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**“I WISH I LOOKED LIKE HER”: THE ENDLESS PURSUIT FOR THE IDEAL  
BODY**

by  
Ebony M. Cox

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Psychology  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
at  
Rowan University  
May 3, 2011

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff

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## **Dedication**

*I would like to dedicate this manuscript to every woman who has fought to define beauty for herself.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank God, without you nothing would be possible.

I would like to thank Dr. Dihoff and Dr. Klanderman for helping me establish this thesis paper. I also would like to thank my family for walking with me through this journey.

## **Abstract**

Ebony Cox

“I WISH I LOOKED LIKE HER”: THE ENDLESS PURSUIT FOR THE IDEAL BODY  
2010/11

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Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the influence that images of models in beauty and fashion magazines had on women’s body image satisfaction. Participants were 23 college women. They were randomly assigned to two experimental conditions: ten women were assigned to the fashion magazine group and the remaining thirteen were assigned to the non-fashion magazine group. A fifty-eight item questionnaire was used to assess overall body image satisfaction, appearance concerns, dieting and eating behaviors, and thinness ideals between participants who were exposed to depictions of models in fashion magazines and those who were not. It was hypothesized that those exposed to images of women in beauty and fashion magazines would be: less satisfied with their overall body type, less satisfied with their appearance, favor a thinner body type, and show more of a concern with dieting and exercise.

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## Chapter One Introduction

For many women the mirror is their worst enemy. Many women find that they never seem to measure up to the idealized images of the “perfect body” that has been branded onto the walls of their minds. Often it is the insecurities within that cause the distortion those women see when they look at their reflection. They are psychologically beaten down by repeated exposures of the “ideal beauty” that has been reflected in the mirror of our media driven society. Many women internalize these fantasized ideals of what is beautiful and they compare that to their realities and often become dissatisfied with their inability to meet those standards. The pressure for some women is so exorbitant that they become slaves to the pursuit of society’s standard of beauty. The desire or need to feel beautiful is not the issue, rather the issue is that many women have blindly accepted society’s definition of it. They have inadvertently relinquished their rights to define beauty for themselves.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/PUPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper aspires to analyze the direct influence that images of models in beauty and fashion magazines have on women’s own body image satisfaction. Specifically, their appearance concerns, dieting and exercise behaviors, and thinness ideals.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because many women struggle with constructing their *own* definition of beauty. Many women are so consumed in this media-driven society that perpetuates these idealized images of what is beautiful that their ability to define beauty for themselves becomes choked out by society’s deceptive and distorted ideals. Visual



forms of media like beauty and fashion magazines present this utopia that seeks and is sought out by women whose insecurities are often stroked by the pages of these magazines that sweetly convey, *“If you want to be beautiful try this...”* For many women this desire to feel beautiful becomes this endless pursuit for perfection. It is essential to understand the influence that beauty and fashion magazines have on women’s own body perceptions.

## HYPOTHESIS

It was hypothesized that exposure to beauty and fashion magazines would have an adverse effect on women’s body perceptions. Those who viewed fashion and beauty magazines would be: (1) less satisfied with their bodies (2) prefer a thinner body type (3) be less satisfied with their appearance (4) show more of a fixation with dieting and exercise behaviors.

## BACKGROUND: “THIN WAS NOT ALWAYS IN”

The examination of the adaptation of the “ideal beauty” in magazines over the years may give us insight into the formulation of the current beauty ideal and its effects on women’s body satisfaction.

## EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY:

Charles Dana Gibson appealed to the minds of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in that he created pictorial illustrations that would redefine the “ideal beauty”. She was the essence of feminine beauty for women and the element of desire for men. The “Gibson Girl” statuesque physique was slender in nature with voluptuous hips and bust that were gracefully enhanced by corseting. She was often depicted wearing her hair on the top of her head in a chignon. Her independent nature was rather alluring for her time. After the

Great War ended, the “ideal body” of the 1920’s shifted and became curveless in nature, almost boy-like. The wasp waisted corset, now abandoned, was replaced by foundation garments that flattened the silhouette (Caldwell, 1981; Mazur, 1986).

### *1920’s*

One feature that transitioned into the era of the “new women” was her desire for independence. The flappers in the 1920’s found freedom in their short hemlines and innovative style. The style of the flappers no longer showed the curves of the female body, it accentuated the figure of the flat-chested, small hipped androgynous who has come to typify the freewheeling, emancipated, working “new women” (Makela, 2000).

Although they may have lacked the feminine ideals of the past, they were still considered beautiful in nature. Despite its reputation, the flapper era ended around the time of the great depression.

### *1930’s - 1940’s*

The pin-up girls of the 1930’s and 1940’s in men’s magazines gave rise to the eroticism of the female body. These idealized women became objects of male fantasy. Her Gibson trim waist flows into slim hips, a small rear, and taut abdomen, reflecting the new flat stomach fashions (Probert, 1981; Mazur, 1986). Pin-up girls like Betty Garble and Ava Gardner emphasized this ideal and made the slender physique and exposed legs a symbol of desire. The “ideal body” of this time reverted back to a more feminized standard of beauty; ample bust and slim hips.

### *1950s and 1960s*

The 1950’s featured the “voluptuous” beauty, resembling the era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose sensuality and curvaceousness made her alluring to the eye. Women like

Grace Kelly mirrored a quiet sophistication that made them figures in the fashion world. They symbolized a subdued and classy sensuality, often associated with the aristocrat and high fashion, rather than the “earthy” sexuality of Monroe or Sophia Loren (Mazur, 1986). Although thinness was not a focal point of the era, its messages still lingered. Seventeen magazine began publication in 1944 to target teens. By 1948, it was publishing articles on dieting and the importance of looking attractive (Smolin & Grosvenor, 2005). In the 1960’s thinness was the silhouette of the feminine ideal. It was during this era that the pressure of slenderization began to manifest through fashion and its magazines. Curvaceousness was replaced by the androgynous, boy-like figures of the 20’s. Slenderness became the ruler by which physical attractiveness was measured. It was in this era that the “thin ideal” began to permeate through the masses.

#### LATE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the desire to embody this “thin ideal” consumed many women. As the increase in dieting and fitness methods became more pronounced in western society so did the messages that they conveyed. Cultural pressure to conform to the slim-hipped ideal was probably unprecedented with its agents being growing media, entertainment, advertising, fashion, and retail industry (Mazur, 1986). There was a growing pressure to emulate what was deemed “attractive”. Surveys conducted throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s showed that more than half of the American women questioned expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies especially their weight (Sherrow, 2001). Many women have a distorted image of themselves and their dissatisfaction with what they see when they look in the mirror may have a lot to do with the messages that they digest.

## DEFINITIONS

*Ideal Body:* the concept of the “ideal Body’ has changed throughout history. Depictions of the ideal body represent what society deems to be most attractive for that time.

*Body Image:* Ones perceptions about his or her own body and appearance. Thoughts about his/her own body can be influenced by many variables including how they see themselves in relation to others. Garner (1981) defined body image to include both a self-perceptual component of what we think we see in size, shape, weight, feature, movement, and performance, and an attitudinal and affective component of how we feel about those attributes and how our feeling motivate certain behaviors (Forrest & Stuhldreher, 2007)

*Body Dissatisfaction:*

This refers to the state of being unhappy with one’s size, shape, weight, or appearance of their body.

## LIMITATIONS

There are multiple limitations to this study. First, the exposure to images of women in fashion magazines is only one variable and may not be the sole determinate in subjects’ perceptions of their own bodies. Second, the data is limited to a smaller sample population; generalization could be stronger if a larger randomly-sampled population was used. Third, sample population may be limited in ethnic diversity and therefore, generalizations may not accurately represent other cultures.

## SUMMARY

Women are consistently barraged by media driven messages, specifically beauty and fashion magazines, which perpetuate insurmountable standards of beauty. We dwell within a culture where a woman's worth is dependent upon the measurement of her waist. The beauty of a woman no longer extends past her external features, her body defines her. Chapter II will review the literature of other research that has examined women's body image satisfaction and its relationship to the media's portrayal of women in beauty and fashion magazines.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

Many women feel an enduring pressure to fulfill society's standard of beauty. Beauty and fashion magazines propagate these unrealistic and insurmountable standards of beauty that have masqueraded as society's normalized ideals. As socio-cultural theory highlights, unrealistic standards of beauty often become a comparison point against women's own evaluation of their physical attractiveness (Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010). This literature review will examine the relational influence that beauty and fashion magazines have on women's body image satisfaction, appearance concerns, dieting and eating behaviors, thinness ideals, and their fears of "fatness".

### BODY IMAGE SATISFACTION

Body dissatisfaction has become a cultural norm for girls and women, a norm that ranges from mild dislike to contempt and even loathing (Levine, 1996; Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999). Prospective longitudinal studies confirm that dissatisfaction with one's body, or negative body image, can be understood as one of the most consistent and significant precursors of negative self-perception, negative emotional states, and healthy body-related behaviors (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Dittmar, 2009). These unrealistic standards of beauty have permeated through our society with such authority that we have inadvertently accepted them as normalized ideals. At the core of body dissatisfaction is a discrepancy between a person's ideal body, and their perceptions of their own body (Greaves, 1994; Glauert, Rhodes, Fink, & Grammer, 2010). Women are in a distinctive period in history where loving their bodies becomes a struggle in our self-absorbed media driven society. Chow (2003) studied adolescent females and their perceptions of teen magazines and found that viewing images of the ideal causes many young women begin

to think about their own bodies in comparison to the ideal. Two girls describe their experience as such:

*A: "And yet then they put a picture of this perfect girl that looks wonderful and everyone wants that kind of body but it's making you love her body not your own".*

*B: "Such a stupid thing, how to love your own body. Yeah, I wish! Does anyone really love their body? I mean she probably doesn't. She probably thinks she's ugly to.*

These fashion and beauty magazines psychologically batter women with their definitions of what it means to be beautiful. There is such an emphasis placed on women's outward construction that images of models become like stimuli that elicit emotional responses in those exposed to them. Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel, Stuckless (1998) examined the changes in mood states of 118 college females after viewing models that exemplify the thin ideal. They found that women felt angrier and more depressed after viewing idealized body images. Research has shown that fashion and beauty magazines do, in fact, influence women's body image satisfaction. Exposure to media-portrayed idealized images focuses attention on the body, and encourages scrutiny of the acceptability of its shape and size (Kilbourne, 1994; Myers & Biocca, 1992; Monro & Huon, 2005). Turner, Hamilton, Jacobs, Angood, & Dwyer (1997) desired to assess whether the visual portrayals of women in fashion magazines induced negative assessments of women's own bodies. They studied 49 college females and found that women who viewed fashion magazines desired to weigh less, were less satisfied with their bodies, were more frustrated with their weight, were more concerned with the desire to be thin, and were afraid of getting fat as compared to those who viewed new magazines. It has been implicated through research that the media is a contributor in the

development and maintenance of body image disturbance and eating dysfunction in women through the conveyance of thinness-oriented norms and values (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, Tantleff-Dunn, 1999; Sypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004).

## THIN IDEAL

### *Internalization:*

Thin ideal internalization is a psychological process that emerges when women assimilate the thin-ideal and its associated standards into their worldview, and executes particular behaviors to approximate towards these ideals (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Woud, Anschutz, Strien, & Becker, 2010). What do magazine cover messages like: “Best Body Ever! Get Pretty Faster, look taller, leaner, curvier without working out” (Seventeen, Nov issue 2010) reveal to young women? Messages like these not only cultivate women’s desire to be instantly gratified but they supply women with a biased definition of what it means to be beautiful and good enough. Chang, Liou, Sheu, & Chen (2004) investigated the experiences of young women who thought they were overweight and one woman expressed her concern in this way:

*“I always wondered why I seek weight reduction for beauty. I tried to lose weight to make myself more beautiful. I often watched female stars on television and they were all very skinny and attractive in their beautiful attire.”*

When women internalize these images and messages within society a psychological process begins to take place. Many women become oppressed by their own thought processes that are often cultivated by exposure to idealized body images in the media. Thin ideal internalization is a particularly potent contributor to negative self-views because the ideal is nearly impossible to achieve (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Darlow &



Lobel, 2010). Its thoughts like, “I have fat jumbo thighs, I wish I had her legs”, “ My arms are so flabby, I wish I could just cut all this excess off” or “ I would be a lot prettier if I just lost just ten more pounds” that make women active participants in their own oppression. Recent research has explored the internalization of the thin ideal, transmitted through popular media and strengthened through social reinforcement, as a potential risk factor for eating and body image concerns (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Heinberg, Thompson, & Stormer, 1995; Thompson & Stice, 2001; Low et al., 2003) . Dittmar, Halliwell, and Stirling (2009) aimed to further understand the impact that thin media models have on women’s body image. They examined 87 women. 41 women were exposed to ultra-thin models and 46 saw control advertisements. They found that those who had internalized the thin ideal reported significantly higher body-focused negative effect after the exposure to thin models compared to the control condition. The results also revealed that there was no effect for non-internalizers. This suggests that there may be more of an importance placed on thinness for those who have adopted society’s ideal beauty standards.

In accordance with Dittmar, Halliwell, & Stirling (2009), Ahern, Bennett, & Hetherington (2008) studied 99 college females to examine whether underweight models influence young women’s drive for thinness. They found that participants labeled many underweight images as “normal weight” which suggests that young women are adopting these normalized ideals of thinness presented in the media. This supports the observation that two of the images of normal weight women were consistently labeled as “overweight”. Hawkins, Richards, Granelly, Stein (2004) also found in their study that women who were exposed to idealized body images reported increased body

dissatisfaction and a variety of negative emotions. Brown & Dittmar (2005) exposed seventy-five women to either neutral advertisements (no models) or to thin models' at either a high or low processing level. They found that the appearance of thin models increased body-focused anxiety for those that had a strong sense of thin-ideal internalization, but body-focused anxiety was further heightened under conditions of high attention. Women are taught to view their bodies from the outside, as if they were commodities, which cause distortion of body image and a disjuncture from our own bodies, which are objectified and continually monitored for faults (Orbach, 1993; Grogan & Wainwright, 1996).

*Social Comparison:*

A young woman views a cute and trendy bikini on a magazine model and pictures herself on the beach, hair blowing in the wind as she struts her stuff under the summer sun. Her thoughts bring her back to reality with a smile on her face wondering if she should go purchase that bathing suit. Not far from her is a young woman who might view that same image and think to herself "Wow she looks beautiful in that bathing suit, I wish I had her legs...If only my legs weren't so fat and disgusting". What is happening here are two different psychological processes of the same idealized image. It is important to note that not all women are negatively affected by the idealized images of women in fashion and beauty magazines. Tiggemann & Hargreaves (2009) concluded in their study that the nature of processing that women engage is crucial to the response to thin ideal images. They studied 144 women who viewed magazine advertisement containing either thin-ideal images or product images. They found that participants who compared themselves to thin images lead to greater negative mood and body

dissatisfaction, while fantasy processing was associated with positive mood. One issue that women have with their own perceptions of their bodies is that they are measuring themselves against this adopted standard of beauty and they often find that they fall short in their pursuits. Wilcox & Laird (2000) found that participants who were less responsive to their own personal cues and had viewed thin models were more confident about their own weight than those who viewed heavier pictures. However, those who were more responsive to personal cues were much less content with their weight after viewing thin models. Research has supported the notion that thin ideals in the media do in fact play a role in how women perceive their own bodies. However, this research delves into how women process these ideals and how their psychological processes influence how they perceive their own bodies.

*Self Enhancement:*

It is important to realize that not all women are negatively affected by idealized body images in the media or process those images in the same way as we have previously discussed. Wilcox and Laird (2000) proposed that only those who place an importance on body shape concerns compare themselves and in turn are more likely to negatively perceive their own bodies. Mills, Polivy, Herman, & Tiggemann (2002) suggested that viewing a beautiful model may act as a motivator for an individual, resulting in a positive shift in self-perception. The self-enhancement effect is interpreted as this manifestation of a fantasized projection of oneself into an idealized scenario (Joshi, Herman, & Polivy, 2003). Mills, Polivy, Herman & Tiggemann (2002) examined 98 female college students in Study 1 and found that restrained eaters ate significantly more after being shown idealized body images than those who viewed only plus size models or product ads.

Exposure to these images did not influence how they felt about themselves in terms of mood, body image, or self-esteem. In fact, they reported a thinner ideal body size and a thinner current body size following exposure. This study suggests that participants' vision of a thinner self disinhibited their restrictive eating practices. Joshi, Herman, & Polivy (2003) found in their study that those who were restrained eaters reported a more favorable self-image and social self-esteem after exposure to thin body images than after exposure to control advertisements. However, they did find that their appearance self-esteem was lower after exposure to thin body advertisements. The problem with these fantasized versions of self is that women are still disassociated with reality even though they may not necessarily perceive their own bodies as negatively as those who may engage in social comparisons, but it still may be problematic nonetheless.

#### DIETING AND EATING DISTURBANCES

Beauty and fashion magazines present this notion that “beauty rests on continuum and you could always stand to be thinner and look better”. It has been noted that because of weight concerns, “women are induced to strive toward a condition of ruddy cheeked emaciation” (Polivy & Herman, 1987; Chernyak & Lowe, 2010). In recent years, a tendency to internalize media messages regarding ideals for attractiveness has been suggested as one potential mediator between exposure to those messages and the development of eating and shape related disturbances (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson, Heinberg, 1999). What is interesting is that beauty and fashion magazines portray themselves as the “fairy Godmothers” to the Cinderellas’ of society; their presence claims to make women feel beautiful. In reality they feed off of the insecurities of many women who search the pages of their magazines internalizing insurmountable standards of beauty. Specifically, it is believed that reading beauty and fashion magazines

leads many young women to internalize and embrace the socio-cultural “thin ideal” and, in turn, motivates them to attain it, sometimes through pathogenic practices (Thomsen, Weber, & Brown, 2002).

Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw & Stein (1994) studied 238 college women to assess the relationship of media exposure (i.e. magazines and television shows) to eating disorder symptoms. They revealed a significant influence of media consumption on eating disorder symptomology. They found that the internalization of these idealized body images predicted increased body dissatisfaction, which was related to heightened eating disorder symptoms. Grogan, Williams, & Conner (1996) examined how body-esteem is influenced by idealized body images that are normalized in women’s fashion and beauty magazines. Their study aspired to investigate the effect that viewing same-gendered photographic models had on women and men’s body-esteem. They found that women scored significantly lower on body-esteem which may insinuate that women are often less satisfied with their bodies than men. In addition, both men and women showed a significant decrease in body-esteem as compared to the control groups who displayed no significant change.

Women buy into this socially constructed pre-packaged image of this “thin ideal” that cultivates this self-absorbed obsession with trying to be a mirrored image of what they see among the pages of these fashion and beauty magazines. Obsession with the body reflects “mindless narcissism, unproductive self-absorption, and the media’s ongoing distortion of feminism to further their own misogynistic, profit-maximizing end” (Douglas, 1994; Bishop, 2001). Thomsen, McCoy, & William (2002) aspired to examine what motivates college women to read beauty and fashion magazines and to determine if

that desire is differentially related to the reading frequency of these magazines and to their level of anorexic risk. They found that college women's desire to lose weight, gain popularity, and improve oneself all predicted greater reading frequency and a higher anorexic risk or potential. Women are saturated in the superficiality of our culture. Many adopt these conceptually deformed standards of beauty, becoming slaves to this endless pursuit of the "ideal". Thomsen, McCoy, & William (2001) developed an in-depth study on 28 outpatients at an eating disorder facility to examine how beauty and fashion magazines impacted their lives. One participant recalled cutting out pictures in magazines when she was a sophomore in high school and she described her experience in this way:

*On my wall, I would cut out all the pictures of the models, you know, the stick thin models, the thinner the better, and put them on my wall. I'd cut them and pin them up on my wall just like a motivator. I'd think, "Those are the legs I want. Those are the arms I want." And I just filled my room up with that and that was my goal.*

One of the important issues that can be found in her experience is that this process of social comparison and her exhaustive pursuit of the "ideal" began in adolescence.

These thin-ideals permeate through the youngest of minds within our society. Pervasiveness of dieting in women of almost all ages in the U.S. society is commonly explained by current belief that thin is beautiful and good (Singh, 1993). Thomsen, Weber & Brown (2002) conducted a study examining 502 high school females and found that the most common dietary/weight control practices of female participants were restrictive food intake and taking diet pill which may be influenced by their consumption of beauty and fashion magazines. In addition, Shaw (1995) found that adolescent females displayed greater body dissatisfaction after exposure to fashion images than their

female adult counterparts.

## FEARING FAT

A woman's body is the battlefield where she fights for liberation (Greer, 1999; Young, 2005). Women not only war with this deformed representation of femininity in the media and magazines, but for many women they are their own antagonists'. Their true adversary is often a mirrored image of themselves. Women have bought into this socially constructed idea that their beauty is dependent upon the amount of fat content they possess. They "fear fat" simply because society says that they should. From society's standpoint "fat" is a women's proverbial kryptonite. Because women have pawned off their *own* definitions of beauty in exchange for the media and magazines deceptive messages, women find themselves consumed by their consciousness of "fatness". The narratives encircling fat women's bodies prompted by magazines are underachievement, unrealized potential, failure, the body as an incomplete project (Young, 2005). Therefore, out of their fear, women will spend the 1500 dollars in personal training sessions, lube their bodies with cellulite cream, pilates their way to thinness, and adopt the latest diet crazes all because society says, "whatever the cost, don't get fat". A woman's conflict with her body runs deeper than this "fat" issue. Her conflict is that she is searching for her worth in a society that defines it by the size of a her pants. It is commonly accepted that body image is a significant aspect of how women evaluate their self-worth (Eldredge, Wilson, & Whaley, 1990)

Today, being slim is more than a fashion; it is deeply rooted in social prejudice. A slender body represents social identity (Chang, Liou, Sheu, & Chen, 2004). For many women, their identities are created around the size and shape of their bodies. The media

and fashion magazines have ingrained this pathological fear of fatness (Robinson, Bacon, & Reilly, 1993,) into the female psyche. Woodman & Hemmings (2008) examined the ought, ideal, and feared body self of eighty-two participants (42 male, 40 female) as predictors of agitation (anxiety) and dejection related affects (happiness). They found that the feared body fat self played a significant role in women's affect than it did for men. Their results suggest that the importance of body fat is often an influential component in the relationship between women's body image and their affect. This "fear of fat" issue that women battle with is not only an influential component in understanding women's body image perceptions, but also the behaviors that are manifested to avoid becoming their "feared-fat self". Dalley & Buunk (2009) sought to examine whether weight-loss dieting behaviors in females were influenced by their desire to embody society's thinness standards, or to avoid becoming fat. They found that frequent weight-loss dieting behaviors were motivated by a desire to avoid an over-fat self, rather than by a desire to obtain the thin ideal. For many women, their fat defines them and distorts how they perceive themselves. Ben- Tovim, Walker, Murray, & Chin (1990) examined the relationship between body estimates and body attitudes in three studies. They found that dissatisfaction was clearly connected with estimates of body size, in that it was the subjects who felt strongly that they were too fat, and their bodies were a source of shame and stigma, who made larger estimates even though they were not actually larger than other participants.

This fear of fatness is not only an issue that plagues young women, but it infects the minds of adolescent females as well. Moses, Banilivy, & Lifshitz (1989) examined the perceptions concerning weight, dieting practices, and nutrition of 326 adolescent



girls and it was found that as many as fifty-one percent of the underweight adolescents reported extreme anxiety about being overweight and thirty-six percent were preoccupied with body fat.

#### SUMMARY

Research has implicated that exposure to thin ideal images does have an influence on women's body image satisfaction. There is such a fixation with trying to emulate the ideal body that many women are often boundless in what they will do to reach society's idealized standards of beauty. This research is significant in that it aids in understanding the relational complexity between beauty and fashion magazines and their influence on women's body image satisfaction.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not beauty and fashion magazines influence how women perceive their own bodies. Specifically, the influence that idealized images of women in fashion and beauty magazines have on women's body satisfaction. It was hypothesized that exposure to beauty and fashion magazines would have an adverse affect on women's body perceptions. Those who are exposed to thin-ideal images of women in beauty and fashion magazines would be: less satisfied with their overall body type, less satisfied with their appearance, favor a thinner body type, and show more of a concern with dieting and exercise.

### PARTICIPANTS/SUBJECTS

Participants were 23 college females who were enrolled at a university in New Jersey. Participants were randomly assigned to two experimental conditions: (n=10) were assigned to the fashion magazine group and (n=13) were assigned to the non-magazine group. There was no significant difference between height and weight between the two groups. Mean weight was 146.95 pounds and the mean height was 65.7 inches.

## METHOD

### *Materials*

Nine magazines were used for this study. They were selected based on the attractiveness of their content. Five magazines exhibited the fashion and beauty ideals that were popular among women: Elle (April, 2011), People (Style Watch, April 2011), Glamour (April, 2011), Lucky (April, 2011), and Life & Style (March, 2011). Five non-fashion magazines were used in: Time (March 2011), Psychology Today (April, 2011), Mental Floss (March/ April 2011), and AARP (September/October 2010). Non-fashion magazines were screened to make sure that there were no existing images of fashion models.

### *Questionnaire*

A 58 Likert scale questionnaire was administered to evaluate subjects' body image satisfaction. The questionnaire consisted of items that examined their overall body satisfaction, appearance concerns, dieting and eating behaviors, and thinness ideal. Examples of these questions were: "I feel self-conscious about the way that I look", "I am dissatisfied with the shape of my body", "I feel that I would look better if I lost weight", "I feel guilty after eating", "I feel like I will never be thin enough", and "I would feel more beautiful if I were thinner". Magazines were read prior to the completion of questionnaires. Questions regarding age, height, and weight were also included.

### *Procedure*

Forty-five minute sessions were scheduled over 8 non-consecutive days. Those who expressed interest in the study signed up through the psychology subject pool. Each participant that signed up was given a consent form explaining the purposes of the

study. After participant signed consent forms they were told that they would have to wait a few minutes. For ten (n=10) of the participants only fashion magazines were available to them while they waited. For the remaining participants (n=13) only non-fashion magazines were available for participants to read while they waited. After five minutes participants were given a questionnaire to complete. 8 out of 10 participants indicated on their questionnaire that they did not read a news magazine while waiting.

### *Statistical Analyses*

#### *Hypothesis*

It was hypothesized that exposure to beauty and fashion magazines would have an adverse effect on women's body perceptions. Those who read fashion and beauty magazines would be less satisfied with their overall body type, less satisfied with their appearance, favor a thinner body type, and show more of a concern with dieting and exercise. The dependent variable was women's body image satisfaction and the independent was the magazine type.

#### *Body Image Satisfaction*

Participants' overall body image satisfaction was assessed to examine women's overall perceptions of their own bodies. The questions were developed to gain a general idea of the beliefs that participants' held about their own bodies. Participants' rated 5 questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1= "never true", 7="always true") and six questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1= "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"). Body image questions consisted of a total of 11 items (e.g. "I always compare myself to the bodies of other women", "I am dissatisfied with the shape of my body", "I think I am overweight", "I obsess about the way that I look"). Scores were summed to yield a measure ranging

from 5 to 35 on the 7-point Likert scale and 6 to 30 on the 5-point Likert scale.

### *Appearance concerns*

Participants' appearance concerns were measured to assess how participants felt about specific aspects of their appearance. Participants' rated 20 items as to their degree of happiness about their specific physical features (e.g. skin, hips, nose, eyes, waist) on a 5-point Likert scale (1= "very happy", 5= "very unhappy"). Scores were summed to yield a measure ranging from 20 to 100.

### *Dieting attitudes and Exercise Behaviors*

Dieting attitudes and exercise behaviors were measured to assess participants own perceptions and their eating and exercise habits. Participants' rated 7 questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1= "never true", 7= "always true") and 5 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= "strongly disagree", 5= "strongly agree"). The dieting and exercise questions consisted of 12 items (e.g. "I think about calories when I eat", "After I eat I feel the need to exercise", "I eat less to keep my body figure"). Scores were summed to yield a measure ranging from 7 to 49 on the 7-point Likert scale and 5 to 25 on the 5-point Likert scale.

### *Thinness Beliefs*

Participants' thinness beliefs were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale. Questions were developed to examine the "thinness" concerns that participants held about their own bodies. Participants rated 12 questions evaluating their thinness beliefs on a 7-point Likert scale (1= "strongly disagree", 7= "strongly agree"). Questions consisted of 12 items (e.g. "I would feel more beautiful if I were thinner", "I want to be thinner", "I think I am overweight"). Scores were summed to yield a measure ranging

from 12 to 84.

### *Type of Analysis*

One-way between ANOVA test was used to evaluate the differences in body image satisfaction, appearance concerns, dieting and exercise behaviors, and thinness ideal among those who viewed fashion magazines and those who did not.

### **SUMMARY**

The data in this investigation sets out to examine the influence that the exposure to beauty and fashion magazines has on women's overall body satisfaction. After data is collected the researcher will be able to determine whether the exposure to idealized images of models in beauty and fashion magazines has an adverse affect on women's own body satisfaction.

## Chapter Four Findings

### RESULTS

It was hypothesized that those exposed to images of women in beauty and fashion magazines would be less satisfied with their overall body type, less satisfied with their appearance, favor a thinner body type, and show more of a concern with dieting and exercise. The one-way between ANOVA test was used to assess overall body image satisfaction, dieting and exercise behaviors, appearance concerns, and thinness ideals among two groups of women: those who viewed fashion magazines (n=10) and those who did not (n=13). The one-way between ANOVA test indicated that there was no significant difference in overall body satisfaction, dieting and eating behaviors, appearance concerns, and thinness ideals between those who viewed were exposed to the portrayal of models in fashion magazines and those who were not exposed to idealized images of women in beauty and fashion magazines.

## Chapter Five Summary, Conclusions, And Recommendations

### SUMMARY

This study aspired to analyze the influence that depictions of women in beauty and fashions magazines have on women's own body image satisfaction. Participants were 23 college women. They were randomly assigned to two experimental conditions: (n=10) were assigned to the fashion magazine group and (n=13) were assigned to the non-fashion magazine group. Fifty-eight Likert scale items were used to examine differences among two groups of women to assess overall body image satisfaction, appearance concerns, dieting and eating behaviors, and thinness ideals. The results were inconsistent with the researcher's hypothesis that suggests that those exposed to images of women in beauty and fashion magazines would be: less satisfied with their overall body type, less satisfied with their appearance, favor a thinner body type, and show more of a concern with dieting and exercise.

### CONCLUSION

The results found in this study were not consistent with previous studies investigating the media depictions of women and their influence on women's own body image satisfaction. The results of this investigation found that women's body image satisfaction was not directly influenced by their exposure to idealized images of women in beauty and fashion magazines. These findings did not support the results of Turner, Hamilton, Jacobs, Angood, & Dwyer (1997) which found that exposure to idealized images in fashion magazines had an impact on how women perceived their own bodies. This current study was a reproduction of the Turner, Hamilton, Jacobs, Angood, &



Dwyer (1997) study. Some differences did exist between the methodology of their study and this current research investigation.

Possible explanations for the discrepancy could be that those who were exposed to the portrayal of models in fashion magazines did not internalize the thin-ideals portrayed in those magazines. Dittmar, Halliwell, & Stirling (2009) found that those who had internalized the thin ideal reported significantly higher body-focused negative affect after the exposure to thin models compared to the control condition. The results also revealed that there was no effect for non-internalizers. This suggests that there may be more of an importance placed on thinness for those who have consumed and accepted society's standards of beauty.

It is essential to understand that not all women are negatively affected by idealized images of models that are portrayed in fashion and beauty magazines. As previously discussed, Tiggeman, Polivy, & Hargreaves (2009) concluded in their study that the nature of processing that women engage in is crucial in understanding their response to idealized images of women in magazines. They found that those who compared themselves to the thin-ideal images lead to greater negative mood and body dissatisfaction. It is possible that those who were exposed to thin ideal images were not measuring themselves against images of models thus, not influencing how they viewed themselves in relation to the models in the magazines.

In addition, it is essential to understand that not all women process images in the media the same way. Viewing a beautiful model may act as a motivator for an individual thus, resulting in a positive shift in how they perceive themselves (Collins, 1996; Mills, Polivy, Herman, & Tiggemann, 2002).

In conclusion, extensive research has supported the notion that idealized images in the media and fashion magazines do in fact play a role in how women perceive their own bodies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends that more research be done on non-white women and the influence that the media has on how they perceive their own bodies in relation to society's euro-centric standard of beauty.

In addition, Black women are less visible in beauty and fashion magazines that represent the white thin ideal. More research needs to be done on how magazines that are geared towards Black women influence how they perceive themselves and their bodies. It is essential to understand how women of color are psychologically impacted by these idealized images of women in the media.

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## **Appendix A Consent Form**

### **Participants over the age of 18:**

I agree to participate in a study on body image satisfaction, which is being conducted by Ebony Cox of the School Psychology Department, Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to examine women's body image satisfaction. The data collected in this study will be combined with the data from previous studies and will be submitted for review.

I understand that I will be required to complete a questionnaire that will examine my body image satisfaction. I understand that I will not be fully debriefed on procedures or exact purposes of the study until data collection is complete.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in anyway thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there is no physical or psychological risk involved in this study, and that I am free to withdrawal my participation at anytime without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Ebony Cox at (609) 214-4989

---

(Signature of Participant) (Date)

---

(Signature of Investigator) (Date)



## Appendix B

### Body Image Satisfaction Survey

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Height: \_\_\_\_\_

Weight: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How often do you have negative thoughts about your body?  
a.) Daily b.) Every few days c.) Weekly d.) Monthly e.) Never
2. How important an issue is body image to you?  
a.) Very Important b.) Important c.) Neither d.) Not important
3. How often do you read beauty and/or fashion magazines?  
a.) Daily b.) Every few days c.) Weekly d.) Monthly e.) Never

#### **Body Image:**

- 1.) I am confident about my body...  
a.) never true b.) rarely true c.) sometimes but infrequently true d.) neutral e.) sometimes true  
f.) usually true g.) always true
- 2.) I compare myself to the bodies of other women...  
a.) never true b.) rarely true c.) sometimes but infrequently true d.) neutral e.) sometimes true  
f.) usually true g.) always true
- 3.) I feel self-conscious about the way that I look...  
a.) never true b.) rarely true c.) sometimes but infrequently true d.) neutral e.) sometimes true  
f.) usually true g.) always true
- 4.) I feel attractive...  
a.) never true b.) rarely true c.) sometimes but infrequently true d.) neutral e.) sometimes true  
f.) usually true g.) always true
- 5.) I obsess about the way that I look...  
a.) never true b.) rarely true c.) sometimes but infrequently true d.) neutral e.) sometimes true

f.) usually true g.) always true

1.) I am dissatisfied with the shape of my body...  
a.) strongly disagree b.) disagree c.) neither agree nor disagree d.) agree e.) strongly agree

2.) I am unhappy about my weight...  
a.) strongly disagree b.) disagree c.) neither agree nor disagree d.) agree e.) strongly agree

3.) How I feel about my body changes...  
a.) strongly disagree b.) disagree c.) neither agree nor disagree d.) agree e.) strongly agree

4.) I feel that I would look better if I lost weight...  
a.) strongly disagree b.) disagree c.) neither agree nor disagree d.) agree e.) strongly agree

5.) I think that I am overweight...  
a.) strongly disagree b.) disagree c.) neither agree nor disagree d.) agree e.) strongly agree

6.) I am pleased with my body...  
a.) strongly disagree b.) disagree c.) neither agree nor disagree d.) agree e.) strongly agree

**Appearance:**

Scale:

1- Very Happy	2- Happy	3-Neither happy nor unhappy	4- Unhappy	5 – Very unhappy
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Using the above scale, how happy are you with the following? (please circle)

- |            |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Skin    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2) Hair    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3) Nose    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4) Weight  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5) Stomach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6) Breasts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) Eyes    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) Thighs  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9) Teeth	1	2	3	4	5
10) Legs (overall)	1	2	3	4	5
11) Physique	1	2	3	4	5
12) Butt	1	2	3	4	5
13) Face (shape and size)	1	2	3	4	5
14) Hips	1	2	3	4	5
15) Lips	1	2	3	4	5
16) Arms	1	2	3	4	5
17) Waist	1	2	3	4	5
18) Eyes	1	2	3	4	5
19) Nose	1	2	3	4	5
20) Chin	1	2	3	4	5

### **Dieting Attitudes and Exercise Behaviors:**

- 1.) I exercise excessively even through pain, fatigue, or hunger...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 2.) I think about calories when I eat...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 3.) I feel guilty after eating...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 4.) I use methods to control my weight (i.e. pills, laxatives)...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 5.) I am conscious about what I eat...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 6.) After eating I feel the need to exercise...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 7.) I exercise on a regular basis...  
**a.)** never true **b.)** rarely true **c.)** sometimes but infrequently true **d.)** neutral **e.)** sometimes true  
**f.)** usually true **g.)** always true
  
- 1.) I diet because I am dissatisfied with my body...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** neither agree nor disagree **d.)** agree **e.)** strongly agree

2.) I am satisfied with my current weight and size...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** neither agree nor disagree **d.)** agree **e.)** strongly agree

3.) I am concerned that I may have an eating issue...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** neither agree nor disagree **d.)** agree **e.)** strongly agree

4.) I feel that I have normal eating habits...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** neither agree nor disagree **d.)** agree **e.)** strongly agree

5.) I eat less to “keep my body figure”...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** neither agree nor disagree **d.)** agree **e.)** strongly agree

### **Thinness Beliefs:**

1.) I feel like I will never be thin enough...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

2.) I am afraid of gaining weight...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

3.) I am concerned with how attractive I look to others...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

4.) Because of the way that I feel about my body, I avoid looking at myself in full length mirrors...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

5.) When I feel good about the way that I look, I am happier...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

6.) I look at the bodies of my friends and compare them to my own...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

7.) I want to be thinner...  
**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)**

somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

8.) I would feel more beautiful if I were thinner...

**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

9.) I talk about my body with my friends...

**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

10.) I would change the way I look if I could (i.e. plastic surgery)...

**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

11.) I feel that I need to look perfect...

**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree

12.) I think that I am overweight...

**a.)** strongly disagree **b.)** disagree **c.)** somewhat disagree **d.)** neither agree nor disagree **e.)** somewhat agree **f.)** agree **g.)** strongly agree