

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Background and Rationale

With the recent hospitalization of Mary-Kate Olsen (an American TV series young actress) in having anorexia nervosa, the public is starting to examine this widespread phenomenon. The world has lost many talented women to eating disorders including Boston Ballet dancer Heidi Guenther, Olympic gymnast Christy Henrich and singer Karen Carpenter, even in Thailand, Marisa Horn admitted to the public in her book that she suffered from bulimia nervosa (Marisa Horn, 2004). What are eating disorders? and Why eating disorders are such a problem to the people who seem to already have a perfect body image and excellent talent that could be seen on television?

According to the International Classification of Disease – 10th Edition (ICD-10; World Health Organization [WHO], 1992), eating disorders are divided into three major types: (1) compulsive overeating, (2) anorexia nervosa, and (3) bulimia nervosa. Eating disorders are mental disorders characterized by clinical disturbances in body image and eating behaviors (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). For instance, patients with compulsive overeating have a strong psychological craving for food that results in uncontrollable eating habits, such as continuous nibbling and/or binge eating. These

eating habits then lead them to have increased feelings of guilt, shame, withdrawal, and/or self deprecation. Patients who suffer from anorexia nervosa perceive themselves as being fat even when they are thin or emaciated. They are will to starve themselves in the pursuit of their ideal perception of physical slenderness and are unwilling to heed warnings regarding the health risks and dangers of being underweight (at least 15 percent below the individual's normal body weight) and have a morbid fear of weight gain with the relentless pursuit of thinness. Finally, patients with bulimia nervosa (unlike those with anorexia) tend to consume a large amount of food, but then try to get rid of the excess calories from their bodies by using various measures such as vomiting, abusing laxatives or diuretics, taking enemas, or exercising obsessively. Like people with anorexia, people with bulimia have an intense fear of gaining weight (APA, 2000).

Every year, millions of people around the world are afflicted by serious and life-threatening eating disorders (Crowther et al., 1992; Fairburn et al., 1993; Gordon, 1990; Hoek, 1995; Shisslak et al., 1995). The vast majority (more than 90 percent) of those suffered by eating disorders are adolescents and young adult women (Hsu, 1996; Gidwani, 1997; Gilchrist, 1998; Hay, 1998; ANAD, 2000). The consequences of eating disorders can be fatal. For example, between 5-20% of individuals who struggle with anorexia nervosa eventually die. The probabilities of death increase within that range depending on the length of the condition (Zerbe, 1995). Sullivan (1995) also found that the mortality rate among people with anorexia (at 5.6% per decade) could be 12 times higher than the general population mortality rate of females aged 15-24. Herzog and Copeland (1985) stated that eating disorders usually persist into adulthood and often

stands as the highest death rates of any mental disorders. Moreover, another study of a group of American college students found that 21.6% of females classified with eating disorders while in college were still found to have eating disorders when re-studied 10 years later (Heatherton et al., 1997). Keel et al. (1999) also found in their study that out of those who suffered from anorexia or bulimia, about half had a full recovery, 30% had a partial recovery, and 20% had no substantial improvement. Given such findings, the World Health Organization suggested in the WHO European Ministerial Conference 2005 at Helsinki, Finland, that eating disorders must be considered as disorders with lifelong consequences (WHO, 2005).

Body image distortions are clearly seen in people who suffered from eating disorders (Thompson & Smolak, 2002). Body image problems are associated with the use of weight control techniques, including dieting and compulsive exercising, which may have negative effects among female adolescents and adults both in the short and long term (Davis & Kenedy et al., 1994; Davis & Apley et al., 1978; Shisslak et al., 1998; Stice et al., 1999). For instance, much research has shown a prevalence of eating disorders among Western female adolescents. Among the group of 9 and 10 year-old girls, 51% felt better about themselves when they were on a diet (Mellin et al., 1991) and 46% stated that they “sometimes” or “very often” were on diets (Gustafson-Larson & Terry, 1992). Many studies involving older women, like the study on recently surveyed has shown that 91% of college women on campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting, 22% stated that they diet “often” or “always” (Kurth et al., 1995). Shisslak & Crago (1995) found that 35% were “normal dieters” who progressed to be

pathological dieters, 20-25% were those who further progressed to a partial or a full-syndrome eating disorder. Western magazine articles surveyed from 1959 to 1988, indicated an overall increase in the emphasis on weight reduction (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). A significant rise in the proportion of diet, exercise and diet/exercise articles was found, and from 1981, the number of exercise articles featured surpassed the number of diet articles. The ratio of diet food advertisements in 48 issues of women's and men's magazines was 63:1 (Silverstein et al., 1986), which proved that there is a demand for this type of article. It is likely that magazines will increase articles on dieting and exercise, and women will continue to buy the magazines, experiment with suggested diets and exercise programs in an attempt to improve their body images. Many studies also indicated that people, especially women, are dissatisfied with their body shapes or weights. For examples, 33% of the girls and 17% of the boys in Gustafson-Larson and Terry's (1992) sample age 9- to 11-year-olds were "very often" worried about being fat, 42% of 1st-3rd grade American girls wanted to be thinner (Collins, 1991), and 81% of 10 years old children were afraid of being fat (Mellin et al., 1991). It is interesting to note that according to Smolak's book (1996), 80% of American women were dissatisfied with their appearances.

Negative attitudes about the body and disordered eating behaviors have been associated adult men and women who have low self-esteem among adult men and women (Brenner & Cunningham, 1992; Mintz & Betz, 1986), and among adolescent boys and girls (Fox, Page, Armstrong & Kirby, 1994). However, the relationship tends to be stronger for females of all ages. William et al. (1993) also found that patients who

suffered from eating disorders reported significantly lower self-esteem than non-clinical dieters, and concluded that poor self-esteem is a trait of anorexia and bulimia nervosa.

Perceptions of female bodies are filtered through a number of normative images presented in the media. These 'public' and normative body images define ideals of beauty, health and fitness (McDermott, 1996). Objective indices of normal or healthy ranges often fail to influence how people judge their own bodies. People tend to be much more influenced by the values of extreme subgroups, such as fashion models and sports people (McDermott, 1996). It is clear that the influence of the media and the way in which it idolizes movie stars, models and sportsmen affect the average person's view of what is attractive. These celebrities hold a very small percentage of the general population and yet the general population wants to be like these few. It is interesting to note here that most fashion models are thinner than 98% of normal women (Smolak, 1996). Hence, the media is unarguably responsible for people's dissatisfaction in their body image as the ideal in the media is often too high for people to obtain and thus, many choose unhealthy eating behaviors and habits as their options.

From early childhood, boys and girls are exposed to representations of body stereotypes through many psychosocial influences. Toys, movie stars, fashion models, dancers and sporting heroes represent a glamorous association with particular body types. The media has been accused of perpetuating different standards of attractiveness for men and women. Women portrayed in television are slimmer than men (Markula, 1995). Female movie stars and magazine models have progressively become thinner (Silverstein

et al., 1986). A study of television role models revealed that 69% of the females were rated as thin in comparison to 18 percent of the males (Silverstein et al., 1986). Anthropometric measurements of display mannequins from the 1920s through to the 1960s determined that they have generally become thinner over time and given the relationship between extremes in leanness and menstrual dysfunction, it was also suggested that women with the same shape would be unlikely to menstruate (Rintala & Mustajoki, 1992). Perhaps these mannequins have been instrumental in presenting unnatural extremes for women. Brenner and Cunningham (1992) reported that the heights of a sample of New York fashion models were significantly (9%) greater than those of average young women, their weights were significantly (16%) lower than average. A disconcerting 73 % of them were below the lower limits of recommended age matched weight. A significant shift to a thinner ideal has been traced through the changes in mass, hip girth, and bust-to-waist ratio of centerfolds and beauty-pageant contestants (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz & Thompson, 1980). By 1988, this index of women's 'ideal' body weight was 13-19 percent below that expected for age and height (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann & Aherns, 1992). This weight range included as one of the criteria for anorexia nervosa recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (15 percent below expected weight).

In Asia, the trend of 'thinness-is-beauty' has gained its popularity over the years. One of the study reported an explanation for how eating disorders has developed in Japan is the social pressure resulting from the standards of female beauty imposed by modern industrial society or Western culture (Kiriike et al., 1988). The increasing globalization

and exposure to Western media has been suggested to increase the rate of eating disorders in Asian countries. In Thailand, Somsong Somkuanhet (1998) studied 200 persons who perceived themselves as overweight and used self-weight reduction method in Bangkok. The investigation found that 51% had 'normal-to-thin' BMI before controlling of their weight, 49% thought that being overweight results in a loss of 'beauty' and 'personality', 43% wanted to lose weight for beauty reason more than health. Siwaporn Udomsin (1998) also found that 64.7% of persons who used services of weight reduction centers in Bangkok had normal BMI, and 83.3% wanted to lose weight for personality reasons.

Fashion models, movie stars, and entertainment/media personnel are obviously suffering from body- image disturbance or eating disorders. Unlike people who are not working on media industry, the entertainment/media personnel who has, or is predisposed to have, an eating disorder, demand an ideal body size, shape and weight (Cash, 1996). This ideal often involves losing weight or body fat, which can precipitate an eating disorder in ones who are predisposed to develop eating disorders or can exacerbate existing disorders (Cash, 1996).

In present, there exists no study on relationships between body image and eating disorder, which deals exclusively with Thai women who work in entertainment/media industry, especially movie and soap opera TV actresses. Thus, the problem statement of this study inquires whether correlation exists between perceived and observed body image, and disturbed eating behaviors in Thai soap opera TV actresses.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the level of body image satisfaction and level of eating disorder of Thai soap opera TV actresses?
2. What is the association between disordered eating behaviors and body image satisfaction of Thai soap opera TV actresses?
3. How do socio-demographic factors affect the actresses' body image satisfaction level and eating behaviors?

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General objective

To investigate body image satisfaction levels and disordered eating behaviors among Thai soap opera TV actresses.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

1. To measure the level of body image satisfaction and level of eating disorder behavior among Thai soap opera TV actresses.
2. To identify associations between body image satisfaction and disordered eating behavior among Thai soap opera TV actresses.
3. To measure how socio-demographic factors may affect actresses' body image satisfaction and eating behavior.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

1. The actresses' satisfaction toward their body image is moderate to low, while the degree of disordered eating behavior is high.
2. The degree of disordered eating behavior in Thai actresses increase with lower body image satisfaction.
3. The type of acting roles played and frequency of work received have an effect on body image satisfaction and disordered eating behavior of Thai actresses, specifically
 - a. Actresses in leading roles are more susceptible to lower body image satisfaction and/or disordered eating behavior
 - b. Actresses with higher frequency of work are more susceptible to lower body image satisfaction and/or disordered eating behavior
4. Socio-demographic factors have an effect on body image satisfaction and disordered eating behavior of Thai actresses, specifically
 - a. Younger actresses are more susceptible to lower body image satisfaction and/or disordered eating behavior
 - b. Actresses with higher income/wealth are more susceptible to lower body image satisfaction and/or disordered eating behavior
 - c. Actresses without children are more susceptible to lower body image satisfaction and/or disordered eating behavior

1.5 Terminology and Operational Definitions

Thai actress

Refers to Thai actress ages between 14 to 49 years old, who played in soap operas which on-aired in Thai free TV during year 2001 to 2005.

Soap opera TV

A soap opera is an ongoing, episodic work of fiction, usually broadcast on television or radio and most recently on mobile phones. This genre of TV and radio entertainment has existed long enough for audiences to recognize them simply by the term soap. What differentiates a soap from other television drama programs is their open-ended nature. Plots run concurrently, and lead into further developments. An individual episode of a soap opera will generally switch between several different concurrent story threads that may at times interconnect and affect one another, or may run entirely independent of each another. Each episode may feature some of the show's current storylines but not always all of them. There is some rotation of both storylines and actors so any given storyline or actor will appear in some but usually not all of a week's worth of episodes. Soap operas rarely "wrap things up" storywise, and generally avoid bringing all the current storylines to a conclusion at the same time. When one storyline ends there are always several other story threads at differing stages of development. Soap opera episodes invariably end on some sort of cliffhanger.

Body image satisfaction

Refers to an individual's perception of their own body. A personal evaluation of what the individual self is physically and biologically. Body image also involves evaluating oneself against others and/or images (Pearce, 1993). In this study the level of body image satisfaction can be measure based on Body Mass Index (BMI), Body Shape Questionnaires (BSQ; Cooper et al., 1987), and Figure Rating Scale (FRS; Fallon & Rozin, 1985).

Disordered eating behaviors

Refers to utilizing unhealthy eating behaviors such as fasting, cutting out certain foods or conducting vomit in an attempt to lose weight. In this study, eating behavior is categorized into 2 levels of severity, which are normal, and subclinical eating disorder. The degree of eating disorder behavior can be measure based on Eating Attitude Test (EAT-26; Garner, Olmstead, Bohr, & Garfinkel, 1982)

Body Mass Index (BMI)

The body mass index (BMI) or Quetelet Index is a measure of the weight of a person scaled according to height. It is used as a simple means of classifying sedentary individuals according to their body fat content. As a rough guideline for Asian adults, a BMI of less than 18.5 implies underweight, over 23 is overweight, and over 25 is obese. It is calculated by taking the weight of the individual in kilograms and dividing by the square of the height in metres.

Socio-demographic factors

Refers to factors related to social and demographic data of the population. In this study, the socio-demographic factors consist of age, education level, ethnicity, marital status, and maternal status.

Playing roles

In this research a playing role refers to importance of role that each actress played during the past one year. Playing roles can be categorized into 4 categories, which are

- Main - plays the role of the protagonist in a play. The word main may also refer to the largest role in the piece.
- Main support - plays a secondary lead or supporting role, usually a love interest, to the leading actors in a play.
- Support – plays a supporting acting role with at least one line of dialogue.
- Extra – plays no role or purpose other than to appear in the background of the play.

Characters of the role

In this study a character of the role refers to character that unusually appears in the role each actress played during the past one year. Characters of the role can be categorized into 4 categories, which are 'Polite', 'Mean', 'Childish/Tomboy', and 'Funny' characters.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.1. Research variables, both dependence and independence, are included in Figure 1.1.

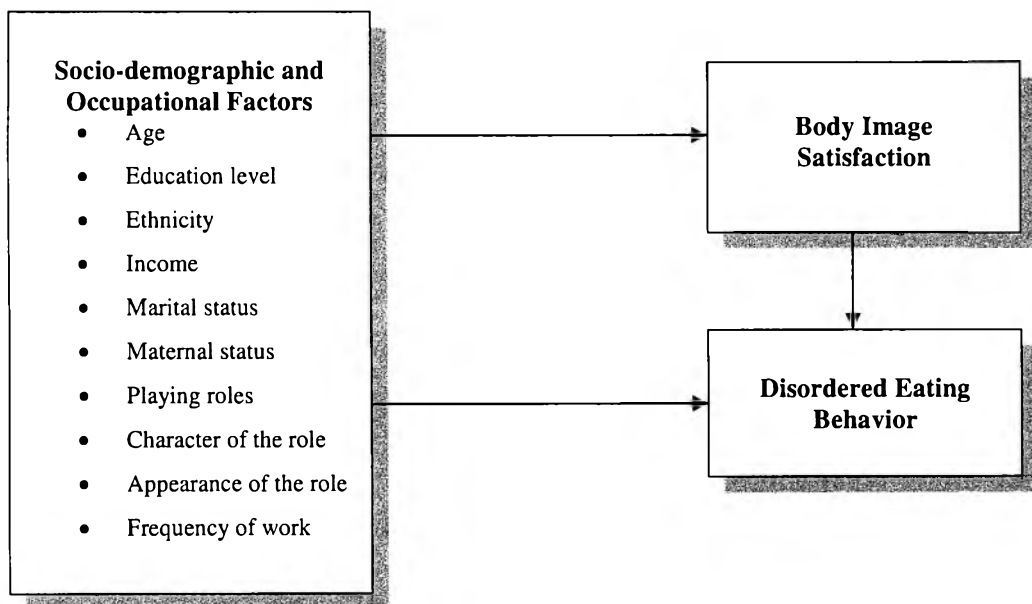


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework of the research

1.7 Expected Outcome and Benefits

The results of this study can be used as a guideline in dealing with disordered or improper eating behaviors problem in Thai soap opera TV actresses associated with body image disturbance, which consequently can be reduce severity of problems associated with social perception of female bodies.