

Surprisingly, Female Models Have Negative Effect on Men

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Many studies have shown that media images of female models have had a negative impact on how woman view their own bodies, but does this same effect hold true when men view male models? A leading researcher of media effects on body image at the University of Missouri looked at the effect of male magazines on college-age men. Completing three different studies, Jennifer Aubrey, assistant professor of communication in the College of Arts and Science, found that unlike their female classmates, it was not the same-sex models that affected the males negatively, but quite the opposite.

In her research, which will be published in *Human Communication Research*, Aubrey found that the cultural expectation for men is not that they have to be as attractive as their peers, but that they need to be attractive enough to be sexually appealing to women.

In her first study, Aubrey measured male exposure to 'lad' magazines, such as Maxim, FHM and Stuff, which she observes contains two main messages: the visual, which mostly contain sexually suggestive images of women; and textual, which contain articles that speak in a bawdy, male voice about topics including fashion, sex, technology and pop culture. Aubrey also measured male body self-consciousness (a participant's awareness and tendency to monitor one's appearance) and appearance anxiety (the anticipation of threatening stimuli). Participants were asked questions such as "During the day, I think about how I look," and then asked the same questions a year later.

"We found that reading lad magazines was related to having body self-consciousness a year later," said Aubrey. "This was surprising because if you look at the cover of these magazines, they are mainly images of women. We wondered why magazines that were dominated by sexual images of women were having an effect of men's feelings about their own bodies."

To help answer this question, Aubrey collaborated with University of California-Davis Assistant Professor Laramie Taylor. The researchers divided male study participants into three groups. Group one examined layouts from lad magazines that featured objectified women along with a brief description of their appearances. The second group viewed layouts about male fashion, featuring fit and well-dressed male models. The final group inspected appearance-neutral layouts that featured topics including technology and film trivia.

"Men who viewed the layouts of objectified females reported more body self-consciousness than the other two groups," Aubrey said. "Even more surprising was that the male fashion group reported the least amount of body self-consciousness among the three groups."

Aubrey speculated that the exposure to objectified females increased self-consciousness because men are reminded that in order to be sexually or romantically involved with a woman of similar attractiveness, they need to conform to strict appearance standards.

To test her theory, Aubrey and Taylor completed a third study that involved breaking men into two groups. Group one received lad magazine layouts of sexually idealized females and group two received the same layouts with average-looking 'boyfriends' added to the photos, with captions about how the female models are attracted to the average-looking men.

"We found that the men who view the ads with the average-looking boyfriend in the picture reported less body self-consciousness than the men who saw the ads with just the model," Aubrey said. "When the men felt that the model in the ad liked average-looking guys, it took the pressure off of them and made them less self-conscious about their own bodies."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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