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The Effect of Visual Media on General Perceptions of Healthy Bodies

by Brooke Biernacki, Elijah Goldenberg, Laura Miller

Introduction

We have read multiple studies which analyze the correlation between digital media and body image. Due to a growing reliance on the internet, social media, and cinematic entertainment in our everyday lives, the transmission of elusive body ideals have become normalized in our everyday consumption of media, particularly towards younger audiences.

In response to our review of articles surrounding the topic, we formulated a survey which examines correlations between the type and frequency of the digital media the participants consume and their perception of a healthy body. The survey also included questions pertaining to the participants' gender, sexual orientation and race.

Methods

★ Survey

We sent out a survey asking participants to look at various images of people and rate them as healthy, somewhat healthy, somewhat unhealthy, or unhealthy. The reference photos were of athletes and celebrities who openly shared their lifestyle choices regarding their physical activity and nutrition. In order to not sway the participants, lesser known athletes were used and in non-athletic settings.

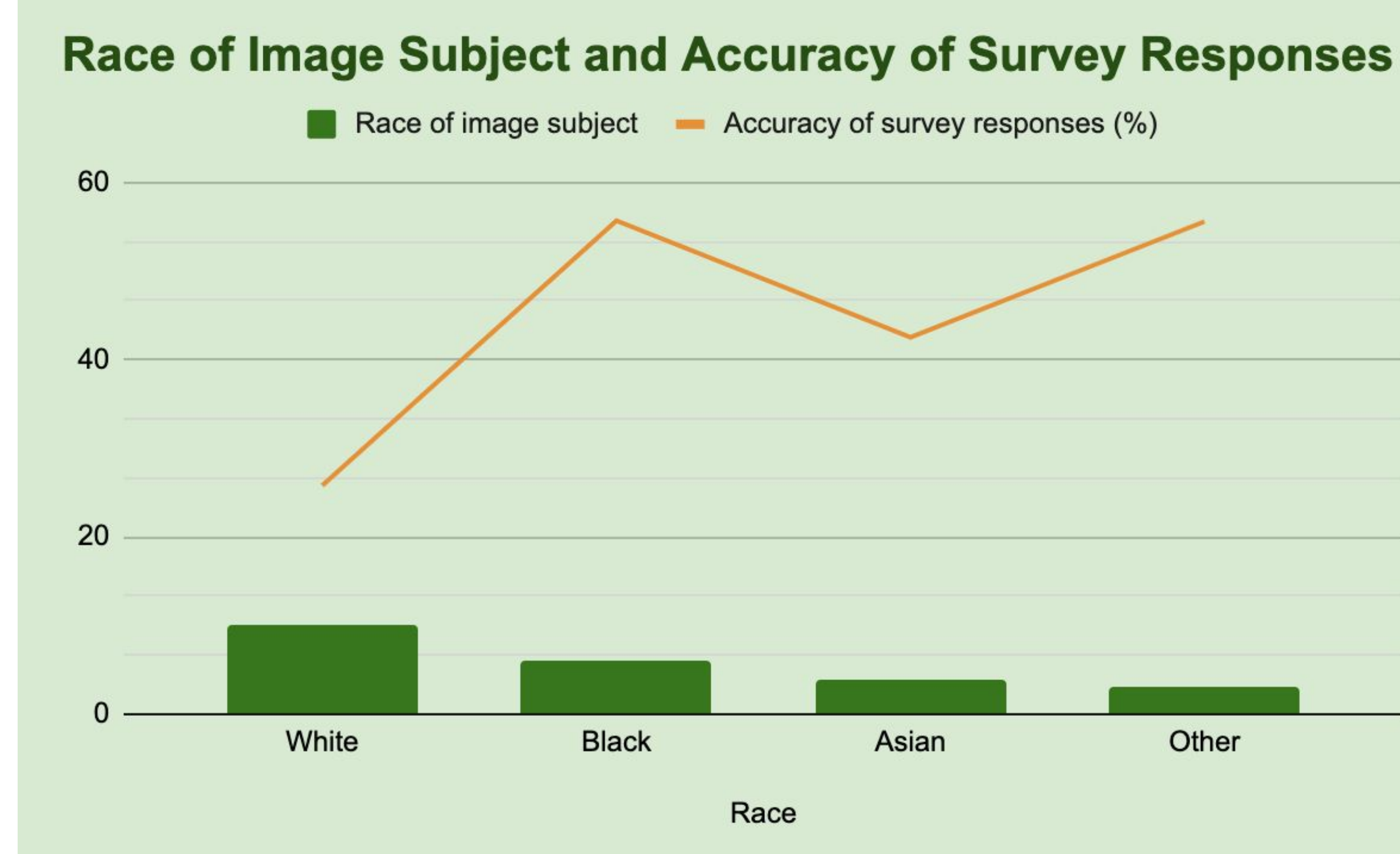
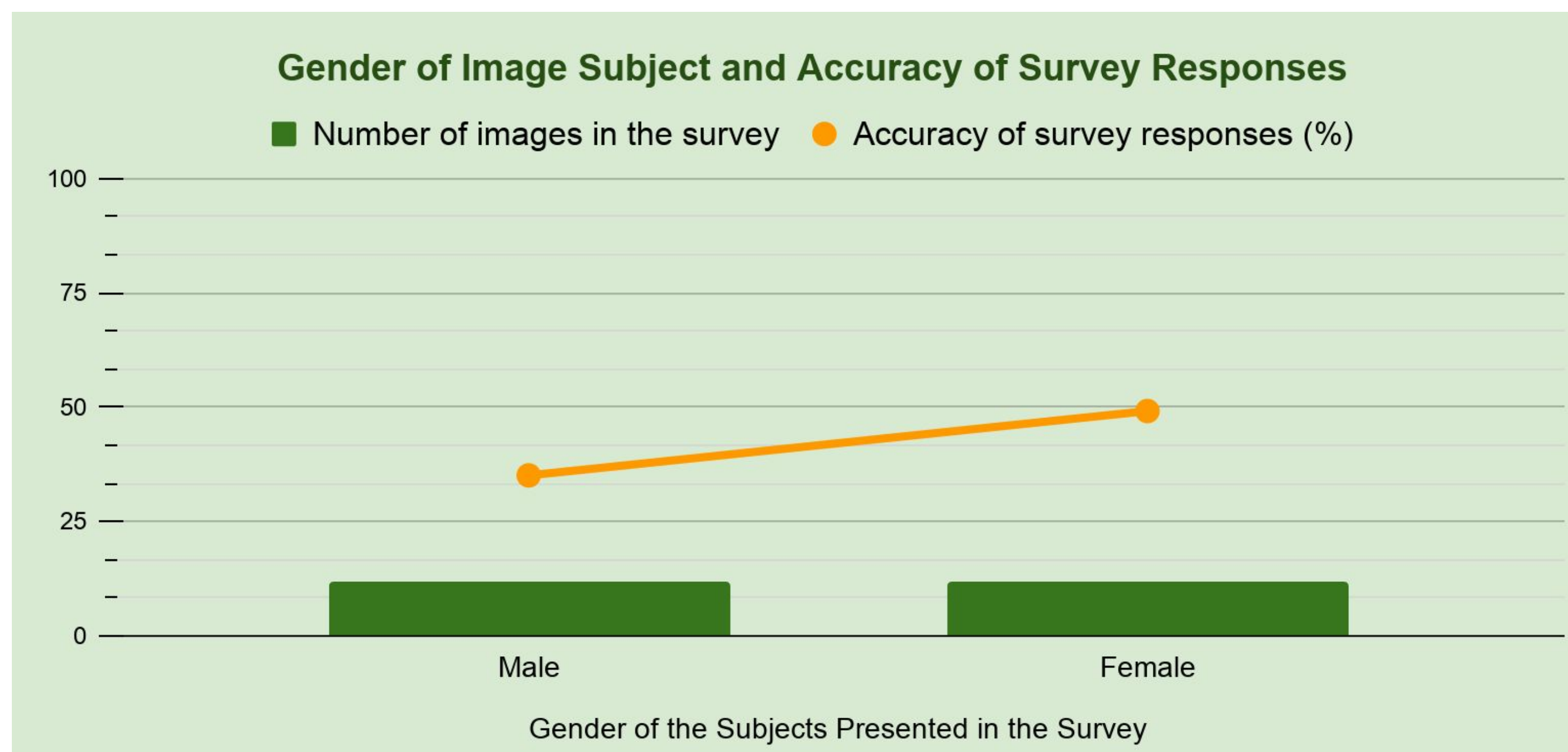
★ Literature Review

These articles primarily focused on women and girls, but there is also some research on men. Although not directly discussing people's perceptions of healthy bodies, the articles back up our research.



Image Credits Top Left to Bottom Right: UFC, Jackson Lee Photos, NewsEN, Marvel Studios, @adriennebailon on Instagram

Results



Discussion and Conclusion

A study conducted by the Flinders University of South Australia in 2005 included 1,452 high school-aged participants and found that young women had higher rates of internalization and a lower weight satisfaction while young men strived for high levels of muscularity. Although there are differences in how males and females are exposed to and perceive TV and cinema, how they internalize and behave in response to viewing idealized bodies in the media they consume.

Our survey of 63 individuals shows that a person's demographics highly influence if they are seen as healthy. Survey participants were much more effective at correctly identifying healthy and unhealthy women and Black people than any other demographic. The most inaccurate perceptions of people's health were from images of people with more extreme body types such as visibly defined muscles and high body fat.

Interestingly, the demographics of the survey participants themselves did not have a noticeable impact on their accuracy for determining the health of others. All demographics watched a lot of tv and movies, and all but three participants use social media every day.

Selected References

Tiggemann, Marika. "Television and Adolescent Body Image: The Role of Program Content and Viewing Motivation." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2005, pp. 361-381., doi:<https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.24.3.361.65623>.

Grabe, S., Ward, L. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2008). The role of the media in body image concerns among women: A meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(3), 460-476. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.3.460>

Scan here to view the survey:

