

Social Media and Fahrenheit 451: They have a lot in common

What if I were to say to you, “Adolescent girls who look at photos of thin fashion models tend to show greater body dissatisfaction than adults.” Your response might be along the lines of mine: “Well, duh.”



As referenced in my list, Shaw (1995) did a study and found this to be the case. If this was the case 30 years ago, what is going on now, in the social media age? Well, what is old is new again. What is different about the Internet versus magazines? For my purposes, I'll use “analog vs. digital.” Analog was harder to come by and had to be actively sought out. If you didn't want to see fashion magazines, you didn't buy them or look at them in stores. Even TV was not the same experience for me - I didn't have a TV in my room when I was growing up. I reflect on my childhood and my children's childhoods and I know they are significantly different from mine, yet it's difficult to quantify. I am definitely biased and want to be careful in what I write, but overall, so much of what I casually read links back to limiting screen time for people of all ages – ourselves included, as we should be modeling this behavior for our kids. Where we spend our own time will reflect back on our families and friends. Using technology as a tool and refusing to be overwhelmed by it is vital for adults and especially important for young, growing minds.

Remember as well, the reality that the digital world is the real world now. Our brains can be fooled so easily! Even without a ton of high tech wizardry, the online spaces provided by video games, chat rooms, comment sections, and social media are the NEW NEIGHBORHOOD for many people. There's no age limit to this either, but of course, younger people are more likely to be in these spaces than older people, since the young are generally more familiar with the tech needed to enter these spaces.



<https://goldenchamber.org/digital-neighborhoods-your-map-to-social-marketing/>

Please be careful about generalizing too much, though! That's a quick way to get yourself in trouble!

An article titled, “Does the Internet function like magazines?” (2012) looked at female undergraduates’ use of the Internet and eating disorder behaviors and attitudes. At that time, “Undergraduate women spent significantly more time viewing online appearance-oriented media, rather than reading image-focused magazines. Appearance-oriented Internet and television use were associated with eating pathology.” This serves to highlight “the vulnerability individuals high in thin-ideal internalization might have to media exposure. They also suggest that Internet media use is an important topic to attend to in eating disorders prevention and treatment.”



To reiterate, “**Appearance-oriented Internet and television use were associated with eating pathology.**” This is in UNDERGRAD FEMALES – I’m assuming they are 18+. What does this do to people under 18? Under 12? People sitting in front of screens when they are 2 years old, temporarily pacified while guardian shops? Or is on a screen themselves? OMG I sound like an old lady. I guess I am, in many ways. To be clear, I am not referring to the times that screens are used as short-term “pacification,” as rewards for good behavior, or other mitigating circumstances. These times would fall under using technology as a tool rather than an all-consuming passion.

I am certainly not personally judging others for their use of screen time with kids under 15. I don’t know what the circumstances were that led to screen time, but when cars, refrigerators, and other appliances are being built with screens and Internet connectivity, how far are we going?

“Today’s science fiction is tomorrow’s science fact.” I guess I can look to Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 541,” first published in 1953 for my own answers. In the beginning of the book, Montag’s wife, Mildred, is talking about their “TV room,” then envisioned as an ENTIRE ROOM THAT IS IMMERSIVE SCREENS. She is a little peeved because they have not been able to finish the room - they only have 3 screens on the walls - the fourth is plain. She is not immersed in her shows and wants to know when they can buy the 4th screen. Also, she can “participate” as a character in the shows, as she can get a script mailed to her and talk at the right time.



“Mildred's TV Parlor Is Almost Here”

<https://techcrunch.com/2011/02/08/mildreds-tv-parlor-is-almost-here/>

Where have I seen this before - I mean now? Oh. Right. Virtual reality headsets are here. Same thing, just smaller than envisioned over 60 YEARS AGO! The “oddball,” Clarice McClellan is the 17 year old who says, “I rarely watch the ‘parlor walls’ or go to races or Fun Parks. So I’ve lots of time for crazy thoughts.” When she meets Montag she also mentions, “My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. He drove forty miles an hour and they jailed him for two days. Isn’t that funny, and sad, too?” Remember, this was published in 1953. I have started to read more contemporary science fiction now, and am fascinated by much of it.

References:

Bair, C., Kelly, N., Serdar, K., Mazzeo, S. (2012). Does the Internet function like magazines? An exploration of image-focused media, eating pathology, and body dissatisfaction. Abstract Permalink: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2012.06.003>.

Shaw, J. (1995). Effects of fashion magazines on body dissatisfaction and eating psychopathology in adolescent and adult females. Abstract PermaLink: <https://doi.org/10.1002/erv.2400030105>.