception and the media. This study is an investigation which implies the relationship of the amount of television watched on people's negative self-image. Data was collected from 46 participants (23 men, 23 women) from Lindenwood University, who completed a self-image survey and reported the amount of television hours watched per week. Disproving the presented hypothesis, there was no relation between the amounts of television a subject watched on his/her positive or negative self-image. However, there are many factors that may explain the findings and the need for further research is highlighted.

For many decades now, people have become more occupied with their appearance. When people think of body image, they think about aspects of physical appearance, attractiveness, and beauty. Images of ideal bodies are everywhere. Female actresses and models are becoming younger, taller, and significantly thinner, whereas the males are becoming taller and more muscularly defined. There is a message being sent out to viewers of television programs and movies about thinness, muscularity, dieting, and beauty. Most often television is portraying an unattainable body image; in return these messages are telling the average person, the viewer, they are in need of adjustment and his/her body is an object to be perfected. Self image is a mental representation of ourselves, which influences our feelings, behaviors, self-esteem, and psychology. People

of society may likely internalize these stereotypes and begin to judge themselves based upon such standards. Many people continuously compare themselves to others, compete for the ideal body, and desire the utmost beauty. The majority of bodies seen on television are out of reach, thus making the audience want it more. There are multiple subliminal messages that television sends that most people do not realize they are being affected by.

There have been many studies focusing on body dissatisfaction, how television influences behaviors and the impact media has on body image, but not strictly on how the amount of television watched might be related to a negative self image while incorporating both genders and multiple ethnic groups. One study primarily compared gender differences in adolescence on body image and body changing strategies, such as losing weight or increasing muscle. This study revealed that girls were more dissatisfied with their bodies than boys and also engaged in more activities with the goal to lose weight, whereas boys were more likely to engage in strategies to increase their muscles (McCabe, Ricciardelli, Mellor, & Ball, 2005). McCabe et al. (2005) also demonstrated that girls reported more perceived messages in the media about weight loss while boys noticed media messages about increasing muscles. While acknowledging the significant gender differences in body dissatisfaction and increase in behaviors to improve ones body image, we are still curious as to what develops such image dissatisfaction and body changing strategies.

Spencer Eth (2002) suggests that “the potential negative impact of the media... has been a serious concern for several decades” (p. 301). Eth published a commentary on

the relation of television images and psychological symptoms such as stress, aggression, and depression. A survey found that children who watched more than six hours of television each day reported more trauma symptoms and aggressive behaviors (Singer, Slovak, Frierson & York, 1998). Pertaining to the viewing of the television coverage of the September 11th attack, Eth (2002) reports a definite correlation between hours watched and percentage of adults suffering “substantial stress reactions.” Due to television's adverse effects, even the American Medical Association (2006) advised that television viewing be limited to no more than one or two hours per day. Knowing how greatly violence and trauma displayed through television is related to stress, aggressiveness and depression, we propose that negative self images are also related to the far-fetched ideal body images shown constantly on television.

Media exposure has been known to affect adolescents and young adults in a negative way (Becker, 2004). Yet, the question is, does it have such an affect that it causes negative self image in adolescents and young adults? It is common to look to television for entertainment, which is what advertiser say is their only purpose. However, too often people see these ideologies on the big screen and use them for guidance or assistance in developing their identities. In the same encoding process, people learn the importance of self-presentation, yet in a distorted fashion. They also begin to believe that with dedication and hard work it is possible to attain their desires and reconfigure their bodies, which likely leads to disappointment and negativity. Subjects in an interview study, indicated that the appearances of characters and values portrayed on television provide a base for identity (Becker). Even the popularity of commercials advertising

exercise equipment is linked to the notion of increasing physical activity to lose weight and diet. Much attention these days is focused on new fad diets and ways to obtain that ideal body. In a study conducted in Fiji, where television was introduced only three years prior, the concept of modifying ones diet gained great popularity (Becker). In the same study there were reports of frequent comments on the admiration of the appearances of television characters, focusing on their thinness and apparel. This supports that watching television increases a desire to emulate characters portrayed on television. If this were true, the possible consequences of constantly viewing such unreachable illusions are; poor self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, eating disorder symptoms and even poor mental and physical health. All these aspects form a negative self-image.

In another study, conducted by Tan and Tan, the researchers hypothesized more television viewing is accompanied by low self-esteem among black more so than white audiences. The results of this study were significant by rejecting the null hypothesis. The researchers found a negative correlation between an African American participant's self-esteem and the amount of television viewing. The problem with this study is the content of the media in which blacks had constant exposure to white-oriented television programs. The effects of the television programs on self-image could change if there was more exposure of black media, such as Black Entertainment Television (BET), Family Matters, etc. Also the entire sample population of African Americans may not have had a television as a form of media to influence their perception of themselves. During the era in which this study was conducted, African Americans were viewed as low social status, which is likely to have skewed their perception of themselves in a negative manner.

If as we hypothesized, the amount of hours a person spends watching television is directly correlated to their self image, then we can safely conclude that television has a negative effect on self-perception. Thus, we predicted that the more hours a person watches television will affect their self-image to be negatively influenced by television. The effects of the media have been studied extensively and many researchers have come to opposing conclusions. The purpose of this study is to reexamine the findings of these studies. Many researchers have found a negative effect of the media on self-image but have not tested a combined participant sample population consisting of males, females, and different ethnicities. In this study we wish to reexamine the findings of previous studies. The fact that television has become more influential in today's society, may also have a more negative influence on a person's self-image.

Method

Participants

In order to determine the accuracy of the hypothesis the experimenters asked 46 participants to complete a study, 23 men and 23 women undergraduate students who participated in the study on their own free will. Two female researchers randomly approached potential participants at the Lindenwood campus, on the third floor in the commons area of the Spellman Center. The participants recruited were from different ethnicity, were either juniors or senior standing, and attended Lindenwood University.

Materials

In the study a questionnaire was used to assess how much a person watches television (Appendix A) and a survey examined the self-confidence about their self-

image (Appendix B). The experimenters provided a table, chair, questionnaire, survey, and pen in order for the participant to complete the study as comfortable as possible.

Recruitment. Upon each approach the researchers followed the steps of a recruitment script (Appendix C) that was read to the student. First the potential participants were politely asked if they had a few minutes to participate in a brief study. If the participants agreed to participate, then they were read the following description; “In this study, you will be asked to complete two tasks. First, you will be given a short questionnaire designed to assess your self-perception. Then, you will be asked by the experimenter to respond to questions pertaining to your television preferences. The entire procedure should take no more than 15 minutes of your time”. If the participant was still willing to continue he/she was asked to read and sign the provided Informed Consent Form.

Informed Consent Form. The Informed Consent Form enlisted the possibility of some participants that may experience personal discomfort and sensitivity. It also explained how the participants could leave at any time throughout the study without penalty and it form was used as permission to take the data from their questionnaire and survey and apply it to the final data as a whole. Every participant volunteered knowing the only compensation was the gratitude of the researchers for taking the time to participate in the study.

Survey. The participants were asked to be seated in a provided chair and table then given instructions to provide a clear understanding pertaining to the tasks that were to follow. The participant was then asked to complete a short survey containing 24

questions about how he/she perceived himself/herself. Then the participant was asked not to contemplate answers for too long, because the first instinctive answer was preferred and to answer every question in complete honesty for valid results.

Questionnaire. After the participant completed the questionnaire the researcher began Part II of the study by asking him/her the interview questions pertaining to television preferences, which were listed in the instructions. The survey enlisted the three questions the participant was going to be asked in the interview. The first question asked by a researcher was “What are your favorite television shows and/or stations that you prefer to watch?” the second question asked, “What is the duration for each show/station watched?” and the final question asked the participant to “Estimate the amount of times per week you spend watching each specific show/station?”. After the participants read the instructions and fully understood the procedure, they were given the questionnaire.

Feedback Letter. Participants were then debriefed, about the nature of the study and given a feedback form. The feedback form included purpose of the study and the contact information in order for participants to obtain the results at the completion of the study.

Results

In order to figure out if the media has any relationship on a person’s self-perception, the experimenters used the Pearson Correlation and a one tailed test. The SPSS program was used to analyze the data to determine whether there is a relationship between self-perception and the amount of television viewed. The data rejects the null

hypothesis by stating there is no significance between the amount of television watched and a person's self-perception; therefore there is no statistical significant difference between the data sets. The results revealed that the two variables were virtually unrelated ($r = .009$). All of the data was calculated from the participants' results. In order to calculate the data on the questionnaire, the Likert Scale was used and the answers were assigned to a certain value. Each questions was assigned a number depending on the strength of their self-perception (-2-highly negative, -1-negative, 0-neutral, 1-positive, 2-highly positive). Also any participants who circled any dissatisfactory with their body (Appendix A- Question 23) received a -1 for each. To calculate the amount of television the participants watched, the experimenters added all of the hours mentioned and then applied the results to the sample population.

Discussion

There are multiple reasons on why we may have had to fail to reject the null hypothesis. Some of the reasoning behind why there is no significance between the two sets of data is many people may not be fully truthful while answering the questionnaire. They may want to fool themselves in believing that they have more confidence in themselves instead of accepting how they truly feel about themselves and/or they may be rushed and not paying close attention to how the questions were written. The participants may not have fully understood the questions and may have felt forced to answer questions falsely or quickly, both which are likely factors to impair the data. The participants could have also felt better or worse on the day they conducted the

questionnaire. Many people could have a lot of intrinsic variation throughout their days, such as not feeling well, unattractive, and attractive, etc.

In order to increase the power of the study, there needs to be an increase in the sample population. The future experimenters should reconsider using self-report and possibly have the participants view a short clip of a movie that portrays ideal body images. After viewing the clip then the experimenters would then hand the participants the questionnaire in order to get the most accurate and immediate results. This suggestion mentioned above would serve a better tool enabling for more accurate research.

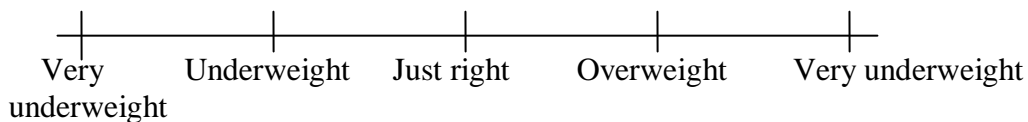
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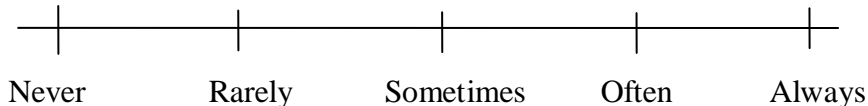
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Walsh, D.A., Goldman, L.S., & Brown, R. (1996). *Physician guide to media violence*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association.

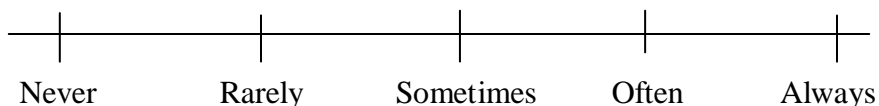
8) How do you feel about your weight?



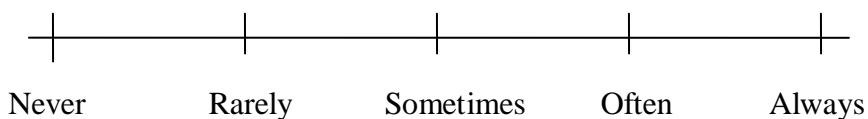
9) How often do you feel pressure to lose weight?



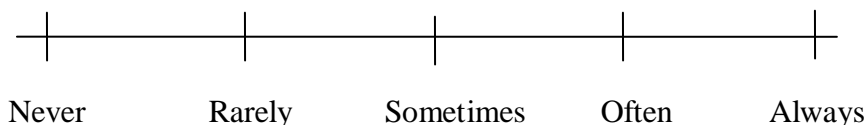
10) How often are you terrified about being overweight?



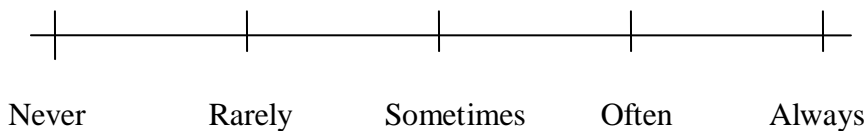
11) How often are you aware of the caloric content of the food you eat?



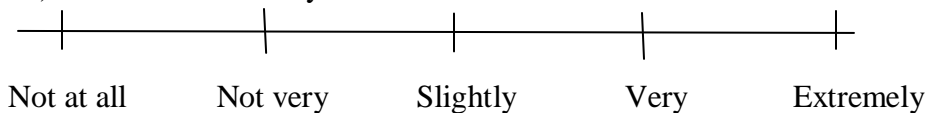
12) How often do you exercise strictly to burn calories and/or to build muscle mass?



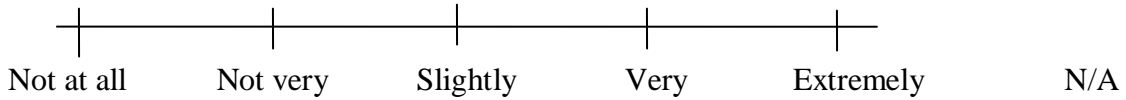
13) How often do you engage in dieting behavior?



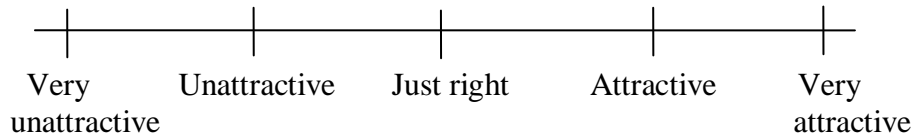
14) How confident do you feel in social situations?



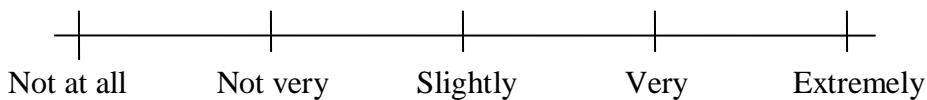
15) How confident do you feel about revealing your body in front of your partner?



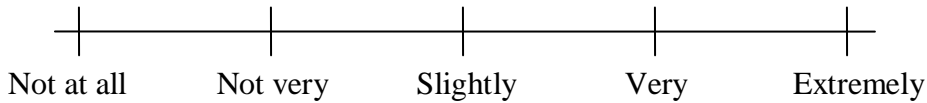
16) The opposite sex would describe you as:



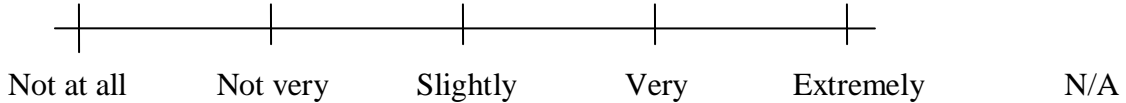
17) How positive do you feel when you choose an outfit to wear?



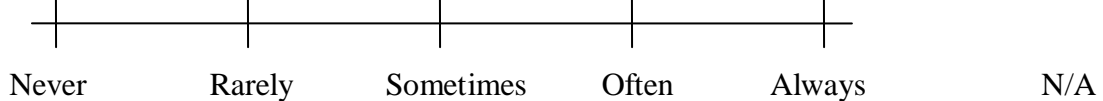
18) How confident do you feel when approached by the opposite sex?



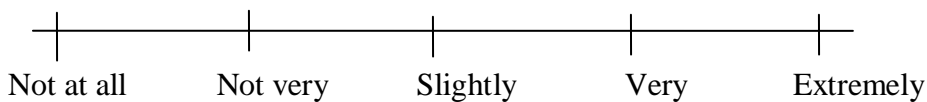
19) How comfortable do you feel when you are engaged in sexual activity?



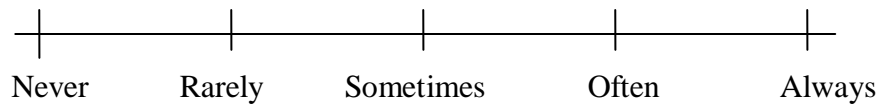
20) How often do you use tobacco products, such as cigarettes to control your weight?



21) How satisfied are you when you look in the mirror?



22) How often are you teased about your appearance?



23) Circle all that apply, I am dissatisfied with my:

- A. abdomen
- B. muscle tone
- C. body weight
- D. overall appearance
- E. arms
- F. chest
- G. hips
- H. butt
- I. legs

Appendix B

Self-Report Interview Survey and Questions

Participant Code Number: _____ Date: _____ Exper. Int.: _____

<i>Television Shows/Stations</i>	<i># of times watched per week</i>	<i>Length of show: One Hour</i>	<i>Length of show: Half hour</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			

Questions:

1. What are your favorite television shows?
2. What is the duration for each show/station watched, 30 minutes long or 1 hour long?
3. Estimate the amount of time per week you spend watching each specific show/station.

Appendix C

Recruitment Script

Each potential subject will be asked:

- “Do you have a few minutes to participate in a brief study?”

If they agree to participate in the study, then they will be read the following description:

- In this study, you will be asked to complete two tasks. First, you will be given a short questionnaire designed to assess your self-perception. Then, you will be asked by the experimenter to respond to questions pertaining to your television preferences. The entire procedure should take no more than 15 minutes of your time.