

Peer pressure trumps 'thin' ideals in the media

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Peers exert a greater influence on teenage girls' dissatisfaction with their bodies than do thin ideals in television or social media use, according to new research by Dr. Christopher J. Ferguson and colleagues from Texas A&M International University in the U.S. Their study is published online in Springer's *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

The influence of the media on [body](#) image, life satisfaction, and symptoms of eating disorders in [teenage girls](#) is a hot debate. Some experts believe that media influences on body [dissatisfaction](#) may extend to symptoms of eating disorders. Others contend that the link between media exposure and body image is inconsistent. Ferguson and his team's work shed light on this debate, by comparing the effects of [peers](#) and the media on girls' body dissatisfaction, eating disorder symptoms, and life satisfaction in general.

To assess exposure to thin ideals in the media, the researchers asked 237 young Hispanic girls, aged 10 to 17 years, to name their 3 favorite television shows and to rate the attractiveness of the female actresses in those shows. They also assessed their body weight and height, whether or not they had feelings of inferiority in response to other girls (peer competition), and how often they used [social media](#). The girls were then asked about how they felt about their bodies, whether they had any eating disorder symptoms, and how satisfied they were, overall, with their lives. Six months later, the researchers repeated these measures in 101 teen girls from the initial group.

On the whole, neither television exposure to thin ideals nor social media use predicted body dissatisfaction, whereas peer competition did. Similarly, television exposure and social media use did not predict eating disorder symptoms. Peer competition predicted eating disorder symptoms long-term, though not in the short term. Interestingly, both peer competition and social media use predicted lower life satisfaction.

The authors conclude, "Our results suggest that only peer competition, not [television](#) or social media use, predict negative outcomes for body image. This suggests that peer competition is more salient to body and eating issues in teenage girls. However, social media use may provide a new arena for peer competition, even if it does not directly influence negative body outcomes."

More information: Ferguson CJ et al (2013). Concurrent and prospective analyses of peer, television and social media influences on body dissatisfaction, eating disorder symptoms and life satisfaction in adolescent girls. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*; [DOI 10.1007/s10964-012-9898-9](#)

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