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## 2 **Body Image**

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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  
a vacuum but is believed to be heavily influenced by 342  
cultural context (Shweder et al. 1998). Further, research 343  
suggests the importance of considering adolescents' 344  
cultural and ethnic background in efforts to under- 345  
stand their body image (Markey 2004). Unfortunately, 346  
research addressing links among body image, ethnic 347  
identity, and general identity development remains 348  
limited (in part, by relatively homogenous samples 349  
and samples too small to allow for cross-ethnic com- 350  
parisons) and somewhat inconclusive. Cultural con- 351  
structs have been viewed as both protective and 352  
harmful in the development of both identity and 353  
body image. Researchers (see Altabe 1998; Wildes 354  
et al. 2001) have suggested that African American 355  
girls are protected from body dissatisfaction and disor- 356  
dered eating because African American cultural ideals 357  
have historically been more robust and voluptuous 358  
than "main stream, white" ideals. However, some 359  
research (see Poran 2006) suggests that African 360

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' 601  
554 media exposure and their body image suggests that 602  
555 exposure to idealized media images leads to decreased 603  
556 body satisfaction (e.g., Durkin et al. 2007; Hofschire 604  
557 and Greenberg 2002). Some research (e.g., Mooney 605  
558 et al. 2009) suggests that media celebrities are particu- 606  
559 larly influential on girls' feelings about their bodies and 607  
560 their attempts to alter the appearance of their bodies 608  
561 through dieting. As girls proceed through adolescence, 609  
562 they appear to become increasingly aware of sociocul- 610  
563 tural messages regarding thinness presented in the 611  
564 media, internalize these messages, and compare them- 612  
565 selves to beauty ideals presented in the media. This may 613  
566 contribute to body dissatisfaction, decreases in self- 614  
567 esteem, and increases in depression (Clay et al. 2006; 615  
568 Durkin et al. 2007). Although the majority of this 616  
569 research examines culturally homogeneous samples, 617  
570 research examining ethnic samples (e.g., Latina girls) 618  
571 presents similar findings: media exposure is associated 619  
572 with the development of body dissatisfaction during 620  
573 adolescence (Schooler 2008). One recent study suggests 621  
574 that the messages about physical attractiveness that 622  
575 youths derive from the media are similar, regardless of 623  
576 their ethnic background (Gillen and Lefkowitz 2009). 624  
577 Further, boys (although understudied) do not appear 625  
578 to be immune to the effects of the media. In one study, 626  
579 preadolescent boys' concerns about their muscularity 627  
580 were linked to their exposure to video gaming maga- 628  
581 zines (Harrison and Bond 2007). 629

582 Body dissatisfaction among adolescents could be 630  
583 expected to be even higher than it is if all adolescents 631  
584 were equally vulnerable to the media messages they 632  
585 receive about what constitutes an attractive physique in 633  
586 most western cultures. However, some research suggests 634  
587 that adolescents who are more concerned about their 635  
588 appearance or value their appearance relatively more 636  
589 than their peers may be especially vulnerable to media 637  
590 influences (Durkin et al. 2007). Research addressing 638  
591 both boys and girls suggests that adolescents' media 639  
592 exposure triggers perceptions of their own bodies as 640  
593 discrepant from the ideal, which may increase suscep- 641  
594 tibility to disordered eating (Harrison 2001; Harrison 642  
595 and Hefner 2006). Adolescents' internalization of 643  
596 media messages begins prior to adolescence and may 644  
597 be encouraged by other socialization agents, particu- 645  
598 larly peers. For example, some research suggests that 646  
599 even young girls are susceptible to media influences on 647  
600 body dissatisfaction, but that media influences may not

601 be direct, and are instead mediated by peer appearance 602  
603 conversations (Clark and Tiggemann 2006; Dohnt and 604  
605 Tiggemann 2006). In other words, peers may play an 606  
607 integral role in deciphering media messages and valu- 608  
609 ing them in terms of their importance and relevance 610  
611 (Kramer et al. 2008). Consistent with research 612  
613 suggesting the potential interactive and cumulative 614  
615 effects of the media and other socializing agents, 616  
617 Levesque (2007) has cautioned that simple interpreta- 618  
619 tions of media influences may be incomplete and that 620  
621 future research is needed to understand how the media 622  
623 interacts with other sociocultural and personality 624  
625 influences in shaping adolescent development. 626

627 Research has yet to clearly determine how adverse 628  
629 effects of the media may be avoided or ameliorated to 630  
631 support positive body image development among ado- 632  
633 lescents. Schooler et al. (2006) suggest the potentially 634  
635 important role of parents in restricting access to some 636  
637 media. Further, parents who use media (e.g., television 638  
639 coviewing) with their adolescents may be able to 640  
641 improve adolescents' healthy attitudes and behaviors 642  
643 (Schooler et al. 2006). Research assessing the efficacy of 644  
645 educational interventions focusing on media literacy 646  
647 among children and adolescents will further contribute 648  
649 to our understanding of the development of healthy 650  
651 body images among adolescents (Clay et al. 2006). 652

## 627 **Conclusions and Future Directions**

628 Research consistently suggests that adolescents are at 629  
630 risk for body dissatisfaction and that this dissatisfaction 631  
632 has the potential to negatively impact their social rela- 633  
634 tionships, health, and well-being. As this article indi- 635  
636 cates, body image is an important construct for 637  
638 researchers (as well as health care providers and layper- 639  
640 sons) to consider even if they are not necessarily 641  
642 concerned with the clinical ramifications of body dis- 643  
644 satisfaction. It is critically important that future 645  
646 research helps to clarify factors that could help *improve* 647  
648 adolescent girls' and boys' body image so that they can 649  
650 grow up to become happy and well-adjusted men and 651  
652 women. 653

654 The current trend in body image research is toward 655  
656 a contextual understanding of body image among both 657  
658 girls and *boys*. Specifically, longitudinal research that 659  
660 follows children and adolescents into adulthood is 661  
662 needed to discern the long-term correlates and conse- 663  
664 quences of body dissatisfaction. Further, although 665  
666 a great deal of progress has been made toward 667

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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