Body image and ethnicity: A qualitative exploration

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history women have been comparing their bodies to celebrities, leading to dissatisfaction, depression, and other negative consequences. Most academic research focuses only Caucasian women's responses to idealized images. This study includes women of color, specifically African-American and Hispanic women, as well as men to see if the same results apply to these different groups. Results show that all groups feel some pressure to adhere to media images, however, Hispanic women felt the most pressure. African-American women and men felt the least pressure. Unexpectedly, men reported feeling some pressure. In the short term, marketers gain from these types of images. In the long term, it is worth it?

Keywords: Advertising, body image, subculture, Hispanic, African-American

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between women's body image and the images portrayed in the media has been explored in both the popular press and academic literature. Further and more recently, social activists, health professionals, the news media, and perhaps the advertising agencies responsible for developing and placing the advertisements are also examining the impact of media images on men. Individuals tend to compare what they see in others (especially others in the media) to what they see in the mirror. The ultra-thin models and/or digitally manipulated images portrayed in the media are unrealistic and idealized, detracting from that image in the mirror. There is little disagreement that images presented in the mass media tend to influence viewers' perceptions of body image. However, many questions remain unanswered. For example, the vast majority of body image research examines the impact of media influences on white women's perception of body image, fewer studies examine the influence of media images on ethnic minority females or males in the United States.

It is clear and undisputed that an awareness of body image, and therefore self-image, begins to form at a very young age and becomes even stronger over time. Dohnt and Tiggemann (2005) find that as many as 69% of very young girls (some of which could not read) report that they looked at magazines focused on appearance using thin models. Gardner et al. (1999) found that girls began to have a desire to become thinner around the age of seven and boys became more aware of their own body size around nine years of age. Perhaps more troubling is the finding that the desire to be thinner is found in young girls at approximately six years of age (Lowes and Tiggemann 2003). Further, as many as 42% of these six year old girls desire a thinner body and 43% indicated that they would use some type of diet to obtain a lower weight and thinner body (Dohnt and Tiggemann 2005).

It is not as clear whether this desire or pressure to become thin affects consumers equally across multiple ethnic groups. Some researchers suggest that the desire to be thin in the United States does not vary by ethnicity. For example, Shaw et al. (2004) examines eating disorders among ethnic groups (e.g., Asian, Black, Hispanic and White). Their results indicate that these study participants were equally likely to suffer from eating disorders, regardless of ethnicity. Shaw et al's (2004) findings suggest that members of these ethnic groups are feeling and responding to the pressure to be thin and are willing to take drastic measures to achieve this goal. However, other research suggests that members of some ethnic groups are more susceptible to media influence than others (Fitzgibbon et. al 1998, Miller et. al 2000). In sum, the findings on the impact of media images on body image across United States (U.S.) ethnic groups are contradictory.

Understanding the extent to which the body images of members of ethnic groups in the U.S. might be deferentially or similarly affected by media images is important in a country that is increasingly diverse and multicultural. Non-Hispanic Whites in the U.S. are the numerical majority of the population; however, this group is growing at a slower rate compared to other groups, e.g., Hispanics and Asians (http://2010.census.gov/news/releases/operations/cb11-cn125.html). Hispanics and African-Americans represent 16% and 13% of the total U.S. population, respectively. Further, California, Texas, the District of Columbia, Hawaii and New Mexico have 'majority-minority populations:' that is, more than 50% of the populations in these states are comprised of members of ethnic minority groups (http://2010.census.gov/news/releases/operations/cb11-cn125.html). Advertisers, public policy

makers and academic researchers need to disaggregate the effects and understand the impact of all types of advertisements on these distinct female and male populations. We address this gap in our academic literature. Our research question is: Do African-American and Hispanic consumers exhibit the same desire to be thin as White consumers when exposed to advertising that uses predominately thin White models? To address our research question we both quantitatively and qualitatively examine the extent to which media presentations and perceived cultural pressures to become thin (or more muscular for males) impact college students with different ethnic backgrounds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Body image conceptual framework

Perhaps the most simple and obvious question to ask is 'why do intelligent consumers choose to use unrealistic images as a source of comparison when in actuality only about 1 in 40,000 (Wolf 1991) meet the measurements of the traditional model?' The answer to this question might be addressed with either Social Comparison Theory and/or Objectification Theory.

Social Comparison Theory introduced by Festinger (1954) suggests that while consumers may understand that the images of very thin models in the media are unrealistic they are still likely to compare themselves to these models. The result of this comparison can be an overall increase of negative feelings about one's own body image and a corresponding drop in confidence and self-esteem. Richins (1991) suggests that viewing 'perfect' models seems to cause consumers to hold lower levels of satisfaction with their own body images. Wheeler and Miyake (1992) provide directionality to the comparisons and suggest that when comparisons are made to these perfect looking models, the direction tends to be 'upward' or 'do I look like them?' Consistent with Richins (1991) this upward comparison is likely to result in lower levels of satisfaction with one's body image.

Turner and Hamilton (1997) compared the responses of women who were exposed to fashion and news magazines. The result of these upward comparisons in women viewing fashion magazines are that the comparisons often lead to (1) a desire to weigh less, (2) more interest in being thin, (3) more frustration with weight issues, (4) more fear of getting fat and (5) less satisfaction with their own bodies than those who were exposed to news magazines (Turner and Hamilton 1997). Further, a meta-analysis (Grabe and Ward 2008) of body image literature indicates that approximately 57% of experimental studies are consistent with the upward comparison thesis and find that thin-ideal body images are linked to women's dissatisfaction with their own bodies. This research also suggests there is strong support for the link between mass media depictions of thin bodies and women's dissatisfaction with body image. In many cases, the resulting effects of this 'upward' comparison can extend beyond the psychological effects to physical effects (Morrison, Kalin and Morrison 2004). That is, some women who make upward comparisons and find themselves lacking, tend to engage in traditional dieting practices, as well as much more harmful weight control practices (Morrison, Kalin and Morrison 2004).

While the argument for upward comparison seems compelling, others suggest that social comparison has a quite different effect. Holmstrom (2004) presents a meta-analysis examining the influence of the media on body image. Holmstrom (2004) postulates that images of thin models have become so common that women may well engage in 'downward' comparisons.

Holmstrom suggests that younger women (who are less likely to be overweight) might be comparing themselves to more overweight images and thereby increase their own levels of body satisfaction.

Objectification Theory might also help explain body image dissatisfaction. This theory suggests that at an early age females learn to internalize other's views of them as their primary view of themselves (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). It is hypothesized that this objectification takes place as a result of interpersonal encounters and 'sexually objectifying gazing.' The latter refers to viewing television programming, music videos, women's magazines, and sports photography in which women's bodies are more objectified than men's bodies. One result of this constant objectification is that both girls and women will begin to think of themselves as objects for others to view and evaluate. Therefore, a positive self-image revolves around their perceived physical attractiveness to others (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). More recently, Fredrick et al. (2007) suggest that women constantly receive signals from friends, peers, family, and the media suggesting that their physical appearance is under constant scrutiny and is a major determinant of their body image. Fredrick et al. (2007) also contend that women report greater appearance surveillance and lower body satisfaction than men.

Regardless of the theory (Social Comparison or Objectification), the literature makes it quite clear that women tend to internalize the thin, physically fit, and typically white images of models shown in mass media advertising. It is also reasonable to assume that it is likely that women often use their perceptions of how others see them in determining how they perceive themselves. However, it is not clear whether the extent of internalizations of these feelings and ideals are constant across multiple ethnic groups, or if cultural and/or subcultural influences decrease the degree to which these images are internalized and acted upon. Further, little is known about how males respond to media images of muscular male models.

We review the literature on the influence of mass media images on body images and self-concepts of African-American women, Hispanic women, and males.

Body image and African-American consumers

Research involving African-Americans, with respect to body image and the desire to have a thin physical appearance, has produced conflicting results. Some of the research indicates dramatic differences between African-American and White women's desires to have a thin physical appearance and satisfaction with their bodies. Other research suggests there are perhaps small, and at times insignificant differences between these two groups. An early 1990 study found that while approximately 90% of White teens indicated they were dissatisfied with their bodies, almost 70% of African-American women were satisfied with their bodies (Psychology Today 1994). In other research conducted during the same time period respondents were asked to describe the perfect body (Ingrassia and Springen 1995). White teens ideal of body perfection was being 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighing between 100 and 110 pounds. On the other hand, African-American girls described the perfect body style in terms of other characteristics, e.g., full hips, thick thighs, and having the right attitude. Aruguete and Nickleberry (2004) found a similar difference in descriptions of ideals: African-American respondents reported preferring a body size they believed was healthy. However, White respondents preferred a body size smaller than they considered being healthy. Aruguete and Nickleberry (2004) also found that African-American students preferred a larger body size than White students. In addition, both African-American men and women were less likely to diet than White women.

In addition to the body image literature that compares African-Americans to Whites there has been some research that explores the influence of media images on these two groups. Milkie (1999) conducted in-depth interviews with a sample consisting of 49 White and 11 African-American girls (grades 9 and 10). The results indicate that the majority of the White respondents indicated a desire to look like the thin models shown in advertisements while the African-American girls were less influenced by the thin images and were more likely to criticize the appearance of thin models. The African-Americans said that African-American men desire women who were not extremely thin. Thus, the African-American respondents appeared to be more influenced by members of their ethnic group than by media images. Levine and Harrison (2004) findings are consistent with Milke's (1999). Their findings suggest that White females who were exposed to fashion magazines reported greater levels of body dissatisfaction. Subcultural influences might be present here: African-American girls indicated that they did not compare themselves to these images as the images were White ideals and did not appeal to them. Levine and Harrison conclude that White females appear to be more influenced by images of thinness than women of color.

As previously suggested, not all the research found differences between perceptions and behaviors of African-Americans and whites. Shaw et al. (2004) conducted 63 different tests using 785 women of various ethnic backgrounds. Their findings are that only one test indicated that both African-American and Hispanic women experienced less internalization of the thin-ideal than did White and Asian women. The other 62 tests found no significant difference among the behaviors of members of these ethnic groups. They therefore conclude that socio-cultural factors and influences may not have any effect across all ethnic groups. Grabe and Hyde (2006) also find this similarity of responses between ethnic groups. They conclude that while White women are slightly more dissatisfied with their body image than other ethnic groups, those differences are very small.

In a meta-analysis of body dissatisfaction literature, Roberts et al. (2006) found that African-American females are more satisfied with their bodies than White women. However, this difference in dissatisfaction levels seemed to disappear around the age of forty. In addition, they conclude that White women have actually become more satisfied with their appearance in recent years. The change could perhaps be the result of more exposure to minority women in mass media advertising that could help modify white women's perception of beauty.

To summarize, the literature is once again rather contradictory as to the influence of media images on the desire to be thin. It is unclear the extent to which African-Americans are impacted by these thin images. It is also not clear whether subcultural norms might mediate the relationship between viewing thin images and internalizing this ideal of beauty. Further, we do not know if the growing use of women of color in advertisements is changing the way all women perceive beauty. This study is designed to provide insight into these issues.

Body image and Hispanic consumers

The literature relating body image to Hispanic women is sparse and contradictory. Acculturation and enculturation might influence the body image of Hispanic women. Through a series of focus groups, Goodman (2002) found that, in general, Hispanic women are more satisfied with a heavier physique. Further, larger, curvier women are more socially accepted in Hispanic media sources and the Hispanic community in general. Pompper and Koenig (2004) also found that both white and Hispanic women indicate that magazine advertisements

emphasize that one should strive to be thin to be attractive to men. However, the overall influence of these ads on members of these two groups differs: White women continue to prefer a very thin body style; however, the Hispanic culture is much more accepting of larger body sizes. Similar to the findings of Goodwin (2002) this research suggests that Latin media sources are also much more accepting of 'full figure' body images.

It is however interesting to note that Pompper and Koenig (2004) also found that Generation X respondents born in the United States (or that had migrated to the United States before the age of five) are more likely to identify with images of White women. Further, they prefer English language magazines and therefore felt more pressure to be thin. Perhaps enculturation and acculturation are influencing factors. This tendency for younger Hispanic women to feel the same pressure to be thin as White women is found in a meta-analysis conducted by Grabe and Hyde (2006). They report that the majority of studies comparing White women to Hispanic women indicate that there are no significant differences in body dissatisfaction as measured with scale ratings of either body satisfaction or ideal body size (Grabe and Hyde 2006). They suggest that the area needs further quantitative testing to verify this assertion.

More recently, Viladrich et al. (2009) suggest that Hispanics (both women and men) are more accepting of heavier body types, perhaps due to the prevalence of obesity within the Hispanic population. Others argue that Hispanic women face similar or perhaps a greater fear of weight gain than do White women. In an attempt to determine which of these hypotheses might be more accurate, Viladrich et al. conducted a qualitative study using forty-four Hispanic women in 5 separate focus groups. While the overall consensus seems to be that the women feel a desire to be thinner as a result of exposure to media images, they also recognize the unrealistic goals being set by the media. Further, there was a belief that Hispanic men prefer women with curves more than very thin women (this is similar to African-Americans [Milkie 1999]). Additionally, the Hispanic participants thought they get more romantic attention from White men if they are thinner and more attention from Hispanic men if they are heavier (Viladrich et al. 2009).

The influence of media sources for the Hispanic community seems to revolve around enculturation and acculturation. As noted earlier by Pompper and Koenig (2004) Generation X respondents born in the United States (or had migrated to the United States before the age of five) were more likely to identify with images of White women and prefer English language magazines. Villarreal and Peterson (2008) also find that the Hispanic population could be segmented into four distinct cohorts based upon their degree of ethnic identity and level of familism (Hispanic core values). These cohorts were labeled as: A-Symbolic Hispanics (weak ethnic identity/high familism), Symbolic Hispanics (strongest ethnic identity/lowest degree of familism), Strong Hispanics (high ethnic identity/highest degree of familism), and Weak Hispanics (weak ethnic identity/low level of familism). These categories are important as it was found that A-Symbolic Hispanics prefer English speaking television. Conversely, Strong Hispanics and Weak Hispanics prefer Spanish speaking programs. However, all groups watched more English speaking television than Spanish-language television (perhaps because of the availability at the time of the studies). It may be that those women who identify more with the Hispanic culture and Hispanic media sources are less likely to be affected by advertisements portraying thin White women as the norm or ideal.

Body image and males

   While body image issues are traditionally thought of as being a female issue there is significant evidence that males are also affected by the vast number of advertisements they are exposed to. As with advertising toward women, the males shown in advertisements are rarely the 'typical' male consumer. Kolbe and Albanese (1996) report that advertisements aimed at males used male models that are not representative of the 'average' male. Many of the advertisements showed males with very strong muscular bodies, and they were presented in upscale situations representing financial success. Interestingly, the use and frequency of 'undressed' male models in advertising is becoming more prevalent. Yang, Gray, and Pope (2005) found that approximately 3% of male models shown in advertising were 'undressed' in the 1950s however, that number had risen to approximately 35% by the 1990s.

   It seems logical to assume that as males are exposed to advertising depicting a more muscular body image, the effects are likely to have negative consequences for one's self-esteem. A recent study of 104 male college students found that even brief exposures to advertising showing muscular male models led to decreases in body image satisfaction (Lorenzen, Grieve, and Thomas 2004). They indicate that a muscular physique is becoming the target to which men are comparing themselves. The results of falling short of this ideal body may be an increase in dissatisfaction, levels of self-esteem, depression, guilt, stress, insecurity, shame, and body dissatisfaction. In turn, these negative results may lead to men attempting to gain muscle mass to attain an unrealistic muscular body image, thereby increasing their risk of developing a medical condition (eating disorder) known as muscle dysmorphia. Higher levels of male oriented magazine readership were also found to be associated with a desire to increase muscle mass. Baird and Grieve (2006) found that, when males were exposed to pictures of muscular men, they reported having lower levels of satisfaction with their bodies than those who were shown pictures of 'normal' male body images. They conclude that there is support for the assertion that social comparison typically takes place in an 'upward' manner which will lead to feelings of dissatisfaction which may result in a variety of medical disorders. Hatoum and Belle (2004) have also reported that men are becoming more concerned about changing their bodies to obtain this more muscular body image. They reported that 80.9% of their sample of 89 male college students indicated a desire to have a different weight than their own and specifically a desire to have a more muscular upper body and legs. To that end, approximately a third of the sample had taken some form of dietary supplements in an attempt to build muscle mass.

   The desire to have or obtain a particular type of body image is beginning to influence how men look at fashion in general. Firth and Gleeson (2004) report that while men typically indicate that they are relatively unconcerned about their body image the reality is that men now tend to be quite careful about their clothing and overall appearance. They suggest that men use clothing to attempt to conceal being overweight or wear loose fitting clothing to appear to be larger than they actually are. They concluded that men are very concerned about body image and this concern plays a major role in their choice of clothing. Interestingly, they conclude that clothing serves as an everyday method of modifying the appearance of one's body. Quite recently, Apeagyei (2011) found that men are choosing clothing that emphasizes or highlights their physique and indicate a particular lifestyle with which they wish to be associated. This concern with body image is clearly associated with one's self-concept and how they feel about themselves in general.

In sum, the literature paints a very clear picture of images presented in the mass media effecting both females and males in a negative manner. It is also clear that there is no definitive answer as to whether mass media images affect all ethnic groups in the same manner. As noted earlier, our research question is designed to help answer these questions and our research question is therefore stated as: Do African-American and Hispanic consumers exhibit the same desire to be thin as White consumers when exposed to advertising that uses predominately thin white models?

METHODOLOGY

Data for the present study was collected via an online survey posted on SurveyMonkey. Students from 3 different Universities (A State University in Florida, a historically African-American University in Florida and a State University in New Mexico) served as the sample for our study. A total of 263 individuals completed the survey: 133 Women and 130 Men.   By ethnicity, the sample includes 125 White/Caucasians, 98 African-Americans and 40 Hispanics. Students were offered extra credit for their participation.

The survey contained questions composed of items from previous research including the Self-Esteem (Appearance) scale developed by Heatherton and Polivy (1991) and the Pressures to be Thin scale developed by Netemeyer, Burton, and Lichtenstein (1995). An open ended question was included to generate qualitative comments about these issues.

Results of quantitative responses

As with previous literature, the results of this study are mixed. There is evidence that partially supports Shaw et al. (2004) contention that the pressure to be thin applies to members of all ethnic groups. The results in Table 1 indicate that women in the three groups examined feel some pressure to be thinner and more physically attractive than they are. Interestingly, the significant difference in the pressure to be thin measure was between African-Americans (who felt less) and Hispanics (who felt the most). There was no significant difference in the pressure to be physically attractive measure As indicated in Table 1 (Appendix).

The same result can be seen with respect to social rewards. There is a significant difference between African-Americans and Hispanics on the measure suggesting greater social rewards go to thin people and no significant difference in the same measure using physical attractiveness. Finally, there is a significant difference between African-American women and Hispanic women on the media favors women with thin bodies and no difference in the same measure with respect to good looks. In sum, all groups believe there is pressure to be thin and physically attractive, but the significant differences were only on thinness and only between African-Americans (who felt less pressure) and Hispanics (who felt the most pressure). What is of particular interest is that Hispanic women report the highest level of agreement with 11 of the first 12 questions.

There is a significant difference between all three ethnic groups with respect to the social comparison measure. The African-American women were the least likely to compare their bodies to their friends (on the 'disagree' side of the scale), whereas the Hispanic women agreed that they compared and the White women were the most likely to compare. This is the only item that was significantly different across all groups.

The remainder of the survey questions asked respondents to evaluate themselves and their feelings on these topics. When the respondents were asked if they were satisfied with their weight the responses ranged from 3.87 to 3.52 (on a 5 point scale) indicating that members of all groups were generally satisfied with their present weight. All groups reported feeling attractive and feeling good about themselves. They also reported a slightly positive feeling when asked if they were pleased with their appearance right now. Interestingly, White women reported feeling the least attractive, the lowest level of feeling good about themselves, and the lowest level of being pleased with their appearance. Conversely, African-American women were the most satisfied. It should be kept in mind that the respondents in this study represent college age women who may be more confident than others. It would appear that the results indicate that White women tend to be the most affected by the pressure placed on them by the media and society in general while African-American women seem to be affected to a lesser degree. What may be the most interesting is that while Hispanic women said they felt the most pressure (from the first set of questions), they were not the most affected in self- evaluations.

An examination of Table 2 seems to indicate that many of the pressures felt by women are also felt by men and that, as with the female sample, Hispanic men often feel higher levels of pressure than their White and African-American counterparts. Once again, all groups seem to feel some level of pressure to become more muscular, maintain a good body and be more physically attractive. However, the only measure of 'pressure' that was significant was the pressure to maintain a good body, where African-Americans felt the least pressure and Hispanics felt the most. As with the women, measures of pressure for physical attractiveness were not significant As indicated in Table 2 (Appendix).

None of the measures relating to the social rewards afforded muscles and/or good looks was significant, though all groups leaned toward believing that better things came to these people. The men do believe that the media should be showing men as they are in real life. This item was significant between White men and African-American men. This result could be due to the fact that stereotypes of African-American men are still prevalent in most media forms.

The male sample is similar to the female sample in that they report an above average satisfaction with their weight, they feel attractive, feel reasonably good about themselves, and are somewhat pleased with their appearance. However, there is an interesting result in the significant difference between White men and African-American men who say they have changed their diet routine to work toward a better body. White men are much more likely to have made the change. Finally, there is a significant difference between all three ethnic groups on the social comparison item. African-American men were the least likely to compare their bodies with their friends, followed by White men. Both of these groups were on the 'disagree' side of the scale. However, Hispanic men were on the 'agree' side of the scale and significantly different from both other ethnic groups. As with the female sample, this is the only item that was significantly different across all 3 groups.

Significant differences were found on two of the self-evaluation items. These differences were between White Men (who were the most negative) and African-American men (who were the most positive) on feeling good about themselves and their appearance, though all three groups were generally pleased with themselves. As noted with the female sample, this is a college age sample and while they may feel pressure to be physically attractive they are perhaps more confident and young enough that many are still active and have not gained significant amounts of weight.

The data shown in Table 3 rather clearly indicates that there are areas where female and male respondents differ. In each case females indicate that they feel more pressure to be physically attractive and have taken steps (diet) to achieve a better body. In general men report being happier with their body and do less comparing than do females as indicated in Table 3 (Appendix).

Results of qualitative responses

An open-ended question solicited qualitative responses. This question asked for any additional comments the participant wished to make about these issues. Two key themes came out of the responses to this one question were: pressure (from society and the media) to look a certain way and personal evaluations and feelings. There were a few differences in these issues by ethnicity and gender.

Pressure

The results from the quantitative analysis showed that these participants recognize the pressures they face from society and the media to be thin, and they reiterated these pressures in their comments.

'We live in a society that put pressure on men and women to look thin. I personally feel like sometimes I won't be accepted in certain groups if I don't look a certain way. We start comparing to other people and start wishing we could be like them.' (Hispanic Male)

'Unfortunately, I have always felt pressured about my body image. I have gotten better as I have gotten older, but it is something I have struggled with my entire life. I think the media could help society by portraying healthy men and woman not necessarily skinny women or muscular men.' (White Female)

The comments about these pressures occurred across gender and ethnic groups. However, White women made many more comments about models in ads, as the following examples show:

'Models and advertisements are appealing so I feel a need to strive to look similar to those advertisements.' (White Female)

'The media supports current fashion trends, and those looks are advertised by a certain body type, so consumers like the trends and strive to look like the models in the ads.' (White Female)

'Many women feel as though they need to compete with super models or actresses. When in reality air brushing takes place or they have personal trainers and the money to maintain a great body.' (White Female)

These types of comments support the quantitative results of this study showing that White women were the most likely to compare their bodies to others, and the most dissatisfied with their current weight and appearance. From an ethnic perspective, African-American women make the most comments suggesting that culture plays a role in determining how an individual responds to these pressures and issues. Notice the difference in the following comments versus those presented above:

'I think it also depends on your cultural and demographics background that people are from. Because people that are White may favor thin bodies where as people that are African-American favor curvy bodies.' (African-American Female)

'I believe that the perception of body image changes with race or cultural background. African-American women are not as fazed when they have a little more meat on their bones, because in our culture that is what we deem attractive.' (African-American Female)

'Different cultures have different images of what a good body is. Within the African-American culture this is not valued as much as it is in mainstream American. I think the image that the media portrays has less effect on the African-American community due to the different characteristic of a good body embodied in our culture.' (African-American Female)

'(The) Media portrays bodies to look different depending on their race. White women are thin, Asian women are super thin, African-American women are usually thicker and Spanish women are very curvaceous. It's just the stereotype. There shouldn't be a double standard for men's physical appearance vs. women's physical appearance. I believe that society should put men under as much pressure to look good as women.' (African-American Female)

It is clear across these comments that the African-American women who took part in this study believe that their culture protects them to some extent from idealized body images presented in the media. This supports the quantitative results from this study showing that African-American women were the least likely to respond to the pressure and the most satisfied with their current weight and physical appearance. It is interesting that only the African-American women made comments specifically about cultural norms. One might expect Hispanic women to do the same. However, they did not.

Personal evaluations

Many comments suggested that participants rebelled against this notion of having to conform to media images. Most of these comments centered on issues related to self-image and self-worth, as the following comments suggest:

'I feel that knowing your self-worth along with being happy with who you are will ease the pressure to be what the media's expectation of beauty is.' (African-American Female)

'Everyone wouldn't mind changing a thing or two about themselves. Although the media portrays women to be thin, with a great deal of sex appeal I feel that self-awareness, and knowing yourself worth along with being happy with who you are will ease the pressure to be what the medias expectation of beauty is.' (African American Male)

One of the most interesting comments came from a Hispanic Female, who summed up many of the issues in one single quotation:

'I am comfortable with my body, but refuse to be pressured by anyone but myself to change it. I believe that the media is under a misconception because the women in society who receive the highest social rewards are not the thin women, but the curvy woman. One with a good attractive shape. (Thin)…This is nasty looking. Women who look as if they are the most fit for child rearing seem to get the most rewards.' (Hispanic Female)

This is a very interesting quotation because Hispanic women were the most likely in this study to feel pressure to conform to the media's idealized body image. However, they were not the most likely to compare their bodies to others or be unhappy with their current weight and appearance (White women were). Somehow the Hispanic women in this study were able to recognize the problem yet not internalize it.

Gender

In the previous results, ethnic differences are presented. There were a few differences with respect to gender in the qualitative comments. Some discussed the double standard that seems to be in effect in our society. Several men mentioned that women are held to a higher standard with respect to their looks and staying thin. A number of women (across ethnic groups) suggested that men should be put under as much pressure to look good as women. The quantitative results from this study showed that men are much less likely than women to compare their bodies to others or change their diet habits. A number of comments related to these issues:

> 'People should want to look good by dieting and training properly. Healthier living habits. I don't care to have huge biceps or bulging muscles but I do want to have a toned body.' (White Male)

> 'I believe you shouldn't try to look the fittest nor the curviest but just enough to be healthy.' (Hispanic Male)

> 'I'm naturally thin and have felt the need to thicken up from time to time but never overwhelming enough to make permanent changes to my diet.' (African-American Male)

These comments support the results seen in Table 3 with respect to the gender differences found in this study. Men do admit that there is pressure to look a certain way, yet they are much less likely to be influenced by these pressures.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this research was to determine the influence of media images on women and men of color. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and the responses to both provide conflicting results. The data rather clearly indicates that women of each of the ethnic groups feel considerable pressure to be physically attractive (all groups have mean scores over 6 on a 7 point scale) and yet Hispanic women report higher scores on 11 of the first 12 questions posed. Thus, Hispanic women, rather than White women report the greatest pressure while African-American women seemed to feel the least amount of pressure to be thin and conform to society's ideals of beauty. Traditional wisdom would have suggested that White women would have had the highest levels of pressure followed by Hispanic and African-American women.

While White women did not feel the highest pressure, they were the most likely to internalize the pressures they felt and be dissatisfied with their current weight and appearance. Hispanic women followed and African-American women were the least dissatisfied. All of these results provide support for social comparison theory. There was a significant difference between

all three ethnic groups on the item 'I compare my body to my friends' bodies.' The means on this item match up with the mean results on the items related to body image satisfaction, supporting the theory that those who compare themselves to others experience dissatisfaction. However, the satisfaction means show that no ethnic group has a monopoly on dissatisfaction and that feelings of dissatisfaction have diffused through the whole of society.

While the findings reported in Table 3 are not particularly surprising, in that the mean scores indicate women feel more pressure to be thin than do males. However, the results do provide data that rather clearly points to the fact that males do feel pressure to look a certain way based upon other's expectations. Male responses to six of the seven questions show mean scores that they are above the neutral level in terms of male feelings about social pressure. That feeling is particularly strong when asked if 'society places pressure on people to be physically attractive' as males responded with a mean score of 5.83 on a 7 point scale. Males also indicated agreement with the statement 'people feel pressure to look like those portrayed in fashion ads' as the mean score for this statement was 5.09 on a 7 point scale. The next three questions ask if they have personally felt pressure or changed their diet to achieve a better body. Interestingly, the mean scores for these questions were all above 4.6 indicating that they have indeed felt some pressure to work toward a better body. It is also interesting, and somewhat contradictory, to note that when asked if they compared themselves to their friends they indicated that they do not (mean score of 3.38) and that they were generally happy with their body (mean score 5.33).

Managerial implications

The reviewed literature, the quantitative data, and the qualitative responses all clearly indicate that consumers are heavily influenced by the media's presentation of the 'perfect' female or male. This is perhaps the result of Social Comparison Theory (Festinger 1954) which suggests that consumers are likely to compare themselves to the models they see presented in the media and therefore hold more negative feelings about their body image, resulting in a drop in confidence and self-esteem. Or, Objectification Theory may be more appropriate in that early age females learn to internalize other's views of them as their primary view of themselves and therefore, a positive self-image revolves around their perceived physical attractiveness to others (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). In either case, the result of viewing television programming, music videos, and women's magazines tends to result in a lack of self-esteem as average consumers can never quite measure up to what they see presented in the media. Given the obvious success the media has had in selling the perfect image, managerial implications can be viewed from either a short term or a longer term view.

From a short term perspective, it is clear that emphasizing perfection, no matter how unattainable that may be, has worked in the past and will likely continue to work in the near future. Based on the data presented in this study, advertisers would be well advised to continue to advertise perfection (tall and thin) to White females showing images indicating this is how the consumer 'should' look. Advertising images aimed at African-American and Hispanic consumers should show larger curvier women as these two groups are not nearly as concerned with being thin as are White females.

It is also clear that media presentations are affecting males in much the same fashion as females. Males now report feeling greater pressure to maintain a good body and be more physically attractive. While these are not negative traits the desire for perfection can in fact lead to negative consequences. Interestingly, when males are shown in men's magazines with their

shirts off they are strong and muscular but when they are shown wearing fashion clothing they are tall and thin. It appears that both women and men are now attempting to live up to almost unobtainable images which may well result in significant decreases in confidence levels, self-esteem, increases in the use of plastic surgery, and in extreme cases may result in eating disorders. This rather unethical short term view is likely to result in short term profitability but perhaps a long term consumer backlash.

A company may decide to take a more long term perspective and begin to change the images in their advertising from tall thin models to models that appear more like the average consumer. Martin and Xavier (2010) suggest that the use of larger sized models may provide a new way for marketers to reach their consumers. They note that the German magazine Brigitte is banning the use of thin models in favor of women with normal figures, while Dove Skincare and Glamour are also using larger sized models in their advertising. The result of using more realistic models is that consumers feel less pressure to be thin (Martin and Xavier 2010) and has been shown to produce higher levels of attractiveness and self-esteem in adolescent girls (Loken and Peck 2005). It would therefore seem logical to assume that a model of average size wearing a particular brand of clothing that the consumer found attractive may sell more product than if that brand were only being worn by an unrealistically thin model.

If a company actually puts stock in the marketing concept, it might serve them well to understand that 68.7% of the respondents in this study reported positively that the media should show normal people as they are in real life. Perhaps advertisers should ask themselves if it truly sells more products by making their consumer base feel badly about themselves, as they try to reach an unreachable goal, or would they sell more by showing people using the products that the average consumer can relate to in some way.   Perhaps one respondent summed it up nicely – 'If everyone were the same the world would be boring.'

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Table 1 - Women's Perception of Body Image

Variable	White Mean N=59	African-American Mean N=56	Hispanic Mean N=18	Significance of p
People feel pressure to look like those portrayed in fashion ads.	5.52	5.75	5.56	.639
Society places pressure on people to be physically attractive.	6.02	6.25	6.56	.124
There is definitely a cultural expectation for people to be physically attractive.	5.54	5.57	5.67	.944
Today's society places pressure on women to maintain a thin body.	5.78	5.39*	6.33*	**.019**
I have felt pressure to maintain a good body.	5.52	4.95	5.61	.063
Thin women receive greater social rewards than women who are not thin.	5.00	4.85*	5.94*	**.026**
I believe that people with good bodies receive greater social rewards than those who do not have good bodies.	5.36	5.20	5.83	.184
Good looking people receive greater social rewards.	5.35	5.68	5.83	.296
The media favors people who are good looking.	6.12	5.98	6.44	.359
The media should show normal people as they are in real life.	5.25	5.64	5.78	.246
The media favors women with thin bodies.	5.98	5.41*	6.50*	**.007**
I have personally changed my diet routine in order to work toward a better body.	5.25	4.80	5.44	.279
I am very happy with my body.	4.71	5.11	5.11	.314
I compare my body to my friend's bodies.	4.93*	3.32*	4.71*	**.000**
The following are based on a 5-point scale with ** indicating reversed scoring.				
I am dissatisfied with my weight.**	3.52	3.87	3.67	.227
I feel unattractive.**	4.09*	4.64*	4.22	**.002**
I feel good about myself.	3.83*	4.45*	4.12	**.000**
I am pleased with my appearance right now.**	3.47*	3.86*	3.72	**.045**

* Group means significantly differ

Table 2 - Men's Perception of Body Image

Variable	White Mean N=66	African American Mean N=42	Hispanic Mean N=22	Significance of p
People feel pressure to look like those portrayed in fashion ads.	5.06	5.17	5.18	.864
Society places pressure on people to be physically attractive.	5.64	6.02	6.05	.123
There is definitely a cultural expectation for people to be physically attractive.	5.16	5.53	5.59	.150
Today's society places pressure on men to maintain a muscular body.	4.88	5.18	5.09	5.48
I have felt pressure to maintain a good body.	4.77	4.11*	5.18*	**.027**
There is definitely a cultural expectation for men to be muscular.	4.50	4.48	5.09	.200
Muscular men receive greater social rewards than men who are not muscular.	4.48	4.74	5.00	.229
I believe that people with good bodies receive greater social rewards than those who do not have good bodies.	4.94	4.93	5.36	.422
Good looking people receive greater social rewards.	5.06	5.65	5.36	.095
The media favors people who are good looking.	5.84	6.14	6.27	.157
The media should show normal men as they are in real life.	4.71*	5.62*	4.86	**.006**
The media favors men who are muscular.	5.09	4.83	5.41	.303
I have personally changed my diet routine in order to work toward a better body.	5.18*	3.71*	4.59	**.000**
I am very happy with my body.	5.24	5.59	5.40	.455
I compare my body to my friend's bodies.	3.41*	2.64*	4.73*	**.000**
The following are based on a 5-point scale with ** indicating reversed scoring.				
I am dissatisfied with my weight.**	4.03	3.90	4.00	.834
I feel unattractive.**	4.26	4.63	4.50	.055
I feel good about myself.	4.09*	4.53*	4.18	**.021**
I am pleased with my appearance right now. **	3.70*	4.15*	3.95	**.045**

* Group means significantly differ

Table 3 - Men's Perceptions vs. Women's Perceptions

Variable	Men's Mean	Female's Mean	Significance of P
People feel pressure to look like those portrayed in fashion ads.	5.086	5.56	.004
Society places pressure on people to be physically attractive.	5.83	6.10	.039
I have felt pressure to maintain a good body.	4.61	5.22	.001
I believe that people with good bodies receive greater social rewards than those who do not have good bodies.	4.96	5.34	.018
I have personally changed my diet routine in order to work toward a better body.	4.63	5.08	.038
I am very happy with my body.	5.33	4.96	.042
I compare my body to my friend's bodies.	3.38	4.19	.001