

Media and Body Image Perception of Women

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Abstract: *India is a country which has a greater amount of discrimination on women for their appearance. The discrimination on the grounds of women's appearance affects their self-esteem and in turn cripples the potential for their development in the society. Media and the marketing companies peddles the ideal image for women and keeps the discrimination in pitch. Thus it becomes difficult for the real life women to reach the score and falls into the sickness of inferiority. This paper studies on how media and marketing companies paves way for psychological, social and economical stress on women by boosting women stereotypes.*

Keywords: Media, women stereotypes, body dissatisfaction, discrimination, low self-esteem

1. Introduction

Mass media imposes societal ideals, values and attitudes on women's appearance which leads to body dissatisfaction among women. Marketing companies and the Media perpetuate ideas about women's beauty and skin tone that trigger the common women to crave for the unnatural beauty. Media and the business world sets and defines happiness, beauty ideals and status mark with an intention to keep their business game on top. People who are passive about these tactics are trapped into these false ideologies and are undergoing an unending pain. There is much pressure put up on the women community regard to their appearance and thus suppressing the community from feeling free and enlightened.

2. Review of Literature

A Study examined by Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson(2004) on "Beauty and thinness messages in children's media: A content analysis", content analysis of advertisements was made on websites targeting teens revealed that cosmetic and beauty items were the products most frequently marketed. Weight-loss advertisements constituted 6% of the total advertisements. Of these cosmetic, beauty, and weight-loss advertisements, most displayed a thin, young, and attractive female, consistent with the beauty ideal. Thus, the importance of beauty and thinness for women is stressed even in media intended for young children.

A research by Tiggemann and Miller(2010) on "The internet and adolescent girls' weight satisfaction and drive for thinness", examined Australian high school females, on the relation between media exposure and body dissatisfaction with an emphasis on the Internet. Students reported their use of the Internet, television, and magazines, and completed measures assessing appearance comparison, thin-ideal internalization, and weight dissatisfaction.

A study by Tiggemann and Slater(2013) on "NetTweens: The internet and body image concerns in preteenage girls", evaluated the impact of the Internet, television, and magazine exposure on the body image of girls ages 10 to 12. Almost 98% reported having Internet access in their home, and 38% had access in their own bedrooms. Ninety percent reported using the Internet daily. Consistent with prior research, magazine and television exposure were both related to thin-ideal internalization, dieting, and reduced body esteem.

An analysis by Milkie(1999) on "Social Comparisons, Reflected Appraisals, and Mass Media: The Impact of Pervasive Beauty Images on Black and White Girls' Self-Concepts", in a comprehensive analysis of the effect of media perception on African American and White American women, found that White women are also damaged by the images, because they promote unattainable beauty, while Black women are unable to relate with the advertisements. This study demonstrates that these advertisements alter the identity of both light-skinned and dark-skinned individuals. Both groups believed that images shown in the commercials are unrealistic, yet they are forced to handle the consequences of these ubiquitous beauty images.

A study by Bond & Cash(1992) on "Black Beauty: Skin Color and Body Images among African-American College Women", indicated that a majority of young women believe that men are more attracted to individuals with light skin tones. they did believe that individuals with light skin were perceived more positively and that they have an unfair advantage in life.

A study by Anderson and DiDomenico(1992) on "Diet vs. shape content of popular male and female magazines: A dose-response relationship to the incidence of eating disorders", found that the media representation of the thin ideal has been connected to the predominance of body image dissatisfaction and dieting disorders. This is yet another reason why this connection between the media and body image is important. This connection is serious because low body image sometimes leads to disordered eating, which in turn can lead to death.

A study by Shelly Grabe et al., (2008) on "The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women", suggests that exposure to mass media depicting the thin-ideal body may be linked to body image disturbance in women. This meta-analysis examined experimental and correlation studies testing the links between media exposure to women's body dissatisfaction, internalization of the thin ideal and eating behaviors and beliefs. The findings support the notion that exposure to media images depicting the thin-ideal body is related to body image concerns for women.

3. Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory

Social psychology pioneers Gordon Allport and Albert Bandura in studying how humans acquire prejudice agree

that our first constructions about skin color are learned from our core societal institutions; family and friends, and valued adult authorities within schools, churches and community groups, and from television and media.

Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner, founder of the cultivation process of television viewing and a pioneer in Communication Theory, was the Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania from 1964 to 1989. His research on the cultivation process of television viewing, beginning in 1967, led to the currently accepted theory that television “has become the primary source of socialization and information among previously heterogeneous populations.” Gerbner and his associates found that the daily images and repetition of images, “facts” and myths “bring everyone into a shared national culture,” which both defines the world and “legitimizes a particular social order.” Television, film, internet media, and print media cultivate, over time, consistent messages and images which are absorbed unthinkingly by viewers as “right” and “normal,” transforming cultural indicators and creating perceptions which become societal standards. Through this media cultivation process, this perception begins to become “fact”. Since Gerbner’s original research the explosive growth of transfer of media via satellite has spread this cultivation globally.

This cultivation begins early – as soon as a child is old enough to watch television and look at images with some understanding. Because of this cultivation, girls, as they move into adolescence, with the acute self-consciousness that accompanies formative years, begin to look at themselves in the third-person perspective – as if there were an unseen camera following them, or as if people in society were mirrors, whose reflection tells them who they are.

But women are not isolated in absorbing these media images and myths. This transfer of media cultural indicators and “norms” effect every level of society where media is accessible. Therefore, the entire global population which is exposed to media absorbs these messages about women, skin tones and, social stratification. Despite counter-trends, these media standards promote the idea that light-skinned women are more beautiful and more desirable than dark-skinned women in every social institution – from marriage to family, education, religion, community groups and the workplace.

Commodification of culture

In modern capitalist societies, cultural products function as commodities that are manufactured and distributed to meet the demands of a consuming public. In literary and cultural criticism, “commodification” and “consumer culture” are terms that direct us to the intimate relationship between large-scale economic systems, particularly market capitalism, and hegemonic cultural ideologies.

“Commodities” are objects designed or promoted for purchase; the people who purchase them are “consumers,” a term that indicates the level of desire cultivated in the purchasing public for commoditized things. In a consumer culture, one’s desire for commodities feels like a need and is

never fully satisfied. Marx argued that with in a capitalist political economy, the market endows objects with a “mystical character” that makes them appear to be of value in and of themselves, rather than as products of human labor or by virtue of their use-value.

4. Methods

This study is based upon extensive review of books, journals, articles, as well as results from many researches on body image perception of women.

5. Discussion

Women is often depicted more beautiful in various media and it is also shown that men only fall for those women who looks beautiful thus a concept of women stereotype is created that women should look more beautiful to be respected and to get attracted by the opposite sex. These are the compulsion that falls on the common women that turns their life more complicated. This makes women to get diverted from doing what she is really interested since taking care of looks becomes an intense concern for today’s women. Girls who could not reach to these expectations, falls in suppression before these raised belief.

The concept of “White Skin” is being forced on the women community which compels them to go behind fairness. Intropical country like India majority of the people naturally have awheatish skin tone and which happens to be our identity but the elite sectors for the sake of making business promotes the idea of fairness as pride. Though the fairness products has its own side effects on the skin, people’s obsession on fairness make them to overlook it because of the demand raised in the society for the fair skin.

The advertisement industry helps the cosmetic companies to create a pressure in the minds of the public to go behind fairness and the elite groups benefit out of it. In commercial advertisements 90% of the women are shown as white skinned with slim body thereby creating an illusion that these are the traits of privileged groups in the society. It demands the common woman to hold all these qualities to feel esteemed and respected in the society. A cosmetic or “beauty” product marketing campaign is designed in a manner that intends to denigrate the self-esteem and confidence of women, thereby enhancing the ability of companies to sell their products.

Human’s basic need is to have food, shelter, clothing and happiness, anything beyond this are just an illusion created by the business sectors to keep their business active and profitable. They define what is status, beauty and happiness to create customer’s lust to reach out these ideals. The passive, innocent people who are unaware of these business motives are much affected since these destination are unattainable. These secondary needs created by the business sectors turns out to be the major pressure for the common man and it is one of the major reason for the human depression. Only truth leads to enlightenment, myths and misconception leads to severe miseries. Media and Advertisement sectors guides us in wrong way about the looks and respects, beauty and esteem and thus we are

trapped into these ideologies which leads to severe depression and health hazards.

Media should hold concern for women, since women's strength not only lies on her beauty, i.e. the outer look of a woman. The truth is that only the inner will power of woman makes her to go heights and shine like a star. Thus Media instead of promoting the useless ideology on women's outer look, they can concentrate on the contents related to the real women development, i.e. to show her self-efficacy. This would definitely help women in strengthening her mind over her self dependency and the power to excel in any sort of job she does.

Women are the backbone for any family and so if we strengthen the minds of the women by motivating messages instead of ruining her minds with false ideas, it would definitely help her and her family members to lead a better life. Many of the women magazines focuses on beauty, fashion and trends. These contents accelerate the ideology of the bourgeois and makes the people go crazy for those unnatural concepts. These make women unaware of the real inner talents and the benefits behind it. This ideology of fashion, trends and the esteem shows that it has a direct effect on the self-esteem. The truth is that without hard work and talents there is no constant esteem that can be received from the society.

In ads the models becomes the role model for the public since they carry all the attractive factors that could grab the audience. Thus people try to imitate them. Most of these ads depict western culture which would provoke the desire to be modern and stylish. This modern lifestyle portrayed in the ads and other media peddles the capitalist ideology, thus keeps the customer lust in high pitch.

The western hegemony rules the minds of the common man. It is not that only politics can dominate over others, it also happens in a ideology, i.e. cultural ideology. These cultural ideologies are masked in Films, Television programs and other forms of Mass media and are sent to the minds of people to shape the beliefs of the people.

The number of people who are exposed to media is very high and its impact on people is also high. One of the important subject that affects people is the fashion and looks. Since the models and actresses are pictured in very attractive way, it reaches the people quickly who are exposed to media and who are much concerned about their looks highly. These ideas pave way for eating disorders and mental depression. This becomes more problematic with the teens since teen's minds are very tender and thus affected very easily. They compare themselves with the models and actresses and make judgment on their looks and goes through an unending depression.

Women's power of living thoughtfully and willfully is shown less in media instead they are kept as glam dolls. The media industry is growing enormously, the model's image in media is not the true image that is kept in any mass media, it undergoes a lots of processing works and lot of software is also emerging out to work in a better mode to reach the ideal image. These images of those models and actors in media

are also created based on many factors such as lighting, camera angles, color correction, the background, settings and manipulation of features. This behind the scenes are hidden and shown as real. These ideals are unattainable and thus create unending miseries in the minds of the people.

These beliefs and attitudes that are created about looks are against nature because nature doesn't order any conditions on the human kind. The nature provides different stages of looks to human according to our lifestyle and ages. Accepting nature's gift on looks in the different stages of life is more satisfying and thus makes a person happy and healthy. The real beauty of human lies with the one who are satisfied and happy without any comparisons and compulsions.

6. Conclusion

Woman is the very soul of any family as she plays multiple roles and works hard to mould it in a proper way. Women should be taken care in a healthy manner for the well being of family and also the nation. The real situation that lies around her are discrimination and fake ideologies which prevent her from being real and show her real power. Women are discriminated on many grounds and beauty is one of the main basis where she is much suppressed. This weakens her confidence to grow in the society and makes her to feel deprived. She is forced to hide herself under the mask of face cream and in the pressures of body shapers. The only way to bring enlightenment is by being real but women by these fake ideologies are pushed to think on unnatural beauty which makes them not to feel really who they are. Media frequently sends a concept on women's head that men are only attracted to women who are highly beautiful and these ideas negatively impact the women's self-esteem. Media and Marketing companies takes a vast effort in setting the ideal female image which are most of the time modified by graphical technologies to look so ideal. These stereotypes are built to influence the common women to crave and consume for beauty kit ever and thus the marketing companies could attain unending profits in the business platform. Media promotes women ideals to be thin, and white skinned with lots of facial beauty this becomes unattainable beauty ideals for common women. Exposure to these sort of female ideals brings lots of dissatisfaction in women regard to their appearance and it ensues low self-esteem, depression, stress, suicidal ideation, unhealthy weight, control behavior, Low levels of physical activity and drug addiction. Media should try to show its concern for depicting reality but since the world has got trapped into the net of marketing and business making it is hard to see reality, instead schools and parents can support their children against body dissatisfaction by providing strong media literacy. campaigns and awareness programs on gender and color equality.

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