Parent, Peer and Media Effect on the Perception of Body Image in Preadolescent Girls and Boys

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to begin to determine how parent, peer and media influences on the perception of body image of preadolescent girls and boys in Rize. The research was carried total 70 students of Mehmet Akif Ersoy middle school. Surveys were collected and analyzed in the statistics department using SPSS 14.0 for Windows. Results indicated peers had the largest negative influence (X 1.60/3.0) and media had the largest positive influence (X 2.12/3.0) for scale-response. Results also revealed the higher the positive influence, the higher positive self-image. As one increases positively the other will increase positively. The correlation between parents, peers, and media and body image was found to be significant, $P < .000 < \alpha = .05$. A correlation coefficient of .606/1.0 revealed a moderate to strong correlation. Results also indicated the preadolescent surveyed had a lower reported body image score than the influence from parents, peers, and media together. Results should be used by health educators to develop educational classes, programs that focus on the impact from parent, peer, and media influences on the perception of body image. The present study provides more insight and new trends in data, to the understanding of the onset of body image development in preadolescent.

Keywords

Body image, Effect, Perception, Media, Parent, Peer, Preadolescent

1. Introduction

Body image may be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that represents how individuals think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes [1]. Muth and Cash [1] conceptualized body image in two self-evaluative ways including satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one’s physical attributes and experience of discrete emotions. Definitions of body image arose to illustrate the different aspects of body image. These definitions include such dimensions as weight dissatisfaction, size-perception-accuracy, body satisfaction, appearance satisfaction, appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body esteem, body concern, body dysmorphia, body dysphoria, body schema, body percept, body distortion, body image, body image disturbance, and body image disorder[2]. The evolution of the complexity of the concept “body image” demonstrates the impact the growing literature has had on our understanding of this experience. More recently, conceptual models for understanding body image issues, such as socio-cultural, psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral and feminist models have been added to the construct [3]. In addition to these conceptual foundations, researchers have considered the development of body image across the lifespan, with an understanding of the experience of body image identity in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood [3]. These stages are also influenced by many factors such as media, culture, family systems, and interpersonal relationships.

Body shape and weight are critical determinants of self-esteem in adolescence because interpersonal success is increasingly seen as being closely linked to physical attractiveness [4]. Even though body image has been found to influence psychological well-being in different phases of life, this relationship is strongest during adolescence [5]. Body image is central to adolescent girls’ self-definition, because they have been socialized to believe that appearance is an important basis for self-evaluation and for evaluation by others [2]. Pubescent girls are becoming intensely anxious and dissatisfied with their naturally developing, fuller bodies [6]. The implications of these to academic outcomes have been noted by Yanover and Thompson [7]. Yanover and Thompson noted that the body image dissatisfaction might lead to high level of school absenteeism due to social anxiety regarding one’s appearance. While body image research has been mostly centered on girls in the past, recent research indicates that body image concerns are rapidly increasing among boys too [6] [8]. Athletic abilities are found to define boys’ popularity and self-confidence and thus, pre-adolescent boys report the desire to gain weight by increasing their muscularity [9]. As male and female body ideals differ, body image dissatisfaction for girls and boys differs as well [10]. The onset of puberty entails bodily changes that, on average,
move girls further away from societal standards of female beauty [11]. Young women desire to be perfect when it comes to their physical appearance, and describe their perfect ideal as tall, extremely thin and slender [12].

The Development of Body Image in Sociocultural Factors:

Media

Dohnt & Tiggemann [13] write that the media plays an important role in determining the ideal body image among adolescents. The ideal body image portrayed for females in the media has become unrealistically thin compared to the past [4]. Magazines, toys, advertisements, clothes all portray an image for girls and boys. Girls are encouraged to be “thin and sexy” and boys are encouraged to be “big and muscular”. An Australian study examined media influences and found that 6 to 10 year old girls who looked at women's magazines (e.g., Woman's Day) had greater dissatisfaction with their appearance and those who watched music television shows and read appearance-focused girls' magazines (e.g., Dolly, Total Girl) predicted dieting awareness [13]. Anderson and Di Domenico [14] conducted a survey of the articles and advertisements featured in the most popularly read male magazines and found that the male magazines contained more shape change articles and advertisements, and thus it would seem that males do not escape the socio-cultural pressure to achieve the ideal body shape. Another study confers that young boys and girls become dissatisfied with their bodies when it comes to media influence and social stereotypes [13],[15].

Parents

Parents and parental criticism about their own children’s weight and physical limitations is a crucial factor in developing body image dissatisfaction. Both mother and fathers’ attitudes towards their own bodies is correlated to body dissatisfaction among adolescents. A number of studies have implicated the role of parents in the development of body image dissatisfaction and emphasizing thinness in pre-adolescent and adolescent girls and boys between 8 to 12 years of age [10],[9],[16],[17]. Direct parental comments, especially mothers’ comments about their daughters’ weight, have a strong relation with their body image [17],[9] further state that parents, especially mothers, who go on diets and are concerned about their weight, tend to encourage their adolescent daughters to be thinner thus promoting body image dissatisfaction among them. Boys also received messages from fathers to exercise more and alter their body shape and size of their muscles [9].

Peers

The role of peers in shaping body image perceptions changes with age and becomes more important during the adolescent years. Social comparison appears as a factor very early elementary school [18]. This is probably one reason why young children are aware of whether they are considered overweight and why they negative feelings about their weight. It probably also contributes to children’s awareness of the negative stereotypes associated with body fat. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that peer messages concerning body shape might affect children’s body image. One study demonstrated such a correlation in third and fourth graders [19]. In addition, fourth and fifth grade girls who thought peers would like them more if they were thinner had higher weight concerns [20]. Friends and school peers can be influential through swapping information, modeling behaviors, exerting peer pressure and also through teasing [21]. Peer modeling and teasing is more strongly related to body dissatisfaction in third- through fifth-grade girls than perceived parental concern about their weight[17].

2. Method

Definition of Study Group and Procedures:

This study surveyed girls and boys ages 12 to 14 years who live in Rize. Participants were chosen from Mehmet Akif Ersoy middle school. A total of 70 participant forms and 70 parent permission slips were collected during the four-week surveying period. Each participant was asked to fill out the Parents, Peers, and Media Influences on Body Image Survey. This survey was adapted from The Sociocultural Influences on Body Image and Body Change Questionnaire developed by McCabe and Ricciardelli in 2001. At the beginning of the surveying process students turned in their parental consent forms and were asked if they would still like to participate in the survey. After it was made clear that completing the survey was the student’s own decision and completely voluntary, child assent forms were passed out to participating students. Participants were instructed on how to complete assent forms and once completed, forms were collected. Students who chose to participate in the study were properly instructed on how to take the survey and their confidentiality guaranteed while doing so. Since there were four different weeks during the summer, the survey was administered four times. The Director obtained signed permission slips from parents at the beginning of each week Surveys were conducted once parental and participant consent forms were obtained each week. Participants were informed of the study purpose and requirements before filling out the surveys Each participant could choose whether she wanted to continue to participate in the study.

Participants in this study were asked to indicate answers on a three-point Likert scale. The following were possible responses: “never,” “sometimes,” or “a lot.” For the positive questions, responses were coded as follows: never-3, sometimes-2, and a lot-1. For the negative questions, responses were coded as follows: never-1, sometimes-2, a lot-3. By coding responses into numeric scores, a higher score indicates a higher level of positive
influence, where a lower score indicates a higher level of negative influence. Each participant was made aware there were no right or wrong answers and responses remained anonymous. Participants were instructed not to write their names on the surveys, or identify themselves in any other way. After instructions were given, participants were able to ask questions as they filled out their surveys. Each survey was placed in a manila envelope to keep all answers confidential. After surveys had been completed, they were analyzed to answer the research questions. This study asked the following research questions:

1. To what extent do participant responses to the influence scales (Parents, Peers, Media) responses to the most positive influence on body image?
2. To what extent do participant responses to influence scales (Parents, Peers, Media) responses to the most negative influence on body image?
3. Which influence has the largest negative impact on body images of participants according to scale-responses?
4. Which influence has the largest positive impact on body images of participants according to scale-responses?
5. To what extent do influences affect body image score (question one) according to scale-responses (Composite)?

![Figure 1. Research flowcharts](image)

3. Results

Q1: To what extent do participant responses to the influence scales (Parents, Peers, Media) responses to the most positive influence on body image?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Participants’ scale-responses to which influence makes them feel the best about their body (survey questions 2-25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale-response: Media were reported as the largest positive influence (X 2.12/3.0) on body image.

Research Q2: To what extent do participant responses to influence scales (Parents, Peers, Media) responses to the most negative influence on body image?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Participants’ scale-responses to which influence makes them feel the worst about their body (survey questions 2-25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale-response: Peers were reported as the largest negative influence (X 1.60/3.0) on body image.
Table 3. Outcome of separating Parents’ category into Mother and Father categories (survey questions 26 and 27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.5098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.6559</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mother has a larger positive influence (X 2.5/3.0) when compared to father (X 1.6/3.0).

Table 4. Paired Samples Test conducted on Mother and Father categories vs. Parent category (survey questions 26 and 27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair: Mother &amp; Father</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.(2.tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.85392</td>
<td>15.526</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a statistically significant difference between father and mother influences P<.000< α = .05.

Research Q3: Which influence has the largest negative impact on body images of participants according to scale-responses?

Table 5. Participants’ scale-responses to which influence makes them feel the worst about their body (survey questions 2-25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.0913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.6029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.1290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale-response: Peers were reported as the largest negative influence (X 1.6/3.0) on body image.

Research Q4: Which influence has the largest positive impact on body images of participants according to scale-responses?

Table 6. Participants’ scale-responses to which influence makes them feel the best about their body (survey questions 2-25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.0913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.6029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.1290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale-response: Media were reported as the largest positive influence (X 2.12/3.0) on body image.

Research Q5: To what extent do influences affect body image score (question one) according to scale-responses (Composite)?

Table 7. Composite score for all scale-responses in every category: Father, Mother, Peers, and Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.4788</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale response (X): X 2.47/3.0
Table 8. Mean score for body image (survey question 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Image</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.2388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Body image score (Y): X 2.23/3.0
The girls have a lower reported body image score than the influence from parents, peers, and media together.

Table 9. Correlation among body image score (survey question 1) and composite score (survey questions 2-25) using Spearman’s rho

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body Image</td>
<td>Composite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Image</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>606**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a significant correlation, P < .000 < α = .05, between parents, peers, and media and body image. There is a statistically significant relationship between the influences and body image. A correlation coefficient of .606/1.0 reveals a moderate to strong correlation.

4. Discussion

The world we live in is a very complex, intimidating, and exciting place where everyday factors influence basically every decision we make, and almost every variable which makes up our sense of self. One of the main components that plays a role in self efficacy is body image. During the span of childhood through adulthood, men and women encounter numerous experiences that help shape and form their perception of themselves. One of the main experiences that helped shape who I am and how I feel about myself would be my battle with leukemia.

Adolescents in Turkey are prone to body image distortions and dissatisfaction. The reasons for this are multi-determined and include the influence of the media and cultural expectations, as well as a discrepancy between an adolescent’s own physical characteristics and the expectations of his or her social environment. Adolescents with severe body image distortions are vulnerable to developing serious psychiatric disorders that can have life-threatening consequences.

Results indicated peers had the largest negative influence (X 1.60/3.0) and media had the largest positive influence (X 2.12/3.0) for scale-response. Results also revealed the higher the positive influence, the higher positive self-image. As one increases positively the other will increase positively. The correlation between parents, peers, and media and body image was found to be significant, P < .000 < α = .05. A correlation coefficient of .606/1.0 revealed a moderate to strong correlation. Results also indicated the preadolescent surveyed had a lower reported body image score than the influence from parents, peers, and media together. In contrast with other studies which have found that exposure to thin and attractive individuals in the media lead to decreased body satisfaction [22] and recent studies find that body image disturbance is on the rise among males in college[23]. One study performed posed the question “Can the Media Affect Us?” [24].

The study showed exposure to thin ideal advertisements, as opposed to advertisements without the thin ideal included, increased body dissatisfaction, negative mood, and lowered self-esteem [24]. Though magazines may be the largest media influence on adolescents and young women, they are not the sole influence which portrays an unrealistic body image for females.

A study performed by Sinton and Birch, aimed at examining many influences, along with media, as predictors of appearance schemas in pre-adolescent girls [25]. Results of the study found all variables, including media exposure were prone to having influence on the level of importance girls place on their appearance [25].

A recent study by Tiggemann and Miller[26] found a strong correlation between body image disturbances and Internet use in general, and a particularly strong association with social networking site (SNS) use.

Previous research supports the relationship between media consumption and reduced self-esteem, increased self-consciousness, body-related anxiety, eating disorder development, and body dissatisfaction [27],[28],[29],[30],[31].

Parental influences are usually positive in regards to the impact they have on the child’s well being. According to findings of previous studies, it is important for parents to set a positive example for their children and avoid negative comments[32].

This supports research that shows the importance of family relations and body image. Though this study shows mothers are most likely to have the largest positive influence, more research is necessary to support these
findings and explain why this is so. Findings of Hammond’s study indicated peers had the largest negative influence on females aged 9-11 in the study’s target population[33].

Results of Hammond’s study indicated that parents had the greatest positive influence on body image of 9-11 year old females. This study also corresponds to that research, indicating that both males and females were most positively influenced by mothers.

The goal of education is not only to teach the curriculum but to help the adolescents cope with their social and psychological problems. Schools need to build young citizens who will contribute positively to the society and become comfortable with who they are and not what the society wants them to be. Schools can help by providing guidance and information in a time of uncertainty. This research allow for a better understanding of how self-esteem is related to exposure to idealized body images, they also demonstrate the broad consequences that these images have on preadolescent. We know that self-esteem and self-image are closely connected. Results may provide insight for future studies in learning how parents, peers, and media affect body images of other preadolescent who live in Rize.

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