

## **A Body of Dissatisfaction: A Study of the Effects of Media Imperialism in Kuwait**

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Media has an enduring reputation of affecting perception. Perpetuating unrealistic body standards is just one way mediated messages influence negatively an audience. In the last 25 years, Kuwait has seen an invasion of western media including TV, music, magazines and movies. We decided to tackle the subject of the effects of this cultural imperialism to see if the prevalence of these imported western body images were having a negative impact. The social comparison theory states that individuals evaluate themselves through comparison even with media images. This study examines how Western-- mainly -- U.S. media imperialism and the social comparison theory through media affects body perception by examining the effects of college-age young adults watching shows with prominent thin television characters compared to shows that had prominent average body types in the cast. We expect to find that exposure to programming with only thin characters will correlate with body dissatisfaction. The study included distributing 286 self-administered preliminary surveys to discover the most popular shows that college students (mostly 18 to 25 year olds) watched. After we identified the most popular shows, blind self-administered surveys were circulated to a sample of 240 college-age young adults (120 males and 120 females) to determine if any correlation could be made between their television show preferences and their body dissatisfaction. We found body image dissatisfaction is being reported, leading to the implication that media imperialism is eroding traditional Arab body image in Kuwait.

*Key Words:* body image, media imperialism, cultural imperialism, social comparison theory, Kuwait

### **Introduction**

Media imperialism is a mode of thought that asserts that foreign culture invades countries through the dissemination of mediated messages such as television, radio, magazines, movies, Internet and music (Dominick 2009). Kuwait struggles between two worlds: it has a strong nationalistic identity with coexists with an overabundance of foreign new media technology (Wheeler 2000).

Kuwait's oil wealth empowers the emirate to invest in a modern communications network to serve its populace. With a population of almost 2.7 million, more than 94 percent of the households in the country have TV satellite (Wheeler 2000, Arab Advisors Group 2007). This commitment to a modern technological infrastructure is part of a government agenda to promote and invest in communications technology, which would service the people and promote Arab society and Islam on a local and international scale. What resulted is a media infrastructure in Kuwait that more closely resembles the media structure in Europe than it does other developing nations. These media sources have become not only ways to access information and entertainment but have become sources of status and national pride. Furthermore, the Iraqi invasion in 1991 also served as a catalyst

for helping to modernize the technology for purposes other than public consumption; the focus being national security(Wheeler 2000):*The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has provided positive benefits for Kuwait's telecommunications ... The effects of the invasion has allowed it [Kuwait] to plan for a future network that provides a greater degree of stability and resistance to such events (p 435).*

This proliferation of media technology means that Kuwaitis, and the large population of expatriates living in Kuwait, have access to competing viewpoints than those of state run television and media. With foreign satellite showing American and British TV shows and movies, and an influx of black market Hollywood DVDs and CDs, increasingly Kuwaitis are seeking out mediated messages and images that are not homegrown. However, this has been at the detriment of local arts and culture. Very rarely is a Kuwaiti produced movie or CD in the top ten purchased media in country in the listings ranked in a local newspaper. Instead, British and American music acts fill the chart listings. More than 200 shops in Kuwait rent and sell DVDs and most customers prefer the latest films from America. While many legal DVDs and CDs sold in stores are government approved, many in the population have turned instead to bootleg media and foreign

satellite to circumvent government censorship. Only 13 percent of those polled reported that they watched Kuwait TV. Satellites with American and British programming are infinitely more popular in the country than local channels (Wheeler 2000). In fact, on observation of satellite TV for this study, the satellite carrier OSN promotes its new American movies as “uncensored” as a way of luring subscribers to order pay-per-view flicks.

More than 1.9 million individuals use the Internet in Kuwait (International Telecommunication Union 2011). Many consume web technology in methods that reinforce local traditions, such as spreading Islam but with so much foreign discourse available online, there are still real fears. More than 30 percent of university students surveyed said that they regularly used the Internet to breakdown traditional cultural dating folkways by meeting up with the opposite gender. “Internet in Kuwait is leading to experimentation, especially among youths, which could lead, sometime in the future, to the interruption of Kuwaiti traditions” (Wheeler 2000, p. 442).

The American mass media is widely exported to other nations such as Kuwait and the concern is that these countries, many being developing, will have their own cultural values and traditions eroded and replaced with American mores and viewpoints. This phenomenon leaves room for inquiry and research on the impact these messages are having politically, for example, the influence on democratic movements or socially, including impact on music, fashion, art, language, and lastly body image, which is the focus of our inquiry.

Critics say that American values and the American point of view is becoming dominant across much of the world due to the exportation of Hollywood films, TV shows and international news based out of the United States. Not only in Kuwait but there are numerous examples: case in point, US exported news coverage about regions such as South America, that are often portrayed as involved with drug trafficking and revolutions, as these are issues that primarily affect US interests and US audiences. In many countries US media has displaced or/and eroded the local media, that are unable to compete with the demand and marketing dollars of US entertainment. To this extent, many countries that see the danger of cultural/media imperialism have placed media quotas on US entertainment content to help offset the damage done to their own domestic media industries and to hinder possible cultural influence and degradation (Dominick 2009).

Petras (1994) asserts that cultural imperialism has two main goals: to gain an economic foothold on foreign markets and the other being political and to shape audiences through cultural hegemony. Cultural imperialism consciously works to separate the audience from their own cultural heritage and

traditions. In his article, Petras makes the point that audiences are largely working class who see US media as a way of assimilating a desirable modern lifestyle. The author postulates that the message is often directed toward young people who are more susceptible to the influences of mediated messages. The youth are the primary market of US media imperialism not only because they are the most lucrative demographic, but because they are the most attracted to US consumerism and ideas of individualism (Petras 1994).

Petras discovered the following: In relation to the third world, cultural imperialism can be defined as the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling class of the west in order to reorder the values, behavior, institutions and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform with the interests of the imperial classes (p. 2070).

However, there isn't a popular consensus on the definition of media imperialism (Fejes 1981). In his article Fejes, articulates that media imperialism emerged from the dependency model as opposed to modernization theories. Modernization revolves around the development of social values, while the dependency model focuses on the relationship between developed and underdeveloped nations, and the problems that arise from that link: underdeveloped nations are at a disadvantage in a political and economic system that favors developed nations. Modernization theorists view the developing countries as evolving social ideas and ideals on a continuum with western industrial nations as the archetype of where this evolution will eventually culminate.

No matter the definition, the influence of media imperialism especially on body image is prevalent and empirical. A wide body of studies have deduced strong causal relationships to substantiate its influence. One three-year study of body image of Fijian women, after the introduction of television, discovered that western programming with the depictions of thin American ideals of beauty led to a precipitous increase in bulimic behavior among teenage girls in the country. Moreover, the Fijian females' sense of being beautiful had also decayed dramatically due to US TV programming (Wykes & Gunter 2005). This has been the trend in other countries: In Italy where men often report to prefer full figured women, the influence of media imperialism on body image is again observable. Florentine women are now facing problems with perceptions of their bodies because of the prevalence of US media messages. This trend is especially pervasive among teenage girls. Furthermore, the rise of eyelid surgery, to mimic western features, is becoming increasingly commonplace amongst Asian women in far-east countries (Fedorak 2008).

## Literature Review

### Body image

Body image dissatisfaction is the theory that individuals are unhappy with how they look in relation to their body. Researchers have been holding the media responsible for the rise in body image dissatisfaction in accordance with the sociocultural theory, which posits that people learn from social interaction. In the article, *Striving for Bodily Perfection? An Exploration of the Drive for Muscularity in Canadian Men* (2003) the authors of the study postulated that exposure to idealized male bodies would positively correlate with a desire to be more muscular and that men who use common social comparisons when evaluating their physical appearance will show a positive correlation with a desire to be more muscular. The researchers surveyed 310 male undergraduates enrolled in a community college and used the DMAQ scale (an 8-item scale that measures the desire to attain a more muscular body) and a modified USC scale to measure how much they use social comparisons (Hopkins, Morrison, Morrison 2003). The findings concluded that there was a strong correlation with fitness magazines showcasing ideal male body types and comparisons to universal standards of the idealized male form, with the strength of dedication of the respondents to attain muscularity.

Moreover, when one speculates how the media emphasizes unrealistic and aesthetic ideals, an image of a tall thin woman with perfectly groomed hair with unblemished skin often comes to mind, but studies have revealed that there has been an increase in emphasis on male aesthetic ideals in the media. In their paper, Jamie Farquhar and Louise Wasylikiw (2007) argue that since the 1980's the image of the male body has evolved to one that has been about the male form as a process, to where a man's physical appearance has now become an object. Now the focus is not on what the body can do but what the male body looks like. To test their hypothesis the authors performed a content analysis of a sample of male bodies in the ads lining the magazine *Sports Illustrated*, from 1975 to 2005 (Farquhar, Wasylikiw, 2007). The authors construed that since the 1970's there has been a steady and strong increase in the trend of conceptualization of men's body as an object, with a consistent surge in discrete male body parts across the sample of magazines.

In the past, the majority of research on body image dissatisfaction has focused on females who have consistently shown dissatisfaction with their bodyweight (Harrison 1997). However, research has been increasingly focusing on males' body dissatisfaction (Morry, Staska 2001; Agliata, Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, Peugh 2007). Though studies have discovered that

both males and females do experience discontent with their body image, they have also given light to the differences in how males and females evaluate their physical appearance. Furthermore, the studies also show that the predictors and effects of body dissatisfaction differ for males and females. One result of body dissatisfaction is eating disorders. Eating disorders have been established to be affected by exposure to various mediated messages resulting in body dissatisfaction. Kristen Harrison (2000), distributed a questionnaire to 366 adolescents in three age groups, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades that measured their media exposure and their interest in the messages that promoted body improvement. To measure their eating-disorder symptomatology, specifically their risk of developing anorexia nervosa, Harrison used the Children's Eating Attitudes Test. Certain subscales from the Eating Disorders Inventory to measure bulimic symptomatology, body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness were utilized. Harrison hypothesized that exposure to thin-ideals through magazines and fat characters through television would produce body dissatisfaction among females and that exposure to media with fat characters would also negatively affect the male audience. She expected that males would be less affected by the male thin-ideal than the females. In her study, Harrison determined that exposure to fat-characters predicted the eating-disorder bulimia and anorexia for females. Surprisingly, exposure to fat-character themed shows also predicted body dissatisfaction and anorexia in young men. The findings of the effects of watching television shows were intriguing to Harrison and are further explored by our current study. The media has shown to be a reinforcing agent for individuals on the ideal body type, as well as a way for individuals to evaluate themselves. When audiences are exposed to thin ideal body images or fat-characters, they are at higher risk of becoming dissatisfied with their bodies (Harrison 2000; Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, Peugh 2007).

There are mountains of evidence that support the idea that exposure to mediated aesthetic ideals have an effect on behavior and attitudes. Anschutz, Van Strien and Engels (2011) discerned in their study of 124 female students that female students who practiced dietary restraint in their daily lives ate less snack food while watching a movie that had commercials with slim models and diet products. The researchers theorized that those who were concerned with or were watching their weight would eat less after consuming ads with thin actors and diet oriented products. And to control for the mood of the movie, the researchers measured the students' mood towards the movie itself. The authors concluded that restrained eaters were reminded of their eating behaviors when they were watching media content with commercials of slim

models and diet products. As part of their study, Farquhar et al. (2007) also uncovered that viewing media that emphasizes and idealizes aesthetic attributes contributes to negative self-evaluations. Furthermore, Grabe and Ward (2008) conducted a meta-analysis on research studies in 2008. Their data revealed that exposure to media that depicts the thin-ideal body is associated with body image dissatisfaction, internalization of the thin body ideal, eating behaviors and to a general sense of body image dissatisfaction in women. Grabe and Ward analyzed published papers such as experimental studies reporting media having a stronger effect on internalization of the thin ideal and eating disorder symptomatology than body dissatisfaction, while other studies show equal effects. Though the studies' results seem to vary, according to Grabe and Ward media exposure to a thin-ideal body is related to body image dissatisfaction in women.

### Gender differences

How the media influences men and women differently has emerged through numerous studies. One example is an investigation by Marian Morry and Sandra Staska (2001). The study's findings surmise that when women read beauty magazines they are more likely to internalize the body image of the models in the magazine, and these women's degree of internalization is also a predictor of self-objectification – the concept of viewing one's self as an object first and as a subject secondly. Consequently, individuals who self-objectify see themselves as entities that others judge by appearance, leading to a preoccupation with looks. For the female subjects in the Morry et al. study, internalization was also the only predictor of body dissatisfaction. Conversely, men would read fitness magazines and their degree of internalization of these ideal body type positively predicted body dissatisfaction. The researchers expected to find evidence for five hypotheses: 1) Men reading fitness magazines would internalize societal ideals and women reading fashion magazines would also internalize societal ideals. 2) Consuming magazines should link with self-objectification in both sexes and that internalization would regulate the self-objectification. 3) Consuming magazines would relate to body dissatisfaction, again regulated by internalization of societal archetypes. 4) An occurrence of eating issues should be observed, and mediated by internalization of societal archetypes. 5) Finally, reading fashion magazines (female respondents) and fitness magazines (male respondents) should produce a relationship with body shape dissatisfaction (Morry and Staska 2001). The researchers recruited 150 students and allocated a questionnaire that included five different scales: the

Magazine Exposure Scale, Eating Attitudes Test, Self-Objectification Questionnaire, Socio-cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire, and Body Shape Questionnaire. The authors found that reading magazines was associated with internalizing societal ideals. For women reading magazines also predicted self-objectification. For men reading fitness magazines with a tendency towards internalizing, predicted body shape dissatisfaction but not eating problems, but when men read fitness magazines while being already dissatisfied with their body type, eating problems were present (Morry, Staska 2001; Stice, Schupak, Shaw, Stein 1994).

Other studies further show that when men are exposed to media images depicting muscular-ideal characters these messages definitively lowered their muscle satisfaction (Hopkins, Morrison, Morrison 2003). The authors surveyed 104 male students and showed them either 15 commercials that depicted men having muscular physiques with their shirts off or 15 commercials depicting men not particularly muscular and wearing clothing that hid their body type. Expecting to find that exposure to ideal-muscular body images on television would lead to an increase in body dissatisfaction, the researchers did indeed find that the men's dissatisfaction with their muscle size and physical attractiveness had increased while watching the muscular ideal commercials more than the control group (Hargreaves, Tiggermann 2009). Interestingly, though men's body-esteem is affected by exposure to muscular body types, their self-esteem was not affected (Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, Peugh 2007). However, certain studies say that when men are exposed to ideal image advertisements they become depressed, indicating that more research in the area is needed to reach a consensus on the subject (Agliata, Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Case in point, when males are exposed to media ideals that emphasize performance attributes, it can contribute to self-evaluation (Farquhar & Wasylikiw, 2007).

A method to better understand how media exposure affects individuals is to study ways that can protect them from the harmful effects of thin body ideal exposure, such as eating disorders. For example, when women are exposed to average sized women in mediated messages this leads to less restrictive dieting habits (Fister & Smith 2004).

Internalization has been found to be an important factor in mediating body dissatisfaction in individuals (Morry, Staska 2001). Culture is indicated also to take a back seat to internalization, according to a study done on Asian-American women that deduced that those who internalized media messages on ideal body types reported lower self-esteem (Lau, Lum, Chronister, Forrest 2006).

## Social Comparison Theory

The social comparison theory posits that individuals compare themselves to others in order to evaluate or to enhance some aspects of the self. The media is a primary agent of the social comparison theory. Researchers who examined this theory postulate that when individuals compares themselves on with universal standards of body image then negative effects on their own body image was often found (Morrison et al. 2003). Serving as a self-evaluation tool, the social comparison theory depends on whether the individual internalizes or differentiates his or herself compared to others who are viewed as superior or inferior (Suls, Martin& Wheeler 2002). A study conducted by Frisby (2004) examined how much race played a role, if any, in body image self-evaluation. She exposed African-American women who had different levels of body esteem to advertisements of thin, physically attractive, white and black models and gauged their self-esteem afterwards. She surmised that viewing Caucasian ideals did not lower the African-American women's self-evaluation regardless of the previous level of body image. However, when exposed to idealized black models, the black women who previously reported low body esteem now reported body dissatisfaction. Frisby's study argues that when black women are exposed to idealized images of women who are similar in racial makeup to themselves problems of self-esteem may surface (Frisby 2004). In at look at male participants, Thornton and Moore (1993) investigated men's self-ratings of their physical attractiveness. The respondents were divided into groups and exposed either to the highly attractive models or less attractive models. As anticipated, the men who had been exposed to the highly attractive models reported high-levels of body dissatisfaction (Morrison et al. 2003).

The present study is investigating the media's influence on male and female body image dissatisfaction in an Arab country with a high prevalence of US media. The following are the hypotheses that we will prove in our research:

### Hypotheses

- 1) The more respondents watch US TV shows, will lead to greater Appearance Evaluation
- 2) Comparable effects of TV shows on body dissatisfaction found in Western studies will be observed in our study in Kuwait.
- 3) Watching TV shows with skinny characters will lead to greater body dissatisfaction.
- 4) Female respondents will report greater body dissatisfaction than male respondents.
- 5) Respondents viewing shows with average body types will report less body dissatisfaction than those watching shows with skinny characters.

## Method

### Pretesting and validation

First, 286 preliminary surveys was distributed to discover what were the most popular shows being watched by both male and female college students (mostly 18 to 25 year olds). We additionally validated our study by distributing a list of these TV shows to four-college age students (two females and two males) to see if dominant characters fell correctly into skinny and average body types for both Arabic and English-language TV shows. We used a 1 to 7 scale where 1 meant "not at all" matching the categorized body type and 7 meaning fitting the body type category "a lot". Because we utilized the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire appearance scale (MBSRQ-AS) by Cash, et al. (1985, 1986) and the widely used Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Scale (SATAQ-3) Heinberg, et al. (1995), we did not see any justification or need for additional pre-testing.

### Sample

A blind (non-face to face) self-administered paper-and-pencil cross-sectional survey (N = 233) was circulated in several classes of a liberal arts college in Kuwait. More than three-quarters of the student sample (75.9%) reported they were Kuwaiti citizens, while the rest reported being nationals of other countries (one respondent did not report his/her nationality). About a half of the sample (48.9%) reported they were males. Seven respondents did not report their gender. Over the half of the respondents (50.4%) were from 21 to 24 years old; 46.1% reported they were 18-20 years of age, and 3.4% didn't report their age.

### Procedure

A blind self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed in a number of classes to ensure higher response rate. The survey was administered in English, which is the official language of the university where the study was administered.

### Measures

#### TV show viewing

Before identifying how often respondents viewed certain television shows, we first generated the list of shows, both Western and Arabic, which were the most popular among the college students. For this purpose, 286 students were surveyed. Based on the students' responses, the list of 21 most viewed TV showed was created. Nine of these shows were

Western (predominantly American, such as “How I Met Your Mother”, “Modern Family”, “The Office”, among others), and 11 were produced in the Middle East (e.g., Noor (نور), Ajial (أجبال), Al-Ghareeb (الغريب)). Each respondent rated on a scale from 0 (“Never”) to 3 (“Often”) how often he/she viewed each of the selected shows.

**Viewing Western and Arabic shows.** The responses to the questions about show viewing were averaged separately for Western shows and Arabic shows. As a result, two continuous variables, *Viewing Western Shows* and *Viewing Arabic Shows*, were computed.

**Viewing shows with skinny characters.** Four coders rated each show on a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 7 (“a lot”) with regards to how skinny its characters were. Shows with the highest rating were considered as *shows depicting skinny characters*. Viewing scores for these shows were averaged to create a single variable. To account for possible gender difference in perceptions of characters’ skinniness, two male coders and two female coders rated the shows separately (intercoder reliability for males: Pearson correlation = .75,  $p < .001$ , intraclass correlation = .74,  $p < .001$ , Chronbach  $\alpha = .85$ ; intercoder reliability for females: Pearson correlation = .69,  $p < .001$ , intraclass correlation = .68,  $p < .001$ ; Chronbach  $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Viewing shows with average-body characters.** Four coders rated each show on a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 7 (“a lot”) with regards to average body types its characters had. Shows with the highest rating were considered as *shows depicting average-body characters*. The overall variable was computed based on the viewing scores for these shows. As in the previous case, gender differences in perceptions of characters’ body averageness were taken into consideration. Two male coders and two female coders rated the shows separately (intercoder reliability for males: Pearson correlation = .79,  $p < .001$ , intraclass correlation = .79,  $p < .001$ , Chronbach  $\alpha = .88$ ; intercoder reliability for females: Pearson correlation = .74,  $p < .001$ , intraclass correlation = .74,  $p < .001$ , Chronbach  $\alpha = .85$ ).

Due to the fact that each show was rated on two scales representing characters’ skinniness or body averageness, some shows were rated high on both. Such shows were excluded from the analysis. We also used The Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire appearance scale (MBSRQ-AS) by Cash, et al. (1985, 1986) a 34-item self-report appearance focused inventory for the assessment of self-evaluation and orientation of five subsets that excludes fitness and health items, which are found in the larger, more comprehensive questionnaire. The shorter questionnaire measures Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation,

Overweight Preoccupation, Self-Classified Weight, and body area satisfaction.

**Appearance orientation.** Appearance Orientation that represented extent of investment in one’s appearance was measured with the use of 12 items (Cronbach’s alpha = .74 for males; .72 for females, Cash et al., 1985, 1986). The respondents rated each of the 12 statements on a scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Then, one variable was computed by averaging scores for each of the 12 items.

**Appearance Evaluation.** Appearance Orientation conceptualized as the feeling of physical attractiveness or unattractiveness; satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one’s looks was measured with the use of seven 7-point items (Cronbach’s alpha = .61 for males; .79 for females, Cash et al., 1985, 1986). For each item, 1 corresponded to “strongly disagree” and 7 corresponded to “strongly agree.” A single variable was calculated by averaging scores for each of the seven items.

**Overweight Preoccupation.** Overweight Preoccupation was defined as fat anxiety, weight vigilance, dieting, and eating restraint. This variable was calculated as an average of scores obtained with the use of four 7-point scales, where 1= “strongly disagree” and 7=“strongly agree” (Cronbach’s alpha =.66 for males; .75 for females, Cash et al., 1985, 1986).

**Self-Classified Weight.** Self-Classified Weight represented how one perceives and labels one’s weight, from very underweight to very overweight. Two 7-point scales from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”) were utilized to measure this variable (Cronbach’s alpha =.66 for males; .78 for females, Cash et al., 1985, 1986).

**Body areas satisfaction.** Body Areas Satisfaction conceptualized as satisfaction with discrete aspects of one’s appearance was measured with the use of nine items (Cronbach’s alpha = .77 for males; .82 for females, Cash et al., 1985, 1986). The respondents rated each of the nine statements on a scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

Lastly, we also distributed the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Scale (SATAQ-3), which directly measures awareness and acceptance of cultural ideals of attractiveness. With this scale, we directly aim to gauge the impact of media messages on the level of General-Internalization; internalization from watching athletes, Pressures felt from aesthetic ideals, and if respondents look to general mediated messages such as film, TV and magazines for information about the ideal standards of appearance (Information). The following are descriptions of the variables used in this scale.

**Internalization-General.** Internalization-General meaning general influence of the media on

perceived body size ideals was measured with the use of nine 5-point scales from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree,” Cronbach’s alpha = .85 for males; .83 for females, Calogero et al., 2004; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999, 2004).

**Internalization-Athlete.** Internalization-Athlete that represented internalization of athletic ideals and sports figures in the media was measured with the use of five 5-point scales from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree,” Cronbach’s alpha = .70 for males; .71 for females, Calogero et al., 2004; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999, 2004).

**Pressures.** Media pressure to achieve certain body size ideals was another variable measured with multiple 5-point items. from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree,” Cronbach’s alpha = .81 for males; .85 for females, Calogero et al., 2004; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999, 2004).

**Information.** Information was conceptualized as the degree to which media is used as a source of Information for determining body size ideal (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al. 1999). The variable was measured with nine 5-point items from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree,” Cronbach’s alpha = .51 for males; .61 for females, Calogero et al., 2004; Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999, 2004).

**Gender.** Gender was included in the analysis because it was predicted that viewing television shows would be associated with body image variables in two gender groups differently.

## Results

Simple linear and multiple regression tests were run to explore the relationships among independent variables (total TV show viewing; viewing Western TV shows; viewing Arabic TV shows; viewing TV shows with skinny prominent characters; viewing TV shows with characters who have average body types) and dependent measures (Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation, Overweight Preoccupation, Self-Classified Weight, body area satisfaction, General-Internalization, Internalization from watching athletes, Pressure felt from aesthetic ideals, and Information). We focus on the most relevant data.

We ran nine simple linear regressions to explore the association between total TV show viewing and the nine dependent measures. It was indicated that total TV show viewing was positively correlated with Appearance Orientation,  $\beta = .14, p \leq .05$ , Appearance Evaluation,  $\beta = .24, p \leq .001$ , General-Internalization,  $\beta = .37, p \leq .001$ , Pressure,  $\beta = .34, p \leq .001$ , and Information,  $\beta = .31, p \leq .001$ . The standardized regression coefficients are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of standardized regression coefficients from simple linear regression analyses between total TV viewing and dependent measures

Independent Variables	Dependent Measures				
	Appearance Orientation	Appearance Evaluation	General-Internalization	Pressure	Information
TV Show Viewing	0.14*	0.24***	0.37***	0.34***	0.31***

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Nine multiple regressions were conducted to test the relationships between viewing Western and Arabic TV shows and nine dependent measures. First, it was found that viewing Western TV shows explained 4% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Overweight Preoccupation ( $\beta = .20, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,208)=8.71, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing Arabic TV shows added less than 1% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change, non-significant ( $n.s.$ );  $F(2,208)=4.48, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing Western shows positively contributed to Overweight Preoccupation ( $\beta = .19, p \leq .05$ ;  $\beta = .04, n.s.$ , respectively). Second, viewing Western TV shows explained 6% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Information ( $\beta = .25, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,207)=13.54, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing Arabic TV shows added 5% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $p \leq .001$ ;  $F(2,207)=12.68, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing both Western and Arabic shows positively contributed to Information ( $\beta = .17, p \leq .05$ ;  $\beta =$

$.23, p \leq .001$ , respectively). Third, viewing Western TV shows explained 9% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Pressure ( $\beta = .29, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,207)=19.06, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing Arabic TV shows added 1% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $p = .87$ ;  $F(2,207)=11.11, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing Western shows positively contributed to Pressure but the same phenomenon was not observed with Arabic shows ( $\beta = .25, p \leq .001$ ;  $\beta = .12, n.s.$ , respectively). Fourth, viewing Western TV shows explained 11% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in General-Internalization ( $\beta = .33, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,207)=25.49, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing Arabic TV shows added 2% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $p \leq .05$ ;  $F(2,207)=14.91, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing both Western and Arabic shows positively contributed to General-Internalization ( $\beta = .29, p \leq .001$ ;  $\beta = .14, p \leq .05$ , respectively). The standardized regression coefficients are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Overall summary of standardized regression coefficients from multiple regression analyses between viewing Western TV shows, viewing Arabic TV shows and dependent measures

Independent Variables	Dependent Measures			
	Overweight Preoccupation	Information	Pressure	General-Internalization
Western TV Shows	0.19*	0.17*	0.25***	0.29***
Arabic TV Shows	0.04	0.23***	0.12	0.14*

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001 .

Nine multiple regressions were conducted to test the relationships between viewing Western and Arabic TV shows and nine dependent measures with the sample split by gender, i.e., responses from males and females were analyzed separately.

**Males.** First, the model with the two TV show viewing variables and Appearance Evaluation as a DV was significant,  $F(2,106)=3.42, p \leq .05$ , with viewing both Western and Arabic shows explaining 6% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in Appearance Evaluation although Arabic shows were not statistically significant on this variable ( $\beta = .27, n.s.$ ;  $\beta = -.19, p = .07$ , respectively). The more male respondents viewed both types of shows, the less positively they evaluated their appearance. Second, viewing Western TV shows explained 7% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Self-Classified Weight ( $\beta = .25, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own,  $(F(1,106)=7.94, p \leq .05)$ . Viewing Arabic TV shows added only 1% to the variance explained and was not significant ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,106)=4.35, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing Western shows positively contributed to Self-Classified Weight, while Arabic shows were not significant in this regard ( $\beta = .23, p \leq .05$ ;  $\beta = .09, n.s.$ , respectively). Third, viewing Western TV shows explained 5% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in General-Internalization ( $\beta = .22, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own,  $(F(1,105)=5.31, p \leq .05)$ . Viewing Arabic TV shows added 2% to the variance explained and so was not a significant factor ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,105)=3.50, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing both Western and Arabic shows positively

contributed to General-Internalization ( $\beta = .17, n.s.$ ;  $\beta = .13, n.s.$ , respectively).

**Females.** First, viewing Western TV shows explained 6% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Information ( $\beta = .25, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own,  $(F(1,96)=6.28, p \leq .05)$ . Viewing Arabic TV shows added 8% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $p \leq .05$ ;  $F(2,96)=7.99, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing both Western and Arabic shows positively contributed to Information ( $\beta = .20, p \leq .05$ ;  $\beta = .29, p \leq .05$ , respectively). Second, viewing Western TV shows explained 6% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Pressure ( $\beta = .24, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own,  $(F(1,96)=5.84, p \leq .05)$ . Viewing Arabic TV shows added less than 1% to the variance explained and was not a significant agent ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,96)=3.14, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing Western positively contributed to Pressure with Arabic shows having negligible effect in this area ( $\beta = .23, p \leq .05$ ;  $\beta = .07, n.s.$ , respectively). Third, viewing Western TV shows explained 11% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in General-Internalization ( $\beta = .33, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own,  $(F(1,96)=11.46, p \leq .001)$ . Viewing Arabic TV shows added 2% to the variance explained and so was not a significant variable ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,96)=6.95, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing both Western shows positively contributed to General-Internalization but Arabic show viewing was not significant ( $\beta = .30, p \leq .05$ ;  $\beta = .15, n.s.$ , respectively). The standardized regression coefficients are presented in Table 3 for males and Table 4 for females:

Table 3: *Males.* A summary of standardized regression coefficients from multiple regression analyses between viewing Western TV shows, viewing Arabic TV shows and dependent measures

Independent Variables	Dependent Measures		
	Appearance Evaluation	Self- Classified Weight	General-Internalization
Western TV Shows	-0.19	0.23*	0.17
Arabic TV Shows	0.27	0.09	0.13

\*p<.05.

Table 4: *Females.* A summary of standardized regression coefficients from multiple regression analyses between viewing Western TV shows, viewing Arabic TV shows and dependent measures

Independent Variables	Dependent Measures		
	Information	Pressure	General-Internalization
Western TV Shows	0.20*	0.23*	0.30*
Arabic TV Shows	0.29*	0.07	0.15

\*p<.05.



Finally, we ran nine multiple regressions separately for male and female respondents to test the relationships between viewing TV shows with skinny prominent characters and viewing TV shows with characters who have average body types as IVs and Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation, Overweight Preoccupation, Self-Classified Weight, Body Areas Satisfaction, General-Internalization, Internalization from watching athletes, Pressure felt from aesthetic ideals, and Information as DVs.

**Males.** First, viewing TV shows with skinny characters explained 6% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Appearance Evaluation ( $\beta = -.25, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,113)=7.57, p \leq .05$ ). The model with the two TV show viewing variables (viewing TV shows with skinny characters and viewing TV shows with average body characters) and Appearance Evaluation as a DV was significant, as well,  $F(2,113)=4.02, p \leq .05$ , with viewing TV shows with average body characters explaining extra .04% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in Appearance Evaluation ( $\beta = -.21, p \leq .05$  for skinny;  $\beta = -.08, n.s.$  for average). The more male respondents viewed both types of shows, but especially shows with skinny characters, the less positively they evaluated their appearance. Second, viewing shows with skinny characters positively contributed to Overweight Preoccupation ( $\beta = .19, p \leq .05$ ), explaining 4% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in the DV,  $F(1,113)=4.18, p \leq .05$ . Third, the model with the two TV show viewing variables (viewing TV shows with skinny characters and viewing TV shows with average body characters) and Self-Classified weight as a DV was significant,  $F(2,113)=4.50, p \leq .05$ , with both IVs explaining 8% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in Self-Classified Weight ( $\beta = .03, n.s.$  for skinny;  $\beta = .28, p \leq .05$  for average). Viewing TV shows, especially those with average-body-type characters, was positively associated with Self-Classified Weight. Fourth, viewing shows with skinny characters was positively correlated with Information ( $\beta = .20, p \leq .05$ ), explaining 4% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in the DV,  $F(1,112)=4.43, p \leq .05$ . Fifth, viewing shows with skinny characters explained 8% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Pressure ( $\beta = .29, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,112)=9.32, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing shows with average characters added less than 1% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;

$F(2,112)=4.66, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing both types of shows, but especially, shows with skinny characters, positively contributed to Pressure ( $\beta = .26, p \leq .05$  for skinny;  $\beta = .03, n.s.$  for average). Sixth, viewing shows with skinny characters explained 7% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in General-Internalization ( $\beta = .27, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,112)=8.64, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing shows with average body characters added less than 1% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,112)=4.37, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing both types of shows, but especially shows with skinny characters, positively contributed to General-Internalization ( $\beta = .25, p \leq .05$  for skinny;  $\beta = .04, n.s.$  for average).

**Females.** First, viewing shows with skinny characters positively contributed to Overweight Preoccupation ( $\beta = .21, p \leq .05$ ), explaining 4% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in the DV,  $F(1,111)=5.12, p \leq .05$ . Second, viewing shows with skinny characters explained 9% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Information ( $\beta = .30, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,111)=11.25, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing shows with average characters added extra 1% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,111)=6.38, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing both types of shows are positively associated with Information ( $\beta = .19, n.s.$  for skinny;  $\beta = .16, n.s.$  for average). Third, viewing shows with skinny characters explained 7% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in Pressure ( $\beta = .27, p \leq .05$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,111)=8.74, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing shows with average characters added less than 1% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $n.s.$ ;  $F(2,111)=4.36, p \leq .05$ ). Viewing both types of shows, but especially, shows with skinny characters, positively contributed to Pressure ( $\beta = .25, p = .07$  for skinny;  $\beta = .03, n.s.$  for average). Fourth, viewing shows with skinny characters explained 10% ( $R^2$ ) of variance in General-Internalization ( $\beta = .32, p \leq .001$ ) when entered to the model by its own, ( $F(1,111)=12.74, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing shows with average body characters added another 3% to the variance explained ( $R^2$  change,  $p = .06$ ;  $F(2,111)=8.35, p \leq .001$ ). Viewing both types of shows, but especially shows with average body characters, positively contributed to General-Internalization ( $\beta = .14, n.s.$  for skinny;  $\beta = .25, p = .06$  for average). The standardized regression coefficients are presented in Table 5 for males and Table 6 for females:

Table 5: Males. A summary of standardized regression coefficients from multiple regression analyses between TV shows with Skinny Characters, TV shows with Average Body Characters and dependent measures

Independent Variables	Dependent Measures					
	Appearance Evaluation	Overweight Preoccupation	Self Classified Weight	Information	Pressure	General-Internalization
TV Shows with Skinny Characters	-0.21*	0.19*	0.03	0.20*	0.26*	0.25*
TV Shows with Average-Body Characters	-0.08	-	0.28*	-	0.03	0.04

\* $p < .05$ .

Table 6: *Females*. A summary of standardized regression coefficients from multiple regression analyses between TV shows with Skinny Characters, TV shows with Average Body Characters and dependent measures

Independent Variables	Dependent Measures			
	Overweight Preoccupation	Information	Pressure	General-Internalization
TV Shows with Skinny Characters	0.21*	0.19	0.25	0.14
TV Shows with Average-Body Characters	-	0.16	0.03	0.25

\*p&lt;.05.

## Discussion

The results of our data analyses show that total TV show viewing is positively correlated with Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation, General-Internalization, Pressure, and Information. Corresponding with our hypotheses, the results also showed that the effects of viewing Western TV shows was more significant than the effect of viewing Arabic TV shows when measuring Overweight Preoccupation, Information, Pressure, and General-Internalization.

We can surmise from these results that Media both Arab and Western images positively correlate with how respondents in our sample view their body image. This reinforces our hypotheses that watching TV shows will lead to great body greater Appearance Evaluation. As the adolescents in our study consume TV it appears many are using both western images and Arab images as the barometer of the ideal body type. The biggest impact here is Overweight Preoccupation. Our study finds that Western media images may be eroding the traditional cultural norms of what is considered overweight, with TV shows often depicting thin female models or athletic males. This transmission is also more readily available from Western programs than Arab shows because Arab shows often feature characters dressed in cultural attire, which precludes displaying the body. Furthermore on many variables such as preoccupation, Information Pressure and internalization Western shows are having a greater impact on the body image of the respondents as well. Since in many cases the results of the Western images were more significant than those found from Arab shows such as the pressure to achieve a certain ideal body type, and then we can deduce that by the way of the social comparison theory that the effects of media imperialism on body image are indeed present in our study. It appears in cultures such as Kuwait where there is tendency to view the west as being more progressive and setting trends, that the citizens, especially the youth, are turning to western media images. In countries like these where leisure time and disposable income is high, the population often turns to the west as the trendsetter of where they should be shopping, how they should be dressed, where they should vacation etc. To facilitate this they often turn to TV shows where their favorite

characters are clad in the latest designer clothes, drink the latest cocktails and drive the latest trendy car. As Kuwait is a collectivist society with limited individualism, citizens and residents may depend on these characters as an outlet and seek to imitate their way of life. Through the social comparison theory people may be asking “*What I am missing?*” “*Why don't I have that?*”, or “*Why don't I look like that?*” The Hermes Birkin bag mentioned in an episode of *Sex and the City* can lead to a demand for the item from the women in Kuwait. A car driven on *Top Gear* may cause a backlog on orders of that model from local car dealers because Kuwaitis maybe comparing themselves to west and surmising they themselves are missing something if they don't have what they see on television. Along this line, the body itself is a commodity that these TV shows are explicitly or implicitly selling to the audiences in Kuwait. Western images now represent the archetype of beauty, thinness and athleticism.

## Western and Arabic shows

### Males

When looking at the effects of viewing western and Arabic TV shows on male body image evaluation; the results showed that the more male respondents viewed both types of shows, the less positively they evaluated their appearance. In addition, viewing both Western and Arabic shows positively contributed to Self-Classified Weight and to General-Internalization. Once again, we are seeing the impact of the social comparison theory. The males in our sample are gauging themselves based on the images they see on TV. There is a direct comparison not only with Arab characters but through the impact of media imperialism, these males are also assessing their bodies based on western standards of masculinity and male beauty. It appears that the males are internalizing images they consume and are thinking about their bodies in comparison to what they see. The males are then routinely not happy with their body types after making this comparison.

### Females

As for females, viewing both Western and Arabic shows positively contributed to Information,

Pressure and General-Internalization. Differently from their male counterparts females in our sample are specifically seeking out television programs as a way to gather Information on their bodies. This process of Information gathering led many of the women in the study to feel the pressure to conform to these body type standards. So while the men were unhappy with their weight and thought about their bodies, in keeping with our hypotheses on gender differences and the expectancy of greater negative effects of media imperialism on females, the women in our study appear more susceptible to media images and often times seek out Information and social comparison. Females then customarily felt the pressure to conform to these ideals more so than the men did.

### **Skinny and average shows**

#### *Males*

The data analyzed also revealed that the more male respondents viewed TV shows depicting skinny and average characters, but especially shows with skinny characters, the less positively they evaluated their appearance. Second, viewing shows with skinny characters positively contributed to Overweight Preoccupation. Viewing TV shows, especially those with average-body-type characters, was positively associated with Self-Classified Weight. Fourth, viewing shows with skinny characters was positively correlated with Information. Unlike what was found when we analyzed the results based on show type: Arab and Western shows, when we divided the data by body type (skinny and average) and looked at 'Information', males exhibited similar patterns to the females. They too were watching shows and seeking out information on bodies. Viewing both types of shows, but especially, shows with skinny characters, positively contributed to Pressure. Viewing both types of shows, but especially shows with skinny characters, positively contributed to General-Internalization in males surveyed. By breaking down our results by dominant body types portrayed on TV programs, we are better able to understand why and when men are thinking more about their bodies. When shows depicted skinny characters the men were generally unhappy with their weight, demonstrating that the specific type of character and TV program depicting a predominate skinny body type was likely to lead to men feeling negative about their bodies while average characters only led men to think about their physiques but not necessarily to critique it. This reinforces our hypotheses that consuming programs depicting skinny characters would lead to body dissatisfaction. In addition, both physique types demonstrate a clear use of social comparison to assess and judge one's own form.

#### *Females*

As predicted, viewing shows with skinny characters positively contributed to Overweight Preoccupation. Viewing both types of shows (depicting skinny and average characters) are positively associated with Information. Viewing both types of shows, but especially, shows with skinny characters, positively contributed to Pressure. What we found was that viewing both types of shows, but especially shows with average body characters, positively contributed to General-Internalization. What is profound is that it is average body types lead to internalization and not shows with predominately-skinny characters, something we did not expect to find in our data but it does highlight our argument that women would be more affected by social comparison and media imperialism than men. It is hard to determine what the females are thinking and why they are internalizing when viewing shows with average characters, perhaps some are able to make sense of the idea that the standard of beauty is not only those depicting thin model-like characters but that women with average bodies. Conversely, they could just be wondering why the women with average bodies don't feel ashamed or embarrassed that their body types are not ideal and this may lead to the female respondents scrutinizing their own appearance.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Our study examined and found significant results on the effects of mediated body images on adolescents living in Kuwait. We were able to demonstrate that young adults were comparing their bodies to the images they saw in both western and Arabic media and this was leading to body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, our study showed significant effects of Western media imperialism on the effects of body image on our respondents. However, our study did not examine how particular TV characters affected this dynamic. It could be theorized that forming bonds with a character leads to greater Appearance Evaluation and body dissatisfaction. For example, if a female idealized Jennifer Anniston on the TV show *Friends*, would this lead to greater body dissatisfaction than watching the contestants on *America's Next Top Model* to whom she may have no attachment? Furthermore, our study leaves open room to present media messages (television shows) to the respondents before surveying their dissatisfaction with their bodies, rather than relying on their recollection of TV consumption. Moreover, due to the high socio-economic status of our sample, many may be consuming more media than their western counterparts due to a large amount of leisure time and less social activities available in

Kuwait than in the West. Future research could control and segment respondents by amount of hours spent in an average week consuming media, especially TV. In addition, inquiry could be made on what percentage of disposable income is being spent on improving body image. Lastly, further research could control for external variables such as peer pressure and parental messages on body image.

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