THE RELATIONSHIP OF EXPOSURE TO MASS MEDIA AND DISORDERED EATING BEHAVIORS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Purpose: The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current research to identify the relationship between media exposure and eating disordered behavior.

Methods: In order to conduct this review, two databases in the fields of psychology and mental health were selected. After four rounds of careful screening, nine articles were selected from these databases and were included in the final sample for qualitative analysis. The articles chosen were published between 2010 and 2013 and focused on adolescent females.

Findings: The findings of the review provide substantial support for the inverse relationship that media exposure has on adolescent’s body image and self-esteem. However, the research explains that eating disorders are complex in nature and their development cannot be attributed to one single factor alone. Although the studies agree that mass media has a negative effect on body image, environmental triggers, sociocultural attitudes, age, race, and genetics must be taken into account when examining the onset of these diseases. Also, relatively few studies have been done on this topic as evidenced by the low number of search results yielded during the searches. Further research needs to be conducted in the area.

Conclusions: The studies provided valuable insights to the adverse effects that the portrayal of thinness in the media has on body image and general health. Several key themes were identified in these studies that shed light on the issues of self-esteem and body image relating to media exposure. Taken together, these studies display the complex nature of eating disorders, and how mass media use is only one factor contributing to the multifaceted nature of these diseases. They also lead to suggestions for further areas of research in order to address this problem.

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