

The Tyra Banks Project:
An Analysis of Supermodel Perceptions and Development of Eating Disorders in Young Women

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Abstract

For many years women have compared themselves and set impossible standards for their appearance based on their perceptions of supermodel portrayals in the media. According to Grabe, Ward, and Shibley Hyde (2008) approximately fifty percent of girls and undergraduate women report being dissatisfied with their bodies. This research will serve to educate women on the dangers of striving for supermodel standards. Through a literature review and analysis of an existing quantitative study conducted by Slice et. al. (1994) on the prevalence of eating disorder symptomatology in women, we will design and distribute an online survey to college aged women assessing their perceptions of supermodels and the effect this has on body image and potential eating disorder development. Using these results we will strive to replicate the results of Rucker and Cash therefore proving that there is a positive correlation between the value placed on supermodels and the chances of developing an eating disorder.

Literature Review

When taking into account the vast amount of media images that one encounters each day, perceptions of oneself may be directly affected. Studies show that between four and nine percent of college women are suffering from professionally diagnosed eating disorders (Fitzsimmons-Craft, Harney, Koehler, Danzi, Riddell, and Bardone-Cone, 2011). This alarming statistic is further complicated when taking into account the fifty percent of women who are dissatisfied with their bodies (Grabe, Ward, and Shibley Hyde, 2008). The media, specifically portrayals of ideal beauty and body type, create unrealistic and unattainable standards for the average woman to strive for (Garbe, et. al. 2011). Often times in the media, advertisers will feature beautiful, thin and flawless looking models in campaigns supporting health regimens. We believe that individuals depicted as healthy and desirable are a contributing factor to young women expressing early signs and inclinations towards development of eating disorders.

The shrinking size of fashion models can be shown as cause of the development of eating disorders in normal women, as the portrayal of “average body size” gets smaller and smaller in media messages (Foley Speck, Gray, Ahrens 2004). Since women are constantly bombarded

with images of beauty that are nearly impossible to attain it can be hypothesized that they will stop at no lengths to achieve their ideal body size (Foley, et. al. 2004). Our study hopes to align with the results of Eric Stice and colleagues (1994), in which quantitative survey methods were used to determine that a woman's perception of herself was correlated to their perception of supermodel beauty. Perceptions of supermodel beauty can form from observing modeling ads in magazines, television commercials and programming along with billboards and displays in stores. By examining the types of models that are feature in these different forms of media and discerning the number of these messages that women are exposed to, the effect of such images of beauty will become apparent (Reaves, Bush-Hutchon, Park, Yun 2009).

The increase in body dissatisfaction can lead to women becoming predisposed to develop an eating disorder. According to Stice and colleagues, body dissatisfaction increased by 4.8% as the amount of exposure increased (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, Stein 1994). This number is crucial to our analysis due to the fact that our current survey will be based upon the same format and questioning style used in this research. Since this study was conducted we predict that these numbers will have fluctuated due to increased media portrayals of even thinner models. We also believe, therefore, that our results will fall directly in line with these findings. The symptomatology associated with eating disorders begins to show at a 43.5% diagnosable rate through analysis of survey data (Stice et. al. 1994) When women are exposed to "idealized images" at a young age, they tend to compare themselves to such images, which leads to a decreased satisfaction with their own attractiveness (Rudd & Lennon 2000). In order to combat the problem of eating disorders in young women as they relate to their perceptions of supermodel

portrayals in the media, further research on the correlation between the two variables warrants attention.

According to Cohen-Tovée, Emery, Mason, McCluskey & Tovée (1997), “Supermodels have been criticised for being a bad role model for young women because of their unnatural thinness, and have even been linked to the increase in eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia”. Additional studies also used quantitative data to compare the body mass index of fashion models in comparison with anorexic, bulimic, and “normal” women. Quantifying these results allows for concrete assumptions to be made about the direct impact perceptions of unnatural thinness has on women. This data found that fashion models, having a BMI range between 17-57, have the lowest range of all groups of women. Anorexic women in this sample were between 14-72 BMI, bulimic women averaged between 23-66 BMI, and normal women averaged in the 21-86 BMI range. According to the Center for Disease Control, the average BMI for a healthy adult is 18.5-24.9. This shows us how unhealthy it is for women to aspire for this body image. In order to fix the problems of negative body perception in young women, education on the topic is necessary. It doesn’t matter whether or not

Birkeland, Thompson, & Herbozo (2005) have written that, “Body image researchers have repeatedly showed that women who view thin-ideal images in the lab experience lower body satisfaction than women who view neutral images”. After bombarding one group of women with thin-ideal images, and a control group with neutral images, the researchers found that women shown thin-ideal images displayed lower body satisfaction on a complete assessment of body-image. Studies have shown a 60% decrease in eating disorder onset symptoms, and a

decrease in overall body dissatisfaction because of exposure to stylized media images (Stice, Rohde, Shaw, Nathan Marti, 2013).

Research indicates “[...]that college women compare themselves to thin ideal media images just as frequently as they compare themselves to peers” (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011). The way media sexually objectifies women’s bodies in advertisements has had a negative effect on the mentality of women in society. From these advertisements, women and men are taught that sexually objectifying a woman’s body is socially acceptable (Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2011). If they don’t reach this social standard, they perceive themselves to be “abnormal” and begin to develop the signs of an eating disorder (Allaire Downs, 2004). There is a need to further research the effects of social comparison, objectification, and gratification theories to get a better understanding that will allow for more effective treatments and preventions.

There have been studies focused on providing information concerning healthy diet and exercise education to at risk college women. These four hour prevention programs are aimed at college women between the ages of 17 and 22 (Eric Stice, Paul Rohde, Heather Shaw, and C. Nathan Marti, 2013). with similar body mass index, which was bordering normal weight towards being overweight. They often exclude women who have been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder. The purpose of these programs are to promote long lasting healthy alterations to diet , physical activity, and overall nutrition. through social interactions instead of using brochures. The participants had follow up post tests to study the effects of the intervention group after six months, one year, and two years. Results showed that after two years, there was a 60% decrease in eating disorder onset symptoms (Eric

Stice, Paul Rohde, Heather Shaw, and C. Nathan Marti, 2013). This significant decrease in at risk college women gives hope to developing future treatments to help college women struggling with eating disorders.

Projected Timeline

November 24, 2014: Develop survey and submit for approval by the IRB.

December 30, 2014: Have survey reviewed and approved.

January 5, 2015: Begin distribution of online survey on Eastern Michigan University's SONA systems.

January, 2014: Advertise online survey via posters around the main campus and the main website.

February: Collect media advertisements and body image portrayals for presentation.

March: Prepare the basic concepts and outline of the presentation.

April: Expand literary review and other qualitative data. Interview a model.

June 15, 2015: Collect survey data from Southeastern Michigan colleges/universities and begin analysis.

July 30, 2015: Draw conclusions from data, and make charts and graphs to display results.

August, 2015: Compile research and data to form a draft.

September, 2015: Have draft reviewed and edited. Create final research paper for submission.

October, 2015: Submit project

Research Budget

Items:

- IRB software \$70
- Office supplies \$100
- Printing and copying \$150
- Survey Participants contest \$50
- Advertising \$150
- Traveling Expenses \$100

Total: \$620

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