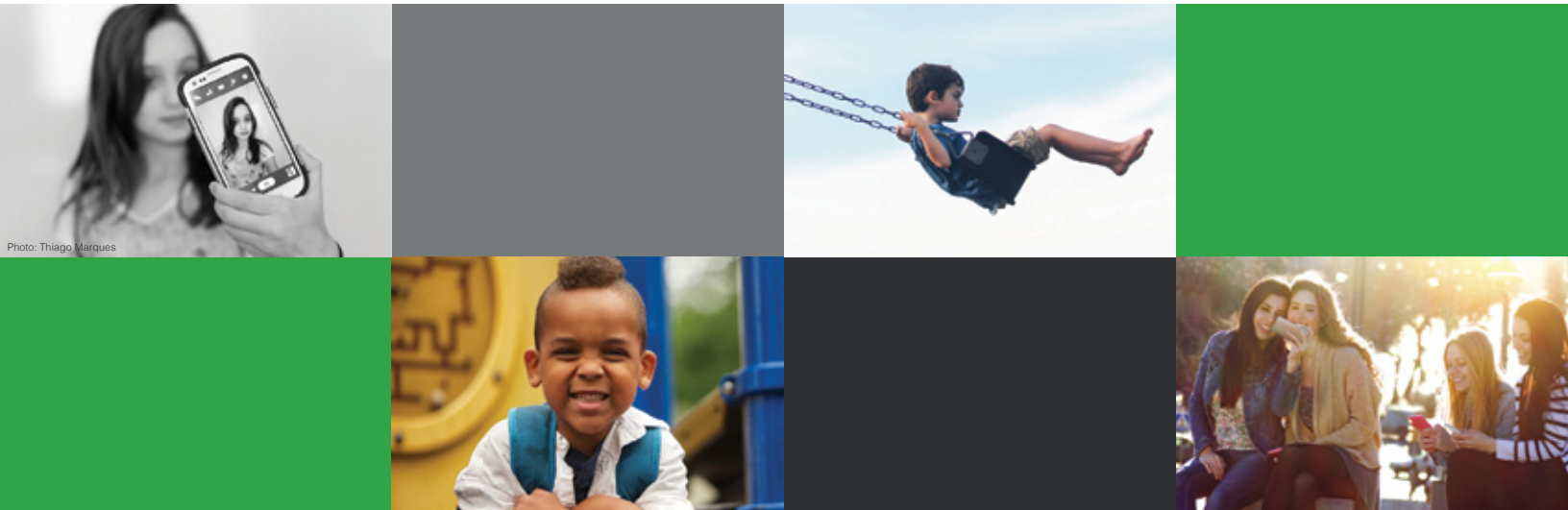


# Children, Teens, Media, and Body Image

**A Common Sense Media Research Brief**



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# Key Findings

## 1

### **Body dissatisfaction and related unhealthy behaviors are quite prevalent among children and teens in the U.S., while societal appearance ideals have become increasingly unrealistic.**

Although some recent research suggests the prevalence of body dissatisfaction may have stabilized or even decreased slightly in the past few years as youth populations in this country diversify (Ferguson, Muñoz, Garza, and Galindo, 2014), rates available from published research are still cause for concern. More than half of girls (55–59%) and approximately a third of boys (33–35%) age 6 to 8 indicate their ideal bodies are thinner than their current body (Lowe & Tiggemann, 2003).

Between 1999 and 2006, hospitalizations for eating disorders among children below the age of 12 spiked 119% (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2009). It is estimated that almost 1.3 million adolescent girls in the United States have anorexia (Rosen & The Committee on Adolescence, 2010). More than any other appearance attribute, weight is most commonly associated with body dissatisfaction for both girls and boys (Jones, 2002).

The average body mass index (BMI) of Miss America winners has decreased from around 22 in the 1920s to 16.9 in the 2000s.<sup>1</sup> According to the World Health Organization, a normal BMI falls between 18.5 and 24.9 (Byrd-Bredbenner, Murray, & Schluskel, 2005).

## 2

### **Body image is developed in early childhood, and even very young children exhibit body dissatisfaction.**

Really young children begin to develop body image alongside the growth of their physical, cognitive, and social abilities; even infants have a general sense of their bodies (Slaughter & Brownell, 2013). Nearly a third of children age 5 to 6 choose an ideal body size that is thinner than their current perceived size (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010). By age 6, children are aware of dieting and may have tried it (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2004, 2006; Lowe & Tiggemann, 2003). Twenty-six percent of 5-year-olds recommend dieting behavior (not eating junk food, eating less) as a solution for a person who has gained weight (Lowe & Tiggemann, 2003), and by the time they're 7 years old, one in four children has engaged in some kind of dieting behavior. Moreover, young children engage with some of the more extreme body portrayals in media in the form of toys such as dolls and action figures. Some research indicates that children's cartoons already portray thinness positively (Klein & Shiffman, 2005).

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\* This research was supported by a generous grant from Google Inc. Common Sense Media is solely responsible for all opinions and analysis presented in this report.

<sup>1</sup> Body Mass Index, or BMI, is a measure of body fat based on weight and height.

# 3

## Body image is learned and formed from many different sources, of which media are only one.

Various studies have documented how individual, familial, and social/cultural factors all are implicated in the development of body image, which is why even relatively “universal” forms of mass media such as television can have differential effects.

*Individual factors.* Children’s own weight status is a strong predictor of self-esteem and body satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 2014). Psychological characteristics such as self-esteem, the feeling of a lack of control, depression, anxiety, and troubled interpersonal relationships also have been linked to body-related perceptions and behaviors, especially among children and teens who go on to have eating disorders.

*Family environment.* Parents are key to children’s healthy development, and body image is no exception. For instance, girls whose fathers tended to express concern about the girls’ weights judged themselves to be less physically able than those whose fathers didn’t (Davison & Birch, 2001). In the same study, girls whose mothers expressed similar concern judged themselves to be less physically and cognitively able. Lowes & Tiggemann (2003) found that 5- to 8-year-old children’s perception of their mothers’ body dissatisfaction predicted their own body dissatisfaction (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003).

*Peers.* Peers exert influence, as do intermediate contextual factors. One innovative study found that fifth- and sixth-grade students who attended schools where older students were present reported more negative body image than the same-age girls who attended schools with only younger students (Strauss et al., 2014).

*Larger societal and cultural factors* also are part of the picture: Prevailing norms and patterns in race, class, and gender all have roles in body image. In the U.S., research indicates that teens of different racial and ethnic groups are differentially prone to body-image issues — generally speaking, eating disorders are more prevalent among white, middle-class girls; Asian-American teens experience high rates of body dissatisfaction; and African-American teens appear not to have internalized an unrealistic thin ideal to the same extent as other groups.

Internationally, a handful of anthropological studies have detailed how body image is culturally defined, such as a study in Western Fiji (Becker, 2004): Three-fourths of the girls reported a feeling of being “too big or fat” three years after television was first introduced to their rural community.

# 4

## Traditional mainstream media (television, movies, music, magazines, advertising) contain unrealistic, idealized, sexualized, and stereotypical portrayals of body types.

Media messages about girls/women commonly emphasize the value of being young and beautiful — and, especially, thin. According to a study by The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media/University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, female characters in family films, on prime-time television, and on children’s TV shows are nearly twice as likely to have uncharacteristically small waists as compared to their male counterparts (Smith, Choueti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2013).<sup>2</sup> Female characters with heavier body types are underrepresented in TV programming. Those who are depicted are more likely to be older and less likely to be portrayed in romantic situations than thin characters (Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003; White, Brown, & Ginsburg, 1999).

In a content review of women’s fashion and fitness magazines, researchers found that most models were young, thin whites. Only 6% of the models had rounder, softer body types, and 95% of the models in the fashion magazines were characterized as lean (Wasylikiw, Emms, Meuse, & Poirier, 2009).

The Geena Davis Institute/USC Annenberg School’s content analysis (Smith et al., 2013) of 11,927 speaking characters in top-grossing family films, on prime-time TV programming, and on children’s TV shows from 2006–2011 found that females were far more likely than males to be depicted wearing sexy attire (28% vs. 8%) and showing some exposed skin (27% vs. 9%), to have a thin body (34% vs. 11%), and to be referenced by another character as physically attractive or desirous (15% vs. 4%).

Girls aren’t the only ones misrepresented in traditional media. The impossibly unrealistic body proportions of Barbie are now well-known, but less known is that male action figures that young boys tend to play with are even more egregiously unrealistic. Their measurements now exceed even those of the biggest bodybuilders (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999). The muscle size of male models in *Playgirl* centerfolds also has increased in this same period of time (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001). The male body is very visible in advertising, with a steady rise in the proportion of undressed males in ads beginning in the 1980s (Leit et al., 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Some research shows that overweight characters in child-targeted sitcoms tend to be portrayed more positively, equitably, and less stereotypically, and that children see more body type diversity among fictional characters in these types of shows (Robinson, Callister, & Janoski, 2008).

# 5

## Exposure to traditional media is a risk factor for developing body dissatisfaction.

Media content both reflects and forms societal values around gender, sexualization, beauty, and body types. Due to the complex and lifelong nature of body image, it's been hard for the field to tie body-image perceptions and behaviors directly and exclusively to media exposure. At best, we can conclude that consumption of mainstream, traditional media (with its stereotypical portrayals) puts children and teens at risk for developing an unhealthy body image (Ferguson et al., 2014), especially when it's accompanied by other risk factors.

For example, one meta-analysis showed consistent associations across 77 experimental and correlational studies on links between media exposure and women's body dissatisfaction, internalization of the "thin ideal," and eating behaviors and beliefs (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008).

In a national survey of girls age 13 to 17 by the Girl Scouts Research Institute (2010), nearly half (48%) wished they were as skinny as the models they saw in fashion magazines and said fashion magazines gave them a body image to strive for (47%). Another survey by the *Today Show* and AOL.com (2014) found that 80% of teen girls compare themselves to images they see of celebrities, and, within that group, almost half say the images make them feel dissatisfied with the way they look. Neither of these surveys was conducted with probability-based samples of nationally representative populations of girls.

Although research on boys is relatively scarce, some of it points to similar linkages between media exposure and body satisfaction (e.g., Lawler & Nixon, 2011).

# 6

## Social media afford teens the capacity for immediate visual and verbal public judgment and comparison, which could affect body image.

Three quarters of teens have a social media profile (Common Sense Media, 2012). These digital social networks provide young people opportunities for self-expression and relationships on an unprecedented scale, but they also are a vast public platform for self-presentation, communication, and social comparison.

Among the teens active on social networks, 35% reported having worried about people tagging them in unattractive photos; 27% reported feeling stressed out about how they look when they post pictures; and 22% reported feeling bad about themselves when nobody comments on or "likes" the photos they post. Though girls and boys alike reported having these feelings, they were more common among girls (Common Sense Media, 2012).

One study of teen girls found that Facebook users were significantly more likely than non-Facebook users to have internalized a drive for thinness and to engage in body surveillance (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013), although the direction of causality is unknown (it's possible that social network users differ from non-users in significant ways that make them particularly prone to media use, media messages, and societal pressure).

# 7

## Presenting their self-image in social media can shape teens' self-esteem both positively and negatively; more research is needed.

Some studies indicate that exposure to one's own social media photos (which often involves engaging with a flattering self-image) can raise self-esteem (Toma, 2013; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). For example, 65% of teen girls and 40% of adults say that selfies — photos that users take of themselves — and other flattering photos of themselves online make them feel more confident (*Today Show* & AOL.com, 2014).

Meanwhile, a Girl Scout Research Initiative study (2010) found that 74% of girls agree “most girls my age use social networking sites to make themselves look cooler than they really are.” And 41% admitted they do this too. The same study found that girls downplay their full complement of positive characteristics and only highlight popular ones (such as being fun, funny, and social) via social media.

However, the focus on appearance may signal a form of *self-objectification* — the degree to which one's self-concept emphasizes one's physical attractiveness (de Vries & Peter, 2013; American Psychological Association, 2007) — indicating they've already been socialized into (or are actively creating) an appearance culture. Indeed, it may be that social media are taking the place of traditional mass media (film, magazines) in setting and breaking norms around appearance.

# 8

## Social media could help combat unrealistic appearance ideals and stereotypes, but research has not yet been conducted on this topic.

Our review sheds light on current trends among celebrities, youth, and the public at large to co-opt social media and “selfies” to portray more realistic appearances and counter sexualized norms, in a public display of self-esteem and solidarity (Green, 2013). Viral videos, slide shows, and the like that question the status quo on body-image ideals have become commonplace. However, there has been no systematic research program examining these trends and their effectiveness at combating harmful stereotypes.

# 9

## There are substantial gaps in research on body image and media.

Relative to the large body of research on traditional media and body image, there is very little research on children's and adolescents' interactive digital and social media use and body image. Across all types of research, however, several populations are underrepresented: boys, young children, communities of color, and LGBTQ youth.

Given how early in life body image — and related negative experiences — develop, there is a real need for prospective, longitudinal research on media use and its role in this area, ideally recording baselines prior to any significant media exposure. Without such research, and with an overreliance on cross-sectional studies, it will continue to be hard to isolate media effects on body image or even model its effects in relation to other explanatory factors.

Missing too are the actual voices of children, teens, and families, with accounts of their experiences and understanding of body-image issues alongside media and technology use. In-depth ethnographic and other qualitative research would be crucial to building this base of knowledge.



# Executive Summary

This research brief reviews existing research on traditional media as well as emerging research on digital and social media with regards to body image. We identify what's known about the links between media and body image and highlight gaps where more research is needed. We begin with a definition of body image, discuss its interrelationships with other developmental issues, and outline its multiple sources of influence. Moving to mainstream media, we catalog key trends in the research on body image, including a special section on early childhood. Next, we review research literature on digital/social media relating to body image. Finally, we turn to lessons for intervention from the research literature and from previous efforts to address body image.

In addition to a review of the research on the intersection of body image and media, our review included related topics such as gender roles and sexualization where pertinent. We also scanned popular culture for exemplars and trends associated with the topic and documented certain media campaigns as case studies or examples that provide pointers for intervention. A methodological note: This review does not cover the public health issue of child/teen obesity and its links with media use. A field of research documents the concomitant rise of media use (associated with sedentary behavior and the influential exposure to unhealthy food via advertising) and childhood obesity. This is an important but separate arena of work that is similarly complex and deserves its own review.

What follows is a summary outline of the findings of our review.

## 1. About Body Image

- a. Body image matters. As part of self-image, it's linked to key aspects of emotional and social well-being and the healthy development of adolescents. Body dissatisfaction is tied to critical mental health problems such as eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression.
- b. Body image is learned. Children develop their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about their bodies by comparing themselves with others, by following role models, by treating what's ubiquitous as what's real, and by accepting peer portrayals/behavior as normative.
- c. Body image is learned very young. Children are aware of body issues and methods to control body size and appearance by the time they are preschoolers, and many young children start exhibiting socially motivated distortions in their body perceptions.
- d. Body image isn't shaped by media alone. It is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by many factors, including the cultural group and society in which we live, our communities, our families, the media we use, and our own individual, psychobiological make-up.
  - i. Body image must be understood against the larger backdrop of gender norms, stereotypes, sexism, and sexualization.
  - ii. Media play a powerful role in the development of body image.

## 2. Traditional Mainstream Media

- a. "Traditional" mainstream media - television, movies, music, magazines, advertising - contain unrealistic, idealized, and stereotypical portrayals of body types.
- b. Consumption of traditional mainstream media affects body image and behavior.
- c. Media messages emphasizing both a thin ideal and sex appeal can have negative impacts, particularly for girls.
- d. More research is needed on children's and teens' increasing access to traditional offline media in digital formats. Movies, TV shows, magazines, ads, and other content are available online, on demand, and at a saturation level that's unprecedented. Is their role in body image magnified as well?

### 3. Digital and Social Media

- a. Offline gender roles and gender differences may be reproduced in online spaces.
- b. Exposure to thin-ideal messages online is associated with girls' negative body image perceptions; more research is needed to clarify this relationship.
- c. The Internet provides access to pro-eating disorder forums and communities and facilitates pro-thinness/fitness content creation.
- d. Managing one's self-image to an online public can influence one's self-esteem both positively and negatively. Tweens and teens live in a social media culture, where popularity and social mores are built and broken on an even wider stage. Research on the implications of social media participation for body image is in its infancy.
- e. Sexism is prevalent online, but research on how it affects girls' body image and self-esteem is lacking.

### 4. This review identifies substantial research gaps in the field of body image and media. These include:

- a. METHODS: Although there are some exceptions, much of the quantitative research on newer forms of media is correlational and retrospective. The field needs prospective, longitudinal research that reaches children before exposure to specific media and technologies and follows them to track potential effects after exposure. Such methods would allow us to disentangle the contribution of preexisting factors to the development of body-image perceptions and behaviors and better understand the unique influence of media. On the other end, rare too are in-depth qualitative studies that explore cultural models of body image and media interaction and how children and teens themselves understand and act about these issues in their everyday lives.
- b. TOPICS: Other than some fledgling efforts, there is relatively little research on the connections between digital/social media and body image. How do these relatively newer forms of interactive media mask, mirror, or magnify (boyd, 2014) the everyday experiences of children and teens around body image? Particular items that are lacking include:

- i. large-scale quantitative data on children's and teens' use (consumption and creation) of, and attitudinal/behavioral patterns around body-related issues in, digital and social media;
  - ii. content analysis of digital and social media for trends in exposure to gender-biased, thin-ideal, and body-image-related content;
  - iii. ethnographic and qualitative research that delves deeply into children's and teens' own experiences and understandings about how they and others present themselves online; and
  - iv. examinations of the relationship between online and offline body-image-related issues.
- c. POPULATIONS: Across the board, research on boys and young men lags tremendously behind research on girls and young women. Lacking too is research among youth of color, LGBTQ youth, and populations outside North America. More research is needed on all these populations to develop a full picture of the links between media and body image. In addition, we need more research on younger teens, tweens, and young children; much of the existing research focuses on older teens and college-age populations.

### 5. Any intervention must attend to the fact that body image is multifaceted and culturally specific. Those interventions that address the role of media should consider traditional, digital, and social media alike and should treat children and teens as both creators and consumers of media content.

# Introduction

## “Target Sparks Body Image Debate With Controversial Photoshop Images”

reads one recent *Parade* headline (Schmitz, 2014), while *Time* recently came out with a story titled “The 300 Workout: How Movies Fuel Boys’ Insecurities” (Dockterman, 2014b) and a newly released *Today Show*/AOL poll documents how teens and young women are “obsessed” with their appearances (Dahl, 2014). A November 2014 search for “body image” on Google News alone brings up over six million hits. There is an established field of research examining how one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward one’s body — one’s **body image** — are linked to portrayals in mainstream media such as movies, television, magazines, advertisements, and music videos. Less known and less researched is what role relatively newer interactive digital media play in the development of body image. There’s also been less attention paid to the role of media in body-image development among really young children.

Why should we care about children’s body image? First, research shows it’s interwoven with key aspects of children’s (and adults’) emotional and physical well-being and that dissatisfaction with one’s body is connected to serious mental health problems including eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression (American Psychological Association, 2007; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Markey, 2010). Indeed, developing a healthy image of oneself is a critical component of healthy development on which many other positive health and life outcomes depend.

**The average Body Mass Index (BMI) of Miss America winners has decreased from around 22 in the 1920s to 16.9 in the 2000s.<sup>3</sup>**

Second, body dissatisfaction and unhealthy behaviors related to body dissatisfaction among children and teens appear to be on the rise in the U.S., while appearance ideals have become increasingly unrealistic (e.g., Puhl, Andreyeva, & Brownell, 2008; Cash & Henry, 1995; Davalos, Davalos, & Layton, 2007). Children as young as 5 years of age express dissatisfaction with their bodies and display awareness of dieting as a means of weight control (Davison & Birch, 2001). The average body mass index (BMI) of Miss America winners has decreased from around 22 in the 1920s to 16.9 in the 2000s<sup>3</sup>; according to the World Health Organization, a normal BMI falls between 18.5 and 24.9 (Byrd-Bredbenner, Murray, & Schlüssel, 2005).

Researchers have long explored the relationship between mainstream media and unrealistic appearance ideals (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2014). These links, in turn, have been correlated with body dissatisfaction and more serious problems, such as depression and disordered eating. To date, body-image research has focused on so-called “traditional” media: offline media that have existed for decades, such as TV shows, movies, advertisements, and magazines. However, young people today are no longer passive consumers of such media. Many also are active media *creators*, with the ability to post content online around the clock. Media messages play a powerful role in shaping gender norms and body satisfaction, and the shift toward digital and social media means that children can easily access, create, interact with, and share peer-to-peer media messages about boys’ and girls’ appearances.

This research brief reviews existing research on traditional media as well as emerging research on digital and social media with regards to body image. We identify what’s known about the links between media and body image and highlight gaps where more research is needed. We begin with a definition of body image, discuss its interrelationships with other developmental issues, and outline its multiple sources of influence. Moving to mainstream media, we catalog key trends in the research on body image, including a special section on early childhood. Next, we review research literature on digital/social media relating to body image. Finally, we turn to lessons for intervention from the research literature and from previous efforts to address body image.

For this report, we primarily conducted a review of the published research literature on body image in relation to various types of media. While we tried to focus our review on research among children and teens, we also included relevant research among young adults. Our review included related topics such as gender roles and sexualization where pertinent. We also scanned popular culture for exemplars and trends associated with the topic and documented certain media campaigns as case studies or examples that provide pointers for intervention. A methodological note: This review does *not* cover the public health issue of child/teen obesity and its links with media use. A field of research documents the concomitant rise of media use (associated with sedentary behavior and the influential exposure to unhealthy food via advertising) and childhood obesity. This is an important but separate arena of work that is similarly complex and deserves its own review.

<sup>3</sup> *Body Mass Index, or BMI, is a measure of body fat based on weight and height.*

# The Many Factors of Self- and Body-image



Self-image (and body image) shapes and is shaped by many factors - figure 1.

# Body Image in Context

## What is body image?

*Body image* describes one's perceptions, feelings, and behaviors toward one's body (Cash, 2004). Our values and attitudes toward our bodies are shaped by the cultural group and society in which we live, our communities, our families, and our own individual, psychobiological makeup. These factors also are essential to how we use, shape, and are shaped by media.

Media are **only** one of many sets of forces believed to impact our body image, but they are an increasingly powerful one. Social psychologists have used various theories to demonstrate how those closest to us, such as our family members, mentors, and peers, as well as those we observe from afar in the media, can shape our body image (see Table 1).

Anthropologists remind us, too, that aspects of our individual, social, and cultural identities (e.g., sex, gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) also can influence the way we perceive and manage our bodies (Paquette & Raine, 2004). Eating disorders, for example, are culture-bound syndromes (Anderson-Fye, 2012a); they are intimately tied to how different cultures define social roles and appearance ideals and the extent to which those cultures value self-control and independence as key to success (see Figure 1).

**Table 1. Social psychological theories relating to the socializing influence of media.**

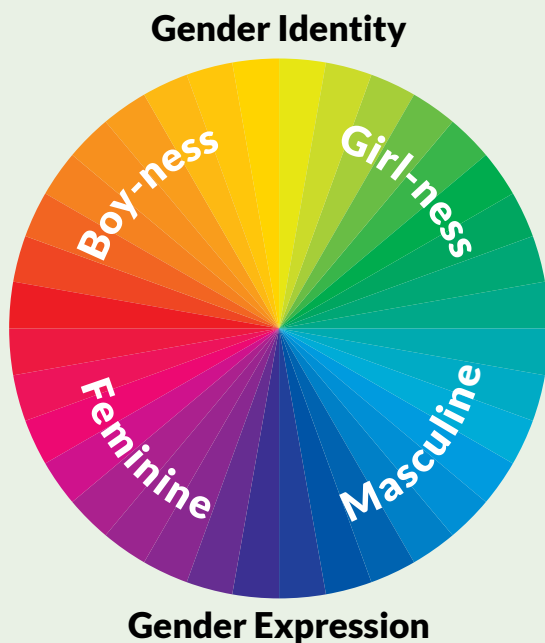
| Theory                             | Theorist                                | Argument   |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Social Comparison Theory           | Festinger (1954)                        | People have an innate motivation to evaluate themselves through comparison with others. Upward social comparison (to those deemed superior or more attractive, for example) can motivate people to improve themselves.     |
| Social Cognitive (Learning) Theory | Bandura (1986; 2001)                    | People learn behavior and values by modeling others, noting what is deemed socially acceptable. This can happen by observing people in the real world or through mass media (and now, increasingly, through social media). |
| Cultivation Theory                 | Gerbner et al. (1994)                   | Repeated exposure to consistent themes (in television) can lead viewers to internalize those perspectives and accept media portrayals as representations of reality.   |
| Super-Peer Theory                  | Strasburger (2007); Huang et al. (2014) | The media can act like a powerful peer, making certain (risky) behaviors and aesthetics seem normative.  |



# Gender as a spectrum

figure 2.

**Gender isn't something fixed; it's about ideas and values, and how we negotiate those ideas and values.**



This report acknowledges that there are various interpretations of the term *gender* particularly in academia. Some scholars argue, for instance, that gender is a fluid, performative act rather than a fixed aspect of one's identity — one that is defined (and redefined) by social and cultural scripts (Butler, 1988; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Most research on media and body image juxtaposes femininity with masculinity and women with men. This body of research also tends to examine media and objectification through a heteronormative lens. We acknowledge that topics surrounding body image can — and should be — analyzed outside of such gender binaries (see Glossary for further information).

## Why does body image matter?

Body image can have serious implications for people's emotional and physical well-being, and it's a crucial part of adolescent development (Markey, 2010). Research links body dissatisfaction with critical mental health problems, including eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression (American Psychological Association, 2007; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008) — issues that children increasingly experience at progressively younger ages. Between 1999 and 2006, hospitalizations for eating disorders among children below the age of 12 spiked 119% (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2009). It is estimated that almost 1.3 million adolescent girls in the United States have anorexia (Rosen & The Committee on Adolescence, 2010), a disorder that has one of the highest suicide rates of any psychiatric condition (Novotney, 2009). More than any other appearance attribute, weight most commonly leads to body dissatisfaction for both girls and boys (Jones, 2002). Moreover, body dissatisfaction has the potential to feed into other negative self-appraisals that affect children's wellness and success across multiple life domains.

**Between 1999 and 2006, hospitalizations for eating disorders among children below the age of 12 spiked 119%.**

In recent history, eating disorders appear to have disproportionately affected white, middle- and upper-class girls and women (Crago & Shisslak, 2003; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002). However, they also are prevalent among women of minority populations (Swanson, Crow, Le Grange, Swendsen, & Merikangas, 2011; Marques et al., 2011) and men (Health & Social Care Information Centre, 2012). There are various psychological, interpersonal, and biological factors associated with disordered eating practices, including low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy or a lack of control, depression, anxiety, troubled interpersonal relationships, a history of abuse, experiences of teasing/bullying, and even possibly genetic components. In addition, researchers have found a high sociocultural value placed on appearance (American Psychological Association, 2007) and on "super woman" ideals of femininity — striving to be beautiful, successful, and independent all at once — to be common contributing factors (Steiner-Adair, 1986; Hart & Kenny, 1997).

## When does body image develop?

Young children's body image begins to develop early alongside the growth of their physical, cognitive, and social abilities; even infants have a general sense of their bodies (Slaughter & Brownell, 2013). In their second and third years of life, children begin to develop awareness of their body size even further when carrying out tasks such as pulling out a chair from a table to sit down or knowing that a doll's outfit will not fit them.

**Nearly a third of children ages five to six choose an ideal body size that is thinner than their current perceived size. (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010).**

Almost as soon as preschoolers complete the developmental task of mastering a concept of their bodies, they begin to express concerns about their bodies, taking their cues from peers, adults, and media around them. Nearly a third of children age 5 to 6 choose an ideal body size that is thinner than their current perceived size (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010). By age 6, children are aware of dieting and may have tried it (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2004, 2006; Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003). Twenty-six percent of 5-year-olds recommend dieting behavior (not eating junk food, eating less) as a solution for a person who has gained weight (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003), and by the age of 7, one in four children has engaged in some kind of dieting behavior. Moreover, young children engage with some of the more extreme body portrayals in media in the form of toys such as dolls and action figures.

Young children in particular pick up models for how to think and behave from those around them. Body-related talk and behavior is no exception. Children's perception of their mothers' body dissatisfaction predicted children's own dissatisfaction in a study with boys and girls age 5 to 8 (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003).

Same-sex (mothers-daughters, fathers-sons) parental nurturing in the form of experienced parental warmth and encouragement also is positively correlated with positive body image (Michael et al., 2014).

**“It is estimated that almost 1.3 million adolescent girls in the United States have anorexia (Rosen & The Committee on Adolescence, 2010), a disorder that has one of the highest suicide rates of any psychiatric condition (Novotney, 2009).”**

# The Role of “Traditional Media” in Children’s and Teens’ Development of Body Image

**“Traditional” mainstream media – television, movies, music, magazines, advertising – contain unrealistic, idealized, and stereotypical portrayals of body types.**

Research on media and body image to date has focused heavily on “traditional” media, such as television, movies, music (videos/lyrics), magazines, and advertising.

For girls and women, media messages commonly emphasize the value of being young and beautiful – and, especially, thin. Female characters in family films, on prime-time television, and on children’s TV shows are nearly twice as likely to have uncharacteristically small waists as compared to their male counterparts (Smith et al., 2013).<sup>4</sup>Female characters with heavier body types are underrepresented in TV programming. Those who are depicted are more likely to be older and less likely to be portrayed in romantic situations than thin characters (Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003; White, Brown, & Ginsburg, 1999). In a study of the top 25 children’s videos in the early 2000s, researchers found that 72% associated thinness with positive character traits such as kindness, 84% linked physical attractiveness with positive character traits, and three out of four videos equated obesity with undesirable qualities (Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004). In cartoons, females are four times more likely than male characters to be shown as underweight, and overweight characters are more likely to be depicted as unintelligent and unhappy compared to underweight characters (Klein & Shiffman, 2005).

By 2010, these kinds of portrayals were even more pronounced. A study of 134 episodes of popular Nickelodeon and Disney children’s/teens’ shows found that Hispanic characters were highly underrepresented and that 87% of female characters age 10 to 17 were underweight, with those fitting conventional definitions of beauty accorded the most positive traits and prominence while unconventional appearance was associated with negative judgments (Northup & Liebler, 2010).

Children and teens continue to spend more time with television/videos than any other type of media (Common Sense Media, 2013; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), making these findings particularly worrisome.

Idealizations of thin female body types also are prevalent in magazines and advertisements. In a content review of women’s fashion and fitness magazines, researchers found that most models were young, thin whites. Only 6% of the models had rounder, softer body types, and 95% of the models in the fashion magazines were characterized as lean (Wasylikiw, Emms, Meuse, & Poirier, 2009). Indeed, models in women’s magazines have become increasingly slender over the past half-century, and ultrathin figures were rare until the 21st century (Seifert, 2005; Sypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004).

For boys and men, current mainstream media idealizes buff and toned bodies, placing great emphasis on fitness and muscularity. In the past four decades, representations of men in the media have become increasingly muscular and unrealistic. Today’s toy action figures, which are commonly marketed toward and played with by young boys, are far more muscular and superhuman than those sold in the 1970s. Their measurements now exceed even those of the biggest bodybuilders (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999). The muscle size of male models in *Playgirl* centerfolds also has increased in this same period of time (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001). These studies reveal that body ideals for boys too have become increasingly unattainable over the years, emphasizing muscularity more ubiquitously and to boys of younger and younger ages.

**Consumption of traditional mainstream media is related to body image and behavior.**

There is an abundance of research (experimental and correlational studies) on the role that media play in girls’ and women’s body concerns. Studies have found evidence to support both direct and indirect relationships between girls’ and women’s consumption of mainstream media and their idealization of certain body types and appearance-oriented behaviors (Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2005). For

<sup>4</sup> Some research shows that overweight characters in child-targeted sitcoms tend to be portrayed more positively, equitably, and less stereotypically, and that children see more body type diversity among fictional characters in these types of shows (Robinson, Callister, & Janoski, 2008).



example, one meta-analysis showed consistent associations across 77 experimental and correlational studies on links between media exposure and women's body dissatisfaction, internalization of the "thin ideal," and eating behaviors and beliefs (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). The mean effect sizes ( $d = -.28, -.39, \text{ and } -.30$ ), though small, demonstrate the negative impact that media can have on women's perceptions of, and behavior toward, their bodies.<sup>5</sup>

**Nearly half (48%) of 13- to 17-year-old girls wish they were as skinny as fashion magazine models (Girl Scouts Research Institute, 2010).**

Studies of young women's attitudes toward popular media indicate that they feel as though their body image is adversely affected by the thin-ideal messages they see. In a national survey of girls age 13 to 17 by the Girl Scouts Research Institute (2010), nearly half (48%) wished they were as skinny as the models they saw in fashion magazines and said fashion magazines gave them a body image to strive for (47%). Another survey by the *Today Show* and AOL.com (2014) found that 80% of teen girls compare themselves to images they see of celebrities, and, within that group, almost half say the images make them feel dissatisfied with the way they look.

Toys also are a type of media, and their tendency to be gender-typed has long been studied. In a famous study of the impact of Barbie, girls age 5 to 8 displayed lower levels of body esteem and a greater desire for thinness (both for their childhood bodies and their ideal adult bodies) after looking at books featuring Barbie dolls compared to ones with Emme dolls (size 16) or no dolls (Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive, 2006).

Anthropologists too have explored the cross-cultural impact of Western thin-ideal media on women's body image (Becker, 2004; Becker et al., 2011; Anderson-Fye, 2012b), but their ethnographic research offers findings that resist easy generalizations (Anderson-Fye, 2012b). In a compelling naturalistic study of adolescent girls in Western Fiji, Becker (2004) was able to assess young women's body-image perceptions and eating behaviors before and after the introduction of Western-style television. The study found that three-fourths of the girls reported a feeling of being "too big or fat" three years after television was first introduced to their rural community. They also developed a willingness to "work" on their bodies that had not been evident before.

Their desire for thinness, however, did not stem from a personal desire to be beautiful but rather a desire to be successful. This indicates they had internalized the idea that idealized beauty equates with success.

Another study among a community in Belize found its young women did not adopt a thin body ideal despite the country's heavy interaction with Western economies and media (Anderson-Fye, 2012b). The women who did engage in disordered eating did so because of economic opportunity and tourism rather than a personal desire for thinness (Anderson-Fye, 2012b). However, even in this case, success is equated with unhealthy body-related behaviors. These studies remind us that although media do have a role in young people's development of body image, there is no clear-cut relationship, as one's peers, family, cultural affiliation, and ethnicities can play a role in shaping one's appearance ideals.

Compared to research on young women, research on the interplay between young men's body image and media lags behind. That said, there exists a fair amount of research to support a relationship between men's exposure to muscular-ideal media and their body esteem (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008; Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004). Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier (2008) conducted two meta-analyses to determine the extent to which muscular-ideal media impacts men's body satisfaction and self-esteem. Their analysis of correlational studies (effect size,  $d = -0.19$ ) and experimental studies ( $d = -0.22$ ) both found a significant relationship between exposure to muscular media images and men's negative self-images (body dissatisfaction, low body esteem, and low self-esteem). Overall, more research is needed on young men's internalization of body-image ideals through mass media channels, as well as the impact of mass media on boys' attitudes toward women's appearances. Additionally, more research is needed on boys and men of color and men who do not identify as heterosexual.

### **Media messages emphasizing both a thin ideal and sex appeal can have negative impacts, particularly for girls.**

Media often capitalize on people's desire to be attractive, encouraging an association between physical appearance, sexual desire, and social success. *Sexualization* is when "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics" (American Psychological Association, 2007). *Sexual objectification* is the process by which a person is viewed as a thing or an

<sup>5</sup> Effect sizes are a way of communicating the relative strength of a statistical relationship, and its practical significance. For example, the effect size of height differential between men and women, on average, is considered large (around 1.7). In practical terms, one would have no difficulty distinguishing the difference.

object for others' sexual consumption instead of a whole person with agency and independent decision-making. *Self-objectification*, which many girls are socialized into, is a process whereby we learn to view ourselves as the objects of others' desire (American Psychological Association, 2007; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). Self-objectification can manifest itself as body surveillance (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012; Wiseman & Moradi, 2010), which can lead to negative self-image and appearance anxiety (American Psychological Association, 2007). Researchers also use the term *hypersexuality* to describe an overemphasis on one's physical attractiveness and sex appeal, not only by way of attire but also body shape (i.e. thin waist, hourglass figure, thinness) (Smith & Cook, 2008).

**According to The Geena Davis Institute/USC Annenberg School's content analysis, across 11,927 speaking characters in top-grossing family films, prime time and children's TV shows (2006-2011), females were more likely than males to be shown wearing sexy attire (28% vs. 9%) and showing some exposed skin (27% vs 9%), to have a thin body (34% vs. 11%), and to be referenced by another character as physically attractive or desirous (15% vs. 4%) (Smith, Choueti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2013).**

Research shows clear connections between sexualized media and body-image ideals. For example, one content analysis of 11,927 speaking characters in top-grossing family films, on prime-time TV programming, and on children's TV shows from 2006–2011 found that females were far more likely than males to be depicted wearing sexy attire (28% vs. 8%) and showing some exposed skin (27% vs. 9%), to have a thin body (34% vs. 11%), and to be referenced by another character as physically attractive or desirous (15% vs. 4%) (Smith et al., 2013). Exposure to these types of media that present hypersexualized images takes a toll on girls' body image and self-esteem. In a study of over 500 teen girls (age 13 to 18), Vandenbosch & Eggermont (2012) identified direct relationships between sexually objectifying media and the internalization of beauty ideals. In short, media messages about women's beauty ideals often emphasize both a thin ideal *and* sex appeal.

Despite the volume of research exploring the role of traditional media in body image, the preponderance of evidence is not conclusive about a strong *causal* role for media. At best, we can say that exposure to/consumption of mass media is a risk factor for developing unhealthy body image (Levine & Murnen, 2009).

### **More research is needed on young people's increasing access to traditional offline media in digital formats.**

To date, there is no research comparing the links between body image and young people's exposure to "traditional" media through digital and mobile platforms with the kinds of links that have been found between "offline" media exposure and body image. Children are increasingly consuming media via the Web and on mobile devices (Common Sense Media, 2013). If they can access TV shows, movies, music, games, and other media with few barriers online, is the impact of so-called traditional media on body image amplified? Take online advertising, for example. Many sites collect users' personal data and target them with specific advertisements based on demographic assumptions. Ads promoting weight-loss programs and beauty products may appear frequently on a female social network user's profile or in Internet search results. Do these types of personalized ad experiences shape young people's internalization of gender stereotypes and body-image ideals? Furthermore, with the advent of transmedia campaigns and the proliferation of messages about any one product — such as a movie title — across multiple touch points frequented by children and teens, it is getting harder to track ubiquitous media messages and ascertain their influence on attitudes and behavior.

# The Role of Digital and Social Media in Children's and Teens' Development of Body Image

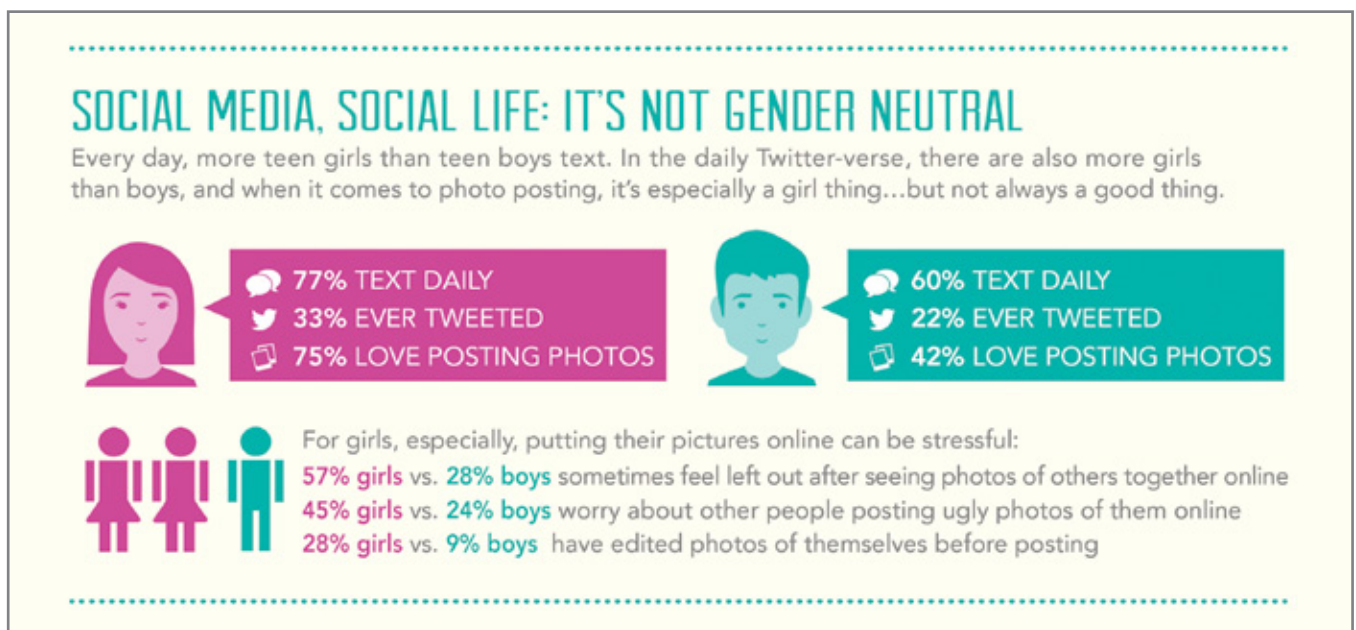
## The Internet has opened up new dimensions for children's exposure to and engagement with media.

Young people can discover all types of user-generated content online, as well as create, remix, and share media themselves. Most children begin engaging regularly with cell phones and social network sites during early adolescence — a time when they also become increasingly preoccupied with image, peer status, and friendship. Teens' online-identity exploration and their friend networks, by and large, are closely connected to their "real world" experiences (Ito et al., 2010; boyd, 2008), and they develop their gender identities in both spaces by modeling others and noting what is deemed socially acceptable (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Through social and mobile media, teens provide one another with instant and impactful feedback on appearance and self-expression. Furthermore, social media participation literally opens up the world to them, with access not only to peers from across the street but also potentially across the country and world — with attendant opportunities and pitfalls (Huang et al., 2014).

## Offline gender roles and gender differences may be reproduced in online spaces.

Today's teens are avid, daily social media users (Common Sense Media, 2012; Madden et al., 2013). Three-fourths of teenagers currently have a profile on a social network site (Common Sense Media, 2012). These digital hangout spaces offer young people new canvases for self-expression and identity exploration, enabling them to choose how they present themselves to an online public (boyd, 2008). They also create new channels for peer-to-peer communication and social pressure. For example, in a national study of teens age 13 to 17, Common Sense Media (2012) found that out of the 75% of teens who had a profile on a social network site, 35% reported having worried about people tagging them in unattractive photos; 27% reported feeling stressed out about how they look when they post pictures; and 22% reported feeling bad about themselves when nobody comments on or "likes" the photos they post. Though girls and boys alike reported having these experiences, they were more common among girls.

## Gender differences in social media use and body-image-related feelings and behaviors - figure 3.



Source: Common Sense Media, 2012

Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan (2008) suggest that gender role constructions on social network sites tend to correspond with those in mainstream U.S. culture (i.e., women as attractive and relationship-oriented and men as strong and powerful). The digital world is an extension of the offline world, and therefore existing social scripts (for example, about gender roles) help shape the creation of norms in online contexts, such as social network sites. In other words, gender norms offline help guide gender norms online. This framework may illuminate some of the statistics in Figure 3 above.

### **Exposure to thin-ideal messages online is associated with girls' negative body-image perceptions.**

A handful of recent research studies have examined the relationship between young women's everyday Internet exposure and their body-image concerns (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013; Bair, Kelly, Serdar, & Mazzeo, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). Some researchers have explored the role of entertainment news, fashion/beauty websites, and health/fitness websites. Bair et al. (2013), for example, found that college-age women not only spend more time with such online media but also that it correlates with body dissatisfaction — more so than exposure to print magazines with similar content. Although the direction of this relationship is unclear in this cross-sectional, correlational study, it appears that the two factors (time spent on online body-focused media and body dissatisfaction) are linked; further investigation is warranted.

Other researchers have examined peer-to-peer interactions on social network sites. One study of teen girls found that Facebook users were significantly more likely than non-Facebook users to have internalized a drive for thinness and to engage in body surveillance (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Another study of college-age females identified a link between disordered eating and appearance-based social comparison on Facebook (Smith, Hames, & Joiner Jr., 2013). It's important to note that all of these studies are only correlational in nature, and thus it is not possible to attribute cause to social media use for body dissatisfaction and internalization of appearance ideals. It is entirely possible — and likely — that young people who are self-conscious about their appearances offline are engaging more with online content that feeds their body-image concerns. It's also possible that young people with the propensity to have these concerns are more likely to create content that mirrors these concerns.

Research indicates that 93% of young women engage in “fat talk” in everyday life offline (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011; Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008); “fat talk” is a term used to describe disparaging or commiserative comments about one's appearance and the need to lose weight. One study explored how witnessing “fat talk” on simulated Facebook pages affected the body satisfaction and psychological well-being of college-age women in the United States and Korea (Lee, Taniguchi, Modica, & Park, 2013); both U.S. and Korean women reported lower body satisfaction after exposure to “fat talk” on a simulated Facebook page, but Korean women were only affected by “fat talk” by an underweight person whereas U.S. women responded similarly to “fat talk” by both an underweight and an overweight person. U.S. women were not affected by simulated peer comments, but Korean women reported lower psychological well-being after witnessing thin-promoting comments from the fat-talking poster's Facebook friends (vs. thin-discouraging comments).

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### **The Internet provides access to pro-eating disorder public forums and communities and pro-thinness/fitness content creation.**

One area of research that has received a lot of attention in the past decade focuses on pro-eating disorder Internet forums and websites. Typically referred to as *pro-ana* (pro-anorexia) and *pro-mia* (pro-bulimia) communities, these self-harm subcultures offer spaces for users to encourage each other's disordered eating practices (boyd, Ryan, & Leavitt, 2011). Users may engage in discussions, manage diary-like entries, and exchange images, poetry, and lyrics to *thinspire* themselves and other community members (Brotsky & Giles, 2007; boyd, Ryan, & Leavitt, 2011; Boero & Pascoe, 2012).

The extent to which these sites actually inspire/exacerbate disordered eating among users is unclear. Heavy users of pro-eating disorder sites commonly have eating disorders



## An example of “fitspiration” - figure 4.



<http://reasonstobefit.tumblr.com/>

(Peebles et al., 2012), but this may be because young people already so afflicted are drawn to such sites. However, one study found that college-age women (who did not already identify as eating-disordered) who were exposed to pro-ana sites for 1.5 hours ended up decreasing their caloric intake and applied some of the techniques they learned from those websites a week later (Jett, LaPorte, & Wanchisn, 2010). Another study found that young adult women experienced lower self-esteem, had an increased perception of being overweight, and reported a greater preoccupation with their weights after viewing a pro-ana website as compared to a female fashion website and a home décor website (Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2007).

Some social media platforms, such as Instagram, have tried to manage pro-ana/pro-mia content by banning common hashtags related to that content (for example, *#thinspiration* or *#thinspo*) (Duca, 2013). However, some experts point out that censoring this type of content may not be the most effective solution. On the one hand, community members either find workarounds (Duca, 2013) or drive the content farther underground. On the other hand, the same content that might inspire a user to engage in disordered eating practices might deter another (boyd, Ryan, & Leavitt, 2011). Mental health professionals also can benefit from the visibility of pro-ana/pro-mia sites, learning from them to help

community members. For example, if researchers or health professionals know the most popular search terms for pro-ana/pro-mia content, they can use search engine optimization (SEO) strategies to direct community members toward research-based resources about treatment and recovery (Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012).

Overall, more research is needed to understand the context of and users' engagement in online pro-eating disorder communities and how health professionals can learn from and support these users online. Researchers also have yet to explore more socially sanctioned forms of *thinspo* or *fitspo* (fitness inspiration) on mainstream platforms, such as Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and Whisper. For example, users on these sites may pin images of slender and fit women with an overlay of inspirational text (a quotation, for example), workout routines, or diet information. A content analysis of a site like Pinterest may shed light on the nature and context of users' interest in a "thin ideal" — particularly in relationship to other popular content on the site (for example, recipes for decadent sweets). A content analysis of YouTube videos (before/after weight-loss montages, video blogs by users chronicling their weight-loss journeys, tips and tricks on dieting and fitness, thinspiration slide shows, and so on) also could provide insight into how younger users are consuming and creating their own messages about body image.

## **Managing one's self-image to an online public can impact one's self-esteem both positively and negatively.**

Researchers on digital youth culture have pointed out the benefits of teens' interest- and identity-driven behaviors online (Ito et al., 2008). Identity exploration has been characterized as the pivotal task of adolescence in Western cultures for decades (Erikson, 1968). But now, this psychological "moratorium," during which adolescents explore their social roles and experiment with their comfort zone boundaries, is playing out both in offline and online contexts.

The extent to which social media magnifies young people's body esteem or satisfaction is unclear. Some studies indicate that exposure to one's own social media photos (which often involves engaging with a flattering self-image) can raise self-esteem (Toma, 2013; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). For example, 65% of teen girls and 40% of adults say that selfies — photos that users take of themselves — and other flattering photos of themselves online make them feel more confident (*Today Show* & AOL.com, 2014).

However, the process of creating and managing a social network profile also can lead to *self-objectification*: one's self-concept being greatly defined by one's physical attractiveness (de Vries & Peter, 2013; American Psychological Association, 2007). For example, one recent study found that young women were more likely to objectify themselves (emphasize physical attractiveness in self-portrayals) in a public online profile after being exposed to an objectifying perfume advertisement (de Vries & Peter, 2013). In another survey conducted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (2014), one in three surgeons (out of 2,700) reported an increase in requests for procedures due to patients being more self-aware of their appearances in social media. Though objectification often is associated with sexualization (American Psychological Association, 2007), it also has been correlated with both body shame and appearance anxiety (Slater & Tiggemann, 2002).

Norms surrounding the kinds of photos teens post of themselves, and appearance-oriented comments that girls commonly receive, deserve more attention from researchers. For example, girls' public displays of friendship online commonly involve appearance-oriented language (Schryver, 2011), but the motivations behind and psychological impact of these practices have yet to be explored.

**About four in 10 teens say that they often or sometimes encounter sexist (44%) or homophobic (43%) comments on social network sites (Common Sense Media, 2013).**

## **Sexism is prevalent online, but research on how it impacts girls' body image and self-esteem is lacking.**

Research on traditional media indicates that gender stereotypes and sexism contribute to body-image issues. However, researchers have yet to explore the impact of gender-oriented online hate and harassment on young people's body images. We do know, however, that these kinds of online behaviors are prevalent. About four in 10 teens say that they often or sometimes encounter sexist (44%) or homophobic (43%) comments on social network sites (Common Sense Media, 2013).

In a study of YouTube videos about being fat, men were aggressors (those who were likely to stigmatize) over 11 times more than women were, although they were victims (those who were likely to *be* stigmatized) twice more than women were. That is, men were slightly more likely to *be* stigmatized, but they were much more likely to stigmatize others, whether the victim was male or female (Hussin, Frazier, & Thompson, 2011; Yoo & Kim, 2012).

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Journalists, bloggers, organizations, and even musical and visual artists are beginning to raise public awareness about the ways in which women are harassed online with derogatory remarks about their appearance, weight, and sexuality (Chemaly, Friedman, & Bates, 2013; Bates, 2014; Mayberry,

2013; Vingiano, 2014; Ross, 2014). Many have called upon social media platforms to actively police verbal attacks against women referencing sexual violence and domestic abuse (Chemaly, 2013; Hess, 2014), and certain sites, such

## Case Study: Turning Digital Hate into a Body-Image Campaign

In 2014, 21-year-old Lindsay Bottos took to Tumblr — a blogging site — to publicize the cruel, anonymous comments she received from users about her appearance. Bottos, an artist, had been criticized for the self-portraits she posted on her personal website. “You’re honestly one of the ugliest people I’ve ever seen in my whole entire life,” one user wrote. “It’s funny because you think you’re cute but its really sad. sorry, the truth hurts,” posted another (Bottos, 2014). The comments directed at Bottos reveal harsh double standards for women, especially regarding body ideals. For example, one user posted, “ew eat something seriously” while another posted, “I can tell you photoshop your pictures to make yourself skinnier. Too bad I know what you look like IN REAL LIFE. Get your fat ass off tumblr and go run or something jesus” (Bottos, 2014).

Bottos decided to turn these cruel comments into art by overlaying them on her self-portraits. When she published the series to Tumblr, her project went viral. Other bloggers and online news outlets picked up the story, shedding light not only on the types of appearance-oriented hatred directed at women online but also the power of art and viral media to raise awareness about such issues.

as Facebook and Twitter, have taken a deeper look at their reporting of abuse because of such public attention (Facebook, 2013; Waldram, 2013).

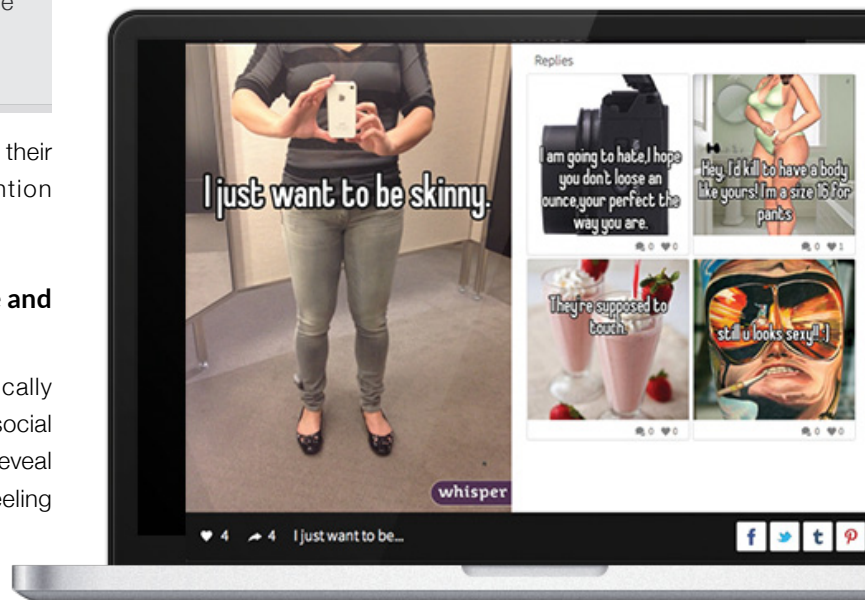
### There is a dearth of research on boys’ body image and the Internet.

To our knowledge, there are no studies that specifically examine boys’ self-presentation or appearance-based social comparison online. As mentioned above, a few surveys reveal that boys do experience body-image concerns online (feeling

bad about themselves after seeing photos of themselves on social media; worrying about appearing ugly in photos posted by others), but it’s to a lesser extent than girls. In reality, these percentages may be even higher than reported, since boys may not admit to feeling concerned about their appearance for fear of coming across as effeminate.

A few researchers have examined the impact of boys’ exposure to Internet pornography on their body images and beliefs about gender roles. For example, Vandenbosch & Eggermont (2013) found that pornography and sexualizing prime-time TV programs appear to have a greater — and direct — impact on men’s self-consciousness about their appearance than men’s magazines and music videos. Another study found that teen boys’ exposure to sexually explicit Internet material is both a cause and a consequence of their beliefs that women are sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). In other words, more frequent exposure to porn leads to stronger beliefs that women are sex objects, and, conversely, such beliefs lead to more frequent viewing of porn (for boys, at least). These findings are particularly significant for girls, given that objectifying and sexualizing media have been found to negatively impact girls’ cognitive, social, emotional, and physical well-being, including their body esteem and eating habits (American Psychological Association, 2007).

## Anonymous social media users challenge mainstream body-image ideals - figure 5.



Source: <http://whisper.sh/topics/5ceb40da-4b21-11e3-a57e-2200afe43fe/skinny>

# Lessons for Intervention

Our interest in children's healthy development today stems from an intrinsic understanding that they will grow up to become tomorrow's adults. Body image is an essential component of children's and teens' growth — one that significantly impacts their emotional and physical well-being. Today's ever-evolving media landscape pushes us to reimagine our strategies for helping children manage the impact that media — both traditional and digital — have on their body esteem and sense of self.

Below are some key reminders for those invested in addressing media and body-image-related issues on a national scale:

## **Body image is multifaceted.**

Media are but one of many sets of factors contributing to body-image perception. Although it may be easy to point fingers at media for the increasingly earlier onset of eating disorders, we can't forget that multiple forces are at play. Eating disorders, for example, have a wide range of root causes: parental and familial ties, peer influence, genetics, trauma, stress, personality factors, and more. To this end, preventing eating disorders requires more than only media-literacy education. It involves developing confidence and self-appreciation, managing stress, and developing mindful and balanced relationships with food (Steiner-Adair & Sjoström, 2006).

## **Any intervention must recognize cultural values.**

Because body image is community- and culturally specific, interventions must recognize cultural values. Lester (2007), for example, found distinctly different ideologies at an eating disorder clinic in Mexico City, Mexico, compared to a clinic in the Midwestern U.S. Each clinic reflected different cultural scripts about agency, sexuality, desire, and femininity. Therapy at the U.S. clinic promoted American values of independence and self-control. In contrast, the Mexican clinic's treatment methods were more socio-centric and familial. This research supports community-specific approaches to interventions around body image. Prior sections chronicle other research on culturally specific aspects of body image as well.

## **Existing programs and campaigns have had mixed results.**

In recent decades, researchers have designed and implemented a variety of programs aimed at addressing adolescents' body-image issues, to varying degrees of success. Such programs — most often implemented in classroom settings (Bergsma & Carney, 2008) — utilize a variety of strategies and frameworks. They commonly involve adult-led, multisession, discussion-based workshops around body-image and self-esteem issues. Some programs seek to change attitudes and behavior through increasing participant knowledge about body-image concerns, healthy eating and exercise habits, and eating disorders (O'Dea, 2004). Others, such as Full of Ourselves, use “non-pathologizing” approaches that view body-image concerns as “culturally sanctioned” social responses as opposed to illnesses (Steiner-Adair & Sjoström, 2006). Targeting low self-esteem — by building a positive sense of self, encouraging acceptance of others, managing stress, and developing communication skills — also has been deemed an important factor in the prevention of eating disorders (O'Dea, 2004; O'Dea & Abraham, 2000; Shisslak, Crago, Renger, & Clark-Wagner, 1998).

Citing the negative influence that media can have on body acceptance, many programs emphasize media literacy as a strategy for combatting body-image concerns (Richardson & Paxton, 2010; Halliwell, Easun, & Harcourt, 2010; Steese et al., 2006). Media literacy involves critically examining media messages that encourage risky behaviors, stereotypes, and social ideals (Hobbs, 1998; Bergsma & Carney, 2008). In one body-image intervention program for middle school girls (Happy Being Me), for example, almost 50% of participants felt that the program's media-literacy component was their favorite part of the course (Richardson & Paxton, 2010). Many of these programs, however, focus on traditional media; few have evolved to address the messages that children encounter and create online. Hobbs & Jensen (2009) suggest that media-literacy stakeholders should focus more attention on digital technology use, helping young people develop familiarity with and a vocabulary for discussing their participation in digital youth culture.



Not all educational programs, however, successfully improve body acceptance and boost self-esteem among preadolescents and adolescents. Some studies have found that educational intervention has little to no effect on adolescent self-esteem, suggesting that existing methods should be reexamined and, perhaps, replaced by more innovative interventions (Richardson & Paxton, 2010; McVey, Davis, Tweed, & Shaw, 2003).

The duration of interventions also matters. For example, in a review of 28 health-promoting media-literacy interventions, Bergsma & Carney (2008) rated long-term interventions as more effective than short-term ones — in part because participants have more time to learn and practice a range of core media-literacy skills. The same study also identified teacher training and professional development as an area of concern, because it takes trained teachers at least a year of consistent practice to become familiar enough with media-literacy content and best practices.

Other studies have found *negative* effects on participants' self-esteem: Programs seeking to educate participants about “dangerous” eating and dieting habits can actually *induce* those behaviors in participants (O’Dea, 2004; Steiner-Adair & Sjoström, 2006). In addition, a majority of prevention programs focus on the body concerns and needs of girls; boys, however, also benefit from media-literacy and body-acceptance programs (Stanford & McCabe, 2005; Wilksch, Tiggemann, & Wade, 2006). In studies directed at both boys and girls, girls tend to show greater boosts in self-esteem than boys or to improve in body acceptance in more areas

than their male counterparts (McVey, Davis, Tweed, & Shaw, 2003; Wilksch, Tiggemann, & Wade, 2006; O’Dea & Abraham, 2000).

Though body image is distinctly different from other health-related issues facing teens, such as alcohol, cigarette, and drug abuse, we can learn from successful campaigns on those topics. Farrelly, Davis, Haviland, Messeri, & Heaton (2005) evaluated the impact of the American Legacy Foundation’s “truth” campaign in the early 2000s on national smoking rates among U.S. youth. Their findings suggest that the smoking prevalence among their sample population decreased from 35% to 18% between 1992 and 2002 and that the campaign accounted for approximately 22% of this decline. The campaign’s approach was unique in that it avoided overt and directive messages telling teens not to smoke. Instead, its messaging centered on exposing manipulative marketing practices of the tobacco industry, as well as graphic images depicting facts about smoking-related death and disease. This case study of a campaign shows the potential power of messages that shy away from didacticism about behavior.

Companies and brands geared toward women also have incorporated messages about realistic beauty standards and wellness into marketing campaigns. The perceived success of these campaigns varies, and many have been criticized for their hypocrisy: simultaneously “challenging” gender stereotypes and unrealistic beauty ideals, all the while promoting beauty and fashion products. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2. Summary of corporate campaigns aimed at body image.**

| Company or Organization/Year            | Campaign  |
|---|---|
| Dove<br>(2004–present)                  | <p><b>Campaign for Real Beauty</b></p> <p>Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty seeks to challenge stereotypical definitions of female beauty by promoting more “realistic” representations of women’s bodies in the media. It also seeks to communicate that it cares about its customers and recognizes the pressures that beauty industries place on women (Nelson, 2014). Over the years, the campaign has used viral videos and ads to overtly display the company’s efforts to feature and celebrate women of diverse backgrounds, shapes, and sizes.</p> |
| Nike<br>(2006)                          | <p><b>Real Women</b></p> <p>Nike’s Real Women campaign aimed to embrace more curvy and athletic body types. Its advertisements zeroed in on body parts themselves (e.g., knees, butts, thighs) with taglines such as “I have thunder thighs.” The campaign was deemed less popular than that of Dove (Pollack, 2005).</p>   |
| Athleta<br>(2012)                       | <p><b>Power to the She</b></p> <p>Athleta, a Gap Inc.-owned company, launched a campaign about the balancing act that busy women face to stay fit. “A lot of brands speak to women about attaining physical beauty <i>or</i> physical prowess. We felt like there was this beautiful space in between, where we could speak to her about being both feminine and powerful,” said Athleta’s Director of Advertising Sheila Shkar (Nudd, 2012).</p>   |
| Aerie<br>(2014)                         | <p><b>Aerie Real</b></p> <p>Aerie, American Eagle Brand’s lingerie line, launched an advertising campaign that featured un-airbrushed models with more “realistic” body types. Though the company’s efforts to showcase its models’ “imperfections” (tattoos, beauty marks, dimples, stretch marks, and so on) were applauded by many, others argued that the models were still very beautiful, young, relatively thin, and sexualized (Dockterman, 2014a).</p>   |
| Mattel and Sports Illustrated<br>(2014) | <p><b>Barbie #unapologetic</b></p> <p><i>Sports Illustrated</i> and Mattel came under fire for the magazine featuring Barbie in the 50th anniversary issue of its annual swimsuit edition. The stated goal of the #unapologetic campaign was to empower fans — not just girls — to “engage and celebrate all that makes them who they are”. Critics argued against the sexualization of a child’s toy — particularly one that has been linked with encouraging unrealistic beauty and body ideals (Grinberg, 2014).</p>                                   |

It is important to note that these campaigns differ from public service campaigns funded by cities and foundations. New York City, for example, launched its NYC Girls' Project, a multiagency, multifaceted initiative aimed at raising girls' body and self-esteem. The campaign featured posters on buses, on phone kiosks, and in subways and involved new after-school programming for girls on the topics of body image, media, and leadership (City of New York, 2014). The success of this campaign has yet to be evaluated, but its motive is clear: addressing body image through empowering messages that aim to broaden standard definitions of beauty.

### Social media can be powerful intervention tools.

Despite potential pitfalls, the Internet offers promising opportunities for positive intervention surrounding young people's body esteem in today's digital world. Overall, teens are much more likely to report that using social media has a positive impact on their social and emotional lives than a negative one (Common Sense Media, 2012; Lenhart, et al., 2011). In a national survey of teens, more than one in four say that using their social network site makes them feel less shy (29%) and more outgoing (28%); one in five says that it makes them feel more confident (20%), more popular (19%), and more sympathetic to others (19%); and 15% say it makes them feel better about themselves (Common Sense Media, 2012).

**Half (52%) of all teen social media users say using such media has mainly helped their relationships with friends, most say social media help them keep in touch with friends they can't see regularly (88%), get to know other students at their school better (69%), and connect with new people who share a common interest (57%) (Common Sense Media, 2012).**

The Internet offers public platforms for young people and adults alike to speak their minds, share their stories, establish meaningful and supportive relationships, and discuss community norms. They can discover role models and stories that are not represented in mainstream media — ones that challenge the status quo. They can make an effort to not perpetuate gender stereotypes in the videos, images, comments, and messages they share and challenge stereotypes they come across. And they can actively promote cultures of kindness, empathy, and respect in their online communities.

### Pinterest user perceptions of social media and traditional gender roles - figure 6.



Source: <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/235172411762857976/>



## Case Study: The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

Social media have opened new avenues for campaigns seeking to challenge popular beauty standards. Viral videos, for example, have been part of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty strategy since 2004.

The campaign's first short film, "Evolution" (2006), featured time-lapse footage of a model being prepared for a photo shoot, photographed, and then digitally altered for a billboard ad. That year, Dove also released a commercial called "Little Girls" that aired during the Super Bowl, reaching an estimated 89 million viewers (Dove, 2014). In 2013, Dove launched a follow-up campaign called Redefine Beauty. They released another short film titled "Dove Real Beauty Sketches" (Doveunitedstates, 2013) that featured an FBI sketch artist who illustrated comparisons between women's self-perceptions and others' perceptions of how they look. In 2014, Dove released another short film, "Selfie," that centered on mother-daughter explorations of self-portraiture, this time focusing on the power of social media to widen common perceptions of beauty. "Social media is putting the reins in their hands," says one mother in the video. "The creativity of social media is definitely allowing you to start to define for yourself what beauty is" (Doveunitedstates, 2014).

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty's intentions generally have been well received by the public, particularly women (Millard, 2009; Nelson, 2014). One study tested the impact of Dove's video "Evolution" on adolescent girls. Those who watched the video before viewing images of ultrathin models reported higher body esteem and body satisfaction in the short term compared to girls who were not shown the video (Halliwell, Easun, & Harcourt, 2010). This study suggests the potential short-term effectiveness of Dove's videos as a media-literacy tool.

However, critics also have pointed out the videos' shortcomings. They primarily feature white, pretty women (Fridkis, 2013), and some argue that their messages place too much blame on girls' inner critics (Keane, 2013). Other critics question Dove's authority to "redefine beauty," since it sells beauty products, and argue that the brand systematically reproduces the ideals that it purports to combat (Alter, 2014; Johnston & Taylor, 2008). Critics also point out that Dove's parent company, Unilever, owns other brands (Slim-Fast, for example) that conflict with Dove's campaign message (Hannah, 2013).

Overall, Dove's videos have demonstrated public interest in body-positive messaging and challenging unrealistic body standards, as well as the power of viral media to scale campaigns. Social media is both opening new doors for campaigns as well as making debates around these campaigns more public, thereby helping consumers think critically about the products they purchase and the messages driving their promotion.

## Examples of Internet and social media initiatives to encourage healthy, non-stereotypical views of gender and body image.

### Youth

**Young people are leveraging the power of the Internet to encourage more realistic and healthy portrayals of girls and boys in the media. For example:**

- Fourteen-year-old Julia Bluhm led a successful Change.org campaign against airbrushed images of women in *Seventeen magazine* (Dwyer, 2012).
- Fifteen-year-old Tavi Gevinson founded an online publication, *Rookie Magazine*, written by teenage girls for teenage girls through a feminist lens. “I felt that there just wasn’t a publication that spoke to me as a teenager or as a girl about the things I was interested in, and worried about, and excited about ...” (Indigo | Chapters, 2013).

### Parents

**Through blog articles, op-eds, and videos, many parents have shared their experiences grappling with and challenging gender stereotypes while raising children. For example:**

- A father captured his 4-year-old daughter, Jessica, saying her daily affirmation (“I like my hair! I like my haircuts! I like my pajamas! ... I can do anything good!”) in the mirror and posted the video on YouTube (Dmchatster, 2009).
- A father published a letter to his son about the importance of seeing a woman for who she is and not how she looks. “It is a woman’s responsibility to dress herself in the morning. It is your responsibility to look at her like a human being regardless of what she is wearing,” he writes (Pyle, 2013).

### Organizations

**Organizations are leveraging the power of social media to create campaigns and products related to gender equality and body image.**

- The Representation Project’s #NotBuyingIt campaign encourages users to call out sexist media through an app and/or a Twitter handle (The Representation Project,

2014). The Representation Project is a nonprofit founded by Jennifer Siebel-Newsom, director of the documentary films *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In*.

- Getty Images and LeanIn.Org joined forces to create a brand-new collection of stock photos that represent women and girls in empowering roles. LeanIn.Org is an organization founded by Facebook’s COO Sheryl Sandberg and is committed to helping close today’s gender gap in leadership (Getty Images, 2014).

### Celebrities

**Celebrities are using social media (e.g., Twitter and Instagram) to speak their minds about body image and gender equality and to share “behind-the-scenes” photos of themselves without professional makeup, styling, and airbrushing.** These powerful snapshots can have a greater impact and life span on the Internet, thanks to online video-sharing, social networks, and online news sites, and have been used to expose gender biases in Hollywood and popular culture. For example:

- Grammy award-winning singer Lorde called out Photoshopped pictures of herself on Twitter: “i find this curious — two photos from today, one edited so my skin is perfect and one real. remember flaws are ok :-)” (Huffington Post Canada, 2014).
- A GIF of Cate Blanchett went viral, showing her playfully scolding a cameraman for his full-body scan of her outfit. “Do you do that to the guys?” she said, crouching down to the camera (Barasch, 2014).

The pressure for girls to look “naturally” beautiful also deserves our attention. Some celebrities, like Lorde, are challenging the status quo by calling out pictures that are airbrushed or by posting pictures of themselves without makeup. When teens see actresses looking gorgeously fresh-faced on Instagram, are they empowered to ditch their makeup bags for the day? Or does this make them feel dissatisfied with their own natural appearances? It’s not clear whether “au naturel” versions of famous figures function as yet another body-image ideal for young people; researchers have yet to tackle these questions.

Singer Lorde calls out airbrushed photos on Twitter - figure 7



Source: <https://twitter.com/lordemusic>



# Conclusion

## In this brief, we reviewed research and campaigns on body image and media.

Beginning with the basics, we found that body image matters because it's integral to children's and teens' growing sense of themselves and their place in the world around them, with crucial impact on their well-being. We also pointed out that body image is a complex phenomenon that's affected by many factors, of which media and digital technologies are only one — but one very powerful — set. We noted that body image (how one thinks, feels, and acts toward one's body) is learned and thus prone to influence. In addition, we found that body image develops early, and social norms around size and appearance are learned very young, around preschool age.

Moving on to a brief review of the research on body image and “traditional” media (movies, television, magazines, ads), we found that there is strong documentation of unrealistic, idealized, stereotypical, and sexualized portrayals of body types. We also found evidence linking consumption of these media with negative relationships to body image and behavior. The explosion of content from these traditional media on new online and digital platforms offers unprecedented access and exposure to young people, yet there is little research on how children and teens interact with this content online and how it affects their body image.

There are a few research efforts on body image in relationship to online and digital platforms. We found these initial research studies indicate that offline gender roles, gender differences, and sexism are reproduced online, potentially setting the stage for stereotypical portrayals of body image. We noted preliminary research findings suggesting that exposure to thin-ideal messages is associated negatively with girls' body-image perceptions. But more research is needed to clarify the relationships among these issues.

With the potential for content creation afforded by online and social media, young people today are as much creators as consumers of content. This raises new questions about the linkages between media/technology and body image that have barely been studied. For example, we found that the phenomenon of public pro-eating disorder communities and

pro-thinness/fitness content is just beginning to be explored by researchers. Likewise, there isn't much research on the implications of managing one's self/body image to an online public — body image in the era of “likes” and wide online social networks — although there are some indications that young people have both supportive and detrimental experiences from their participation in social media.

Finally, we found a conspicuous absence of research on large bands of young people. Notably, boys and young men, youth of color, youth who are not heteronormative, and populations outside North America all are rarely subjects of research on body image, which tends to focus heavily on U.S. white girls and young women.

This report identified the following important, prioritized areas of needed research:

1. Research among populations not typically studied — young children, boys, youth of color, and LGBTQ youth
2. Longitudinal studies that could help establish causal mechanisms (Tiggemann, 2014)
3. Large-scale quantitative data on children's and teens' use (consumption and creation) of, and attitudinal/behavioral patterns around body-related issues in, digital and social media
4. Content analysis of digital and social media for trends in exposure to gender-biased, thin-ideal, and body-image-related content
5. Ethnographic and qualitative research that delves deeply into children's and teens' own experiences and understandings about how they and others present themselves online
6. Examinations of the relationship between online and offline body-image-related issues

In addition, we conducted a review of some leading social campaigns and drew the following key takeaways for creators of interventions or educational campaigns around body image and media:

1. Body image can't be addressed in a vacuum. It is multidimensional and affected by several elements in a young person's life. As such, focusing solely on media/technology use may not address the fundamental factors behind it. Key elements to examine are self-image/self-esteem, gender, peers, families, and cultural groups. Furthermore, prevailing offline stereotypes and gender biases — inherent in sexism, sexual objectification, and hypersexualization — are deeply intertwined with body image and with media/technology.
2. Children are creators and consumers of content; interventions should address both sides of the coin.
3. Young people are digital natives bathed in social media, likely deriving both benefits and drawbacks from its use. Campaigns aimed at young people would do well to draw on the power of social media.
4. Every young person is situated within a particular community and context. Generic interventions that don't speak to the specific experiences of a variety of young people may have limited effect.
5. Since body-image norms and concerns are learned very young and prone to influence from children's immediate environments (families, caregivers, peers), there's a great need for intervention at an early stage.



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# Glossary

**Anorexia:** A type of eating disorder characterized by an incessant pursuit of thinness. Anorexic patients (both men and women) often perceive themselves as overweight, regardless of their actual weights (Föcker, Knoll, & Hebebrand, 2013; American National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, n.d.).

**Binge Eating Disorder (BED):** A type of eating disorder characterized by recurring, compulsive episodes of overeating (Westerberg and Waitz, 2013; Binge Eating Disorder Association, n.d.).

**Body Dissatisfaction:** An individual's negative feelings toward his or her body, often regarding weight and size (Polivy & Herman, 2002; McLaren & Kuh, 2004).

**Body Image:** One's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and actions toward one's body. Body image is typically conceptualized through body size, evaluation of physical attractiveness, and emotions associated with body shape (Grogan, 2006; Cash, 2004).

**Bulimia Nervosa:** An eating disorder characterized by frequent episodes of excessive food intake followed by compensatory weight-loss strategies, such as purging (National Eating Disorders Association, n.d.).

**Digital Media:** Forms of electronic, often Web-based, media and communications, including websites, apps, and games.

**Eating Disorder:** An illness that results in serious disturbances of one's daily diet. Individuals with eating disorders can over-eat or starve themselves and frequently suffer from body dissatisfaction, depression, and/or other mental health concerns. Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2007).

**Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS):** Disordered eating patterns that fall outside the main diagnostic categories of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Over 50% of adults and adolescents who seek treatment for disordered eating are diagnosed with EDNOS (Le Grange, Swanson, Crow, & Merikangas, 2012; NIMH, 2007).

**Fat Talk:** The behavior of people (most studied among women) of average weight and height of conversing negatively about their body sizes and appearances (Craig, Marz, Bazzini, 2007; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011).

**Fitspiration (Fitspo):** The online practice of sharing images with text that encourage viewers to exercise. The term *fitspiration* is a combination of *fit* and *inspiration*.

**Gender/Gender Roles:** The attitudes, feelings, and behavior that any given culture associates with biological sex. *Gender roles* are the sets of beliefs and behaviors that society applies to individuals on the basis of biological sex (American Psychological Association, 2011; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

**Gender Expression:** The way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, or body characteristics (American Psychological Association, 2011).

**Hate Speech:** Cruel, hostile, or negative statements about someone based on his or her gender, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, ability, or age (Common Sense Media, 2012).

**Muscular Ideal:** An idealized vision of the male body as lean and muscular, which is frequently perpetuated in mainstream media. Some adult and adolescent males attempt to achieve this ideal through health-threatening behaviors, including steroid use and excessive dieting or exercise (Cafri et al., 2005).

**Pro-Ana Communities:** Online communities that promote anorexia and disordered eating among members. These communities bring together supporters of “pro-ana lifestyles” by sharing techniques for weight loss, describing strategies to hide anorexic symptoms, and offering social support for dieting individuals (boyd, Ryan, Leavitt, 2011; Boero & Pascoe, 2012).

**Pro-Mia Communities:** Online communities that promote bulimia nervosa among members. These communities proliferate techniques for weight loss, describe strategies to hide bulimic symptoms, and offer social support for bulimic individuals (boyd, Ryan, Leavitt, 2011).

**Self-Objectification:** A psychological process by which people — especially girls and women — internalize others’ objectifying perspectives of their bodies, thus becoming self-monitors of their own appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2005).

**Sex:** The classification of an individual as “male,” “female,” or “intersex” as a result of biological sex indicators, including internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, sex chromosomes, and gonads (American Psychological Association, 2011).

**Sexual Objectification:** The act of reducing another person’s value to that of an object of sexual desire or gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2005).

**Social Media Sites:** An umbrella term that refers to online social networks (such as Facebook, Google Plus, and LinkedIn), as well as to information- and media-sharing sites (such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Tumblr) (Madden et al., 2013).

**Thin Ideal:** A westernized standard of feminine beauty that places a high value on having a skinny body. Current beauty standards demand that women are not only thin but also “curvaceously thin,” meaning they are expected to have large breasts and buttocks with small waists, arms, and legs. These appearance ideals are unattainable for most women (Harriger, Calogero, Witherington, & Smith, 2010).

**Thinspiration (Thinspo):** The online practice of sharing motivational images and text that encourage viewers and readers to lose weight and engage in disordered eating habits. The term *thinspiration* is a combination of *thin* and *inspiration* (Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012).

**Traditional Media:** Forms of media that existed before the Internet, including magazines, television, music, and advertisements.

# Children, Teens, Media, and Body Image

A Common Sense Media Research Brief

## Credits

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## Common Sense Media's *Program for the Study of Children and Media*

The mission of Common Sense Media's *Program for the Study of Children and Media* is to provide parents, educators, health organizations, and policymakers with reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. For more information about the program and to read reports on these studies, visit [www.commonsense.org/research](http://www.commonsense.org/research).

For inquiries, contact [research@commonsense.org](mailto:research@commonsense.org).

## About Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids, families, and educators by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

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