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2 **Body Image**

3 CHARLOTTE N. MARKEY¹, PATRICK M. MARKEY²

4 ¹Rutgers University, Camden, NJ

5 ²Villanova University, Villanova, PA

6 This article reviews current research addressing adoles-
7 cents' body image. The correlates and consequences of
8 body image are described, as is the significance of body
9 image to other areas of development including puberty,
10 identity, media consumption, family, peer, and roman-
11 tic relationships. The historical context of body image
12 research is reviewed in addition to the contemporary
13 importance of understanding body image given rising
14 concerns about adolescents' vulnerability to both obe-
15 sity and eating disorders.

16 There are many reasons why it is important to
17 understand adolescents' body image. One only needs
18 to pick up a newspaper, turn on the television, or glance
19 at the magazines in the checkout line at the grocery
20 store to be reminded of our cultural obsession with the
21 appearance of our bodies. Advice on how to improve
22 one's physical appearances abounds – from how to lose
23 weight to how to surgically alter one's appearance. It is
24 no wonder that young people today are concerned with
25 how they look, seemingly more so than any past
26 generation.

27 An attempt to understand physical appearance con-
28 cerns, especially with respect to body-related concerns,
29 is often the work of body image researchers. Body
30 image is the self-evaluative component of self-image
31 that focuses on physical attributes and appearance. It
32 functions as a dynamic force and does not merely
33 denote a static image of the self as “something attrac-
34 tive” or “something fit,” but rather, body image repre-
35 sents the power, confidence, and sense of agency that is
36 derived from one's physical being (D. Newman, per-
37 sonal communication, July 12, 2005). Interest in body

image has come to researchers' attention most often 38
under conditions of extreme distortion or dissatisfac- 39
tion. Body dysmorphic disorder, anorexia nervosa, and 40
bulimia nervosa represent psychiatric disorders 41
hallmarked by negative body image. However, the 42
range of normal and pathological body image experi- 43
ences is broad and has psychological, behavioral, and 44
developmental consequences all along its spectrum 45
(D. Newman, personal communication, July 12, 46
2005). In this article, the history of body image 47
research, current trends and statistics regarding adoles- 48
cents' body image, the contemporary importance of 49
body image research, the developmental significance 50
of body image in terms of adolescents' pubertal, iden- 51
tity, social, and psychological development, as well as 52
future directions for the study of adolescents' body 53
image are discussed. 54

55 **Historical Understanding of Body Image** 56

A recent (June, 2009) literature search in PsycInfo for 57
the key words “body image” produced 6,968 articles, 58
books, chapters, and dissertations addressing this 59
topic. Dating back to 1903, “body image” research 60
originally focused on self-image or self-concept and 61
usually examined samples of mentally retarded or oth- 62
erwise psychologically ill or impaired individuals' sense 63
of self (not necessarily their physical body). This early 64
research differs from contemporary body image 65
research in its relatively general approach, psychoana- 66
lytic undertones, and scarcity (<1% of body image 67
research was published before 1970). The majority 68
(90%) of body image research has been published 69
since 1980, paralleling an increase in research 70
addressing eating disorders in the last 3 decades. 71
What may be most striking is not the relatively recent 72
proliferation of research addressing body image, but 73
the predominantly clinical nature of this research. Of 74
all the body image publications, the vast majority can 75
be found in abnormal, clinical, health/medical, or 76

77 social/personality journals. Only a minority (<1% it
78 appears) can be found in developmental psychology
79 journals and even fewer are longitudinal studies in
80 peer-reviewed journals. And yet, presumably, everyone
81 has a “body image” and understanding what this
82 means – particularly during adolescence – is significant
83 not only because of the clinical ramifications associated
84 with body dissatisfaction, but also because of the rele-
85 vance of body image to so many other areas of adoles-
86 cents’ lives.

87 **Adolescents’ Body Image: Recent** 88 **Trends and Statistics**

89 When adolescents are asked about their thoughts and
90 feelings about their bodies, the result is often discour-
91 aging. Generally, adolescents are quick to point out
92 flaws with their bodies, are not happy with the appear-
93 ance of their bodies, and report body-related concerns
94 and dissatisfaction (Shapiro et al. 1997; Wertheim et al.
95 2009). However, concerns regarding body image clearly
96 develop prior to adolescence, particularly among girls.
97 Some research suggests that girls as young as 5 years old
98 begin to express dissatisfaction with their bodies
99 (Davison et al. 2000; Smolak 2004). These early signs
100 of body dissatisfaction are, predictably, associated with
101 weight status such that girls who weigh more (even
102 taking height into account) are more dissatisfied with
103 their appearance (Davison et al. 2000). Further, per-
104 sonality (e.g., self-esteem) and sociocultural influences
105 (e.g., media exposure) are demonstrated predictors of
106 the development of body dissatisfaction (Clark and
107 Tiggemann 2008; Wertheim et al. 2009). Girls’ con-
108 cerns about body and weight issues do not subside
109 from childhood to early adulthood, but instead appear
110 to intensify with age (Cash and Henry 1995; Striegel-
111 Moore et al. 1986). Measures assessing body image and
112 statistics determining body satisfaction versus dissatis-
113 faction vary from study to study (with findings ranging
114 from 24% to 90% of girls dissatisfied with their bodies;
115 D. C. Jones, personal communication, July 16, 2009;
116 Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2002; Presnell et al. 2004; see
117 Yanover and Thompson 2009 for a review of assess-
118 ment issues), however reports seem to indicate that at
119 least half of girls report dissatisfaction with their bodies
120 by mid-adolescence (Casper and Offer 1990; D. C.
121 Jones, personal communication, July 16, 2009; McCabe
122 and Ricciardelli 2003a; Paxton et al. 1991). Further,
123 Paxton et al. (1991) report that adolescent girls believe

124 that improving the appearance of their bodies would
125 make them happier, healthier, and better looking.

126 The majority of research on body image has focused
127 on girls and women; fewer studies have addressed these
128 issues among boys and men. However, Smolak (2004)
129 has suggested that during adolescence boys become
130 concerned with both their body size and muscularity,
131 which causes them to experience levels of body dissat-
132 isfaction that are comparable to adolescent girls’ body
133 dissatisfaction. Further, McCabe and Ricciardelli
134 (2004) have suggested that boys may develop greater
135 body image concerns during adolescence due to an
136 increased interest in emulating male body ideals. Con-
137 sistent with this notion, some estimates indicate that
138 10–75% of preadolescent and adolescent boys are dis-
139 satisfied with their bodies (Collins 1991; Ericksen et al.
140 2003; D. C. Jones, personal communication, July 16,
141 2009; McCabe and Ricciardelli 2004). Similar to
142 research addressing girls, different measurement tools
143 and standards used to calculate body satisfaction versus
144 dissatisfaction likely account for a portion of the vari-
145 ability in body dissatisfaction across studies. Regard-
146 less, boys are clearly not immune to concern about
147 their bodies. However, with limited research addressing
148 the developmental trajectory of boys’ body image
149 through adulthood, it remains somewhat unclear
150 whether or not boys’ body image concerns intensify
151 into adulthood or as one study suggests, may actually
152 decrease by the end of adolescence (Bearman et al.
153 2006).

154 **Contemporary Importance of** 155 **Understanding Adolescents’ Body** 156 **Image: Obesity**

157 The striking statistics concerning adolescents’ suscepti-
158 bility to body dissatisfaction in combination with
159 recent secular trends regarding obesity makes under-
160 standing adolescents’ body image particularly impor-
161 tant. It is unlikely a coincidence that the current “era of
162 appearances” is also the “era of obesity.” These days, it
163 is difficult not to be aware of the growing obesity
164 “epidemic” (Centers for Disease Control and Preven-
165 tion 2009; World Health Organization 2003) affecting
166 American adults and an increasing number of children
167 and adolescents. As Americans grow heavier, they also
168 appear to grow increasingly afraid of food and more
169 worried about their appearance. As noted by others
170 (see Irving and Neumark-Sztainer 2002), there seems

171 to be an association between our March toward obesity
172 and our love of an emaciated female body and a fit male
173 physique. Indeed, research seems to clearly suggest that
174 body dissatisfaction and weight concerns are forerun-
175 ners to dieting and other body-change strategies (Lowe
176 et al. 2006; Markey and Markey 2005; Stice et al. 1999;
177 Tomiyama and Mann 2008). However, the efficacy of
178 most weight-loss approaches is highly questionable,
179 with weight gain being a likely outcome of most
180 attempts to lose weight (Polivy and Herman 2002;
181 Stice et al. 1999). Consistent with these findings is
182 additional research indicating that self-restriction and
183 external attempts to control food intake tend to result
184 in increased food consumption, binge eating, and
185 higher weight status (see Polivy and Herman 2002,
186 for a review). Thus, it appears that the cultural focus
187 on being thin and fit may indirectly fuel the obesity
188 crisis. In order to ameliorate adolescents' health, and
189 help them to maintain a healthy weight status, it is
190 important to help them redirect their energy away
191 from efforts to maintain an unrealistic, idealistically
192 thin and/or muscular physique and toward feeling pos-
193 itive about their bodies and making healthy long-term
194 choices about food and physical activity.

195 **Contemporary Importance of** 196 **Understanding Adolescents' Body** 197 **Image: Disordered Eating**

198 In addition to links between body image and obesity,
199 research has established links between body image con-
200 cerns and disordered eating. Body dissatisfaction has
201 been found to consistently predict disordered and mal-
202 adaptive eating behaviors as well as other psychological
203 problems (e.g., clinical eating disorders, depression)
204 among girls (Smolak 2004, Stice and Bearman 2001;
205 Stice and Shaw 2002). In fact, Stice's (2002) meta-
206 analysis suggests that body dissatisfaction is one of
207 the most significant predictors of disordered eating.
208 Different elements of body dissatisfaction (e.g., general
209 appearance concerns versus weight and shape con-
210 cerns) appear to have different predictive power in
211 determining girls at risk for disordered eating. Usually,
212 more specific body concerns are more predictive of
213 disordered eating (e.g., Shaw et al. 2004; Wertheim
214 et al. 2001). Among boys, body image concerns appear
215 to be concurrently associated with dieting, weight-loss
216 strategies, low self-esteem, depression, eating disorders,
217 and the adoption of maladaptive body-change

strategies (e.g., steroid use; see Cafri et al. 2005; 218
McCabe and Ricciardelli 2004). However, the dearth 219
of studies examining the consequences of body dissat- 220
isfaction longitudinally contributes little to our under- 221
standing of boys' and men's body dissatisfaction and 222
even suggests that longitudinal relations between body 223
dissatisfaction and consequences such as disordered 224
eating may not exist among boys (Ricciardelli et al. 225
2006). 226

As mentioned above, weight status plays a role in 227
the development of body image; it has also been found 228
to be associated with eating disorder risk. In one recent 229
study (Babio et al. 2008), girls determined to be "at 230
risk" for the development of disordered eating were not 231
only dissatisfied with their bodies but more likely to be 232
relatively heavy (assessed using body mass index), more 233
calorie-restrictive, and more vulnerable to sociocul- 234
tural emphasis on thinness. Thus, contemporary 235
models of the etiology of eating disorders should 236
include not only body image, but biological (e.g., 237
weight and pubertal status) as well as sociocultural 238
influences (e.g., parent and peer influences; Wertheim 239
et al. 2009). Body dissatisfaction is clearly a primary 240
predictor but it is not the only factor contributing to 241
disordered eating; body dissatisfaction in combination 242
with other risk factors heightens the likelihood of ado- 243
lescents' vulnerability to disordered eating. 244

245 **Developmental Significance of Body** 246 **Image**

247 Although research examining body image has 248
increased in recent years due to concerns regarding 249
the consequences of body dissatisfaction (Smolak 250
2004), it is not just the clinical consequences of body 251
dissatisfaction that warrant developmental researchers' 252
contributions to body image research. Psychologists 253
who study adolescents are uniquely suited to under- 254
stand body image in the context of other physical, 255
psychological, and social experiences that accompany 256
the adolescent years.

Puberty. The physical development that accom- 257
panies the adolescent years is more extensive than 258
that experienced at any other time of life (aside from 259
infancy). As children grow into adults, they must adjust 260
to a new physical form that may seem desirable, 261
strange, and awkward to them all at the same time. 262
Developmental research (see Archibald et al. 2003) 263
elucidates the significance of puberty as a physical 264

265 change and as a socially embedded experience with
266 implications for body image.

267 Girls' physical changes that accompany puberty
268 often bring them further from the cultural ideal of
269 beauty (which is, essentially, prepubertal in appear-
270 ance; Brumberg 1997). Girls typically gain
271 a significant amount of weight (~ 25 lbs) during
272 puberty (Warren 1983), and weight status is often
273 viewed as the most reliable correlate of body dissatis-
274 faction (McCabe and Ricciardelli 2003a). Although
275 different studies suggest the effects of these physical
276 changes vary in severity and importance relative to
277 other factors (e.g., sociocultural influences) in
278 predicting girls' body image, most studies reveal
279 puberty as a risk factor for girls' body dissatisfaction
280 (O'Dea and Abraham 1999). The timing of girls' puber-
281 tal development relative to their peers also appears to
282 be significant, with earlier developers more inclined to
283 gain more weight and most likely to report greater
284 body dissatisfaction (Ackard and Peterson 2001;
285 Archibald et al. 2003). Further, some research supports
286 mediation models indicating that puberty predicts
287 body dissatisfaction, which in turn predicts depression
288 and/or lowered self-esteem (Siegel et al. 1999; Williams
289 and Currie 2000). One exception to these findings
290 concerns girls' breast development, which appears to
291 be positively associated with girls' body image (Brooks-
292 Gunn and Warren 1988).

293 Research focusing on links between boys' pubertal
294 experience and body image is not abundant and pre-
295 sents less conclusive findings. In contrast to research
296 addressing girls, some body image research suggests
297 that puberty may present a risk factor for boys' body
298 image because during the transition to puberty, boys
299 tend to desire to be *larger* (i.e., more muscular) and
300 more developed than they perceive themselves to be
301 (Yuan 2007). Relatively, boys' attempts to change their
302 bodies (i.e., through weight lifting, food supplements
303 use, or even steroid use) have been linked with their
304 pubertal status (Ricciardelli and McCabe 2003). How-
305 ever, post-pubertal boys tend to have higher body sat-
306 isfaction than do boys who are prepubertal or currently
307 experiencing puberty (O'Dea and Abraham 1999).
308 Thus, although puberty may present a body image
309 challenge for many boys, the ultimate result of puberty
310 appears to be favorable for most boys.

311 *Identity.* Identity development has long been viewed
312 (see Erikson 1968) as a central task of adolescent

development. Body image is an aspect of identity and 313
as such, its development is particularly salient to ado- 314
lescents. Researchers such as Harter (1988, 2003) have 315
described different constructs that contribute to ado- 316
lescents' sense of self in addition to academic compe- 317
tence, popularity and social acceptance, romantic 318
appeal, and physical appearance. Relevant to 319
researchers' understanding of body image develop- 320
ment, Harter's work (e.g. 2001, 2003) suggests that 321
adolescents' perceptions of their physical appearance 322
contributes most significantly to their overall sense of 323
self. With changing bodies to make sense of, adoles- 324
cents' views of their bodies no doubt contribute to their 325
physical appearance self-concepts and, in turn, to their 326
identity development (Frost and McKelvie 2004; 327
Rosenblum and Lewis 1999). 328

329 Identity exploration can be a confusing process for
adolescents and seems to parallel, especially for girls,
330 a decrease in self-esteem during this developmental
331 period. As mentioned earlier, pubertal development
332 may contribute to this decrease in both body satisfac-
333 tion and self-esteem (Siegel et al. 1999; Williams and
334 Currie 2000). However, some research suggests that
335 relatively high self-esteem may protect girls from
336 experiencing body dissatisfaction and adolescents
337 who have positive feelings about their appearance
338 tend to have relatively high global self-worth
339 (Mendelson et al. 2000; Paxton et al. 2006). 340

341 Identity development does not take place in
342 a vacuum but is believed to be heavily influenced by
343 cultural context (Shweder et al. 1998). Further, research
344 suggests the importance of considering adolescents'
345 cultural and ethnic background in efforts to under-
346 stand their body image (Markey 2004). Unfortunately,
347 research addressing links among body image, ethnic
348 identity, and general identity development remains
349 limited (in part, by relatively homogenous samples
350 and samples too small to allow for cross-ethnic com-
351 parisons) and somewhat inconclusive. Cultural con-
352 structs have been viewed as both protective and
353 harmful in the development of both identity and
354 body image. Researchers (see Altabe 1998; Wildes
355 et al. 2001) have suggested that African American
356 girls are protected from body dissatisfaction and disor-
357 dered eating because African American cultural ideals
358 have historically been more robust and voluptuous
359 than "main stream, white" ideals. However, some
360 research (see Poran 2006) suggests that African

361 American girls are at increasing risk of body and
362 appearance-related concerns. Further, the process of
363 acculturation and loss of ethnic identification have
364 been discussed as risk factors for body dissatisfaction
365 among Asian American and Latina girls (Iyer and
366 Haslam 2003; Miller and Pumariega 2001). Similar to
367 much of the body image literature, research addressing
368 issues of body image and identity development is
369 biased in its focus on girls and women and leaves
370 questions about associations among adolescent boys.
371 However, some research (e.g., Miller and Pumariega
372 2001; Shaw, Ramirez et al. 2004) suggests body image
373 concerns are central to identity development, regard-
374 less of gender or ethnic background.

375 *Family Relationships.* Adolescents' relationships
376 with their family members, particularly their parents,
377 change during this developmental period. Research
378 suggests that adolescents' and their parents' physical
379 intimacy decreases and communication patterns shift
380 to include both increasing emotional connectedness
381 and increasing conflict (Larson and Richards 1994).
382 These relationship changes are speculated to be linked
383 with physical changes accompanying puberty (see
384 Steinberg 1987) and have the potential to impact par-
385 ents' influence on their adolescents' developing body
386 image (McCabe and Ricciardelli 2003b). Specifically,
387 certain elements of family functioning have been linked
388 to adolescents' body image and disordered eating
389 behaviors. Low levels of family expressiveness have
390 been found to predict body dissatisfaction (Babio
391 et al. 2008), most likely indicating that families rela-
392 tively low in qualities including warmth and emotional
393 support are more apt to raise adolescents who are
394 insecure in general and worried about their appearance
395 more than are other adolescents. Longitudinal research
396 examining both adolescent girls and boys further shows
397 a link between parental support deficits and future
398 increases in body dissatisfaction (Bearman et al. 2006).

399 Some research addressing family influences on
400 body image highlights the gendered nature of these
401 associations. In particular, mothers' influences appear
402 more consequential for girls' body image development
403 and fathers' influences appear more consequential for
404 boys' body image development (Davison et al. 2000;
405 Ericksen et al. 2003; McCabe and Ricciardelli 2005).
406 This influence begins prior to adolescence, but may
407 become more salient to adolescents as their bodies
408 take their adult form. Parents' influences may be most

409 significant when they are explicit, such as actively
410 encouraging their adolescent to try to lose weight or
411 participate in particular dieting techniques (Benedikt
412 et al. 1998; Wertheim et al. 1999). Some research sug-
413 gests that adolescents who report receiving messages
414 from their parents regarding food restriction or exer-
415 cise behaviors were likely to participate in the pre-
416 scribed behaviors (McCabe and Ricciardelli 2005;
417 Ricciardelli et al. 2000). Further, this research suggests
418 that messages from fathers are predictive of both strat-
419 egies to lose weight and increase muscles among boys,
420 with girls' mothers being primary influences on their
421 body-change strategies.

422 Some research suggests that parents may indirectly
423 teach their adolescents to be dissatisfied with their
424 bodies. Parents' behavioral correlates of their *own*
425 body dissatisfaction (e.g., dieting, complaining about
426 their appearance) are associated with similar attitudes
427 and behaviors among their children (Fisher et al. 2009;
428 Haines et al. 2008). Further, parents' dominant role in
429 food socialization is relevant to our understanding of
430 adolescents' body image development given findings
431 linking children's weight status, parental regulation of
432 children's food intake, and both parent and child
433 weight concerns (e.g., Davison et al. 2000; Fisher et al.
434 2009). Although the majority of this research seems to
435 indicate that parents are not necessarily positive influ-
436 ences on body image development, it is important to
437 note that when parents convey *positive* body image
438 messages, their adolescents are found to report feeling
439 more positively about their bodies (Ricciardelli et al.
440 2000).

441 *Peer Relationships.* The adolescent years are an
442 important developmental period for the establishment
443 and alteration of relationships with peers. Recent
444 research (e.g., Jones and Crawford 2006) suggests the
445 important role peers may play in shaping adolescents'
446 feelings about their bodies. This research indicates that
447 both adolescent girls and boys talk with their friends
448 about their appearances and changing their appear-
449 ances (e.g., dieting, muscle building) and peers' feed-
450 back is associated with adolescents' behavioral
451 attempts to alter their bodies (see Clark and
452 Tiggemann 2006; McCabe and Ricciardelli 2003b).
453 Girls appear somewhat more likely than boys to com-
454 pare themselves to both their same-sex peers and other
455 models in appraising their appearance (Jones 2004),
456 but social comparison has negative body image

457 consequences for both boys and girls (Jones 2001).
458 Some research (e.g., Jones et al. 2006) suggests that
459 boys may experience more pressure from peers to
460 change their bodies than girls do. Other research high-
461 lights girls' friends as among the most consequential
462 influences on adolescents' body image and attempts to
463 change their bodies, with peers being more influential
464 than parents (Hutchinson and Rapee 2007; McCabe
465 and Ricciardelli 2005). Additional research that exam-
466 ines the ways in which both boys and girls deflect and/
467 or internalize the messages they receive from their peers
468 about their bodies will extend current findings and help
469 clarify discrepancies across studies.

470 Explicit negative feedback from peers in the form of
471 appearance-related teasing has been found to be par-
472 ticularly detrimental to the development of body image
473 (e.g., Davison and Birch 2002). A large portion of
474 adolescents (approximately 33% of boys and 50% of
475 girls; Eisenberg et al. 2006) report being teased about
476 their bodies. Teasing often begins prior to adolescence
477 and has been shown to be associated with weight status
478 at both extremes (Kostanski and Gullone 2007). Girls
479 are more likely to be teased about their appearance
480 when they are overweight, but boys who are either
481 overweight or underweight are vulnerable to peer teas-
482 ing (Kostanski and Gullone 2007). Regardless of the
483 focus of peers' teasing, correlates of adolescents' expe-
484 riences of teasing include low body esteem, body dis-
485 satisfaction, and an interest in changing their physical
486 appearance (Davison and Birch 2002; Eisenberg et al.
487 2006; Markey and Markey 2009). Of course, peers are
488 not the only source of appearance teasing; family mem-
489 bers are often implicated in this research as well (e.g.,
490 Keery et al. 2005). The extent to which peer influences
491 are significant predictors of adolescents' body images
492 relative to other influences (e.g., family) or in combi-
493 nation with other influences requires additional
494 exploration.

495 *Romantic Relationships.* The development of
496 romantic relationships typically begins during the ado-
497 lescent years. However, little research addresses poten-
498 tial links between romantic relationship experiences
499 and the development of adolescents' body image. As
500 might be expected, adolescent girls with higher weight
501 statuses have been found to be less likely to report
502 romantic relationship experiences and a sense of
503 romantic competence than are those with lower weight
504 statuses (Halpern et al. 2005; Mendelson et al. 2000).

505 Further, some research suggests that adolescent girls
506 who are in romantic relationships may be more likely
507 to try to change their bodies via dieting than are their
508 peers who are not in relationships (Halpern et al. 2005)
509 and perceived pressure to be thin from romantic part-
510 ners has been associated with body dissatisfaction and
511 disordered eating across time (L. Shoemaker, personal
512 communication, August 5, 2009).

513 The mating literature (which, typically focuses on
514 adults) suggests the importance of physical appearance
515 (including body shape; see Singh 1993) in mate selec-
516 tion and relies heavily on evolutionary theory to
517 explain men's greater concern than women's about
518 partners' physical appearance. Once in romantic rela-
519 tionships, young men's and women's own body satis-
520 faction has been found to be correlated with their
521 perceptions of their romantic partners' satisfaction
522 with their bodies (Goins and Markey 2009; Markey
523 and Markey 2006). Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson
524 (1995) go as far as to suggest that romantic partners
525 may not only shape women's feelings about their bod-
526 ies, but may influence their vulnerability to disordered
527 eating and their general psychological health. One
528 study addressing romantic partners' influence on
529 young men's body image suggests positive associations
530 between body image and sexual intimacy in romantic
531 relationships (Goins and Markey 2009). Thus,
532 although current research in this area focuses mostly
533 on adults and requires speculation about the parallel
534 experiences of romantic relationship development and
535 body image development during adolescence, it
536 appears that this may be a fruitful avenue for future
537 research.

538 *Media Influences.* Adolescent development is
539 unquestionably influenced by media culture, especially
540 as the twenty-first century presents an ever-increasing
541 number of options for engaging with various forms of
542 the media ranging from the Internet to cell phones
543 (Levesque 2007). Although it has long been suggested
544 that idealized media images may negatively influence
545 impressionable youths, research now provides evidence
546 to support the negative effects of the media on body
547 image (Clay et al. 2006; Durkin et al. 2007; Markey and
548 Markey 2009). Not surprisingly, this research is limited
549 by its almost exclusive focus on adolescent girls, but it
550 does utilize diverse methodologies that are both corre-
551 lational and experimental in nature (e.g., Harrison and
552 Fredrickson 2003).

553 Research examining links between adolescents'
554 media exposure and their body image suggests that
555 exposure to idealized media images leads to decreased
556 body satisfaction (e.g., Durkin et al. 2007; Hofschire
557 and Greenberg 2002). Some research (e.g., Mooney
558 et al. 2009) suggests that media celebrities are particu-
559 larly influential on girls' feelings about their bodies and
560 their attempts to alter the appearance of their bodies
561 through dieting. As girls proceed through adolescence,
562 they appear to become increasingly aware of sociocul-
563 tural messages regarding thinness presented in the
564 media, internalize these messages, and compare them-
565 selves to beauty ideals presented in the media. This may
566 contribute to body dissatisfaction, decreases in self-
567 esteem, and increases in depression (Clay et al. 2006;
568 Durkin et al. 2007). Although the majority of this
569 research examines culturally homogeneous samples,
570 research examining ethnic samples (e.g., Latina girls)
571 presents similar findings: media exposure is associated
572 with the development of body dissatisfaction during
573 adolescence (Schooler 2008). One recent study suggests
574 that the messages about physical attractiveness that
575 youths derive from the media are similar, regardless of
576 their ethnic background (Gillen and Lefkowitz 2009).
577 Further, boys (although understudied) do not appear
578 to be immune to the effects of the media. In one study,
579 preadolescent boys' concerns about their muscularity
580 were linked to their exposure to video gaming maga-
581 zines (Harrison and Bond 2007).

582 Body dissatisfaction among adolescents could be
583 expected to be even higher than it is if all adolescents
584 were equally vulnerable to the media messages they
585 receive about what constitutes an attractive physique in
586 most western cultures. However, some research suggests
587 that adolescents who are more concerned about their
588 appearance or value their appearance relatively more
589 than their peers may be especially vulnerable to media
590 influences (Durkin et al. 2007). Research addressing
591 both boys and girls suggests that adolescents' media
592 exposure triggers perceptions of their own bodies as
593 discrepant from the ideal, which may increase suscep-
594 tibility to disordered eating (Harrison 2001; Harrison
595 and Hefner 2006). Adolescents' internalization of
596 media messages begins prior to adolescence and may
597 be encouraged by other socialization agents, particu-
598 larly peers. For example, some research suggests that
599 even young girls are susceptible to media influences on
600 body dissatisfaction, but that media influences may not

601 be direct, and are instead mediated by peer appearance
602 conversations (Clark and Tiggemann 2006; Dohnt and
603 Tiggemann 2006). In other words, peers may play an
604 integral role in deciphering media messages and valu-
605 ing them in terms of their importance and relevance
606 (Kramer et al. 2008). Consistent with research
607 suggesting the potential interactive and cumulative
608 effects of the media and other socializing agents,
609 Levesque (2007) has cautioned that simple interpreta-
610 tions of media influences may be incomplete and that
611 future research is needed to understand how the media
612 interacts with other sociocultural and personality
613 influences in shaping adolescent development.

614 Research has yet to clearly determine how adverse
615 effects of the media may be avoided or ameliorated to
616 support positive body image development among ado-
617 lescents. Schooler et al. (2006) suggest the potentially
618 important role of parents in restricting access to some
619 media. Further, parents who use media (e.g., television
620 coviewing) with their adolescents may be able to
621 improve adolescents' healthy attitudes and behaviors
622 (Schooler et al. 2006). Research assessing the efficacy of
623 educational interventions focusing on media literacy
624 among children and adolescents will further contribute
625 to our understanding of the development of healthy
626 body images among adolescents (Clay et al. 2006).

627 **Conclusions and Future Directions**

628 Research consistently suggests that adolescents are at
629 risk for body dissatisfaction and that this dissatisfaction
630 has the potential to negatively impact their social rela-
631 tionships, health, and well-being. As this article indi-
632 cates, body image is an important construct for
633 researchers (as well as health care providers and layper-
634 sons) to consider even if they are not necessarily
635 concerned with the clinical ramifications of body dis-
636 satisfaction. It is critically important that future
637 research helps to clarify factors that could help *improve*
638 adolescent girls' and boys' body image so that they can
639 grow up to become happy and well-adjusted men and
640 women.

641 The current trend in body image research is toward
642 a contextual understanding of body image among both
643 girls and boys. Specifically, longitudinal research that
644 follows children and adolescents into adulthood is
645 needed to discern the long-term correlates and conse-
646 quences of body dissatisfaction. Further, although
647 a great deal of progress has been made toward

648 understanding how cultural and ethnic background
649 contributes to the development of body image (e.g.,
650 Gillen and Lefkowitz 2009), additional work remains.
651 Finally, experimental designs, interventions, and crea-
652 tive methodologies that move beyond the survey-based
653 designs that have been so popular in this area of
654 research should enhance our understanding of the
655 development of body image and improve our ability
656 to positively impact adolescents' body image.

657 Cross-References

- 658 ▶ Adolescence
- 659 ▶ Body Image
- 660 ▶ Eating Disorders
- 661 ▶ Gender
- 662 ▶ Obesity

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