

A Body of Dissatisfaction: a Study of the Effects of Media Imperialism in Kuwait

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Abstract

Mass Media has a long-standing reputation of influencing perception and affecting behavior. And in the age of globalization investigating its influence in different cultural contexts has become increasingly relevant. Perpetuating unrealistic standards of body types is just one way mediated messages are said to influence negatively an audience. By way of TV, magazines and movies, the media imperialism of the United States is having a strong presence in small countries like Kuwait. The same media effects, on body image and identity that are found in the US should also be observable. Furthermore, the social comparison theory states that an individual evaluates their own opinions by comparing themselves to others. Exposure to US media, in this case US television shows, offers individuals characters to whom to compare themselves. This study examines how US media imperialism and the social comparison theory through media affects body perception by examining how often college-age young adults watched shows with prominent thin television characters compared to shows that had a diversity of body types in the core cast. Being exposed to programming with only thin characters is expected to correlate positively with body dissatisfaction. The study included distributing 286 preliminary surveys to discover what were the most popular shows being watched by college students (mostly 18 to 25 year olds). After the most popular shows were identified, surveys were circulated to a sample of 240 college-age young adults (120 males and 120 females) to determine if any correlation could be made between their television show preferences and their body dissatisfaction, or lack thereof.