

# 1 Could Looks Kill?

Despite normal hunger, slender shape and a successful social life, many young women deprive themselves of nutrition to the extent that they risk serious illness and even death. Epidemiological research has indicated that women's preoccupation with food and body shape is widespread, while the incidence of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia is on the increase. In the United States, a survey of over 2,500 schoolgirls aged between 13 and 18 found that more than three-quarters said they wanted to lose weight and two-thirds had dieted in the past year to lose weight (Whitaker et al., 1989). Even more poignantly, 8 per cent of this sample reported that they had vomited during the past year to lose weight, 2 per cent had used diuretics and 17 per cent, diet pills. The researchers concluded that between 0.2 per cent and 7.6 per cent of their sample could be considered as anorexic. In another American survey, it was reported that 20 per cent of young college females had claimed to self-starve (Pyle et al., 1990). Eating disorders can include anorexic or bulimic behaviour; the first involves the rejection of food and the second purging after eating.

Long-term studies have indicated a 20 per cent mortality rate after 30 years (Theander, 1985), and anorexia is very much like committing slow suicide. In the UK, recent research on 37,500 schoolchildren found 60 per cent of 14- and 15-year-olds felt overweight even though they were actually average and below weight. Dr Regis of Exeter's Health Education Unit commented that 'more effort was needed to stop teenage girls becoming obsessed with trying to emulate waif-like models' (*Daily Mail*, 27 October 1998).

The likelihood is that diagnosed eating disorders may only be the visible tip of a contemporary obsession with body shape that engenders addictive and/or destructive behaviours as a means of weight and shape control. Smoking, drug use, over-exercise, cosmetic surgery (Wolf, 1992) and self-harm may well also be part of the profound subjective dissatisfaction with their body image that is evident and prevalent among, young women in particular. Extreme weight control tactics are not unknown amongst young men but it has long been established that it is women who tend to exhibit more dissatisfaction with their bodies (Heunemann et al., 1966).

Body obsession has historical precedents, particularly in relation to religious ascetism and associated fasting (Bordo, 1993), but is arguably both different from earlier examples and more pervasive than ever before in contemporary Western culture (Counihan, 1999). The modernity of the apparent expansion of 'fasting' and its focus on the body rather than on the soul appears to parallel the explosion of the mass media over the past 40 years. Consequently, causal or probable relationships between media representations and body image have been regularly, theoretically posed since Orbach (1978), who briefly noted the tendency for the media to produce a picture of ideal femininity as 'thin, free of unwanted hair, deodorised, perfumed and clothed ... They produce a picture that is far removed from the reality of everyday lives' (1978: 20–21).

### **Body shape ideals**

Anorexia and bulimia are behavioural syndromes. Body image is a psychological construct. While they represent distinct phenomena, however, they are frequently closely interrelated. In fact, body image concerns and a pre-occupation with dieting among teenagers often emerge together (Byely et al., 2000). The 'body image' construct tends to comprise a mixture of self-perceptions, ideas and feelings about one's physical attributes. It is linked to self-esteem and to the individual's emotional stability (Cash and Szymanski, 1995; Thompson, 1990).

Clinical statistics based on medical treatment rates can be referred to in relation to anorexia and bulimia. Normative statistics of body image disturbance, however, are less easy to find. Most of the research on body image perceptions has been conducted with college student samples that are not representative of the general population. Such studies have been primarily concerned with investigating the antecedents of body image dissatisfaction rather than with establishing its national prevalence. In the United States, attempts have been made to produce statistics beyond college samples to indicate how widespread a problem negative body image might be.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the magazine *Psychology Today* conducted large-scale surveys of body image among adult men and women aged 18 to 70 years (Berscheid et al., 1973; Cash et al., 1986). A further nationwide US survey was conducted among adult women only (18–70 years) in the early 1990s (Cash and Henry, 1995). These surveys indicated that both men's and women's body image perceptions have become more negative over time (Cash and Henry, 1995; Cash et al., 1986). In 1985, three in ten (30%) American women said that they were unhappy with their overall physical appearance, a figure that increased to nearly one in two (48%) by 1993 (Cash and Henry, 1995).

In the UK, much of the evidence about the prevalence of body image satisfaction or dissatisfaction has derived from readership surveys run by glossy magazines. One survey conducted in 2000 by *Top Santé* was reported in a national daily newspaper as having found that half of a sample of 5,000 women with an average age of 37 years classified themselves as overweight. More than eight in ten (83%) said that they felt inhibited by their body and that their life would be considerably improved if they were happy with their body (Stevenson, 2000).

The same magazine conducted a further survey in 2001, and on this occasion 3,000 women with an average age of 38 replied. Once again, the great majority (85%) were unhappy with their shape and nine in ten (90%) said that their appearance depressed them. There was further evidence that women think a lot about their bodies. Whatever their size, over seven in ten (73%) reportedly thought about their size and shape every day and eight in ten (80%) felt that their lives would be considerably enhanced if they felt totally happy with their body (*Daily Mail*, 9 August 2001). The central concern of women as revealed by these surveys was that they felt they were too big. In the 2001 survey, the average respondent claimed she had tried to diet at least six times, with more than eight in ten (86%) saying they had dieted at some point, and around three in ten saying they had fasted (32%), displayed bulimic tendencies (31%) or anorexic tendencies (28%).

Yet not all the evidence from these surveys has been consistent. A survey of 3,000 women aged between 18 and 40 who were interviewed on behalf of Garnier cosmetics in Britain, the United States and Australia reportedly found that most said they thought about their bodies a lot. While many dreamed of improved physical attributes such as a flatter stomach (46%), firmer buttocks (20%) and shapelier legs (14%), when asked to name a celebrity whom they most admired for her body shape, the most popular choices (Kylie Minogue, 23%; Catherine Zeta-Jones, 15%; Jennifer Lopez, 12%) were preferred because of their shapely figures rather than for their slenderness (Lockett, 2002).

### **Locating a source of blame**

Blaming the media for reproducing and extolling representations of unrealistic female bodies that influence young women to starve themselves has almost become a popular truism. Just as the mass media have been frequently accused of causing perceived increases in sexual and violent crime so they are now subject to a barrage of criticism for persuading young girls that thin is beautiful. Even medical opinion notes the media as a possible causal factor. Crisp argued that anorexia 'meets the psychosocial concerns of the person concerned' (1992: 5). He highlighted two major

socio-cultural developments as contributing to its relative contemporary prevalence: the fundamentally altered nature of sexual relationships and mass media and communication.

Contemporaneously, within psychology, a growing volume of research since the 1960s has explored body image perception. The importance of the subject has stemmed, to a significant degree, from the association of certain idealized body images with disordered eating habits, the increased prevalence of which in some societies is recognized as a major health problem (Streigel-Moore et al., 1986). The core of body image dissatisfaction has been located within a discrepancy between the perceived self and ideal self. The ideal self-image may be considered as either an 'internal ideal' or a 'societal ideal' resulting from the dictates of the surrounding cultural and societal environment as to what constitutes the perfect body. Perceived-ideal discrepancies that cause dissatisfaction in relation to aspects of the body that are regarded as malleable, such as weight and the distribution of fat, are believed often to provoke attempts to narrow this discrepancy through such methods as dieting and exercise (Silverstein et al., 1988).

Explorations of eating disorders and related body shape perceptions have indicated that there are biological, psychological, social and cultural factors linked to symptoms of disordered eating. Any number of these factors may individually or collectively set the stage for the development of disordered eating (White, 1992). While such symptoms can occur among a wide variety of people (men as well as women), most of the research attention has centred on their more commonplace occurrence among young women (see Dolan, 1989; Schwartz et al., 1982; Stoutjesdyk and Jevne, 1993).

The appearance of body image dissatisfaction has been observed to emerge among young girls at the very beginning of their teenage years. Certainly, 13-year-olds have been found to report concerns with their body size and appearance that are in turn linked to lowered self-esteem. However, girls as young as 11 years have been found to exhibit similar perceptions in those cases of early arrival of puberty (Williams and Currie, 2000).

The emergence of body image concerns is important because it is frequently associated with the appearance of disordered eating patterns too. This is worrying when it occurs in the early teen years that are important physical growth years. The more dissatisfied young girls are with their bodies, the more likely it is that they will under-eat at this vital period of physical development (Griffiths and McCabe, 2000). Both parents and peer groups play a significant role in relation to onset of body image disturbance and disordered eating. Any suggestion of a concern on the part of a parent with their own body or the display of dieting on their part can create a psychological climate in which such behaviours are encouraged in impressionable teenagers (Vincent and McCabe, 2000).

## Gender and body image

In academic and wider public discussions about media and body image, most of the attention is focused on the impact that media representations of body shape have upon women. This emphasis often disguises the fact that men, too, are increasingly defined by their bodies. According to Henwood, Gill and McLean (2002: 183), 'Patterns of consumption, lifestyle choices and media representations of men now often focus upon men's appearance and the male body. ... Media advertising routinely depicts in positive ways youthful toned muscular male bodies or focuses on style in men's clothing and physical appearance'. What effects do these representations have?

Some writers have argued that media images can present ideals in terms of physique for men just as much as for women (Henwood et al., 1999). There is a need to consider the extent to which men's bodies are treated as commodities or objects to be gazed upon in the same way as had previously been claimed about the representation of women's bodies. The nature of any media impact in the realm of masculinity, however, must take into account the typical benchmark self-perception for men. While research has shown that women tend to regard themselves as bigger than they really are, for men the opposite is true. Men tend to perceive themselves as underweight and as thinner than they actually are and report a desire to be larger (Harmatz et al., 1985; Miller et al., 1980; Mintz and Betz, 1986). Men also overestimate both women's and other men's preferences for a large, muscular physique for men (Cohn and Adler, 1992).

As with women, society's view of men may have been shaped and reinforced by media images. The use and display of men in advertising could have served as a particularly potent social conditioning force in this context. It is pertinent to ask whether a muscular, toned, fit and hard-bodied ideal is being promulgated in respect of men in the same way as a thinness ideal is being projected for women. In comparing themselves to such an ideal, how are men affected? Does it leave them feeling anxious and less confident or less secure about themselves (Mort, 1988; Nixon, 1996)?

It has been suggested that men seek to embrace physical strength, hardness and power to reinforce the traditional masculine ideal – and at the same time to distinguish itself from ideas about femininity. The female form is traditionally conceived as soft and rounded, while the masculine form, in contrast, is taut and lean. The male preoccupation with abdominal stomach muscles in the face of a decline in physical labour and increased girth, embodies an attempt to hold on to this traditional masculine ideal of muscular strength and condition (Baker, 1997; Henwood et al., 2002).

Body image studies among men have begun to demonstrate that men can display as much dissatisfaction with their bodies as do women. Furthermore, this finding has occurred in a number of different countries.

One study of college-age men in Austria, France and the United States found that, across all three countries, young men chose an ideal body shape that was considerably heavier and more muscular than the shape they judged they currently had. They also believed that women preferred a male body that was heavier and more muscular (Pope et al., 2000). With women, lower body self-esteem and higher body dissatisfaction have been found to motivate a drive for thinness. A comparable drive for muscularity has been hypothesized to occur among men who are unhappy with their body image. Boys and young men who are dissatisfied with their current body shape have been found to display a drive to put on weight in the form of more muscle (McCreary and Sasse, 2000). Anecdotally, this tendency has been linked with male magazines' emphasis on muscular physiques for men (and the 'six-pack' stomach) which, in turn, is believed to have created a climate in which young men are encouraged to take drugs such as anabolic steroids to achieve the body they want. Abuse of such drugs can lead to serious health problems, including impotence, heart disease, cancer and violent mood swings (Chapman, 2000).

Given changes in gendered roles and the growing socio-cultural emphasis on looks and grooming, it may well be that men feature more and more frequently with poor body image, low self-esteem and consequent self-harming or mental health problems but there is no doubt that currently it is overwhelmingly a problem of and for young women. So this book focuses first and foremost on femininity and the representation of female bodies. It also focuses on Western cultures, particularly the United States and Britain, where eating disorders appear to be pandemic. We again acknowledge, however, that this may well not be a static situation and the future may see a more universal incidence of self-starvation.

### **Cultural standards of beauty**

In Western societies especially, a general preference for a thin body shape has become established as the norm. Culturally, however, this is not yet a universal phenomenon, nor indeed has it been consistent even within Western nations. Many societies have associated a plump physique for women with attractiveness and in some cultures obesity has been admired (Ford and Beach, 1952; Rudofsky, 1972). For over 30 years in Western societies, however, young females have reported more positive attitudes towards a small body size and thin physique, with the exception that a well-developed bust is often preferred (Calden et al., 1959; Nylander, 1971).

Large-scale surveys have produced consistent evidence that the desire to lose weight is prevalent among many national populations, especially

among women (Button et al., 1997; Davis and Katzman, 1997; Serdula et al., 1993; Streigel-Moore et al., 1996). However, the positive connotations of a slender body shape occur very frequently in Western cultures. A thin body shape is associated with success personally, professionally and socially (Bruch, 1978). At the same time, food – perceived as a cause of loss of thinness – can take on a negative hue for many women (Chernin, 1983; Orbach, 1978). The pleasures of food represent a temptation that must be brought under control through rigid and restrictive eating patterns for the greater good of attaining some socially sanctioned beauty ideal.

Despite the early observations of cross-cultural differences in body shape ideals, evidence has begun to emerge that Western-style concerns about body shape occur in non-Western populations, particularly among individuals who have had frequent contact with Western people and their culture. One study of young white and Asian women living in London and young Asian women living in Lahore in Pakistan who were English-speaking found similar associations between body dissatisfaction and attitudes to eating throughout all three groups. All the women who participated were recruited from slimming and fitness gyms in both cities. The youngest women in each case exhibited the greatest body image dissatisfaction (Bardwell and Choudry, 2000). A further study conducted among young women in South Africa found that eating disorders linked to body self-esteem were prevalent across black, white and Asian women (Wassenaar et al., 2000).

Other research has confirmed that similarities in judgements about physical appearance and attractiveness can occur across cultural groups, but some subtle differences also prevail. An American study presented figure drawings to Caucasian, African American and Hispanic college students who were asked to choose figures that most closely matched their current body shape, the body shape they would most like to have, the shape they felt would be found most attractive by the opposite sex, and the opposite-sex figures they found most attractive. Dissatisfaction with body shape was greatest among women regardless of ethnicity. However, both men and women misjudged which shapes the opposite sex would rate as most attractive. The women guessed that the men preferred shapes thinner than those they actually reported. African American women, however, had the most accurate views about what men would find attractive, and Caucasian women held the most distorted views in this respect. The men, throughout, guessed that women preferred shapes bigger and bulkier than those actually indicated by the women (Demarest and Allen, 2000).

Norms of feminine beauty in Western culture, however, have varied considerably over time (Goodman, 1995; Seid, 1989; Wolf, 1992). Although female attractiveness was once epitomized by a plump body shape, the

contemporary ideal, at the close of the twentieth century, emphasized a slender body. As we will see in more detail in later chapters, researchers have documented this cultural shift by showing that female magazine centrefolds, beauty pageant contestants and female models have become thinner over time (Garner et al., 1980; Seid, 1989; Wolf, 1992).

The impact of this changing ideal for feminine beauty is further exemplified by the increasing pervasiveness of dieting among women, especially young women. Polls conducted in the early 1960s (Wyden, 1965) on a nationwide sample of adults in the United States found that over 30 per cent were especially concerned about their weight. Only 10 per cent of overweight adults were dieting, another 20 per cent were trying not to gain weight and another 40 per cent were concerned but not doing anything about it. A separate poll by the same author showed that such concern rarely led to corrective measures (Wyden, 1965). In contrast, other research reported that as many as 70 per cent of high school girls were dissatisfied with their bodies and wanted to lose weight (Heunemann et al., 1966). Over subsequent years, further polls of American youth revealed that 30 per cent of high school girls and 6 per cent of boys were dieting on the day they were interviewed, although only 15 per cent of the girls, but 19 per cent of the boys were overweight. Furthermore, over 80 per cent of girls, but fewer than 20 per cent of boys expressed a desire to weigh less and over 40 per cent of girls had been on a diet by their senior year in high school, whereas only 24 per cent of their male cohorts had ever dieted (Dwyer et al., 1967, 1969, 1970). By 1977, the percentage of college women either on diets or consciously trying to control their eating in order to keep their weight down was up to 82 per cent (Jacobovits et al., 1977).

Coincident with this increasing norm of thinness, rates of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among women have risen (Silverstein, Peterson et al., 1986). Research on body image has indicated that women consistently perceive themselves as overweight (and as heavier than they actually are) and report a desire to be thinner (Cohn and Adler, 1992; Mintz and Betz, 1986). Women also tend to report an ideal body size that is significantly thinner than their perceived actual body size (Cohn and Adler, 1992). Finally, women overestimate both men's and other women's preferences for female thinness (Cohn and Adler, 1992). Explanations for these different perceptions have increasingly pointed to the media and to claims that an idealized, slender female form is over-represented with possible harmful consequences for the self-perception of women who do not see themselves as complying with the stereotype of acceptable feminine beauty.

Certainly, the cultural standard of beauty in relation to body shape is promulgated, to a significant degree, via the major mass media. Modern institutions of advertising, retailing and entertainment produce vivid notions of beauty that change over time. These mediated 'ideal' images

place pressure upon women in particular to conform to the body image currently in vogue. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the major media of the day focused upon the upper torso of women, placing emphasis upon the aesthetics and sexual allure of a large bosom. Subsequently, this body fashion was replaced by an emphasis upon being slender and, concurrently, many young women, not clinically diagnosed as anorexic or bulimic, nevertheless expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies. Their main concern is the avoidance of becoming overweight (Cash, 1990). Some writers have harshly criticized the mass media for playing a powerful role in conditioning women to adopt the thin standard as the ideal body shape (Mazur, 1986).

Yet, despite the criticisms levelled at the media in this context, surprisingly little work has actually addressed either the nature of media representations of the body or the ways in which audiences may interpret and use such images. During the 1990s, this position began to change. A few studies, mostly in the United States, of the antecedents of body image perceptions and disordered eating propensities place special emphasis on the mass media as potential causal agents (for example, Botta, 1999, 2000; Champion and Furnham, 1999; Grogan et al., 1996; Harrison, 1999, 2000a, b; Harrison and Cantor, 1997). In the UK, in 2000, the British Medical Association (BMA) agreed with academics Levine and Smolak that there 'is a great deal of theorizing and media criticism, available but far too little systematic research' (BMA, 2000: 31). A summit meeting held at 10 Downing Street (the British Prime Minister's office) in June 2000 confirmed both general concern about self-starvation and the need for more research into the role of the media.

## About the book

This book starts to address the lack of research on the media, body image and eating disorders by bringing together new empirical work on both media representations and audience responses, within a broad discussion of socio-cultural change, gender politics and self-identity. It is joint-authored in two parts, to investigate textual work (see Wykes, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003) and audience research (see Gunter, 2000) as rigorously and informatively as possible. The introduction and conclusion compare and contrast the two theoretical paradigms and analyse the differing methodological approaches and findings critically and creatively.

Part One, entitled *Media Representations* focuses closely on textual theory and analysis. It overviews theories of eating disorders, subjective identity, history of representation and the role of socio-cultural discourses. It investigates the contemporary 'moral panic' over the media and the body and the lack of detailed analysis of the mediated material

blamed for the current health crisis by theorizing the role of the mass media in gendered discourses and analysing textual examples from print and screen. Part One concludes by integrating the findings of detailed analysis within the broader debates of the role of the media, gender norms and values, health, sexual politics and commerce.

Part One comprises Chapters 2–5. Chapter 2, *Dying to be Thin*, focuses closely on the history of eating disorders and reviews medical, psycho-analytic, sociological and feminist research. It argues that any proper understanding of behaviours and concepts, which are suicidal at worst, frequently socially disabling and even at the level of least harm, inhibiting and damaging to self-esteem for many young women, must look beyond the tip of the iceberg that presents as diagnosed anorexia or bulimia. It argues that the media works on the body in much more subtle and broad ways than simply the promotion of a thin aesthetics and that the pursuit and promotion of slenderness is in many ways a metaphor and sometimes a disguise for a whole range of perceived gender norms within the agenda of sexual politics. The chapter argues that thin is a feminist issue because it is symptomatic of a context within which power works to construct very particular models of acceptable femininity in a range of discourses such as the family, the law, religion and, most systematically, covertly and invasively, the media.

Chapter 3, *Body Matters*, explores the history of the representation of the body and reviews theoretical work on the body as a cultural construct. It places self-starvation in the context of other body dysfunctional and displacement activities such as self-mutilation, drug abuse, over-exercise, fashion and cosmetic surgery in order to better understand how women are so subject to seeing themselves as 'deviant' bodies. The chapter considers what are desirable, normal, acceptable looks in our culture and how such norms are disseminated and by implication what is considered abnormal and other than desirable.

Chapter 4, *Print: Selling Sex and Slenderness*, argues that glossy magazines, although not innocent of promoting a thin aesthetics, are not solely responsible for constructing gender norms and values and that the slender-is-sexy norm would only be 'saleable' if it fitted into wider mediated concepts of gender and identity. The chapter uses the press as a case study for identifying those concepts and their prevalence, because newspapers remain the most sourced form of media in the UK, with some 14 million newspapers sold daily. It considers Julie Burchill's claim that the *Daily Mail* has created thousands more anorexics than *Vogue*, (*Guardian*, 8 July 2000) by analysing newspapers in order to assess the nature and extent of engagement in gendered discourses, direct or indirect. It looks both at coverage of 'thinness', particularly in relation to stars and models (Lena Zavarone/Kate Moss), and broader representations of women. It then focuses on the glossy magazines that have been

blamed for the anorexic epidemic. Jess Carter-Morley, a fashion editor for the *Guardian*, epitomized the populist view of the role of women's magazines in causing eating disorders when she wrote 'surely it is time for the glossy magazines and designers who demand and promote an extremely thin body shape to take a more responsible attitude' (*Guardian*, 31 May 2000). The chapter explores the ways in which femininity is narrated for the reader in popular magazines for teenage girls and young women and asks what the implied value judgements are and whether women are being manipulated. Drawing on semiotics, narrative theory and critical discourse, the analysis interrogates the 'sites' so vehemently attacked by newspaper journalists, medics and MPs during 2000 for causing young women to emulate 'waifs' and 'heroin-chic' and assesses the evidence that magazines sell slenderness as part of sexual attractiveness and social success.

Chapter 5, *Starring Roles: Screening Images*, extends the analysis of the mass media from print to electronic forms by looking at television and the World Wide Web. It explores the ways in which stars move both across performance arena and between media forms and how their iconic status might make them influential on young women, particularly when few other women ever feature in the mass media in any positive way. It considers the contexts of representation, particularly looking at contemporary women's serials, and assesses the rapidly growing Web as both a source of information about femininity but also of interaction between women and girls.

Part Two of the book, entitled *From Media Representations to Audience Impact* inverts the focus of Part One on the media and texts by arguing that any account of media meanings is necessarily partial without concern for the audience. Research on the representation of body image in the mass media spans more than 30 years. Within the context of communication effects, studies of body image portrayals in print and broadcast media have raised a number of theoretical explanations of media influences on, and methodological approaches to, this particular domain of human experience. The section shifts from concern with analyses of body image representations *per se* and the interpreted possible reasons for, and consequences of, these to audience research that seeks to elicit evidence of effects or correlations from media users themselves.

Chapter 6, *From Representation to Effects*, focuses closely on the psychological processes that suggest that political, medical and public opinion that the media affects attitudes and behaviours is well founded. It explores why women seem more concerned with shape and size than men and why slenderness has positive connotations for the female self. The chapter looks at theories relating to role models, covetousness, aspiration and pre-existing mental schemas and assesses their validity and value as a means of explaining the role of the media in the phenomenon of self-starvation.

Chapter 7, *Media Exposure and Body Image Ideals*, moves from theoretical approaches linking the media to body image and self-identity, to considering the methods that have been used to test effects theory. It looks at what has been learnt by surveying audiences in order to test for correlations between role models and self-perception. It contextualizes self-image and represented image in cultural norms and contexts.

Chapter 8, *Media Causation and Body Image Perceptions*, turns to experimental methods of seeking causal relations between media models of femininity and young women's attitudes to and behaviours around their bodies. This chapter reviews studies designed to test cause-effect relationships between both magazine and television accounts of female shape and size and audiences' reported self-esteem and body perception.

Chapter 9, *The Media and Clinical Problems with Body Image*, moves to research on 'clinical' populations of women specifically diagnosed with eating disorders. It looks at the differences between 'disordered' and 'normal' eaters in terms of their attitudes to and behaviours around food and the media.

Chapter 10, *Conclusion: Body Messages and Body Meanings*, compares and contrasts the approaches to media images and self-perception explored in this book. Both approaches have their own particular strengths and weaknesses. We consider to what extent these might inform better theoretical models and methodologies relating media representations of the human body and public conceptions of body shape. We review what has been elicited from the research undertaken for this book and, in the context of calls for closer self-monitoring of body representations by the mass media and their producers, discuss whether there are any policy-related recommendations or other kinds of action or information that might usefully intervene in the process whereby 'looks could kill'.