



Understanding the Effects of the Media's Promotion of the "Perfect Body" Image Among Adolescent Girls in Lagos Nigeria

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Abstract: *The media's role in the projection of the perfect body image has been widely highlighted in discussions around body dissatisfaction. Several research works of Western origin abound that investigate the influence of the media on body image perception especially among women. This study therefore seeks to investigate the applicability of the claims and conclusions from research conducted in the West to the particular circumstances of adolescent girls living in Lagos Nigeria where culture and traditional beliefs exert a strong influence on everyday life, even for those living in modern cities with more access to Western media consumables. For this research, data was collected and analyzed to test the trueness or otherwise of several hypotheses that were derived from literature. Importantly, this study also highlights some philosophical considerations around beauty and body image that seldom appear in academic discussions on the subject of body image and dissatisfaction.*

Keywords: *Adolescent girls, body image, body dissatisfaction, Lagos Nigeria, media*

INTRODUCTION

We live in an age where the media exercises a tremendous amount of influence on how we perceive the world around us, judge what is acceptable or not [1] even in matters related to religion and politics [2], and make everyday decisions on every facet of our physical, spiritual, social and intellectual lives, from profound moral and existential issues to mundane activities like deciding on the colour of socks to wear. This influence is strengthened by the ubiquity of the production centers of a media culture (television, radio, films, music, internet, advertisements, magazines, newspapers, etc.) from which it appears humankind has no opportunity of escaping. As Kellner [1] aptly puts it, "a media culture has emerged in which images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviours, and providing the materials out of which people forge their identities."

The topic of media culture and identity has been extensively researched, and explorations in this regard have submitted conclusions that have deep and wide-ranging ramifications both from the perspective of the cultural collective and the individual perception of self, especially in the specific ideals of physical appearance and its attendant notions of beauty and body image.

Media culture and the impact on the female body image is an area that has also been extensively researched [3-8] with mature literature and fairly developed dimensions, measures and tools for experimental research [9]. Some of these studies have focused on adult women [10-13], some on first-graders [14], while others have focused on adolescent girls in various locations and across diverse cultures, including Mexican-American girls [15], Australian adolescent girls [16], Jewish-American girls, Singaporean girls, young females in Kuwait [17], as well as in England and Denmark [18]. Some studies have also focused on adult women of colour from specific cultural backgrounds, with examples including African-American women, Hispanics [19-21] and Asian-American women [22]. These studies have considered the impact of several types of media channels such as TV, magazines, social media in general, Facebook in general, specific aspects of Facebook, and other platforms such as MySpace.

Interestingly, all these studies have focused largely on white Caucasian females or women of colour living in North America and Europe. Although there have been a few cases like the study on black African girls in Cape Town [23], there appears to be a significant paucity of research on how the media affect body image perceptions of adult females and adolescent girls born and live in Africa. There appears also to be no known research of this nature focused on adolescent girls born and living in Lagos Nigeria. In addition, the existing studies have largely ignored the philosophical questions raised by the topic of media culture and female body image. These are the identified challenges this paper attempts to address.

This current study therefore highlights and discusses these aforementioned philosophical considerations, but mainly investigates how much exposure to Skinny Television (i.e. television shows where the lead characters are females with skinny body types) affects body image perceptions among adolescent girls living in Lagos, Nigeria. Lagos is one of the more sophisticated and multi-cultural urban cities in Nigeria, where tastes and culture among youths are more susceptible to the influences of Western media, thus the choice of selecting it as the location for the study. Therefore, in alignment with extant literature, it was hypothesized that there will be a strong correlation between exposure to the media and negative body image perceptions characterized by low self-esteem, excessive body comparisons and fear of negative appearance evaluations. Specifically stated, the following are the hypotheses that this study aims to investigate:

H1: Adolescent girls living in Lagos will prefer to be thin than fat.

H2: Viewing Skinny TV shows (i.e. TV shows where the lead characters are females with skinny body types) will result in increased body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls living in Lagos.

H3: The same effects viewing Skinny TV shows have on body image perceptions as found in Western studies, will also be detected in this current research.

H4: Because of cultural inclinations and family support systems, body image dissatisfaction amongst adolescent girls living in Lagos will vary along ethnic lines.

To investigate these hypotheses, a quantitative research method was adopted because it was best suited in determining the correlation between the key variables identified and used in the study. This is discussed in details in the appropriate section of this paper.

Literature Review

Body Image and Media Portrayal of Women

Cash and Pruzinsky [3] adopted a subjective approach in their definition of body image as a collection of perceptions, feelings and thoughts a person has about his or her body, which includes sexuality, function, race and appearance. According to the researchers, there is a cognitive dimension of body image which explains the beliefs people hold about their bodies including the behaviours and consequent proclamations about self which are motivated by such beliefs. This cognitive dimension co-exists alongside an emotional dimension that is made up of an individual's accumulation of experiences of appearance over time.

Cash and Pruzinsky's definition suggests that the concept of body image is multidimensional, an idea many researchers subscribe to even though there appears to be no agreement on the number and nature of the dimensions. In addition to Cash and Pruzinsky's cognitive dimension, Banfield and McCabe [5] identified the perceptual and affective dimensions which respectively relate to how accurately a person might estimate specific features like shape and weight, and how these can determine the way he or she feels about his/her body appearance.

Cash and Pruzinsky's [3] notable contribution to the study is that body image is not static, but changes (and sometimes very markedly) over the life span of an individual. These changes, of course, result from exposure to the media, but also from interactions with other socio-cultural factors including peers, friends, family and the society [4], which exert a very strong influence. In fact, as noted by Romo, Mireles-Rios and Hurtado [15] in their study on body beauty perceptions of Mexican-American adolescent girls, "social and cultural values are believed to play a role in the types of bodies that adolescent girls consider beautiful and desirable."

The idea that body image changes over time suggests that it can be learned. It was Lightstone [6] who observed this psychological dimension of body image, and postulated that this learning process is heavily influenced by what happens in the family and among peers, but more importantly by the dominant culture the individual is exposed to. From an early age, individuals are bombarded with mediated messages on physical appearance and this tends to influence their perception of the body in later years.

The media is deeply implicated in its role as a socializing agent, through the way it portrays the female body image. These portrayals have become so powerful that they are creating new cultural norms and defining how beauty is perceived in the society. Just by watching TV, films and flipping through print advertisements, one begins to get a sense of what the media has defined as the ideal female body image, an ideal that presumably leaves us with almost no choice but to focus our attention on the legs, breasts and female body shape.

Several studies have been conducted on how the media portrays female beauty [24] and the "Thin Ideal" appears to be the dominant model every woman should strive to attain in order to be considered beautiful. As observed by Morris and Nichols [7], this ideal is widespread, based on cross-cultural studies that have compared media portrayals of beauty in the United States with other countries such as Korea, Taiwan, Germany, Iran and Singapore. Consistently, thin women are portrayed as attractive, desirable and successful, and such portrayals are usually so strong and frequent [25].

The media portrayal of women has been described as unrealistic [12], sexist, exploitative and harmful [10], and nothing short of representations meant to objectify women [8]. This construction of the beauty ideal and female attractiveness affects women in different ways.

Effect of Media Culture on the Female Body Image

To understand the effects of media portrayal of the female body image on women, we must turn to Gerbner's [26] cultivation theory and Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. According to Gerbner [26] "heavy television viewers were more likely to perceive the real world in accordance with what they viewed on TV".

And according to Festinger (1954), individuals are constantly evaluating themselves, and this self-evaluation hinges on some sort of comparison with others, either in a downward manner when they compare themselves to others and find others to be lacking, or in an upward manner when the individuals find themselves to be lacking in comparison to others [8]. Taken together, it becomes clear that the thin ideal is not only reinforced by what is portrayed by the media, but also by social interactions with others [27]. As stated by Tiggermann and Slater [13], “the process of social comparison may provide the mechanism by which exposure to media images induce negative effects”.

Heinberg and Thompson [28] concluded that media portrayals of the female body negatively affects a woman’s mood, emotions and body satisfaction. This dissatisfaction with the body, which sometimes degenerates into extreme cases, provides grounds for women to seek out risky measures including taking pills, undergoing reconstructive surgeries, smoking excessively (as a weight reduction strategy), just to reach the ideal body shape. Body dissatisfaction has significant consequences, and several studies have identified its positively correlated relationship with stress and depression [29], decreased confidence and self-esteem [4], and escalating cases of eating disorders [30]. As Berberick [10] noted, The National Eating Disorder Association reported in 2005 that there are about ten million women affected by Anorexia. In addition, Berberick [10] presented statistics from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons who reported that “from 2000 to 2009, there was a 36% increase in breast augmentation surgery, 84% increase in tummy tuck procedures, 41.84% increase in lower body lifts, 41.91% increase in arm lifts, 132% increase in buttocks lifts, and 65% increase in breast lifts.”

Apart from the physical effects noted above, there are also consequences on the society as a whole, some of which include escalating cases of sexual assaults, stalking and exploitation, pornography and damaged marriages and family life. This is almost a necessary consequence based on the bombardment of media messages which seem to suggest that women are nothing without their looks and that there are advantages and social benefits associated with being and looking sexy. As Berberick [10] puts it: “...if [women] can sell their sexiness, they can have anything”.

Research Method

Participants and procedure

The participants in the study were twenty-eight (28) young women between the ages of 18 and 23 years who were largely recruited from the Ikoyi, Lekki and Victoria Island areas of Lagos. The participants were all Nigerians (Ibo=39.3%, Yoruba=53.6%, Other tribes=7.1%) who have lived in Lagos for at least 7 years. Since all the participants were 18 years and above, no parental consent was required, and therefore none was obtained. In addition, the permission of the organizations where some of them worked was not sought, since participation was voluntary and the study fell outside the official interest of the businesses.

Participants were simply told they were participating in a study. The aims and objectives of the study were not disclosed in order not to bias their responses. Participants were then shown 7 different magazine covers, each with the full portrait of a model. The seven models shown represented various body shapes ranging from the ultra-thin to the obese. After viewing the magazine covers, the participants were briefly interviewed, and then proceeded to complete the questionnaire individually.

Prior to administering the questionnaire, several pre-tests were conducted and it was determined that the questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete on the average. Therefore, questionnaires completed in less than 7 minutes were not used in the study. Additionally, as suggested by Meier and Gray

(2013), the researcher tried as much as possible to ensure that the questions were presented in a very random order to minimize any sequencing effect.

Finally, weight and height were self-reported by the participants during the questionnaire completion. However, they all reported that they were not sure of the weight and height measures reported; therefore, these variables had to be discarded. Hence, BMI could not be calculated.

Measures

Skinny TV Show Viewing: This variable measured how much participants viewed TV shows (mostly American shows) where the leading characters were actresses with skinny body types. In line with the study conducted by Mitchell et al. [17], the score for this measure was determined by averaging the ratings of individual participants for 15 identified Skinny TV shows on a scale of 0 (“Never”) to 4 (“Very Often”). Part of the process of generating the final list of 15 Skinny TV shows (including *Desperate Housewives*, *Devious Maids*, *Drop Dead Diva*, *America’s Next Top Model*, etc.) involved interviewing adolescent girls and also comparing online reviews for TV shows with high adolescent female following. It was important to follow this process to arrive at a list of Skinny TV shows that are popular in Nigeria, especially in Lagos where the study was conducted.

Self-esteem: The Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale was used to determine how much impact the media had on the self-esteem of participants. The scale consisted of ten questions with options for responses represented on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Agree”) to 4 (“Strongly Disagree”). For some of the questions, the response options were reverse-coded. The scores of all ten questions were added to determine the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Score. Higher scores indicated more self-esteem. In the study’s current sample, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.802 representing a high level of internal consistency.

Physical Appearance Comparison: The revised Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS-R) developed by Thompson, Heinberg and Tantleff [28] was used to evaluate how inclined the participants were to compare their own appearance with that of others. The PACS-R is an 11-item scale with response options ranging from 0 (“Never”) to 4 (“Always”). In the sample gathered for this study, the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.883

Fear of Negative Appearance: The Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (FNAES) developed by Lundgren, Anderson and Thompson (2004) was utilized in this study to determine how the participants felt about how other people evaluated their body appearance. The 6-item scale provided response options ranging from 1 (“Not at all”) to 5 (“Extremely”), with higher score indicating escalating fear of negative appearance evaluation. For the current sample, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.669.

Internalization of the Thin Body Ideal: This variable was measured using the Socio-Cultural Internalization of Appearance Questionnaire for Adolescents (SIAQ-A), developed by Thompson, Shroff and Keery (2004). In line with the study conducted by Meier and Gray (2013), the 5-item SIAQ-A “was used to assess the extent to which adolescents adopt the media-presented appearance ideals for themselves”. Survey participants responded to the measure using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Definitely Disagree”) to 5 (“Definitely Agree”), and answers to the questions were summed up. Higher scores indicated higher internalization of media-presented appearance ideals. For the current sample, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.890.

Appearance Attitudes: This variable was measured using the recent version of the Socio-Cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-4). Similar to the SIAQ-A, the SATAQ-4 is helpful in providing an indication of how messages contained in the media, as well as socio-cultural factors (family, peers, etc.), influence how individuals perceive body image. Specifically, the SATAQ-4 is a direct measure of the awareness and acceptance of cultural ideals of attractiveness. This measure was administered on a 5-point Likert

response scale ranging from 1 (“Definitely Disagree”) to 5 (“Definitely Agree”), with a higher sum score indicating a higher influence of socio-cultural factors on perception of attractiveness. The current sample used in this study reported a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.818.

Results and Discussion

This research aims to study how exposure to media (particularly Skinny Television, as described above) affects body image perceptions among adolescent girls living in Lagos, Nigeria. All analyses, including the execution of “one-way Pearson correlation tests on all major variables”, were conducted using the IBM SPSS software package on an Apple MacBook Pro running the OSX operating system. Correlation results between the independent and dependent variables, as well as other descriptive statistics are shown below.

Table 1: Skinny TV Show Viewing

Skinny TV Show Viewing		
	Frequency	Percent
Rarely	5	17.9
Sometimes	15	53.6
Often	8	28.6

Table 2: Most Attractive Model Type

Table 3: Ethnicity

Most attractive model		
	Frequency	Percent
Thin	17	60.7
Fat	11	39.3

Ethnicity		
	Frequency	Percent
Ibo	11	39.3
Yoruba	15	53.6
Other	2	7.1
Total	28	100.0

Table 4: Correlations

		Correlations								
		Self Esteem	Physical Appearance Comparison	Fear of Negative Appearance	Socio-cultural Internalization of Appearance	Internalization - Thin or low body fat	Internalization - Muscular or athletic body	Internalization - Pressure from Family	Internalization - Pressure from Peers	Internalization - Pressure from Media
Most attractive model	Pearson Correlation	.142	.236	.049	.166	-.399*	-.395*	-.237	.128	.265
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.472	.226	.803	.400	.036	.038	.225	.517	.173
	N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
Least attractive model	Pearson Correlation	-.483**	.124	-.397*	-.395*	-.255	.186	-.131	-.061	-.113
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.528	.036	.037	.190	.344	.507	.757	.568
	N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
Skinny TV Show Viewing	Pearson Correlation	.028	-.670**	-.002	.356	-.113	-.433*	.036	-.688**	.152
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.887	.000	.990	.063	.566	.021	.857	.000	.441
	N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

		Self Esteem	Physical Appearance Comparison	Fear of Negative Appearance	Socio-cultural Internalization of Appearance	Internalization - Thin or low body fat	Internalization - Muscular or athletic body	Internalization - Pressure from Family	Internalization - Pressure from Peers	Internalization - Pressure from Media
Age	Pearson Correlation	-.235	-.079	-.349	-.269	-.117	.072	-.141	-.192	-.386*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.228	.690	.069	.167	.554	.714	.473	.327	.043
	N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	.126	.434*	.376*	-.309	.289	.301	.362	.678**	.143
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.524	.021	.048	.110	.135	.120	.058	.000	.468
	N	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To facilitate discussion of the results, and the guideline provided by Laerd Statistics (2013) shown below, can be very useful in properly interpreting the results and the outcome of the study.

Strength of Association	Coefficient, <i>r</i>	
	Positive	Negative
Small	.1 to .3	-0.1 to -0.3
Medium	.3 to .5	-0.3 to -0.5
Large	.5 to 1.0	-0.5 to -1.0

This guideline provides a way of quantifying the strength of association in a correlation analysis of two variables. For this study, it helps in understanding how strong the relationship is between the dependent (e.g. self-esteem, physical appearance comparison, etc.) and independent variables (e.g. skinny television viewing) of the study.

Hypothesis 1: Adolescent girls living in Lagos will prefer to be thin than fat

From the results of the survey conducted, an overwhelming 60.7% of the participants indicated that they preferred the thin model shown to them over the fat or the ultra-thin models. When asked, these participants also indicated that they would either like to maintain their weight (in the case of those that considered themselves thin) or lose some pounds/kilograms (in the case of those that considered themselves not slim enough) in order to look like the thin model shown to them.

When asked to describe specific features about the thin model that they found more attractive, these participants mentioned attributes like “flat tummy”, “thin waist” and “slim arms”. Interestingly, majority of the participants in this category, without prompting, indicated that in addition, they would also like to have average-sized breasts and big (but not over-sized) buttocks. In other words, while they prefer to be thin, they also want “attractive curves” in the form of bigger breasts and fuller buttocks.

When asked why they wanted thin bodies with “attractive curves”, the participants gave various reasons such as “that’s what boys like”, “to be healthy and fit”, “so I can go to the beach without being ashamed of myself”, “I love taking pictures, so I want to look good in my photos”. These results are consistent with what Romo, Mireles-Rios & Hurtado [15] observed in their study on body beauty perceptions of Mexican-American adolescent girls: that “social and cultural values are believed to play a role in the types of bodies that adolescent girls consider beautiful and desirable.” In Lagos Nigeria, women with pronounced body curves are generally considered more attractive, even in very traditional settings. Culturally, men appear to be more inclined towards women with bigger breasts and fuller buttocks. In local television adverts, women with these pronounced body types are usually cast. It is therefore not surprising that majority of the participants while desiring to be “thin”, have expressed their understanding of this ideal through a given cultural lens.

39.3% of the participants indicated that they preferred the fat model. When engaged further, some of these participants indicated that it was offensive to use the term “fat” in describing the models. They offered that a more appropriate term was “plus size”. When asked why they preferred the fat model, various answers were given. However, most of the answers were centred on the fat model “feeling comfortable in her skin and not being ashamed of what people will think of her body”.

The results obtained from the study prove Hypothesis 1 to be true. Thus, it can be inferred that most of the adolescent girls living in Lagos will prefer to be thin than fat. However, the definition of “thin” must be understood to include “attractive curves” like sizeable breasts and buttocks.

Hypothesis 2: Viewing Skinny TV will result in increased body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls living in Lagos

Based on the outcome of the survey, 28.6% of the participants claimed they viewed Skinny TV shows often, while 53.6% of the participants did so less often. Only 17.9% admitted to rarely watching Skinny TV shows. This result distribution is important because it partly provides the basis for examining the body dissatisfaction outcomes.

The study used nine different measures to determine the influence of watching Skinny TV shows on body dissatisfaction of the participants. Of these nine measures, four showed a positive correlation with Skinny Television viewing. This suggests that the more the participants watched these types of television shows, the more it negatively affected their self-esteem and the extent to which they accepted appearance and body image ideals presented by the media (socio-cultural internalization of appearance). Also, the more they watched Skinny TV shows, the more pressure they felt from both family and the media to attain such ideal body sizes. However, as indicated by the results of the survey, whilst there is a positive correlation, the strength of the association between Skinny TV views and self-esteem ($r=0.028$), pressure from family ($r=0.036$) and pressure from the media ($r=0.152$) was small. But there existed a fairly strong relationship between Skinny TV viewing and acceptance of body ideals presented by the media ($r=0.356$). This means that how the participants interpreted the ideal body image (i.e. the type of body they should aspire towards) was strongly influenced by the media.

The other five of the nine measures showed a negative correlation with Skinny TV show viewing. Among these, physical appearance comparison ($r=-0.670$), need for muscular body ($r=-0.433$) and pressure from peers ($r=-0.688$) showed strong negative association with Skinny TV show viewing. This means that while watching skinny television increased body dissatisfaction amongst the participants, it was not to the extent of wishing they were muscular, comparing their appearance to that of others, or feeling pressure from their peers. This is partly understandable, as many adolescent girls would rather not look muscular.

Overall, the results clearly show that there is a direct correlation between viewing Skinny TV and increased body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls living in Lagos. This proves Hypothesis 2 to be true.

Hypothesis 3: The same effects viewing Skinny TV shows have on body image perceptions as found in Western studies, will also be detected in this current research.

From the discussion of extant literature above, it has been established that increased exposure to the media (including Skinny Television) leads to body image dissatisfaction amongst adolescent girls. This fact appears to be almost universal, considering that this study has been conducted in several Western (and Asian) countries. Even though the specifics vary in certain ways (for example, the strength of the association between Skinny TV and measures of body dissatisfaction), the results confirm that the same effects observed in Western studies are largely applicable in the case of adolescent girls living in Lagos (although it must be noted that the definition of “thin” is slightly different in the local cultural context). This outcome proves Hypothesis 3 to be true. This is hardly surprising since, thanks to satellite television, smart phones, internet and opportunities to vacation abroad, adolescent girls living in Lagos are exposed to largely the same media as their Western counterparts.

Hypothesis 4: Because of cultural inclinations and family support systems, body image dissatisfaction amongst adolescent girls living in Lagos will vary along ethnic lines

The results of the survey showed that for eight out of nine of the measures considered, there was a positive correlation between the ethnicity of the participants and the level of body image dissatisfaction they experienced. Some of the body image dissatisfaction measures showed strong correlations with ethnicity (for example, pressure from peers, comparing one’s physical appearance with that of others, pressure from family, fear that other people will negatively evaluate their body appearance, etc.). Participants who indicated their tribe as Yoruba showed more body dissatisfaction from exposure to Skinny TV show viewing than participants from any other tribe. This finding proves Hypothesis 4 to be true.

Limitations of the Study

This research formulated and interrogated several hypotheses on the effects of the media’s portrayal of the ideal body image on perceptions and body dissatisfaction of adolescent girls living in Lagos Nigeria. The results obtained from this study clearly indicate that young girls living in Lagos are affected by how the media presents the ideal body image, and this influence is similar to what is obtainable in other Western countries. However, these results must be considered in the light of circumstances that imposed certain limitations on this study.

Firstly, the sample size used in the study was small and may not be representative enough to provide adequate assurances on the outcome of the study. The participants were mostly from the upper middle class, with other income levels under-whelmingly accommodated.

Secondly, even though the study was designed to be correlational, the direction of this correlation (i.e. causation) cannot be effectively established from the study.

Finally, the data used in this study were self-reported by the participants of a survey that constituted part of this research. This necessarily requires that provision be made for bias on the part of the participants, who may have completed the questionnaire not on the basis of their current situation, but on what they desire their situation to be. However, these limitations provide opportunity for further research where, for instance, the direction of the relationship between Skinny TV show view and body image dissatisfaction can be investigated. In addition, this study can be improved by examining how the influence of the media on body image perceptions vary along educational background and income levels of adolescent girls living in Lagos.

Philosophical Considerations

The topic of media culture and female body image raises important philosophical questions that must be highlighted. Firstly, from an ontological, epistemological and even axiological perspective, the concept of beauty and attractiveness have to be systematically and properly dimensioned. What is the meaning of beauty? Who defines it and how? How is it dependent (if at all) on the ever-dynamic relationship between the perceiver and the perceived? Is there a common universal understanding of beauty, and if so, what properties make it transcend cultural boundaries? Or does the standard of physical beauty vary according to culture? Are cultural concepts of beauty influenced by cultural interactions, and if so how do we begin to understand the role of cultural domination on concepts of beauty?

The concept of beauty has been studied deeply by many philosophers with perhaps the most notable contribution (in terms of providing a solid foundation for the exploration of aesthetics) having been made by Kant in his work *The Critique of Judgement* (published in 1790), which drew wide-spread debate, praise and a significant measure of criticism, but which nevertheless made it possible for later thinkers (such as Schelling, Hegel, Fichte) to explore new philosophical directions and contribute to our understanding of beauty [31]. Kant theorized that perception of beauty is always a question of judgment, and such aesthetic judgments have four unique and particular features which he calls “moments” (to be understood as dimensions of consideration in the construction of the concept of aesthetics), and which we come to know using the faculties of the mind: understanding and sensibility. Kant’s first moment is *disinterestedness* which separates desire and derived pleasure as distinct from the aesthetic judgement in the sense that an object can be beautiful and that beauty is not bestowed upon it by our implicit or explicit desire of the pleasure we can experience from beholding it. However, as Kant postulated, the reverse is actually the case: the beauty of the object can result in desire or the experience of pleasure. The second moment describes the *universal* behaviour of aesthetic judgments which rejects any form of subjection or containment within any property of any particular reality, but possesses an objective essence or being of which particular realities can only participate in to varying degrees. In other words, beauty is not about any one particular object, but exists at a level such that it can be applied to a multiplicity of objects. The third moment addresses the issue of *purpose* and *purposiveness*. What is the purpose (understood as ‘end’ or ‘finality’) of beauty? According to Kant, beauty has no definite purpose *per se* (in terms of what it is meant to achieve, or meant to be like), but must still be considered as purposive (i.e. appears to have a purpose) as far as our faculty of judgment is concerned. Kant’s fourth moment submits that aesthetic judgments are necessary because there ought to be a general agreement by everyone if the principle of common sense (understood as that “...shared capacity for the exercise of taste”) is followed.

This paper does not pretend to deal with Kant’s exposition on aesthetics in an exhaustive manner, but must not fail to highlight that the notion of beauty has evolved through history from Antiquity through the Middle Ages and especially during the Renaissance. As noted by Durrigl [32], central to the notion of beauty in Antiquity is the “ideal that unites physical beauty and moral value in a human being”. Thus beauty became much more than just external appearances. During the Middle Ages, a distinction became very apparent, which emphasized inner beauty (associated with good and uprightness, and belonging to the soul) over physical appearance which was considered mortal, temporal and therefore transient and corruptible. According to Durrigl [32], “the moral and aesthetic responses to things were united, and intertwined. Therefore, for example, many saints were depicted not only as pious, virtuous, good, chaste, but also as beautiful.”

The evolution of the notion of beauty through history also suggests that there must also have been some form of cultural influences of the time [32], with several key concepts surviving into a new era and being shaped by thinkers of the time.

Perhaps the important thing to note is that an entire body of knowledge has been developed over centuries around the notion of beauty, and this must not be discarded rather whimsically in modern day discussions of the female body image and its attractiveness. When we discuss the beauty of the female body image, it must be done with an awareness that considers the depth of meaning of the concepts and notions implicated in such discussions. In today's media portrayal of beauty and attractiveness, this appears to have been significantly narrowed.

In exploring the influence of the media on the female body image, the ethical issues around the production and propagation of a hurtful image of the female body by the operators of the media culture industries must also be considered. Media productions are not only meant for entertainment, informational or functional purposes. In producing media artefacts, the operators of the media culture industries ascribe or delegate a certain level of responsibility to their productions, to the extent that these productions are active intermediaries that can shape the actions and influence the behaviour of their consumers. In line with our discussion for instance, media productions like TV shows become teachers and champions of the "accepted way" to conceptualize the female body, sex and human sexuality. Because of their capacity to steer human action, experience and even existence, and in addition to the media's inherent intentionality in all use cases, it becomes nearly impossible to ignore the ethical questions necessarily arising from this. Media production is an inherently moral activity and we must consider questions and make judgements around the intentions and motivations of media producers.

With questions around the media's capacity to steer human action come inseparable philosophical questions on human freedom. The media projects a certain image of the female body, but are women (and indeed men) passive consumers of such a body image ideal or are they willing co-operators in this "intimidation" by the media with respect to body image? Is this willing cooperation absolute or somewhat determined by the constant bombardment by the media? If the latter is adjudged to be the case, then what kind of questions does this constraint on human freedom and its subsequent determination of human dignity begin to raise, and how do we address such questions?

Philosophical questions of beauty/aesthetics, ethics, freedom and human dignity are only just a few that demand immediate and in-depth exploration in any discussion concerning effects of the media on our perception of the female body image. Examining all four and their inter-relationships within the context of the media's portrayal of the female body image and the consequent influence on media consumers is, without doubt, an exciting proposal for further research.

Conclusion

This study has shown that adolescent girls living in Lagos are also susceptible to the adverse effects of internalizing the media's portrayal of the perfect body image. This finding is useful for parents and educators who may be challenged in identifying the root causes of the low self-esteem or eating disorders they may have noticed in their adolescent daughters or students. Once these are detected, affected girls should be availed of counselling sessions aimed at helping them improve. This study has also highlighted areas that should be given particular attention in designing counselling interventions (these areas are represented by measures that have shown strong association with Skinny TV show viewing). For researchers intending to conduct body image research amongst adolescent girls living in Lagos, it is hoped that this study will provide a useful starting point.

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