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The Effects of Daily Media Consumption on Adolescent Girls

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Abstract:

Media infiltrates society so heavily that it can seem impossible to go an entire hour without viewing several different platforms of media. This paper seeks to explore the effects that daily media consumption has on teenage girls, as well as which types of media can be a foundation for eating disorders, self-esteem problems, loss of identity and heightened jealousy. An additional focus is how much of each media type can be consumed before these effects are evident. Through examining studies that investigate the effects of Facebook, music videos, fashion magazines and television shows, evidence suggests that adolescent girls experience negative effects similar to those listed above. Facebook can increase feelings of envy and life dissatisfaction; music videos can twist the perception of healthy sexual relationships; fashion magazines can be correlated with eating disorders, and television can bring about a loss of one's self-esteem. By heightening parental involvement in adolescent's media intake, false perceptions of reality in body image or sexual relationships can be eliminated.

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Throughout recent decades, the use of media-based technology has heightened society's global connection. Media helps maintain friendships with loved ones that live across the globe and increases the ability to work away from home. However, there are limits to the benefits of media-based technologies.

Research has shown that media can damage relationships and increase crime (Helfgott, 2015; Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014). The damaging effects of the media touch youths specifically; for them, social norms are developed from what they see in the media rather than in real life (Ayala, Mickens, Galindo & Elder, 2007).

Teenagers are no strangers to the media. In fact, adolescents in the United States of America spend an average amount of 6.75 hours a day using some form of media — most commonly television — and this usage typically occurs when a parent is otherwise occupied in another task (Roberts, 2000). As well, when teenagers graduate from high school, statistics show that they have spent as much, if not more, time watching the television than learning in the classroom throughout their whole lives (Roberts, 2000). While it is unknown exactly what the teenager is watching, research highlights that the most popular television shows among teenagers contain 6.7

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sexual scenes per hour, higher than other demographics (Wright, 2009) There are risks involved with watching a highly sexualized show that contains unrealistic body images, one of which is that women are portrayed as sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). These hours in front of the television with no parental involvement can mean that youths may perceive all kinds of unrealistic lifestyles without filter.

Some believe that media consumption has increased, but this could be attributed to the multiple technologies that fall under the umbrella of “media” nowadays. Looking back in time, media was not used as much as it is today, but this could be due to how few media outlets there were (Mayer, 1993). In 1979, newspapers were the most common outlet of media (Mayer, 1993; Roberts, 2000). In today’s world, adolescents have access to much more exciting forms of media, like internet, movies, video games and social media. Even when using one form of media, young people’s appetite for consumption may still not be satiated, as 15% of total media time is spent using two or more media outlets concurrently (Roberts, 2000). Ultimately, it’s clear that the increase in media channels have elicited greater use among teenagers.

Although everybody can experience the effects of

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media use, this paper will focus on the effect that media has on adolescent girls. Adolescence is a period of life during which humans discover their identity, so their minds are very impressionable. Because of this, images depicted in the media can be seen as the standard for normality and popularity (Chia & Gunther, 2006; Young & Jordan, 2013). Females of this age are not the only people to experience the sinister effects of media consumption, but a lot of research has been dedicated to studying this specific demographic. The negative effects associated with media use may come because of a genetic predispositions associated with developmental age or gender (Baker et al., 2009; Culbert, Burt, McGue, Iancono, & Klump, 2009; Eliot, 2004;). However, adolescent girls could be consuming more of the types of media that lead to dangerous effects, or that trigger negative effects because of their genetic predisposition. These dangerous effects result in negative behaviors like disordered eating or unhealthy sexual behaviors (Ayala et al., 2007; Chia & Gunther, 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Rather than focus on genetic predispositions, this analysis will seek to understand the role media plays in eliciting harmful effects.

This paper will focus on how much of the media's

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influence can be consumed before it can be considered “unhealthy” and what types of media are more commonly found to instigate harmful effects. However, it shouldn’t be concluded that the recent rise in media consumption will only have negative effects. But, the appropriate amount of usage and the risks that are run with each media outlet must be considered. Specifically, Facebook can lead to social comparison, music videos can lead to unhealthy or harmful sexual behaviors, fashion magazines can lead to eating disorders and television can lead to a lower self-esteem (Becker, 2004; Mabe, Forney, & Keel, 2014; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington & Davies, 2007; Shaw, 1995).

Facebook

Having online friendships is positively correlated with life satisfaction ratings—that finding does not seem to be a negative outcome of Facebook use (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012). However, recent research is beginning to note the potential hazards of certain types of Facebook use. One study found that most Facebook users are predominantly females who have a desire to look at the profiles of other females of the same

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age range (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012). When compared to women who infrequently use Facebook, it has been noted that higher feelings of jealousy are present in women who often use Facebook (Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009). This could be because Facebook is not only used for social interaction but also self-expression (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012). Women are also more likely to use Facebook for the purpose of impression management—trying to control the way other Facebook users perceive them (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012). Those with disordered eating behaviors are also more likely to un-tag themselves from photos perceived as undesirable for their profile (Mabe, Forney, & Keel, 2014). This shows impression management, a behavior that adolescent girls can fall into with compulsive Facebook use. Hence, the representations on the site may not always be accurate.

Commonly, most people use the Facebook app on their smart phone multiple times a day. Research shows that the average college student can spend up to 100 minutes on Facebook, especially looking at photos (Mabe et al., 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014). Research has found that there are higher rates of eating disorders among girls who use Facebook weekly (Mabe et al., 2014). This is attributed to the fact that Facebook gives

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rise to two pressures that reinforce the belief that thin is best: peers and media (Mabe et al., 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014).

Facebook photos most likely account for disordered eating because of the ability to edit them and because of the reinforcing nature of “likes” (Mabe et al., 2014). If an insecure teenage girl posts an unedited picture that receives minimal “likes,” it is possible that this outcome can reinforce her insecurity. Whereas, if a “popular” girl posts an unrealistically edited photo that receives a plethora of “likes,” her behavior has been reinforced and is more likely to be repeated. The insecure girl might see the edited image of the popular girl, and think that having skin as flawless or a waist as thin is what she needs to do to obtain “likes”. This is one example of how Facebook use can lead to disordered eating among teenage girls. Studies also found that great emphasis is placed on receiving positive comments or “likes” on photos (Mabe et al., 2014). Dissatisfaction can be felt when these positive reinforcements do not come, a dissatisfaction that can lead to eating disorders. It can be said that just Internet use as a whole could increase a female’s unhealthy body perceptions. However, studies have found that when compared to a control Internet group, Facebook use is correlated with a concern with

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bodyweight (Mabe et al., 2014; Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2015). Furthermore, it has also been found that it is the peer-comparison aspect of Facebook that can lead girls to feel dissatisfied with their own image (Mabe et al., 2014). Thus we can see that Facebook's aim to bring friends together can also backfire when people compare themselves to their friends.

It has been established that Facebook use could have a relationship with women's body image, but how it affects overall well-being is a similar topic of study. It has been found that overall well-being and life satisfaction decreases with increased Facebook use (Kross et al., 2013; Satici & Uysal, 2015). Researchers texted their participants up to five times a day for a total of 14 days with questions about life satisfaction (Kross et al., 2013). The questions they asked their participants surrounded physical and cognitive satisfaction with their lives after Facebook use (Kross et al., 2013). More complex than just attributing it to "Facebook use", multiple factors like "Facebook friends, perceived supportiveness of ones online network, depressive symptomology, loneliness and self-esteem" all contribute to the way that Facebook makes its users feel (Kross et al., 2013, pg. 1). We can see that it is not the initial Facebook use that decreases well-being, but rather the deciding factors

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are the pre-disposed life situation and happiness that the user is already subject to. Facebook can either increase or decrease according to the levels of happiness that are already present. Studies show that low life satisfaction can be a predictor of Facebook overuse (Satici & Uysal, 2015). This means that low levels of life satisfaction and Facebook use have a circular relationship—both influence one another.

Facebook can be central to young people's social lives, so it is difficult to say that it must be boycotted in order to maintain overall well-being. It could be almost impossible to completely avoid Facebook, but if youths were more educated on the risks of such use, problems with self-esteem and life satisfaction could decrease. Certain boundaries should be put in place to ensure positive Facebook use.

Adding to these findings, studies have shown that Facebook use can be directly related to mood. When compared to no Facebook use, it has been found that even 10 minutes of Facebook use each day can result in a more negative mood (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014). It seems counterproductive to use a social networking site designed to connect us with friends if it results in a more negative mood. If negative moods become

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frequent, they can become negative attitudes and negative outlooks. This is evident in how Facebook use has also been positively correlated with women's dissatisfaction with their face, hair and skin (Fardouly et al., 2015). Interestingly, it is not correlated with women's weight dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015). This could be explained with the high statistic of women who only post photos displaying themselves from only their shoulders and up (Fardouly et al., 2015). Without many images of the whole body, overall weight is not the focus of women's dissatisfaction. Still, Facebook clearly has an impact on women's perceptions of their bodies, manifested through moods and levels of satisfaction.

Additionally, depressive moods can be brought on as a result of different types of Facebook use. Passive Facebook use can be defined as using Facebook to view other people's profiles, while active Facebook use can be defined as using Facebook to post images or inform others about one's own life. After conducting a six-month study on 12-19 year olds, experimenters found that passive Facebook use increased feelings of loneliness and depressive moods, while active Facebook use decreased feelings of loneliness and depressive moods (Frison & Eggermont, 2015). These feelings are brought

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about regardless of whether the participant was using Facebook in a public or in a private setting (Frison & Eggermont, 2015). Studies have also looked into the effect that perceived social support on Facebook can have on adolescents. Results found that a lack of social support, or negative social support, strongly correlated with depressive moods (McCloskey, Iwanicki, Lauterback, Giammittorio, & Maxwell, 2015). Researchers concluded that Facebook cannot be used as a therapeutic intervention for depression (McCloskey et al., 2015). Thus it can be concluded that the way adolescent girls use Facebook, as well as what support they feel while online, can have a negative impact on depressive moods.

These results could be accounted for by another variable perhaps not taken into consideration; maybe those adolescents who are already feeling lonely feel no reason to post anything to Facebook, and as a result do not receive any “likes” or comments, and thus the loneliness increases. On the other hand, those who feel that they have a supportive network around them may have the confidence to post images and in turn receive feedback, thus increasing the belief that people care about them. While this study does not specify how much time can be spent using Facebook before these effects may occur, it

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does highlight an important concept: the way Facebook is used.

From each of these studies, it could be concluded that Facebook can lead users, especially adolescent girls, to feel envy towards other girls and to be dissatisfied with their own body image or life. This is because it can lead woman to make peer comparisons as well as reinforce the idea that comments and “likes” are an important validation. Ultimately, Facebook is a tool that can yield positive and negative effects dependent on how it is used.

Music Videos

Music videos are a more specific genre of media when compared to television or video games, so the effects that they have on audiences are only recently beginning to be studied. It seems as if sex and music videos go hand-in-hand. In fact, two-thirds of music videos contain sexual content and erotic behavior (Oosten, Petter, & Valkenburg 2015). Music videos by nature are shorter than films or time spent on Facebook. Usually, music videos last about 3-4 minutes. Exposure to sexual and violent content does not take long because of the shortness of the videos, meaning that even small amounts of intake yields high amounts of objectification (DuRant et al.,

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1997; Peterson et al., 2007). Even brief amounts of exposure can lead to higher amounts of sexual permissiveness before marriage and increased acceptance of anti-social behavior (Peterson et al., 2007). Hence, it's important that young women know the responsible way to watch music videos.

Music videos also reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. Typically, females are shown in submissive sexual roles while males are more dominant and sexually aggressive (Peterson et al., 2007; van Oosten et al., 2015). Females are even depicted as mere props to the overall *mise en scène* of the video (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). Opinions about the definition of a healthy sexual relationship are being based on images of women who are being coerced into sex and images of female token resistance - the belief that when a woman says no to sexual advances, she is really just playing 'hard to get' (van Oosten et al., 2015). During adolescence, teenagers are forming ideas and impressions on sexual matters and these music videos may lead to the idea that these kinds of imbalanced sexual relationships are the norm (van Oosten et al., 2015). It's clear that young people — and especially young women — can quickly internalize the gender stereotypes represented in music videos.

In music videos, gender stereotypes are not the only

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representation of how women should act. Studies have found that when adolescent girls watch sexualized music videos, their beliefs in misogyny and male sexual dominance as the norm increase. Commonly, when adolescent females repeatedly see images like this, they learn that if they express their sexual desires explicitly, they are “bad girls” and instead should wait for sexual advances from males (van Oosten et al., 2015).

Another experiment showed female college students a highly sexualized music video or a non-sexualized music video, then rated their perceptions of blame in a date-rape scenario (Burgess & Burpo, 2012). It was found that the girls who viewed a sexualized music video blamed the female victim of the date rape as being responsible for the event (Burgess & Burpo, 2012). This shows that sexual content in music videos leads young women to accept that men are not in control of their sexual desires and it is a woman’s fault if men desire them. Essentially these videos imply that women are objects designed to satisfy men’s sexual needs (van Oosten et al., 2015). Clearly, the misogynistic lessons learned by women are infiltrating their beliefs and actions.

In regards to genre, researchers have considered the effect music videos may have on African-American teenage

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girls, particularly rap music videos (Peterson et al., 2007). Rap music is most commonly associated and performed by African-Americans. So as young African-American girls watch these videos and see members of their own culture achieving fame through the means portrayed, they perceive highly sexualized images as the norm (Peterson et al., 2007). Common themes among rap music videos are “economic deprivation, racial injustice, social isolation, dysfunctional families, violence, hopelessness, pain, and struggle for survival” (Peterson et al., 2007, p. 1158). Recent studies have even shown that rap music and rock music contain more violence and use of weapons than other genres of music (DuRant et al., 1997). When African-American teenage girls watch rap music videos, research found that they are more likely to have multiple sexual partners, become engaged with drug and alcohol use, become involved with boys who do drugs and be tested positive for a sexually transmitted disease (Peterson et al., 2007). As seen, the false realities of music videos have very real effects on girls’ lives, regardless of ethnicity.

We can note that not every music video will damage the viewer. The types of music videos that are most likely to show sexual objectification are hip-hop, R&B, rap and pop, so these

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are the genres to take extra care with when viewing. However, these genres of music are among the most popular in today's music world. It can be difficult to avoid, as they are usually the genre's that comprise the top 100. Negative beliefs about healthy sexual relationships can come about after minimal exposure to sexualized music videos. These beliefs can lead to negative sexual behaviors, specifically date rape, belief in female token resistance and body dissatisfaction (Peterson et al., 2007; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). Ultimately, music videos are powerful in the ways they change how women perceive themselves and their relationships with men.

Fashion Magazines

Another media outlet that is associated with negative effects are fashion magazines. A high percentage of women struggle with self-loathing and eating disorders due to involvement in the fashion industry. For some women, even seeing the images of the thin models on the pages of magazines or catalogues, advertisements or shop windows gives them negative feelings about their bodies (Stice, Spangler, & Agras, 2001; Wiseman, Sunday, & Becker, 2005). Female models are now thinner than 98% of American women (Wiseman et al., 2005). Some studies

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have gone further to say that these effects are most obvious amongst adolescent girls, and girls with a pre-existing eating disorder, negative body image or lack of social support network (Stice et al., 2001; Wiseman et al., 2005). Not only this, but it has been found that viewing thin models can decrease women's satisfaction with their bodies and with their lives (Wiseman et al., 2005). Clearly, magazines, while small, carry a lot of weight.

When considering the effects of magazines, body dissatisfaction appears to be greater in adolescent girls than in adult women when viewing "adult" fashion images (Shaw, 1995). Researchers attribute this finding to how teenage girls are still developing their identity (Shaw, 1995). When adolescents see adult women portrayed in a certain way, it can become appealing to seek after a similar look. With that said, it cannot be generalized that every teenage girl will be categorized as being in a danger zone when viewing adult fashion images. The same study found that "age, weight and [pre-existing] bulimic tendencies" are a strong indicator on responsiveness of fashion images (Shaw, 1995, p.20; Stice et al., 2001). Those of a lighter weight and younger age were less affected by the images they saw. Those who already showed signs of disordered eating were reinforced by the images that present a thin ideal. Regardless,

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there is a correlation between the amount of magazines read and the levels of body dissatisfaction for young women (Zuckerman, 2003) Ultimately, magazines tend to make women with image concerns more insecure.

Exposure to magazines does not have to be long in order to have an effect. Even when only presented with a quick fashion advertisement, young females experience high levels of body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2015). After measuring multiple variables of body dissatisfaction, only weight-related body dissatisfaction occurred after seeing pictures of skinny models (Fardouly et al., 2015). The other variables of body dissatisfaction included face, hair and skin variables as well as mood predictors. From this we can see that the fashion industry really targets young female's weight satisfaction. Sometimes it doesn't even have to take a fashion magazine, which by design seeks to tell women what they should look like, to encourage negative thoughts about one's own body; a 15-minute exposure to fitness and sports magazines resulted in a decrease of body satisfaction among female college undergraduates (Cameron & Ferraro, 2004). It's clear that women may compare themselves to others, no matter the magazine.

From these studies we can see that even brief exposures

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to fashion and fitness magazines result mostly in increased body dissatisfaction among women, particularly adolescents. These results do not mean that magazines should be avoided, but that girls should believe more forcefully that the bodies they see on magazine pages are digitally edited and portray an unrealistic lifestyle.

Television

In today's media saturated world, it is becoming almost impossible to go an entire day without viewing some kind of televised video. A study that looked into the effects that television usage had on Chinese females sought to demonstrate that there has been a significant rise in amount and type of media use (Peat et al., 2015). Results found that adolescent women watch television for an average of 1-½ hours a day on weekdays and 2 hours at the weekend (2015). Of the 820 adult women in the sample, almost 10% answered "yes" to the question "do you feel fat despite others thinking you are too thin?" (Peat et al., 2015). Results did not find statistically significant outcomes for the relationship between heightened use of television and heightened disordered eating. Despite not being statistically significant, television can account for more

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of the variability in disordered attitudes rather than actual disordered behaviors (Peat et al., 2015). This shows that there is a relationship between these two variables, but causation cannot be implied.

Television—particularly westernized TV—has been shown to have negative effects on teenage girls. In 1995, there was one case of an eating disorder in Fiji. Then, westernized television was introduced and shows like *Friends* began to air, gaining popularity. In 1998, 11.9% of adolescent girls were experiencing an eating disorder (Orbach, 2011). The experimenters decided to look into this sudden phenomenon of eating disorders by interviewing adolescent girls to examine their media intake and disordered eating symptoms (Becker, 2004). In a study of 65 Fijian adolescents who watched television for at least three nights a week, it was found that 50% feel overweight (Becker, 2004). Becker cannot attribute the body dissatisfaction and sometimes extreme dieting or eating disorders to just television usage, but has found television as a strong indicator of eating disorders (2004). Ultimately, television affects how young women perceive themselves. Seeing the “thin-ideal” portrayed time and again on the screen can lead teenage girls to decrease in self-esteem and develop

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eating disorders, resulting in a loss of identity.

Conclusion

The media is an outlet that must be used with caution. It is crucial to be educated in all the possible risks inherent in a life of consistent media intake. However, media users must be cautious and aware that sometimes, these forms of media can bring down self-esteem, cause jealousy and alter views about healthy sexual relationships.

Some steps to take that will decrease the negative effects of media for adolescents include parental involvement. Heightening parental involvement with adolescent's media intake can greatly decrease the output of negative sexual behaviors and low self-esteem (Schooler, Kim & Sorsoli, 2006). Having a healthy belief that the bodies used in magazine images are digitally altered can help to lessen body dissatisfaction. Recognizing that the scenarios depicted in television shows or music videos are not accurate portrayals of daily life for the common person can help viewers to avoid false perceptions of reality. Time restraints may not be a useful solution because, as stated above, it only takes 3-4 minutes for a sexualized image to be seen in a music video, or 10 minutes of Facebook use for a

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mood to turn negative.

This research does not definitively answer the question of how much the media can affect its audiences; each study has its limitations. Research still cannot definitively find which of all the media platforms can be known to produce the most harmful effects. It even still cannot answer the question of how much can each person spend using different types of media before it can become harmful. For each person, thresholds and limits are different. For example, some people may spend their 6.75 hours of television time watching educational programs or historical documents. Surely these types of shows will not have the same effects that perhaps watching a sexualized show will bring. At this point, research cannot give definite solutions to the questions that have been posed in this paper. However, one thing is certain: media is all around us, and it is up to the individual to recognize the warning signs of a behavior that decreases self-esteem or heightens negative sexual behaviors.

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