



PERPETUATING THE IDEAL: THE ROLE OF FASHION MAGAZINES IN PROMOTING UNREALISTIC BEAUTY

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Abstract: Fashion magazines have been criticized for promoting unrealistic beauty standards through the use of thin, conventionally attractive models, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy in many women. This unattainable beauty standard has been linked to an increased risk of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, especially among young women. This qualitative ethnography study aims to explore how fashion magazines promote unrealistic beauty ideals and their impact on women's mental health.

Over time, fashion magazines have played a significant role in shaping beauty standards. Thin, youthful models in magazines such as Harper's Bazaar and Vogue set the stage for the idealization of thinness, which became the dominant Western beauty standard. Despite criticisms, fashion magazines continue to promote certain physical appearances.

Studies have shown that fashion magazines can have a negative impact on women's mental health, particularly young women. Exposure to images of thin, conventionally attractive models has been linked to increased levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors, as well as feelings of anxiety and depression. One possible explanation for this negative impact is the use of photo editing and digital manipulation techniques to create idealized images of models. While fashion magazines have the potential to promote self-acceptance, it is important to address their negative effects on self-image and mental health by promoting diversity and inclusivity in representations of women and developing strategies for promoting positive self-image.

Keywords: Fashion, Magazine, Beauty, Self-Image, Mental health.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Fashion magazines have been a subject of interest for researchers and scholars in their role of promoting unrealistic beauty standards. The impact of these magazines on shaping societal expectations of beauty and physical appearance is widely acknowledged. With their focus on showcasing thin, conventionally attractive models, fashion magazines often perpetuate unrealistic beauty ideals that are unattainable for most women. This can have negative impacts on their self-esteem, body image, and overall mental health.

In addition to promoting certain physical appearances, fashion magazines often encourage the use of various products, cosmetics, and fashion items that are marketed as a means to achieve these unrealistic beauty standards. The constant exposure to these messages can create a sense of inadequacy in many women, leading to an unhealthy obsession with achieving a certain beauty standard that is often unachievable. This has led to concerns about the impact of fashion magazines on women's mental health and well-being.

Studies have extensively explored the relationship between fashion magazines and body image concerns. Exposure to these magazines has been linked to an increased risk of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, particularly among young women. The images of thin models and the messages about the importance of physical appearance that are prevalent in fashion magazines can create unrealistic beauty standards and promote an unhealthy focus on physical appearance.

Given the potential negative impact of fashion magazines on women's body image and self-esteem, understanding their role in perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards is crucial. This paper aims to examine in detail the ways in which fashion magazines promote unrealistic beauty ideals and their impact on women's mental health and well-being.

II. BEAUTY STANDARDS' HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Beauty standards have evolved throughout history and vary widely across different cultures and time periods. ..the special resonances, and special ambiguities, of the very concept of 'beauty'; partly, it is because personal appearance is intimately bound up with the sense of self-worth, and, more critically, with sexuality, sexual attractiveness and sexual success(Marwick , n.d.). In ancient Egypt, for example, beauty was associated with a slim and elongated figure, as depicted in the artwork of the time. The ancient Egyptians considered youth and beauty to be highly desirable, especially in women, and they had several remedies available to counter the effects of aging. The Ebers Papyrus, written around 1550 BC, provides instructions for preventing gray hair and sagging breasts. Although few tombs contain depictions of elderly women, this cannot necessarily be attributed to the effectiveness of Egyptian beauty products (Graves, 2010). In ancient Egyptian art the ideal form of the body is a youthful and slim figure. Even for the lower classes, age and obesity are rarely depicted in women (El-Kilany, Raoof, 2017).In contrast, the Renaissance period in Europe celebrated curvier, more voluptuous figures. The 20th century has seen a range of beauty standards, from the slender flapper girl of the 1920s to the hourglass figure of the 1950s to the supermodel physique of the 1990s.

According to Lorenzo the Magnificent, the epitome of beauty during the Italian Renaissance was embodied by a woman who possessed an alluring and ideal height. Her complexion was white, yet not pale, and had a fresh, but not overly vibrant appearance. She exuded a solemn demeanor without any hint of arrogance, displaying a charming and amiable disposition without any frivolity or trepidation. Her eyes were bright and animated, yet her gaze was tempered and devoid of any haughtiness or malice. She had a well-proportioned physique, which bestowed upon her a sense of dignity and poise that distinguished her from other women, and in her movements, whether walking or dancing, she exuded an air of elegance and attraction. Her hands were the most exquisite that nature could fashion, and she adorned herself in a manner befitting a noble and refined lady, always tastefully attired (Masters, 2013).

The standards for female beauty during the Renaissance were just as strict as those present in contemporary society. Women were expected to possess specific physical traits such as long, flowing golden blonde hair, dark brown eyes, and a high, white forehead. Although white skin was fashionable during this time, it was preferable to have a subtle rosy tint in the form of blushing cheeks or other similar features. Additionally, having full arms and legs, a broad waist, and a round stomach were all considered attractive, as thinness was not highly valued in Renaissance Italy (Marlisa den Hartog, 2020).

Fashion magazines have played a significant role in shaping these beauty standards over time. In the early 20th century, magazines such as Harper's Bazaar and Vogue showcased images of thin, youthful models, who represented a departure from the curvier beauty standards of the previous century. This set the stage for the idealization of thinness that would come to dominate Western beauty standards in the latter half of the century. When examining depictions

of older women in fashion promotional materials, it's important to take in to account all facets of the industry, including designers, editors, advertisers, and manufacturers. This is because the fashion industry as a whole often promotes the concept of youthfulness to older women as a means of selling their products (Lewis, 2011).

The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of the counterculture movement and the rise of the feminist movement, which challenged traditional beauty standards and called for greater diversity in representations of women. The 1980s and 1990s, however, saw a return to a focus on thinness and the emergence of the "heroin chic" trend, which glorified a sickly, emaciated appearance. The crucial roles played by agency and self- knowledge for women caught within a society of patriarchal imagery, beauty- obsessed advertising, and pressures – from both sexes – to conform to unrealistic standards of bodily perfection (Brand,2003).

In recent years, there has been growing criticism of the unrealistic beauty standards promoted by fashion magazines, with many calling for greater diversity in representation and a rejection of the one-size-fits-all ideal. This has led to the emergence of body positivity movements and a growing emphasis on celebrating beauty in all its forms. Despite these developments, however, fashion magazines continue to play a significant role in shaping beauty standards and promoting certain physical appearances. Fashion magazines objectify females in a different way than television does. Magazines “teach” readers how to modify their appearance according to the current ideals (Sypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004).

III. MAGAZINE IMPACT ON SELF-IMAGE

Studies have found that fashion magazines can have a negative impact on women's self-image and mental health, particularly among young women. Exposure to images of thin, conventionally attractive models in these magazines has been linked to increased levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors, as well as feelings of anxiety and depression. Young women, recognized well known models and identified them by name. Almost invariably, the models elicited strong reactions on the part of these women, sometimes positive, often negative (Crane, 2012).

One possible explanation for this negative impact is the use of photo editing and digital manipulation techniques to create idealized images of models. These images can create unrealistic beauty standards that are impossible for most women to achieve, leading to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. It has become commonplace to retouch model portraits in fashion and magazine photography, typically with the goal of accentuating the subject's most favorable attributes while downplaying any less desirable ones (Dunn, 2015).

However, some researchers argue that fashion magazines can also have a positive impact on self-image when they promote diverse representations of women and celebrate beauty in all its forms. By showcasing a variety of body types, skin colors, and cultural backgrounds, fashion magazines can help to broaden society's definition of beauty and promote greater self-acceptance.

Despite this potential for positive impact, it is important to address the negative effects of fashion magazine exposure on self-image and mental health. This may involve advocating for greater diversity and inclusivity in fashion magazine representations, as well as developing strategies for promoting positive self-image and combatting negative self-talk. Vogue portrays women as inferior through sexualized images, which is important for their purpose of advertising products as a cure for women's perceived feelings of inadequacy. This creates an illusion that buying and using these products will lead to happiness and success by making women more attractive and confident (Lindner, 2004).

Fashion magazines can offer inspiration and enjoyment, it is important to acknowledge their potential negative impact on self-image and mental health. By continuing to study this complex relationship and working to promote positive representations and attitudes towards beauty, we can work towards a healthier and more inclusive societal standard of beauty

IV. FASHION MAGAZINE EXPOSURE AND EATING DISORDERS

Numerous studies have linked exposure to fashion magazines with an increased risk of developing eating disorders, particularly among young women. These magazines often promote a narrow definition of beauty that prioritizes thinness, which can contribute to negative body image and a preoccupation with weight and appearance. This preoccupation can lead to disordered eating behaviors, such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, and purging.

One study found that young women who reported frequent exposure to fashion magazines were more likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors and had a higher risk of developing an eating disorder. The most conservative perspective posits that ample evidence exists to suggest that the media has a significant impact on shaping body image and generating feelings of dissatisfaction with oneself in young girls and women (Constructed, 2008).

Fashion magazines often feature articles on dieting and weight loss, which can further reinforce the idea that achieving a certain body type is necessary for success and happiness. These articles may promote unhealthy dieting behaviors, such as fad diets, that can contribute to the development of eating disorders. Women's magazines emphasize changing one's appearance, particularly through weight loss, to improve one's life. The implication is that being thin equates to happiness, sex appeal, and lovability. However, these magazines also contain contradictory messages about weight loss strategies and eating behaviors, such as placing weight loss prescriptions alongside high-fat food pictures and recipes (Malkin, 1999).

Fashion magazines are not the sole cause of eating disorders, they contribute to a broader cultural context that places a high value on thinness and physical appearance. It is important for researchers and clinicians to understand the role that fashion magazines play in the development of eating disorders so that effective prevention and treatment strategies can be developed. This may involve promoting more diverse representations of beauty in media and providing education and support for individuals who may be at risk for developing eating disorders.

V. SOCIAL COMPARISON AND UNREALISTIC STANDARDS

Social comparison theory suggests that people evaluate their own beliefs, attitudes, and abilities by comparing themselves to others. This theory can be applied to the impact of fashion magazines on women's body image and self-esteem. When women are exposed to images of thin, conventionally attractive models in these magazines, they may compare themselves to these unrealistic beauty standards and feel inadequate or inferior.

The constant exposure to these unrealistic beauty standards can also create a sense of pressure to conform to a certain body type or appearance, which can lead to negative impacts on self-esteem and body image. Women may engage in unhealthy dieting behaviors or feel dissatisfied with their own bodies, which can contribute to the development of eating disorders and other mental health issues. Women tend to view themselves as overweight regardless of their actual weight, which leads to dissatisfaction with their bodies. This is due to distorted perceptions of body size. While body dissatisfaction seems to remain stable across age in women, studies suggest that the importance of appearance appears to decrease with age (Pliner, 1990).

Moreover, the images of models in fashion magazines are often highly edited and manipulated, creating an even more unrealistic and unattainable beauty standard. Women may strive to achieve a body type that is physically impossible, which can lead to frustration, disappointment, and negative impacts on mental health and well-being. Aware of your own body image issues and feelings related to your own body satisfaction. These feeling and biases may influence your work with youth. Empower yourself by becoming media literate and challenging unhealthy beliefs you may have regarding weight, shape, and eating (Croll, 2005).

It is important to recognize the impact of social comparison and unrealistic beauty standards on women's self-image and mental health. Strategies to combat this issue may involve promoting more diverse representations of beauty in media, providing education and support for individuals struggling with body image issues, and encouraging a shift towards a more inclusive and accepting cultural perspective on beauty and physical appearance

V. ANALYSIS OF BEAUTY IDEALS/MESSAGES

The beauty ideals and messages promoted by fashion magazines have been analyzed and found to be highly unrealistic and unattainable for most women. These ideals prioritize thinness, youthfulness, and conventionally attractive features such as clear skin, symmetrical facial features, and long hair. These standards are often reinforced through the use of highly edited and manipulated images of models, which create an unattainable standard of beauty that is impossible for most women to achieve.

These beauty ideals often fail to acknowledge the diversity of body types, races, ages, and physical abilities that exist in the real world. This can create a sense of exclusion and inadequacy for women who do not fit into these narrow beauty standards, leading to negative impacts on their self-esteem and mental health. Fashion magazines in the presentation of body-image messages, it was clear that health/fitness magazines, such as Women's Health, Fitness, and Shape, offer little more than a repackaging of the thin-ideal images that have long been associated with beauty/fashion magazines (Conlin, 2014).

The messages promoted by fashion magazines often prioritize physical appearance over other qualities such as intelligence, creativity, and kindness. This can create a narrow and limiting definition of femininity that is based solely on external appearances, rather than the multifaceted qualities that make women unique and valuable. Girls may be gradually internalizing a thin body ideal, but not to an extent that pushes them to immediately start practicing behaviors designed to replicate that ideal in their own lives (Harrison, 2006).

It is important to note that these beauty ideals and messages are not limited to fashion magazines but are also reinforced by other forms of media, such as television shows, movies, and social media. As such, they reflect broader cultural values and norms about gender and beauty, and require a systemic approach to address.

To address the negative impacts of unrealistic beauty ideals and messages, there is a need for greater diversity and representation in media. This includes featuring models and celebrities of different ages, sizes, races, and physical abilities, as well as promoting a broader definition of beauty that includes inner qualities such as personality, character, and values. Additionally, education and awareness campaigns that promote positive body image and self-esteem can help women develop a healthier relationship with their bodies and challenge unrealistic beauty standards.

VI. STRATEGIES FOR POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

To promote positive body image and counteract the negative effects of unrealistic beauty standards, there are several effective strategies that can be employed. One of the most effective approaches is to develop media literacy and critical thinking skills among individuals, especially young people. This strategy involves teaching individuals how to recognize and analyze the messages and images promoted by media, and to develop a more nuanced and critical understanding of beauty ideals.

Another strategy is to promote greater diversity and representation in media, including fashion magazines, television shows, and movies. This can involve featuring models and celebrities of different ages, sizes, races, and physical abilities, as well as promoting a broader definition of beauty that includes inner qualities such as personality, character, and values. By promoting more diverse representations of beauty, individuals are encouraged to celebrate their unique qualities and recognize the value in diversity.

Education and awareness campaigns that promote positive body image and self-esteem can also be effective. These campaigns can provide individuals with the tools and resources they need to develop a healthier relationship with their bodies, such as information about healthy eating habits, exercise, and self-care. These campaigns can also encourage individuals to seek help if they are struggling with body image concerns or disordered eating.

Finally, it is important to promote a culture of self-acceptance and self-love, where individuals are encouraged to value themselves based on their unique qualities and strengths, rather than their physical appearance. This can involve promoting self-compassion, self-care, and positive self-talk, as well as creating supportive environments that

celebrate diversity and individuality. By creating a culture of self-acceptance, individuals can feel more empowered to embrace their unique qualities and focus on their inner strengths rather than their physical appearance.

VII. CONCLUSION

Fashion magazines have a complex relationship with societal beauty standards and women's mental health. While they can offer inspiration and enjoyment, their promotion of unrealistic beauty ideals and narrow definitions of beauty can have negative effects on women's self-image and well-being. The impact of fashion magazines on promoting disordered eating behaviors and contributing to the development of eating disorders is particularly concerning. However, there is potential for fashion magazines to have a positive impact on self-image and mental health by promoting diversity and inclusivity in representations of beauty.

It is important to acknowledge the historical evolution of beauty standards and the role that fashion magazines have played in shaping them. While there have been movements to reject narrow beauty ideals and celebrate beauty in all its forms, fashion magazines continue to have a significant influence on societal standards of beauty.

More research is needed to fully understand the impact of fashion magazines on women's mental health and well-being and to develop strategies for promoting positive self-image and combating negative effects. Exposure to fitness and beauty magazines is linked to individuals internalizing the ideal body image standards of being thin for women and physically fit for men. The study found that people who read these magazines are more concerned about their physical appearance and are more likely to exhibit disordered eating behaviors compared to those who do not read them.

Ultimately, greater diversity and inclusivity in representations of beauty, as well as a rejection of one-size-fits-all ideals, is needed to promote a healthier and more inclusive societal standard of beauty. Fashion magazines have the potential to play a role in this, but it will require a concerted effort to address the negative impact of their promotion of unrealistic beauty ideals while promoting a positive and diverse representation of beauty.

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