The Presence of a Picture of Model on Self Esteem and Attractiveness Rating of College Women

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**Method**

**Participants**

One hundred traditionally aged college women (19-22 years) will be participating in this study at a small liberal university in southern Virginia. They will be given extra credit in their psychology course for participating. All participants will be treated ethically.

**Materials and Procedure**

Every participant will sign a consent form (see Appendix A) before the beginning the study. After the consent forms are signed, I will hand out a survey to each participant face down (see Appendix B). They will receive the survey with one of three conditions; they will have an image of a supermodel, the name of a celebrity, or neither (see Appendix C, and D). Once each participant has received their survey, I will instruct them to turn it over and begin. The group that has the image of a model and the group with the name of a celebrity will begin by rating them on a scale of 1 to 10 (see Appendix D). They will then complete the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) for the subject before continuing to the rest of the survey (See Appendix E). All the participants will complete an attractiveness rating and Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale about themselves. After they are finished I will instruct them to add up their RSES scores at the bottom of the page (they will also add up the RSES scores of the subject if applicable). Before they leave, I will inform them of the number of the university’s counseling service because of the sensitivity and possible emotionality of the study.

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In recent years, there has been a push in the scientific community to try to understand how detrimental a poor self-esteem is on the lives of women. Women tend to struggle with self-perception because of the influx of media that enforces a singular standard that not all women have the possibility to reach. Each aspect of beauty is laid out to meet this standard from the length of one’s hair to the size of the body, even to the size of their shoe. The disappointment that stems from not being able to achieve these ideals can lead to deterioration in mental health, that could potentially lead to attempts at suicide (Lehmann, Hilimire, Yang, Link, & DeVylder, 2016). It can also bring body dissatisfaction and eating disorders to attempt to obtain a certain weight or body shape increasing the risk of heart problems, organ failure, muscle and tissue damage, and more (Gordon, Castro, Sitnikov, & Holm-Denoma, 2010).

Traditional college-aged women have a particularly difficult time with self-perception because it is a time of high strain, and on top of that they must deal with the stigma of things like the ‘freshman 15’ (the idea that in one’s freshman year of undergrad they will gain around 15 pounds). Pressure to not gain this weight, and or the disillusionment when one does, emotionally manipulates a women’s perception of herself. Self-esteem as the evaluation of one’s self-worth (Stapleton, Crighton, Carter, & Pidgeon, 2017). There has been extensive research in the relationship between self-esteem and body image that has found a positively associated correlation between the two (Gordan et al. 2010). A negative body image and low self-esteem are linked to increased likelihood for depression, anxiety, lack of motivation (Harter, 1999). This can be distressing on the moral of a woman in college, leading to a negative impact on her ability and or strive to study, consequentially worsening her grades.

It is one thing to have moments of discomfort of one’s body, but it is another to be consumed by the inadequacies a woman sees in herself. The obsessive behavior of thinking about the problems of her body is where problems can arise. For instance, she might develop a complex with food where she doesn’t eat or purges after she does (Gordon et al., 2003; Perez, & Joiner, 2003). She could also develop an addiction to exercising in a constant effort to lose or maintain a particular weight (Sorenson, 1997). Changes to the body that are this drastic lead to significant health problems such as; weakened immune system, insomnia, heart failure, chronic dehydration, low blood pressure, decreased menstruation and ovulation, weakened esophageal tissue, and more (Gordon et al., 2003; Perez, & Joiner, 2003; Sorenson, 1997).

The effects do not only impede the physical attributes, but can also be significantly harmful to the mental state of the woman. Women who experience low self-esteem tend to struggle with mental health disorders whether they had been present before or after the development of their self-esteem (Lehmann et al., 2016). Lehmann, Hilimire, Yang, Link, & DeVylder (2016) found that if a participant had prior suicide attempts had a lower self-esteem score on the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES). It becomes a cycle in which a lower self-esteem can lead to a suicide attempt, that can then lead to an even lesser self-esteem. This becomes especially prevalent in college-aged women because suicide is the 3rd highest killer of that age group (Lehmann et al., 2016). Knowing what kind of esteem, a woman has can help make sure she receives the proper attention through stressful situations since she is more likely to commit suicide.

The reason I want to look into the kinds of esteem in college-aged women is due to the high concentration of things shared on social media that reflect a low self-esteem. There is an overwhelming amount of negative words about self-perception than positive, and whether it is in a serious matter or not there is no way to tell in a social media post. With suicide having such an impactful presence on this age group, it is especially important for people in a position of power and influence such as residential advisors, peer mentors, and faculty, should be well versed in detecting the signs of possible suicide contemplation to help prevent attempts.

The appearance of culturally beautiful women who do fit the ideals can affect how women view themselves. During the Victoria Secret Fashion Show, elite models walk a runway in lingerie on seemingly perfect fits for the body type Americans find beautiful. The negative impact this can have on women can be shown in hoe comparative they are with the women they see. Those who compare themselves in detail tend to have a lower self-esteem than those who don’t compare or not as in depth (Stapleton et al., 2017). It is further exemplified in women that are not White, because they struggle to see positive images of their race on the same level that White women do since the ideal American woman is white. Due to the lack of examples of women of minority races being glorified as White women are, women of color tend to have lower self-esteems and greater problems with body dissatisfaction (Chao, Vidacovich, & Green, 2017; Gordon et al., 2010; Perez. & Joiner, 2003).

I predict that these will also fall true in the data I collect from my experiment. I hypothesize that women who see the image of the model will have a lower self-esteem on the RSES, and will rate themselves lower on the overall self-perception rating. In addition, I believe that women who are not the same race as the model will also rank lower on the RSES and self-perception rating. After being affected by the sight of the model, women will tend to rate themselves lower because they will be comparing themselves, unlike the women who do not see an image because they have nothing to compare to and will solely base it on the way they see themselves. Similarly, women of color will compare themselves to the beauty standards of another race when those are not likely the standards of their own race, as compared to those who have nothing to subject themselves to. Supplementing previous research that there will be a correlation between societal beauty values and self-esteem rating in college-aged women.

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