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# Reality television and its impact on women's body image

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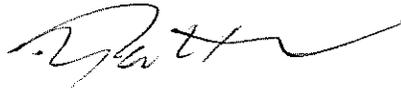
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REALITY TELEVISION AND ITS  
IMPACT ON WOMEN'S BODY IMAGE

By

AYARZA MANWARING

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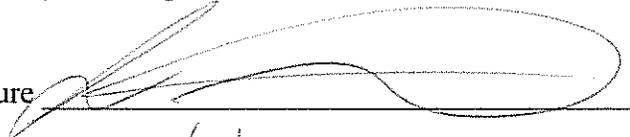
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Date

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IMPACT ON WOMEN'S BODY IMAGE

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mom

Daphne Manwaring

Who taught me to find joy in reading

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that both print media and television may affect the body image of young women. Tiggerman and Pickering (1996) found that it was not just the amount of television viewed, but the viewing of appearance focused shows that affected body image. Schooler, Ward, Merriwether and Caruthers (2004) came to the conclusion that women's viewing of shows with predominantly white casts lead to greater body dissatisfaction. To date, no investigations have looked at a new and popular genre, categorized as, 'reality television'. The purpose of this study was examine the effects of viewing this new genre and its impact on women's body image.

The research participants were 82 female undergraduate students at Eastern Kentucky University who were asked to fill out two surveys. One survey assessed television-viewing habits. This survey was made up of the twelve highest rated scripted television shows and the twelve highest rated reality television shows, as reported by the Nielsen Company. To measure the frequency of television viewing, a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (I have never watched it) to 5 (I watch it every week/ I've never missed an episode) was used. To measure body image, the three subscales of the Body-Esteem Scale were used (Franzoi & Shields, 1984).

The results indicated that there was no relationship between television viewing and body image. None of three subscales of the Body-Esteem Scale (Weight Concern, Sexual Attractiveness, and Physical Condition), were significantly correlated with either reality television or scripted television viewing. Discussion focuses on both the limitations of the research and the possible implications of the null results.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The impact of the media on girls' and young women's self-esteem and body image has been a long researched topic that has produced mixed results. While research has mainly focused on scripted television, magazines and television ads (Bergstrom, Neighbors & Malheim , 2009; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Tiggemann & Wilson-Barrett, 1998), there has been no research on the newest television phenomenon, reality television. Though it is argued that reality television does not depict real life events (Chaney, 2011), this brand of television has produced some of the most viewed and highest rated television shows, with every broadcast network and most cable networks airing at least one reality television program. Festinger (1954) posits that humans possess a drive to evaluate their abilities and their opinions with the opinions and abilities of others that they perceive to be like them. Reality television provides regular young women with the belief that they too can become famous (Reiss & Wiltz, 2001). How does that affect their body image?

MTV, the network targeted towards young women, is one of the biggest reality television networks today, with shows like "*Jersey Shore*", "*Teen Mom*", "*16 and Pregnant*", "*The Real World*" and countless others. These shows showcase bodies that are unlike those of the average American woman. Gorman (2010) explained that "The Real World" is the longest running reality television show, with their 24<sup>th</sup> season finale ranking as the number 1 show among females, ages 12 to 24, during its 2009 run. There have been complaints from viewers, as well as researchers, that "*The Real World*", which

is currently in its 26<sup>th</sup> season, has gotten less “real” because the people showcased on the show are not representative of everyday people (Chaney, 2011).

Another of MTV’s highest rated shows, “*Laguna Beach*”, spun off into another highly rated show, “*The Hills*”. Both shows were supposed to depict the coming of age stories of a group of friends. The first one, “*Laguna Beach*”, focused on a group of high school students and the second, “*The Hills*”, focused on a group of young men and women. In 2007, one of the cast members of “*The Hills*”, Heidi Montag underwent two plastic surgeries, followed by 10 more plastic surgery procedures in 2009. In an interview with Time magazine she said this, “My ultimate dream is to be a pop star. I'm competing against the Britney Spearses (sic) of the world-and when she was in her prime; it was her sex appeal that sold. Obviously, looks matter; it's a superficial industry” (Garcia, 2010).

CHAPTER II  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Body Image and the Media**

There have been many different definitions of body image; this study will be looking at body image using Grogan (2007) definition. She defines body image as “a person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body”. It will also use Grogan’s (2007) definition for body dissatisfaction, which she defines as “a person’s negative thought and feelings about his or her body.” Research has indicated that body dissatisfaction can be seen in studies with girls as young as six years old (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Tiggemann & Wilson-Barrett, 1998). This has led some researchers to conclude that the amount of time spent watching television is not the culprit but the type of television watched. This lead to the theory that there are certain components of media that encourage a “thin ideal” (Borzekowski, Robinson & Killen, 2000). The thin ideal is explained as “a cultural ideal of thinness for women, which is well below the average weight of women in that culture, directly causes body dissatisfaction at a higher rate among women than men” (McCarthy, 1990; Walker, 2010 ). Schooler, Ward, Merriwether and Caruthers (2004) have found that the cultural ideal of thinness for women is more often than not dictated by what they are watching on television.

Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn (2010) found that girls between the ages of 3 and 6 did not endorse the thin ideal even when exposed to the media. They concluded that unlike adolescent girls and young women, girls in this age range, simply adopted the persona of the characters that they found attractive and identified with, instead of comparing themselves and their bodies to the characters. This research echoes the findings of Dohnt

and Tiggemann, (2006). They found that about 60% of five-year-old girls wanted a heavier body than they believe that they possessed at the moment. This is in great contrast with adolescent girls and college aged young women who desire thinner bodies than their actual boy weight at the time.

### **Young Girls**

Tiggemann and Wilson-Barrett (1998) investigated the gender differences in body dissatisfaction among younger children. The study was completed using 140 children in grades 3-7 from two primary schools in Australia. They were divided into three groups based on age. They created two questionnaires; one specifically made for girls and the other made for boys, which was then read aloud to the different groups. Each child was given a series of silhouettes with nine different body types and asked to identify the one that looked like them, the one that looked like they would like to look and the one that they believed would be most attractive to the opposite sex. To assess stereotypes they were given pictures of figures that ranged from medium sized to obese and asked to identify which figure was lazy, popular, happy and attractive. They were then given a version of the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory for Children survey (Battle 1976) where they were asked 25 questions that required a yes or no answer to describe how they felt, for example, "boys and girls like to play with me". This study found that for girls their ideal figure was thinner than they were and that their ideal figure was also thinner than what boys indicated that they liked. Boys showed no desire to be thinner; however, there was a link between self-esteem and body satisfaction in boys but not in girls.

Unlike most of the other research Hendy, Gustitus and Leitzel-Schwalm (2001) found that body image in preschool children was influenced most by models, verbal

messages, physiological factors and experience of competence related to body image. Their study consisted of 111 preschool children ages 3-6 who were interviewed while their mothers and teachers completed questionnaires about the child. The Child's body image was measured using the seven body silhouettes created by Collins (1991). They were asked to identify the silhouette that looked most like them and the silhouette that looked most like they wanted to look. They also measured verbal messages from peers to the child that indicated whether their peers would play with them if they were fatter or thinner.

The questionnaire completed by the mother was about the child's nutrition, identifying what they ate and how much they ate. Mothers were then asked to complete a body image test using the silhouettes to examine their attitudes toward their own bodies. However, mothers also had to answer questions about how often they had suggested to their child that he or she needed to "lose weight" and exercise to lose weight. The results suggested that there was no difference between the boys and the girls, nor was there any indication that the children wanted to change their body. Similarly, Dohnt and Tiggemann (2004) found that preschool aged children do not view their bodies in the same way as adolescents or adults, and the preschool girls in this study wanted to be bigger, instead of thinner. Borzekowski, Robinson & Killen, 2000; Botta 1999; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether & Caruthers 2004; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996 where instances in which body image disturbance led girls to want to be thinner

Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) investigated how peers and media influenced body satisfaction and self-esteem in elementary aged girls. The study was conducted with primary school girls ages 5-9 in Australia. For this study, body image was split into two

categories: “desire for thinness” and “appearance satisfaction”. To measure desire for thinness, researchers used the Children’s figure rating scale (Tiggemann & Wilson-Barrett, 1998). This scale presented girls with silhouette drawings and asked to identify those which looked the most like their own and the one which they would most like to look like. Appearance satisfaction was measured using a pictorial format similar to the one used by Harter and Pike (1984). The girls were shown a picture of two different girls and given prompts such as, “This girl is happy with the way she looks”, “This girl is not happy with the way she looks”, “Which girls are happy and which are not?”, and “Are you always happy with the way you look?”. To measure self esteem, the Global Self-Worth Scale of Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter & Pike, 1984) was used. Participants were asked to choose from statements and identify which of the statements were most or least like them.

Donht and Tiggemann (2006) used three different variables to measure peer influences: perceived peer desire for thinness, peer discussions and imitation. They measured perceived desire for thinness using the figure rating scale (Tiggemann & Wilson-Barrett, 1998) again to have the girls assess what their best friends would like to look like. To assess peer discussions, the girls were asked about the nature of their discussions with friends and whether or not they discussed the way that celebrities looked. To measure imitations, they asked the girls about whether or not they try to imitate famous models and/or movie stars. To measure media influence researchers provided the girls with a list of 12 popular shows and asked them to select which ones they looked at and to indicate how often they looked at a specific show. Magazines were also incorporated into the measure of media influence, the girls were asked whether they

looked at or read magazines. Additionally, they were asked to identify the magazine or magazines and to indicate how often they either looked at or read those magazines. At the end of each interview session, the researchers weighed the girls to determine their BMI.

The study found that girls who watched more appearance focused television shows were less satisfied with the way they looked. Results also indicated that girls who had more discussions with their peers about celebrities and what they looked like had more of a desire to be thinner. This study took place over the span of a year, so the girls were interviewed twice; the researchers found that girls who had a higher BMI during the first interview were also found to have a greater desire to be thinner.

Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn (2010) conducted a study on exposure to media and young girls' body image, using mother/daughter pairs. The children were placed into either the experimental group or the control group. The experimental group viewed clips from ten different animated movies that contained characters making appearance related comments or engaging in appearance related behaviors. The control group viewed a set of neutral clips from seven animated films that did not contain appearance related messages. They then observed the children to see the number of appearance related behaviors and actions they committed. Children were interviewed both before and after their exposure to the videos, they were asked questions about their appearance and answered using a visual scale, they were also asked questions pertaining to how they believed a princess a princess looked and whether or not they thought that they would be able to become one. To measure body image the researchers used a computer manipulated figure where they placed the child's head onto a body that matched their skin tone and then printed out the

figures and presented them to the child asking them which one looks more like them; they continued this process until the child picked two of the same pictures.

They found that there was no difference in play activity between the girls in the experimental group and the girls in the control group and no relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction. According to Dohnt and Tiggemann (2004) girls younger than six would not exhibit body dissatisfaction based on media exposure. However, Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn (2010) found that generally girls 5-6 year old chose thinner bodies than girls 3-4. The girls aged 5-6 in both the control and experimental groups also believed that to be a princess a person must be thinner than the girls in the 3-4 year old age group believed was necessary.

### **Teenage Girls**

Tiggemann and Pickering (1996) addressed the role that television played in body dissatisfaction and the drive for thinness with teenage girls. Students completed questionnaires during class where they self-reported their height and their weight, which the researchers used to calculate their BMI. They were then asked to complete the drive for thinness subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Omstead & Polivy, 1983). To assess media consumption, the girls were given a list of all the television programs that had been aired the previous week and were asked to circle which ones they had watched (Tangney & Feshbach, 1988). They also assessed the type of television program based on a categorization scale developed by Potter (1987), which identified the shows either as a comedy, drama, and soap opera. The study found that total television viewing time (an average of 22.72 hours per week) was not related to body dissatisfaction or drive for thinness, but the type of program watched, did impact both body

dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. They found that girls who watched more soap operas, movies and sports showed more dissatisfaction with their bodies than girls who did not. However, they found that only the viewing of music videos predicted a drive for thinness.

Borzekowski, Robinson and Killen (2000) examined the relationship between media and perceived importance of appearance and weight concerns. The study was conducted using ninth grade girls. The researcher took each participant's height and weight using a digital scale and a portable stadiometer. To measure media consumption, they asked each participant to circle a number from 0 to 12 hours to indicate the amount of time spent using different media sources. They divided the media into four different categories and asked the girls how much time they spent using each type of media on both weekdays and weekends. The media sources were television, videotapes, playing computer and/or video games and watching music videos. Most girls reported watching television; however, there was no significant relationship between hours spent watching television and body image. The only significant relationship found was between the number of hours spent watching music videos and the perceived importance of appearance and weight concerns.

Like Borzekowski et al. (2000), Botta (1999) investigated high school age girls. The girls were asked to fill out a survey anonymously where they reported their height and weight, which was then used to determine their BMI. They were then asked how many hours and minutes they spent watching television every week and how much time was spent watching a certain type of programming. They were asked how much time was

spent watching programs like, “Melrose Place” and “Beverly Hills 90210”, or what the researcher termed as “thin television dramas”.

Botta (1999) used social comparison as a measure of body image. The participants were asked about the amount of time spent comparing their bodies with images in the media and whether or not they compared their close friends’ bodies with the media images. Participants were also asked whether or not they thought about why the television characters had such perfect bodies and both their bodies and their close friends’ bodies did not look like the television characters. Additionally, they answered a number of questions about whether an image seen on television is one that they believe is ideal or too thin and how often this occurs and whether or not they were satisfied with their bodies. They were also asked if they saw different body parts as being too big, too thin and about how often they were terrified of gaining weight, as well as how often they were preoccupied with being thin, how often they had bulimic behaviors like stuffing themselves with food and going on eating binges.

Botta(1999), unlike Borzekowski et al. (2000), did not focus on the number of hours that the participants watched television, but instead examined the amount of time that they spent comparing themselves to the people on television. She found that the girls who compared their bodies to the bodies of the characters on television were more likely to exhibit body disturbance issues and body image issues because their bodies looked nothing like the television images. Botta (1999) also found that girls who exhibited body image and body disturbance issues were more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors in their quest for the perfect body.

Bell, Lawton and Dittmar (2007) examined how models in music videos impact adolescent girls' body image. To test their hypothesis they split the girls into three different groups: one group was exposed to music videos that featured the thin models, a second group listened to songs from the music videos without seeing the video, and the final group was asked to learn a list of 20 neutral words. They also recorded the girls BMI by collecting their weight and height. The girls who watched the music videos viewed researcher selected videos comprised of all girl bands, with the highest ratings on the music charts for the week, such as "The Pussycat Dolls", "Sugarbabes" and "Girls Aloud". They also selected these bands because the lead singers of each group epitomized what the researchers believed to be the thin ideal for most young women.

To measure self-esteem, Bell et al. (2007) relied on the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory (Battle, 1981). They measured the moods of the participants using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1998). They measured body image by using a modified version of the Body Image States Scale (Cash, Fleming, Alindogan, Steadman & Whitehead, 2002). However, they modified it using a Visual Analogue Scale because it was more sensitive than the likert scale that the Body Image States Scale originally used. For the Visual analogue scale, they anchored participants at the ends of the scale and asked them to indicate how they were feeling by having them place a mark on a line somewhere between 1 (extremely dissatisfied) and 9(extremely satisfied).

They found that girls who had been exposed to the thin ideal in the music videos showed a significantly larger increase in body dissatisfaction between their results pre-exposure to the thin ideal and post-exposure to the thin ideal when compared with the

adolescent girls who only listened to the songs and the adolescent girls who had to recall the words. Bell et al. (2007) also found that there was no difference between the girls who had high self-esteem and low self-esteem, and they were all affected by the music videos similarly in terms of their body image. However, they found that both the adolescent girls who listened to the songs and watched the music video did experience significantly lowered positive affect when they were compared to the baseline group whose only task was to memorize the neutral words.

### **Young Women**

Henderson-King and Henderson-King (1997) examined the effect of viewing what most consider ideal images on the body image of women. They also examined whether an increased awareness about social judgments or what others consider to be attractive would speed up the effects of the ideal images. They used 30 slides of images from magazines to investigate the thin ideal in the media. Conversations between two female experimenters discussing a friend who had gained a lot of weight and thus was now unattractive was also used to examine social judgments. Participants were given two surveys: Snyder and Gangestad's (1986) 18-item self-monitoring scale, and the Body Esteem Scale (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). They then asked the participants to report their current height and weight.

They found that in the slides where the participants saw the neutral image, there was no relationship between self-monitoring and the women's feelings about their physical condition. However, among women who were exposed to the "ideal images", there was a positive relationship between self-monitoring and the way they felt about their physical condition. They also found that there was no relationship between weight

and sexual attractiveness in the condition where the participants viewed the neutral condition. However, they also found that there was a negative relationship between weight and sexual attractiveness in the condition where the participants viewed what they considered the ideal body. Heavier women also felt less positive about their sexual attractiveness after viewing the ideal images than thinner women felt. Henderson-King and Henderson-King (1997) also found that self-monitoring moderated the effects of social judgments about attractiveness, with high self-monitors feeling less positive after overhearing the judgments and low self-monitors feeling more positive about their sexual attractiveness, physical condition and weight concern after overhearing the conversation.

Schooler, Ward, Merriwether and Caruthers (2004) investigated the role that television viewing and race have on body image. This study's population was made up of 548 white women and 87 black women, ages 17-22. Maternal education served as a measure of social status, even though the women came from well-educated families, the mothers of the white women averaged more years of schooling than the mothers of the black women. Participants completed a 31 page survey packet that included information on television viewing habits, body image attitudes and ethnic identity. Seven scales were used to assess body image: three subscales of the EDI, three subscales of the Body Esteem Scale and the Body Shape Questionnaire. Ethnic identity was measured on three subscales of the Multi-group Ethnic Identity measure. To assess television habits the participants were provided with a list of 35 top rated primetime sitcoms and dramas from 4 years prior and were asked to indicate how often they had watched each program on a 5-point scale.

The study showed that both groups watched about the same amount of television about 19 hours per month. However the black women tended to watch more black oriented television than the white women. The black women reported a significantly lower drive for thinness, as well as fewer tendencies toward bulimia and significantly less body dissatisfaction. They also tended to have fewer negative thoughts about their bodies and significantly higher body esteem on all three subscales of the EDI. White women's body image revolved largely around their BMI, with women with higher BMIs reporting poorer body image on six of the seven body image outcomes. Watching more television with white casts also predicted poorer body image; the frequent viewing of "White TV" was associated with greater body dissatisfaction and negative thoughts about one's body. The viewing of more television programs with a white cast tended to predict bulimic tendencies in both black and white women, however when white women viewed more television with black casts, the drive for thinness was greatly reduced, and they also had fewer bulimic tendencies and negative thoughts about their bodies.

Tiggemann and Slater (2004) investigated how music videos affected both social comparisons and body dissatisfaction. The study was conducted using 84 female students at Flinders University between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. Mood and body dissatisfaction were measured on eight visual analog scales, both before and after viewing music video clips. Participants were asked to place a mark on a line (anxious, depressed, angry, happy and confident) indicating how they were feeling both before and immediately following the viewing of a music video. Participants were also asked indicate how much they thought about their appearance while watching the video clips,

and how much they compared themselves with the women in the video. They found that even brief exposure to music videos led to body dissatisfaction in women.

Want, Vickers and Amos (2009) focused their research on how the television show, “Friends” affected women’s body image. It aimed to study if there was difference in appearance ratings between people who viewed “Friends” and people who did not. The participants were 76 female undergraduate students from a Canadian University. They were broken into four groups: the control group, an exposure group, an appearance intervention group and a weight and shape intervention group. In the control group, the participants answered the appearance satisfaction question before they watched a 10-minute clip from the show. In the exposure group, participants watched the clip and then filled out the survey. In the appearance intervention group, the participants read the survey first then watched the clip, then they filled out the survey. The last condition was much like that of the appearance intervention groups, except that instead of answering an appearance survey, these group members completed a weight and shape survey. For each condition the 10-minute clip that participants were shown was from “Friends” episode 20 of season nine. Participants were asked to complete a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) to determine mood and body satisfaction. The findings show that even the short 10-minute clip of “Friends” had an adverse effect on the ratings of the women’s satisfaction with their body. The women who completed the survey after viewing the clip were more likely to compare their bodies to the bodies that they viewed on screen.

Bergstrom, Neighbors and Malheim (2009) investigated the link between media comparison and low body image. Their study aimed to find out if larger women rate dimension unrelated to appearance, as being more important after media exposure. The

researcher proposed that women who viewed more media images depicting thin models would experience more weight concerns and that women who had low self-esteem, regardless of their BMI would rate dimensions unrelated to looks as being more important. This study was conducted using 197 female undergraduates, however only 181 of them returned to finish the second part of the study. To assess self-worth they used the Dimensions of Self-Worth Questionnaire (DSWQ), which was constructed specifically for the study. Body Image was measured using the Body Esteem Scale (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). Self-esteem was measured using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965). To measure the media consumption component they used twenty different magazine advertisements.

The study was conducted over a period of two weeks, during the first week the women came in and were told that the researchers were conducting a study on values. After signing up for the study, they completed a baseline measure and were told to return one week later. When they returned, they viewed a slide show with twenty images, some of which were targeted toward body consciousness and others were more neutral. The women also filled out a questionnaire that assessed their attitudes toward each product in each magazine advertisement. There were two different kinds of ads ten ads were compiled of thin female models and the other ten of electronics, cleaning products and automobiles. After viewing the slide show they were then asked to fill out the DSWQ and the Body Esteem Scale. Once finished with the surveys, the participants were then taken to another room to be debriefed and have their height and weight measurements taken.

Bergstrom et al. (2009) found that women with higher BMIs who viewed the ads with the thin models were more likely to experience weight concern. However, women

who did not view the thin models group had similar weight concerns regardless of BMI. After viewing the thin models in the advertisements, women with higher BMIs rated physical features as less important.

Hall, Baird, Gilbert, Miller and Bixby (2011) explored how exposure to media while exercising affects body image in college aged women. To do this they used the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale-3 (Thompson, van den Berg, Roehrig, Guarda & Heinberg, 2004). It is a 30 item Likert scale that is used to measure how society influences one's body image. They used single-item scales to measure appearance and comparison processing. The participants provided responses to questions such as "To what extent did you think about your appearance while watching the video clips?" (Tiggemann and McGill, 2004). They responded using a seven-point scale with responses that ranged from 1 = no thought about my appearance to 7 = a lot of thought about my appearance. They used the word-stem completion task (Tiggemann, Hargreaves, Polivy & McFarlane, 2004) as an implicit measure. Lastly they used the weight subscale of the Physical Appearance State and Trait Anxiety Scale (Reed, Thompson, Brannick & Sacco, 1991) to measure physical appearance state anxiety. The researchers found that television programs did influence both the implicit and explicit attitudes about the participant's bodies. They found that participants reported a higher number of appearance related words after viewing the videos that contained the ideal images. However, they found regardless of the significant effects of the thin ideal on both implicit and explicit measures, it did not affect exercise performance. After viewing the videos, the young women did not exercise at a higher intensity or for a longer period of time.

## **Reality Television review**

In 2010, Heidi Montag of “The Hills” fame was interviewed by Time magazine about her plastic surgery procedures, something that she publicized by going on countless talk shows and giving interviews to a number of magazines. She had just completed 10 different elective plastic surgery procedures at once and was making the rounds discussing her plastic surgery journey. Uhls and Greenfield (2011) indicated that the media may play a great role in influencing the body image of both young women and children, and in her interview Heidi discusses bringing pictures of movie stars to the plastic surgeon to request a specific body part be made to look like that celebrity’s body. During the interviewing, she told the interviewer that she was already planning her next breast augmentation surgery.

Neilsen media (Television trends, 2010) has shown reality shows as being a staple in the top 10 rated shows for any given week on both broadcast and cable networks. Shows like “The Real World” are aimed toward a group of key viewers, with MTV being the top ranked channel for people, ages 12-29. It is not surprising that they produce a large number of the shows that make up the reality television lexicon. A number of studies (Bell, Lawton & Dittmar, 2007; Borzekowski, Robinson & Killen, 2000; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996; Tiggemann and Slater, 2004) have indicated that music videos are one of the main sources of body image problems and the drive for thinness, in my study, I hypothesized that people who spend more time viewing MTV’s reality television shows would have higher instances of body image disturbance than people who do not.

Recent news reports have focused on the reality of reality television rehashing an old debate, “How real is reality television?”. One of the most famous reality television personalities, Kim Kardashian, of E!’s *Keeping up with the Kardashians* is divorcing her husband of 72 days. This has sparked debates among readers and television viewers about how real a reality television show is. Chaney (2011) purported that reality television is largely scripted and spiced up for dramatic flare; she also asserted that all reality television viewers should know this by now. The Writers Guild of America informs us that reality television is an ad based business which can be indicated by the results of previous research that indicated that even television ads can affect body image. In the case of Kim Kardashian, her wedding was a highly publicized event that gave the network some of its highest ratings and also gave product companies and advertisers the ability to get their products recognized by viewers.

Dixon (2008) explored three of the highest rated reality television shows, ABC’s *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, MTV’s *I Want a Famous Face* and FOX’s *The Swan*. In their article, they ascertained that we do not see everything on television and that after the cameras leave, particularly on shows like *Extreme Makeover*, the participants are sometimes left worse off than they were before the television cameras got there. There have been claims of shoddy workmanship because the house is thrown together so hurriedly and some participants have also faced tax problems, because they are now living in a brand new dwelling that can be appraised and then taxed at a higher rate. Dixon (2008) argues much like the Writer’s Guild Association that *Extreme Makeover Home Edition* is simply a place to get products sold, with the builders and designers announcing the brands of the product and the store where they purchased the products. It

is also argued that product placement in television shows like *Extreme Makeover* and subsequently the Kardashian wedding, is a way to get products to the masses who now set DVR's and fast forward through the commercial breaks that have historically been the primary means for advertising these products.

Like in the Garcia (2010) Time magazine article on Heidi Montag, Dixon (2008) explored *I want a Famous Face*, an MTV reality show that featured teens who went under the knife to look like their idols. Much like Heidi Montag, the teens took their plastic surgeons pictures of body parts of their favorite celebrities so that they could be transformed into looking like them. Some of the participants on *I want a Famous Face* were teens hoping to break into Hollywood, who once again like Heidi Montag, believed that the only thing holding them back was their looks. Research has indicated that currently more young people want to be famous and believe that they can be famous, regardless of talent, because of reality television (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011).

Dixon (2008) also explores FOX's *The Swan*, a reality show that depicted two women's three to four month journey of plastic surgery. The participants got major plastic surgery during the first month and then followed it up with three months of recuperation and other plastic surgery procedures. After all of the procedures, the participants competed in a beauty pageant where the winner was crowned, "The Swan". One contestant remarked that "no matter how good you look on the outside, people still need to work on the inside. It's important to fix the inside first ". She also remarked that FOX should start doing a show like that for men. "The Swan" has since been cancelled and no show similar in content and format has been aired.

Uhls and Greenfield (2011) hypothesized that the content of television shows has shifted over the decades. Fame now leads the pack, as the value that is most sought after and emphasized in popular children's television shows. One possible outcome of this is that children who watch these shows may become obsessed with seeking such fame, not because of they have talent, but because it is what is seen on television. The researchers believe that the drive toward fame may play a role in the rise of narcissism in youth, which may have dire consequences because television is used as a means of socialization. A recent article in The Guardian (Brookes, 2010) conducted a survey and found that children living in Britain were not only influenced by television shows, but also by stories of individuals rise from having nothing to being wealthy. Kids believed that they would be able to "be the next Oprah". However, another survey reported in the same article indicated that children's drive to be famous might be more them wanting to please their parents than them wanting to actually be famous, which may be more of an indication that it may be parents impressing their wants onto their kids and not kids actually wanting to be famous.

### **Purpose of Research**

Since past research (Borzekowski, Robinson & Killen, 2000) has indicated that the link between television and body image exists not only in the number of hours spent watching television but in the type of television that is watched, it is my hypothesis that young women who spend more time watching reality television will have a show greater body dissatisfaction than the young women who spend more time watching scripted television.

Since past research (Bell, Lawton & Dittmar, 2007; Borzekowski, Robinson & Killen, 2000; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996; Tiggemann and Slater, 2004) has indicated that watching even small amounts of music videos will contribute to negative body image and I have observed that after every MTV show is a snippet from a music video. I am expecting that viewing MTV reality shows will be negatively associated body image.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### **Participants**

The participants were 82 undergraduate women currently attending Eastern Kentucky University. Participants signed up using the online ECU SONA system.

#### **Measures**

##### **Body Image**

The participants were asked to complete the Body Esteem Scale (BES; Franzoi & Shields, 1984), which is a measure body satisfaction. The Body Esteem Scale measures Sexual Attractiveness (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ;  $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = .54$ ), Franzoi and Shields (1984) define this as body parts that cannot be changed through exercise and can only be changed by using cosmetic surgery. Weight Concern (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ;  $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .92$ ), was defined by the researchers as the parts of women most usually objectified by men. Physical Condition (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ;  $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) was defined as the parts of the body that can be changed through physical activity. This scale contains 35 items assessing perceptions of various body parts and functions and uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = have strong negative feelings; 5 = have strong positive feelings).

##### **Television Viewing**

To measure the frequency and type of television viewing, a list of 12 of the most watched scripted shows (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .60$ ;  $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = .44$ ) and 12 of the most watched reality shows (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .65$ ;  $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = .51$ ) from both broadcast and cable television in the past year was compiled, using the Nielsen rating guide (See

Appendix A<sup>1</sup>). The study asked participants to give each show a rating (1 = I've never watched it to 5 = I watch it every week).

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<sup>1</sup> All tables and figures are listed in the Appendix

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

To examine the association between, reality television and body image, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted among the variables (see Table 1). The results showed that neither reality television nor scripted television was significantly correlated with body image. However, it did reveal a significant correlation between Sexual Attractiveness and the amount of television that was viewed daily.

To examine the association between MTV reality television shows type and frequency of viewing and body image, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted among the variables (see Table 2). The results showed no significant correlation between MTV viewing and body image. However, the results did show significant correlations between the other reality television shows and sexual attractiveness. It also showed a significant correlation between the viewing of MTV reality television shows and daily television shows. There was also, an interaction between the other television shows and the amount of time that the young women spent watching television every week. Indicating young women spend more time watching non-MTV reality shows than they spend watching MTV reality shows.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine whether reality television played a role in affecting women's body image and whether young women who watched reality television shows on MTV showed more body dissatisfaction than those who do not. The present findings indicate that reality television is related to Sexual Attractiveness, however contrary to my hypothesis viewing MTV reality shows was not related to body dissatisfaction.

There was a relationship between the number of hours that people spent watching television daily and sexual attractiveness. This indicates that the amount of time that is spent watching television affects whether young women feel attractive or not. This can be an effect of television, Uhls and Greenfield (2011) indicated that while fame was the number one value promoted in television today, body image was ranked as the fourth. So in effect, this result should not be a surprise. The amount and frequency of time spent watching reality television on channels other than MTV also showed a significant positive correlation with Sexual Attractiveness. Since Sexual Attractiveness explores the parts of the body that is only changeable by surgery (Franzoi & Shields, 1984) it is not surprising that there would be a positive correlation. If fame is dictated by outside beauty (Garcia, 2010) then the correlation between Sexual Attractiveness and other reality shows is plausible. It should also be considered that most of the stars of MTV reality shows have been embroiled in controversy, making their lives seem less than ideal. The reality shows on the other networks have so far stayed clear of controversy so the viewers may view more positively than the cast of the MTV reality shows.

Though my hypothesis was not supported by the results, it provides a great starting point for examining the relationship between reality television and body image. With every major television network airing at least one and in some cases more than one reality show, it seems as though reality programming is here to stay. The Huffington Post (Shuter, 2010) recently reported that a large number of teen girls were becoming pregnant to audition for “roles” on both *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*. This indicates that reality television has further reaching consequences than first believed.

We live in a culture where television shows are made up of “the beautiful people” and when you do not fit into that role you are either not shown as much on the reality shows or your weaknesses are exploited in the scripted shows. One example of that would be the scripted show *Glee*, a show about high school students in an Ohio, Glee Club. On *Glee* the skinny “pretty” girls are cheerleaders and the overweight ones are Greco-Roman wrestler or obsessed with food.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The population available largely limited this study, Eastern Kentucky University is a predominantly white university so there was not a large population of women of color available to participate in this study. Demographic information was not collected from participants so it was not possible to examine individual differences like SES, age, race and ethnicity. It is also important to note that this study was a correlational study and since correlation does not indicate causation, there may be a number of factors that influenced the significant correlations viewed in this study. Race is an important factor to look at in future research because Schooler et al (2004) found that not only is there a difference in African American young women and White women when it came to body

image but that, that difference may be a function of the types of television that they are watching. Young women of either race who watched more predominantly “black” television had less body dissatisfaction than young women who watched “white” television.

Reality television has become such a big part of the television lexicon, future research with more diverse populations is encouraged. I also believe that this area of research would benefit greatly from the implicit measures test, considering that the study asked people to identify how they feel about specific body parts. The implicit measures test would measure their automatic unconscious beliefs about their bodies, which would leave no room for the misrepresentation that can occur on explicit measures. When designing this study one of my main concerns were errors with self-reporting Donht & Tiggemann, (2006) asked the girls in their study to report height and weight or even weighed them. I felt that, that would create some uneasiness among the women especially because they were not completing the surveys in a room by themselves and since weight is such a sensitive issue asking them to self-report would lead them to be less than truthful (Cialdini & Goldstein) so that they could maintain a positive self-concept and not stray from the norm.

The research method was also a limitation. I would suggest that when replicating this study, participants complete their surveys in a room by themselves. In this study the participants all came in groups, which could have increased the need to maintain a positive self-concept by conforming to the answers that their friends gave (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004)

## **Future Research**

Based on the results and the limitations of this study there are several areas for future research. First the inclusion of a demographic survey (age, race, SES, height, weight) is important. Second reworking the format of the study so that the participants come in individually is important. Third exploring other variables that affect television viewing (depression). Finally relationships with other media (magazines, ads, music videos, with or without reality television stars) would also provide material for greater comparison to previous research.

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## APPENDIX A

### Measure of television viewing

Appendix A: Measure of television viewing

About how many hours of television do you watch daily? \_\_\_\_\_

About how many hours of television do you watch each week? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Please indicate the television shows that you have watched **in the past year** based on the scale below.

- 1 - I have never watched it
- 2 - I watch it when I have time
- 3 - I watch it sometimes
- 4 - I've missed a couple of episodes
- 5 - I watch every week/I've never missed an episode

\_\_\_\_\_ America's Got Talent

\_\_\_\_\_ America's Next Top Model

\_\_\_\_\_ American Idol

\_\_\_\_\_ Big Bang Theory

\_\_\_\_\_ Big Brother

\_\_\_\_\_ CSI

\_\_\_\_\_ Dancing With the Stars

\_\_\_\_\_ Glee

\_\_\_\_\_ Grey's Anatomy

\_\_\_\_\_ How I Met Your Mother

- \_\_\_\_\_ Keeping Up With the Kardashians
- \_\_\_\_\_ Law & Order SVU
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mad Men
- \_\_\_\_\_ Modern Family
- \_\_\_\_\_ NCIS
- \_\_\_\_\_ Project Runway
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sons of Anarchy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Survivor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teen Mom
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Jersey Shore
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Mentalist
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Real Housewives
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Real World
- \_\_\_\_\_ Two and a Half Men

## APPENDIX B

Bivariate correlations between reality television and body image

Table 1. Bivariate correlations between reality television and body image

Variables	Reality	Scripted	Physical Condition	Sexual Attractiveness	Weight Concern	Daily TV
Reality						
Scripted	.25*					
Physical Condition	.13	.04				
Sexual Attractiveness	.15	.17	.55**			
Weight Concern	.05	.04	.50**	.42**		
Daily TV	.18	.07	.18	.22*	.14	
Weekly TV	.20	.15	.03	.12	.03	.79

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

## APPENDIX C

Bivariate correlations between MTV reality television shows and body image

Table 2. Bivariate correlations between MTV reality television shows and body image

Variables	Sexual Attractiveness	Weight Concern	Physical Concern	Scripted	MTV Reality	Other reality	Weekly TV
Sexual Attractiveness							
Weight Concern	.42**						
Physical Condition	.55**	.5*					
Scripted	.17	.04	.04				
MTV Reality	-.004	-.06	.07	-.01			
Other reality	.23*	.13	.14	.34**	.31**		
Weekly TV	.17	.04	.04	1**	.01	.34**	
Daily TV	.23*	.14	.17	.06	.25*	.06	.06

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

## APPENDIX D

### Mean and Standard Deviation

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations

Concept	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reality	2.03	.51
Scripted	1.72	.44
Sexual attractiveness	3.49	.54
Weight Concern	2.78	.92
Physical Condition	3.18	.72