INTRODUCTION

In the United States, 20 million women and 10 million men suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder sometime during their life. This includes anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and an eating disorder not otherwise specified with numerous cases underreported or not reported at all (Wade, Keski-Rahkonen, & Hudson, 2011).

In addition to the previous disorders listed, many individuals struggle with disordered eating behaviors (DEB).

The mortality rate associated with anorexia nervosa for females (between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four) is twelve times higher than the death rate of all other causes of death (Sullivan, 1995).

In new cases of eating disorders, the rate of development has been increasing since 1950 (Hudson et al., 2007; Streigel-Moore & Franko, 2003; Wade et al., 2011).

Disordered eating behaviors are a widespread concern among college-aged women specifically, and research suggests that media plays a role in this (Bair, 2012).

Recent reports indicated that over 70% of consumers age 18–33 use the Internet to watch videos. Participants were found to have used four times as much image-focused Internet than magazines and twice as much image-focused internet than television. This indicates a shift in how media is reaching women and how there may be a potential correlation between media exposure and disordered eating behaviors. (Zickuhr, 2010).

Using a national sample of college-aged women, the current study assessed associations between internalization of the thin ideal, media pressures, disordered eating behaviors, and psychosocial impairment due to eating disorder features.

It was hypothesized that media pressure and internalization of the thin ideal would be positively correlated with disordered eating behaviors and psychosocial impairment.

METHOD

Participants

N = 95 college women throughout the country
Mean age = 19.04, SD = 1.16
87.4% Caucasian, 3.2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.2% Other, 2.1% Latino or Hispanic, and 2.1% Alaskan Native or American Indian
96.8% Heterosexual, 1.1% gay or lesbian, 1.1% bisexual, and 1.1% pansexual
71% with annual family income above $41,000

Participants were recruited in new cases of eating disorders, the rate of disordered eating behaviors is a widespread concern among college-aged women specifically, and research suggests that media plays a role in this (Bair, 2012).

The clinical Impairment Assessment Questionnaire (Bohn & Fairburn, 2008) assesses adherence and awareness of society’s attitudes regarding thinness and attractiveness. Contains inverted questions to determine acquiescence.

Participants were recruited from advertisements on Facebook (47.1%) and Craigslist (5.9%), flyers around campus (35.3%), and a psychology class participant pool (11.8%).

Participants completed informed consent and confidential and anonymous online surveys.

After completing the survey, participants were provided with debriefing information, including resources and referrals.

Participants were also offered a chance to enter a raffle for a $50 gift card.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Means, ranges, and standard deviations for all study variables are displayed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>RANGE</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional Impairment</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>27.84</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressures</td>
<td>20.69</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>29.39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disordered Eating</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>11.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS: INFERENTIAL

The following table provides information on the number of participants who scored above the cutoff on the EAT measure. The cutoff is a score of 20 and those who receive a score of 20 or higher are recommended to be interviewed by a qualified professional to determine if they meet the diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder (Garner et al., 1982).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid – No</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, results showed that media pressures and internalization of the thin ideal were positively correlated with disordered eating behaviors and functional impairment. Findings indicated that functional impairment and disordered eating were significantly correlated with each other. Although longitudinal studies are needed to research this further, the data suggest that internalization of the thin idea and pressures from the media may lead to disordered eating behavior, and ultimately, functional impairment.

LIMITATIONS:

The current study is limited by a homogenous sample (age, race, and socioeconomic status); thus, the generalizability of the results is limited. In addition, the current study was a part of a larger study that examined college women’s stalking experiences. Therefore, the sample was limited by mostly measuring whether or not women who had experienced stalking, which may have affected findings.

FUTURE RESEARCH:

There is a need for more research efforts focused on:

- Disordered eating behaviors among men since the majority of research currently focuses on women.
- The Internet as a growing media source and potential correlations between the Internet as a media source and disordered eating behaviors.
- Including more diverse samples of participants.
- Examining the longitudinal effects of social media on disordered eating behavior.
- Exploring the specific factors associated with media influence on body dissatisfaction.

Most of the current research focuses on looking at pro-eating disorder websites as a media source and the potential correlation between that type of media source and an internalization of the thin ideal. By expanding the focus from pro-eating disorder websites to all aspects of social media, there can be a more in-depth analysis of types of media and its influence on body dissatisfaction.

Clinical Implications:

Based on the current findings, future research should focus on longitudinal studies that examine correlations between the media and disordered eating behaviors, as well as focusing on a more representative sample of the population, including men.

Ultimately, implementing prevention programs and community campaigns aimed to combat the media’s focus on the thin ideal may lower potential negative effects such as disordered eating behaviors.