

How pop video models prompt poor body image in girls

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The use of ultra-thin models in music videos can lead to poor body image in the young girls who watch them, researchers from the University of Sussex reveal in a new report published this week.

Music videos have been seen as an influence on young people with regard to violence, sexuality and alcohol, but this new study is the first to track the relationship between music video culture and the impact it has on how adolescent girls view their bodies.

Dr Helga Dittmar is a psychologist at the University of Sussex who studies the impact of consumer society on individuals' sense of identity and well-being and is one of the authors of the study, published in the journal *Body Image*.

She says: "The mass media is a pervasive force in shaping body ideals, but this negative impact has remained under-examined. Female models in music videos help to promote thinness as desirable - and are often depicted in ways that emphasise this physical ideal. It is against this ideal that young girls come to measure themselves, often unfavourably, which can lead to body dissatisfaction and, in turn, unhealthy eating behaviours."

The study set out to test if music videos have an adverse effect on young girls' body dissatisfaction, given that 12-19-year-olds are by far the biggest consumers of such videos, now omnipresent in shops, clubs and in the home, through channels such as MTV. Videos are also often aimed specifically at young girls, says the study, particularly through the marketing of all-girl bands to teenage females.

To test the theory, 87 girls aged 16-19 years at a sixth-form college in the North East of England took part in a series of tasks described simply as tests to assess memory. A third watched music

videos featuring thin, attractive members of girl bands such as the Pussycat Dolls and Girls Aloud; another third listened only to the music videos; a final third were asked simply to learn a list of neutral words. All three groups were then asked questions about what they had listened to or watched, and the answers measured for levels of self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and mood.

The researchers discovered that after just ten minutes' exposure, it was the group who watched music videos featuring thin, idealised models who exhibited the greatest increase in body dissatisfaction, compared to those who merely listened to the songs or had completed the memory task.

Additionally, the findings showed that girls with both high and low self-esteem were equally vulnerable to the negative impact of music videos on their body image.

Dr Dittmar and her co-authors - DPhil student Beth Bell and Rebecca Lawton of the University of Leeds - now hope to extend their research to pre-adolescent girls, and the potential negative impact on young males' body image from watching muscular male models in music videos.

Source: University of Sussex

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