YDi
SEQUOR
youth
development
initiative

Issues of Body Image Affecting Female Adolescents

Annie Haymond

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a turbulent time of life, and teenage girls especially can be stressed over concerns about body image. Not only is the media is full of images of thin women, but peers often encourage the focus on thin body ideals (Botta, 2000; Jones and Crawford, 2006). In fact, girls become aware of thin image ideals and dieting as a way to achieve those ideals as early 5 to 8 years of age (Dohnt and Tiggemann, 2006). Parents can intervene and promote a healthy body image through healthy eating habits and an active lifestyle (Flynn and Fitzgibbon, 1995; Savage et al., 2009; Sinton and Birch, 2006; Usmiani and Daniluk, 1996; Yanez et al., 2007). This is vital because poor body image is linked to depression in adolescent females (Rierdan and Koff, 1997; Sinton and Birch, 2006; Stice et al., 2000). Youth development practitioners can help young people instill self-esteem linked to a positive body image (Usmiani and Daniluk, 1996). Cultural differences in ideal weight and body dissatisfaction between African American and Caucasian girls can affect educational programs on healthy body image development (Nollen et al., 2006).

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Parents' attitude affects female adolescent body image satisfaction and eating habits.
2. Ideal body images are different for Caucasian and African American teenage girls.
3. The media influences body image satisfaction among teenage girls.
4. Body dissatisfaction is linked to depression in teenage girls.

DETAILS ON RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

Parents' attitude affects female adolescent body image satisfaction and eating habits.
When mothers have positive body images for themselves, their daughters tend to have more positive body images (Usmiani and Daniluk, 1996). Conversely, if a mother has abnormal eating habits, this may influence the eating habits of her daughter (Yanez et al., 2007). Daughters may view their heavier mothers as role models and wish to gain weight to show others that they are grownups too (Flynn and Fitzgibbon, 1995). In addition, fathers have a strong influence on their children's physical activity habits; for example, through encouraging their children to be involved in physical activity (Savage, DiNallo, and Downs, 2009).

Ideal body images are different for Caucasian and African American teenage girls.
While both African American and Caucasian girls say they want to be thinner, African American girls are more likely to discuss positive aspects of their bodies and adopt heavier body image ideals (Botta, 2000; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999; Nollen et al., 2006; Rucker and Cash, 1992). Caucasian girls are at a greater risk of developing eating disorders because of thinner body ideals in childhood and adolescence (Rucker and Cash, 1992). Mothers of preadolescent African American girls are more accepting of heavier body weights, suggesting that heavier body images are culturally valued (Flynn and Fitzgibbon, 1995). As a result, African American girls and women may be less motivated to practice healthy behaviors that prevent obesity (Flynn and Fitzgibbon, 1995).

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY | **TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION**

Graphic Design and Layout: Toby L. Lepley, Ph.D.

The media influences body image satisfaction among teenage girls.
Adolescents turn to the media to find ideal body sizes. The more girls compare themselves and their friends to thin women they see on television, the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with their bodies and develop unhealthy eating habits (Botta, 2000). In addition, watching appearance-focused TV shows and reading celebrity magazines are predictors of dieting awareness (Dohnt and Tiggemann, 2006), with TV a stronger predictor of girls' body ideals than magazines (Harrison and Hefner, 2006). An ethnic group's ideal body image may be encouraged by media portrayals of what constitutes normal weight (Nishina et al., 2006).

Body dissatisfaction is linked to depression in teenage girls.
Research shows that girls who place a greater importance on appearance tend to have higher rates of depression (Sinton and Birch, 2006). Weight concerns and dissatisfaction have been associated with increased symptoms of depression in early adolescent girls (Rierdan and Koff, 1997). In addition, body dissatisfaction, dietary restraint, and bulimic symptoms have been shown to predict depression among initially non-depressed female teenagers (Stice et al., 2000). General body dissatisfaction is more predictive of depressive symptoms in girls than is being overweight (Nishina et al., 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
Parents, peers, the media, and cultural background are some of the factors affecting the development of a healthy body image for adolescent females. Youth development practitioners can use several strategies to discourage body dissatisfaction and promote healthy body images:

- Practitioners, health providers, and educators should stress to parents the importance of their influence on their daughters' development.
- Practitioners should incorporate cultural differences in body image ideals and body satisfaction in health education programs.
- Practitioners should teach adolescent girls how airbrushing makes the images of thin women they see in the media appear perfect.
- Practitioners should emphasize girls' talents and abilities in promoting healthy self-esteem independent of body image issues.

Understanding factors that contribute to body image will help practitioners mitigate the negative effects. Promoting healthy lifestyles and positive body images in girls is essential to building self-esteem and combating body dissatisfaction. If practitioners can develop programs that help reduce body dissatisfaction, depression among teenage girls may be reduced significantly (Stice et al., 2000).

AREAS WHERE ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IS NEEDED
Although research has been conducted on adolescent body image, some areas still need to be studied. More research has been done on mothers' influence on daughters' body image than has been done on fathers' influence; thus, research should be conducted on paternal influence on healthy body ideals. Additional research on the relationship between media effects, the desire to be thin, and eating disorders in adolescent females is required. Further, a better understanding of the role of culture in girls' body images is needed. And research should be conducted to determine the point in development at which girls become overly concerned with diet and exercise to achieve an idealized body.

REFERENCES
Botta, R. A. (2000). The mirror of television: A comparison of Black and White adolescents' body image. *Journal of Communication*, *50*(3),144-159.

Dohnt, H. K. and Tiggemann, M. (2006). Body image concerns in young girls: The role of peers and media prior to adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence , 35*(2), 141-151.

Flynn, K. and Fitzgibbon, M. (1996). Body image ideals of low-income African American mothers and their preadolescent daughters. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 25*(5), 615-630.

Harrison, K. and Hefner, V. (2006). Media exposure, current and future body ideals, and disordered eating among preadolescent girls: A longitudinal panel study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *35*(2), 153-163.

Jones, D., and Crawford, J. (2006). The peer appearance culture during adolescence: Gender and body mass variations. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(2), 257-269.

Neumark-Sztainer, D., Story, M., and Faibisch, L. (1999). Issues of self-image among overweight African-American and

Caucasian adolescent girls: A qualitative study. *Journal of Nutrition Education, 31*(6), 311-320.

Nishina, A., Ammon, N.Y., Bellmore, A.D., and Sandra Graham, S. (2006). Body dissatisfaction and physical development among ethnic minority adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(2), 189-201.

Nollen, N., Kaur, H., Pulvers, K., Choi, W., Fitzgibbon, M., Li, C., Nazir, N., and Ahluwalia, J.S. (2006). Correlates of ideal body size Among Black and White adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(2), 293-301.

Rierdan, J. and Koff, E. (1997). Weight, weight-related aspects of body image, and depression in early adolescent girls. *Adolescence, 32*, 615-624.

Rucker, C.E. and Cash, T.F. (1991). Body images, body-size perceptions, and eating behaviors among African-American and White college women. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 12*(3), 291-299.

Savage, J., DiNallo, J., and Downs, D. (2009). Adolescent body satisfaction: The role of perceived parental encouragement for physical activity. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 6*(1), 90.

Sinton, M., and Birch, L. (2006). Individual and sociocultural influences on pre-adolescent girls' appearance schemas and body dissatisfaction. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(2), 165-175.

Stice, E., and Hayward, C. (2000). Body-image and eating disturbances predict onset of depression among female adolescents: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 109*(3), 438-444.

Usmiani, S., and Daniluk, J. (1997). Mothers and their adolescent daughters: Relationship between self-esteem, gender role identity, and body image. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 26*(1), 45-62.

Yanez, A.A., Peix, M.A., Atserias, N., Arnau, A. Brug, J. (2007). Association of eating attitudes between teenage girls and their parents. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 53*(6), 507-513.

Please share your thoughts about this research brief at http://bit.ly/YDIresources

Thanks!

youth
development
initiative