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# Women's Body Image in the Media: An Analytical Study of Recent Body Image Movements across Media Platforms

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Communication Studies

Bridgewater State University

December 12, 2017


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**Introduction**

The media has clearly defined what beauty is for women from eighteenth century print magazines to modern day social media platforms. Women are constantly surround by the media's promotion of the thin ideal, and the idea that a thin figure will directly correspond to a happy life. Historically, thinness symbolized signs of morality and purity, evolving to a modern association of sexy, self-disciplined and successful characteristics (Rice, 2014). Although a large body was idealized in other parts of the world being symbolic of one's health and wealth, the thin ideal infiltrated other cultures with the globalization of visual media (Tiggeman, 2002). Today the western ideals of women's appearance are inescapable; from disordered eating habits to attain an emaciated figure, skin lightening treatments to obtain milky skin, and plastic surgeries to alter the natural structure of one's bodies, women go to great lengths in order to appear societally 'acceptable'. With the escalation of physical, mental, and psychological repercussions an appearance-obsessed society can cause, strides have been made toward defying the unrealistic and narrow portrayal of beauty. By turning outlets of media against themselves, body image advocates have used different platforms to spur movements promoting self-love and self-acceptance in a time where body loathing is awfully common among women.

Chapter 1 discusses the prevalence of body positivity on Instagram and to what extent this viral movement helps women battle self-objectification, social comparison, and other negative body image symptoms. Due to the prevailing cultural pressures for women to conform to the westernized thin ideal, body positivity aims to combat the body loathing and fat shaming thoughts women often struggle with (Sastre, 2014). By surveying young women on their attitudes toward their own bodies, the bodies of others, and how Instagram usage may be associated with such emotions, the study analyzes body positivity as a solution to combat

negative body image and suggests what is further needed to help women in a time of unhealthy and unrealistic appearance ideals.

Although positive body advocates are women of all sizes, many such as size 26 supermodel Tess Holliday, are women you do not fit the fashion industry's straight and 'acceptable' sizes. In most cases the media's 'thin ideal' incorporates women's sizes 0 to 6 (Pipia, 2015). Magazine models typically fit the lower end of the straight size spectrum and runway models have a history of conforming to even smaller sizes such as 00 to 2 (*Embrace*, 2016). Despite the wide usage of the term 'plus size' the phrase implies that anything in this category is 'above' or 'bigger' than average. Ironically, the average sized women in the United States is currently a size 16, making 'plus size' the national average for women (Christel & Dunn, 2016). Therefore, Chapter 2 analyzes women's body image messages through women's magazines, comparing mainstream publications to publications intended for a solely plus size audience. By looking at magazine cover images, headlines, articles, and advertisements in *Shape*, a mainstream print publication for women and *DARE*, an online plus-size beauty and fashion magazine, content is compared in light of how each frames body image messages due to their audience. Although, the emergence of plus size magazines appearances as a solution to women who feel misrepresented or ignored in mainstream publications due to body size, this chapter discusses the downfalls a plus size magazine may incur due to an exclusively plus size audience and the fact that 'plus size' is not an ideal promoted by many media outlets, despite it's prevalence in the realistic sizes of women.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 dissects the escalation of women's dissatisfaction with their bodies, commonly referred to as normative discontent through the body image documentary *Embrace* (2017). The concepts of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality are

investigated in terms of how each may serve as a solution to the body loathing and fat shaming women often experience, whether through personal self loathing or from others. Body diversity and body functionality serve as new frameworks for combatting negative body image as body positivity is the most dated of the three, and discussed in depth within in the previous chapters. This research adds to the conversation of what can be done to further remedy negative body image symptoms for women of future generations.

Rather than focusing on the generalization that many women are unhappy with their bodies due to media's promotion of unrealistic beauty ideals, this research explores the ways in which media can function as a tool to combat the westernized stereotype of acceptable appearances. The globalization of media, and rapid advancement of visual platforms has increased body dissatisfaction among women which can lead to psychological hardships like depression, anxiety, and mental illness (Andrew, Tiggeman, & Clark, 2016). Yet, when the abilities of the body are promoted rather than it's appearances, the prominence of aesthetic obsession starts to diminish. By adding to this growing field of research and opening the doors to future studies, this thesis investigates women's body image in the media through a progressive lens and how the body image epidemic women surrounding women may eventually be eliminated.

# Chapter 1

Body Image and the Modern Women:
Investigating Positive Body Image Movements on Instagram

**ABSTRACT**

*Instagram is one of the fastest growing social networking sites with over 600 million active users to date and approximately 70 million daily photo updates (instagram.com/press). While many Instagram users archive and document fat shaming, body loathing, and unhealthy beauty ideals, including images from Pro-Anorexia groups, an increasing number of posts reflect the new popularity of the Body-Positive Movement. Body-positive groups such as Body Positivity, Fat Acceptance, and "Fitspiration" have millions of followers. This research dissects the rhetoric used in Instagram posts related to self-love and positive body image, and analyzes the emotional responses such posts evoke in young women who frequently use the social media platform. This study also examined possible correlations between participants' personal Instagram habits and body image. The methods included analysis of body-positive Instagram posts and surveys of 128 females between the ages of 18 and 25. Participants were asked self-reflective questions about their habits and attitudes regarding Instagram, as well as questions about body image, levels of satisfaction with their appearance, and psychological investments in their appearance. Despite the uplifting nature body positivity embraces, any focus on appearance, positive or negative may trigger body-shaming thoughts. With the prevailing cultural pressures for women to look unhealthily thin to be beautiful, these findings show the effects of Instagram's body-positive posts and suggest what is needed to further heal the body-loathing mindset of modern women.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Instagram is one of the fastest growing social networking sites as one-third (32%) of all online adults use the platform as of 2015 (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016). The promotion of self-acceptance has become prominent on Instagram through the Positive Body Movement, which stresses inclusivity by showcasing bodies of all shapes and sizes (Sastre, 2014). By utilizing a platform where earning social support is a common motivation, the empowering self-presentation medium had the potential to reach many (E. Lee, J. Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015). As of November 2017, the hashtag #bodypositive on Instagram had over 4 million posts #selflove had over 11 million (www.instagram.com). In response to groomed and filtered profiles fitting the mold of society's idyllic beauty, (thin and toned) body positive advocates aim to speak out

against the appearance obsessed promotions and unhealthy advertisements of perfection constantly bombarding women.

In 2012, plus size American supermodel Tess Holliday created the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards in an effort to combat those who deemed beauty exclusive to single-digit sizes (Gordon, 2016). The idealized images of women constantly seen in the media add to the other growing communities on Instagram like Pro-Anorexic (Pro-Ana), Thinspiration, and Fitspiration (Marcus, 2016). Pro-Ana and Thinspiration groups support weight loss through eating disorders and advocate for a thin lifestyle using guilt stricken images and phrases (Boepple & Thompson, 2016). The obsession to obtain a thin body practiced by these groups may directly impact disordered eating psychopathology therefore, many outlets try to ban pro-ana or thinsperation related content however, fitspiration, although dangerous is not seen to be as detrimental (Boepple & Thompson, 2016). Defined as "promoting fit and healthy lifestyles," Fitspiration groups circulated objectifying images of muscular men and women, encouraging dieting and exercise for appearance, which may normalize compulsive exercise (Boepple & Thompson, 2016). Regardless of the appearance messages being sent, such communities promote messages that inevitably trigger toxic thoughts of self-criticism and social comparison, especially when societally idealized images are curated from friends (Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian, 2017). Unlike the Fat Acceptance Movement, which aimed to reject the societal norm of ideal thinness by advocating and embracing larger sizes, the community circulating around body positivity goes beyond weight acceptance (Marcus, 2016; Dicken, Thomas, King, Lewis, and Holland, 2011). As part of the Body Positive Movement or 'BoPo' for short, advocates aim to promote body acceptance regardless of any appearance based differences from cellulite, stretch marks, acne, and even physical disabilities (Salam, 2017).

A common misconception of the movement is that these women feel 'ra-ra-fabulous' about their bodies everyday (Salam, 2017). On the contrary, the movement is not about attaining personal perfection but rather reaching a point of balance between body acceptance and neutrality. Rather than embracing in radical body love which asks women to regulate their emotions and hold a high standard of self esteem, embodying neutrality and "accepting the body you have as an essential part of you" is a healthier mindset as Joan Chrisler, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Connecticut College in New London advises (Meltzer, 2017). Modern ideas like 'fitness and health at every size' add to the movement's diversity and versatility as no one body shape is singled out. However, amongst this growing social movement, "beauty sickness" still plagues society. Coined by Renee Engeln Ph.D, a psychologist and body image researcher, beauty sickness is "what happens when women's emotional energy gets so bound up with what they see in the mirror that it becomes harder for them to see other aspects of their lives" (Engeln, 2017). Despite the efforts body positivity has made we still live in a 'beauty sick' culture as many women strive for an appearance of unattainable perfection although aware of the impossibility for such goals. How effective can social movements be when advocates themselves are semi-hypocritical at the values of body positivity? Body dissatisfaction and self-objectification have reached a point of normative discontent in women as increased media use can cause women to become dissatisfied with their bodies Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Littleton, 2008; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985). Succumbing to the verbal cures of 'You're Beautiful', 'try a diet', and 'exercise more' when women feel dissatisfied towards appearance have become common practice although such treatments show little to no improvement. The Body Positive Movement has certainly made strides in curing the beauty sick minds of modern women, which will hopefully inspire further action towards the emotional, psychological, and

physical detriment of negative body image.

*Literature Review*

Body image research among young women remains prevalent in disciplines of the social sciences as with focuses shifting from the negative aspects associated with body image to broader facets like body positivity (Tylka, 2011). With the rise of social media, increased eating disorder statistics and the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction, the academic landscape of body image is constantly shifting, addressing multiple societal issues when faced with this epidemic. Renee Engeln, PhD. coins the term "beauty sickness" as a diagnosis for an appearance obsessed society, instilling the value that physical attributes are a woman's most important features (Engeln, 2017). From sexualized advertisements and toys to household conversation, girls are taught at a young age that society prioritizes their looks over all other characteristics (Andrew, Tiggeman & Clark, 2016).
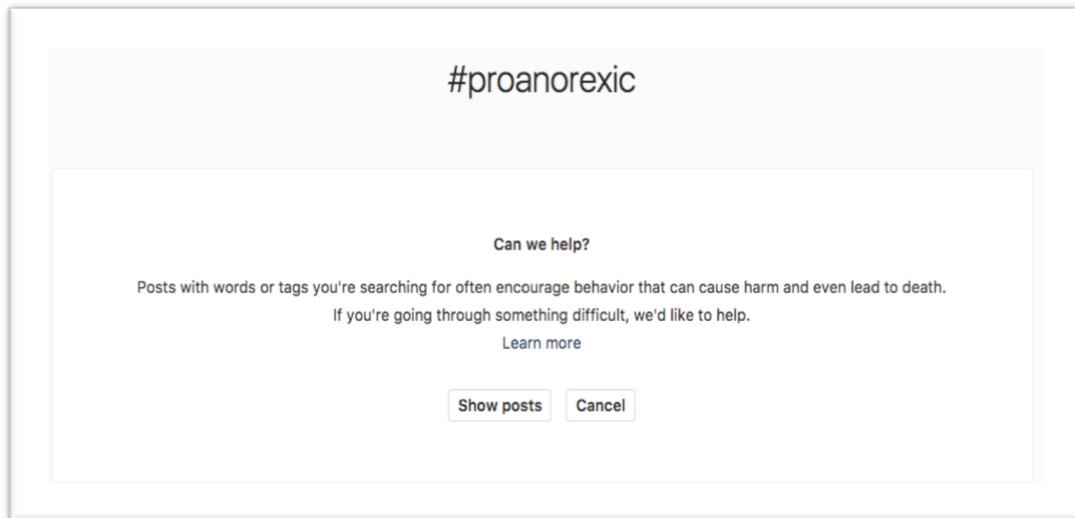
Despite the prevalence of body image research some aspects of the subject have become redundant and mundane (Tylka, 2011). The idea that women are never satisfied with their bodies, or the most upsetting insult to a woman is a derogatory comment on physical appearance has become normalized (Engeln, 2017). With social media's entrance into everyday lives as a daily normalcy, issues facing body image have escalated with more complex avenues (Tiggeman, 2002). Instagram, a predominately visual social media platform is rapidly growing in popularity as a third of all online adults (32%) have an account as of 2015 and there are approximately 70 million daily photo updates (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016). The notion that Instagram is a gateway to self-objectification, social comparison and body dissatisfaction is an understatement as these symptoms have been positively correlated to thin ideal media exposure, and mass media consumption in general (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004; Grabe et al.,

2008). A 2015 study investigating motivations for using Instagram 'self-expression' was the highest scoring category, concluding that Instagram is predominately an "empowering, new, self-presentation medium, especially among the young" (Lee E., Lee J., Moon, and Sung, 2015). However, the self-expressive techniques showcased online are more of the physical self compared to an individual's valued interests, activities, or aspirations. Instagram largely serves as an appearance-focused media platform, constantly bombarding newsfeeds with the current societal beauty ideal (Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian, 2017). Therefore, a wide gap remains between those who use Instagram as a tool of conceit and/or reassurance for their own appearance, and those who operate individual profiles as a way of motivating and inspiring women in protest to society's relentless beauty standards.

The current beauty ideal is a thin frame and has always been such. Historically, thinness symbolized signs of morality and purity, evolving to a modern association of sexy, self-disciplined and successful characteristics (Rice, 2014). The psychological drive for thinness that many women experience is a powerful preoccupation that takes precedence over all other thought. The constant mental obsession over appearance is an example of cognitive attention syndrome (CAS) where valuable and beneficial thought is prevented by repetitive worry and rumination, self-focused attention, and negative self-beliefs (Davenport, Rushford, Soon and McDermott, 2015). In Englen's book multiple women admit to thinking about their bodies all day, everyday. From calories burned to food intake and the reflection that stares back from the mirror, thoughts revolving around body image seem inescapable. Therefore, this notion of preoccupied thought and perpetual dissatisfaction in women is referred to as 'normative discontent,' standardizing the negative feelings and overtly critical evaluations women and girls have towards their bodies (Lubkin and Larsen, 2013).

The thin beauty ideal was circulating long before the days of Instagram, however the appearance based social media platform has aggravated the inescapable effect of body-related thoughts. Idealized images and advertisements of societally claimed 'beautiful women' instill negative body thoughts into many women. A common hashtag on Instagram is #bodygoals, where many users promote appearance based images of women with thin waists, skinny legs, and toned arms. Individuals who aim to inspire and motivate others to pursue or maintain a low body weight construct the vast 'thinspiration' community online. Continually, 'thinspiration' may cross over into the pro-anorexic community, individuals who drive the pursuit of thinness to an objective extent, promoting anorexia and other eating disorders as an ideal lifestyle. Although all 'thinspiration' advocates are not part of the 'pro-ana' community, many profiles post content related to drastic food restrictions and emaciated figures (Marcus, 2016). From the unhealthy depths of online thinspiration grew the prominence of 'fitspiration' on Instagram. Despite fitspiration's intention to encourage healthy lifestyles with recipes, exercises, and additional fitness motivation, women in such images largely match societal beauty ideals, therefore increasing appearance comparisons and body dissatisfaction (Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian, 2017). In 2012, Instagram banned search terms and hashtags revolving around thinspiration as the content's contribution to eating disorders and unhealthy behaviors came to prominence. The new guideline reads "Maintain our supportive environment by not glorifying self-injury" (www.instagram.com/press). Searching terms like #thighgap or #thinspiration generate no results and others such as #proanorexic bring you to the following screen:

Figure 1

#proanorexic

Can we help?

Posts with words or tags you're searching for often encourage behavior that can cause harm and even lead to death.
If you're going through something difficult, we'd like to help.

Learn more

Show posts    Cancel

Additionally, no 'fitspiration' content has been banned from Instagram although similar messages to 'thinspiration' are commonly promoted regarding weight stigmatization, guilt-inducing and dieting or food restraint messages (Boepple and Thompson, 2016). A recent study suggests that 'fitspiration' is a culturally acceptable way of promoting dietary restriction, disordered eating, and over-exercising as many 'fitspo' individuals test high for such diagnoses including drive for muscularity and compulsive exercise in order to achieve an idealized body (lean and toned) rather than to strive for health or fitness related goals (Holland and Tiggemann, 2017). Therefore, such profiles only add to the beauty sick epidemic plaguing society. In an effort to combat idealized and unattainable beauty standards caused by the constant stimulation of filtered profiles, a new group has emerged aiming to promote 'real beauty' and 'true self-expression' against society's definition.

The Positive Body Movement advocates for a supportive relationship between the self and the body however, the movement itself does not have a finite mission as positive body image advocates encourage this outlook on body image through numerous akin philosophies (Sastre,

2014). Rather than promoting a sole philosophy, advocates and influencers personalize their own standard of beauty through captions and pictures, showcasing the individuality of beauty and the lack of an ideal or standard (Marcus, 2016). The #bodypositive hashtag contains over 3 billion posts on Instagram where considerable attention has been given to the movement. Continually, the movement towards body acceptance differs from previously established digital communities like 'fat acceptance', echoing the idea that any changes a women may want to make to her body is an act of body betrayal (Marcus, 2016). The 'fat acceptance' movement has received mix emotions as one side of it advocates for women to be afforded equal opportunities regardless of size, while another side completely throws away any ideas regarding health as if maintaining a large weight is an act of protest against the societal ideal in itself. Despite the growing body of research on women's body image, these new advocating groups on social media raise the questions of how effective the methods are in terms of women's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Participants for this survey (*N*=128) were young women recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participation recruiting service. The survey covered multiple aspects of body image including self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, self-confidence, social comparison, and their engagement on Instagram in relation to body image. All participants were women ages 18-25 since body image concerns are prevalent in this population (Neighbors and Sobal, 2007). The mean age of all participants was 22.5 years. The majority of participants identified as White (*n*=84, 65.6%) with the next largest population being African American or Black (*n*=16, 12.5%). Continually, 11 identified as Latino or Hispanic Americans (8.6%), 10

Asian (7.8%), 1 American Indian or Alaskan Native (0.78%), 1 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.78%), and 5 reported "other ethnicity" including mixed races (3.9%). The population of women ages 18-25 also constitutes for the largest group of active Instagram users (Pew Research Center, 2016). Only the 99 participants that reported having an active Instagram account were prompted to complete the supplemental questions on Instagram usage. Additionally, all participants (*N*=128) were given the opportunity to report if they have ever experiences or are currently recovering from an eating disorder. 31 participants (24.22%) reported positively to a history with eating disorders.

**Measures and Materials**

*Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire Appearance Scales (MBSRQ-AS)*

Used extensively in body image research, the 34-item MBSRQ-AS (Cash, 2000) was used to measure 5 subscales: Appearance Evaluation which measures feelings of physical attractiveness or unattractiveness, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with personal looks; *Appearance Orientation* which measures to what extent an investment is put into one's appearance with levels of importance, attention, and engagement in appearance related behaviors*; Body Areas Satisfaction* taps into specific feelings towards discrete aspects of personal physical appearance, focusing in on certain areas of the body; *Overweight Preoccupation* assesses the relevance of one's fat anxiety, weight vigilance, dieting, and eating restraint; and *Self-Classified Weight which* reflects how an individual perceives and labels their weight (Cash, 2000). Participants indicated the pertinence of the 34 statements to them personally using a 5-point scale (1=definitely disagree, 5=definitely agree) on items such as "I check my appearance in the mirror whenever I can" and "I constantly worry about being or becoming fat". Continually a 5-point scale (1=very dissatisfied, 5=very satisfied) was also used to indicate an individual's

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dissatisfaction or satisfaction with certain aspects of their body like "face, lower torso, muscle tone, etc."

### *Short form of the Situational Inventory of Body-Image Dysphoria (SIBID-S)*

Body image concerns are often caused by psychological disturbances such as poor self-esteem, social anxiety, and depression. The SIBID-S (Cash, 2002) focuses on the frequency of negative body-image emotions across 20 specific situational contexts using a 5-point scale to indicate how often an individual experiences such negative emotions (0=never, 4=always or almost always). Situations included "At social gatherings where I know few people" and "When I'm trying on new clothes at the store" (Cash, 2002).

### *Appearance Schemas Inventory-Revised (ASI-R)*

The 20 item ASI-R (Cash, 2003) assesses individuals' psychological investment in their physical appearance consisting of two subscales: *Self-Evaluative Salience,* the cognitive-behavioral investment in one's own appearance (i.e. My physical appearance has had little influence on my life) and *Motivational Salience,* the extent to which one engages in appearance-management behaviors (i.e. I try to be as physically attractive as I can be) (Cash, 2003).

### *Emotional Reactions to Instagram Posts*

Participants were given a series of 7 anonymous public Instagram images and asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 5=extremely) to what extent each photograph made them feel the following emotions: confident, jealous, self-conscious, anxious, and happy.

*Background Information*

Participants were asked to provide their age, ethnicity, and given the option to report a personal experience with eating disorders.

**Procedure**

The Institutional Review Board at Bridgewater State University approved all information regarding the survey. Only women between the ages of 18 and 25 were eligible to take part in the survey. Participants were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participation recruiting service and were compensated a minor reward ($2.00). Participants were warned that the questionnaire might contain trigger words/phrases that may be mentally harmful or uncomfortable for those who have experienced or are currently experiencing an eating disorder, depressive symptoms and/or anxiety due to body image and were given the option to leave the survey at any time. After consenting to the terms of continuation, participants completed the online survey including the aforementioned measures followed by demographics and questions on Instagram usage.

**RESULTS**

**(MBSRQ-AS)** The average scores for the factor subscales of the MBSRQ-AS are listed in Table 1 alongside the average norms for the measure (Cash et al., 1985, 1986). The highest scoring average was reported for appearance orientation (M = 3.60, SD .70) where high scorers place more importance on physical appearance and engage in more appearance-based behaviors. All average scores are less than the measures norms, with the exemption of overweight preoccupation. Higher scores on this scale indicate a greater potential for fat anxiety, dieting and restraintful eating. For the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale, the score averaged 3.03 (SD = .76).

Within the targeted body areas, it was found that women were most dissatisfied with weight (n=73, 57.0% reported 'very to mostly dissatisfied') and mid torso, or waist and stomach (n=85, 66.4% reported 'very to mostly dissatisfied').

**(SIBID-S)** Reporting emotions towards body image in situational contexts on a 5-point scale, participants averaged 3.30 (*SD* = .84), a figure significantly higher than the average for subsequent studies by the norm (*M* = 1.72, *SD* = .79) (Cash, 2000). Higher scores on the 0 to 4 scales indicate a higher frequency of dysphoric body image emotions and intensity.

**(ASI-R)** Using the factor subscales participants averaged higher on Motivational Salience (M = 3.64) compared to Self-Evaluation salience (M = 3.53). In Table 4 the scores from the ASI-R composite and the additional two subscales are compared to the norms from Cash's 2004 study.

**Emotions toward Instagram Images** Instagram usage positively correlates with depressive symptoms caused by self-objectification and social comparison, which evoke emotions of anxiety, envy and low self-esteem (RSPH, 2017). The correlation is identical to the phenomenon of Facebook depression, an earlier psychological indication of social media's influence on mental wellbeing. In contrast, positive body image messages aim to circulate a conversation about personal journeys towards the sought-after positive relationship between the self and the body, commonly empowering women to feel confident and satisfied in their own skin (Sastre, 2014). Among the seven Instagram photos shown in the survey, one came from an advertisement, one was from a 'thinspiration' profile and the remainders were chosen from body positivity advocates. Three images particularly accrued intriguing results. In regards to Picture

#3, 102 participants reported moderate to extreme confidence (rankings 4 or 5) and only 7 reported emotions of extreme anxiousness (ranking 1). On the other hand, Picture #5 which came from a 'thinspiration' profile had 83 participants report feelings of anxiousness from 'somewhat' to 'extremely' (rankings 3-5). 46 reported no confidence (ranking 1) and 60 were 'moderately' to 'extremely' jealous as a reaction to the picture (ranking 3-5). Only 8 women out of all participants (N=128) reported no feeling of self-consciousness. Similarly, Picture #2 or the advertisement had the highest scoring for self-consciousness as 102 participants recorded the emotion from 'somewhat' to 'extremely' (3 somewhat = 44, 4 moderately = 39, 5 extremely = 38). Additionally, 47 reported no feeling of confidence (ranking 1). Picture #7 had the most positive rankings, as 103 women felt 'moderately or extremely' confident while 75 reported happiness at the same rankings. Only 5 participants gauged 'extreme' jealousy while 10 felt anxious towards the post.

**Instagram Usage** Participants who had an active Instagram account (*N*=99) reported how often they engage the platform. Between once a week to 10+ times per day, 20.3% (*n*=26) answered 3-5 times a day with 18.75% (*n*=24) next at 6-10 times daily. Amongst the eight options given for primary motivations to use Instagram (business/work, social interaction, staying up-to-date, archiving, escape from reality, browse the lives of others, express myself and other) participants choose up to three categories. The three most common motivations were social interaction (*n*=72, 72.7%) browsing the lives of others (*n*=57, 57.6%) and to express myself (*n*=53, 53.5%).

**Body Positivity on Instagram** Among the 99 participants with an active Instagram account 40.4% (n=40) currently follows Body Positive or Self-Love advocates on Instagram. 10 were

'unsure' if they followed any profiles in this category. 18 participants reported that they have personally made a post pertaining to positive body image or self-love, 7 were unsure and the remainder did not personally promote such messages. Within the group of 18 who had made a positive body image post, only 16.7% (n=3) promoted such posts with regularity (on a weekly to monthly basis).

Table 1 – Multi-dimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire Appearance Scales (MBSRQ-AS)

| Factor Subscales: | Cash et al., 1985, 1986 | | Present Study | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| APPEARANCE EVALUATION | 3.36 | .83 | 2.99 | 1.02 |
| APPEARANCE ORIENTATION | 3.91 | .68 | 3.60 | .70 |
| BODY AREAS SATISFACTION | 3.23 | .63 | 3.03 | .76 |
| OVERWEIGHT PREOCCUPATION | 3.03 | .92 | 3.13 | .90 |
| SELF-CLASSIFIED WEIGHT | 3.57 | .62 | 3.51 | .78 |

Table 2 – Situational Inventory of Body-Image Dysphoria (SIBID-S)

| | Cash, 2000 | | Present Study | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| SIBID-S | 1.72 | .79 | 3.30 | .84 |

Table 3 – Body Areas Satisfaction Scale – Weight and Mid-torso results

| | WEIGHT | MID-TORSO |
|---|---|---|
| 1 – Very Dissatisfied | 32 | 44 |
| 2 – Mostly Dissatisfied | 41 | 41 |
| 3 – Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied | 28 | 17 |
| 4 – Mostly Satisfied | 19 | 18 |
| 5 – Very Satisfied | 8 | 9 |

Table 4 – Appearance Schemas Inventory Revised (ASI-R)

|  | Cash et al. (2004) | Present Study |
|---|---|---|
|  | M | M |
| COMPOSITE ASI-R | 3.44 | 3.55 |
| Self-Evaluation Salience Subscale | 3.23 | 3.53 |
| Motivational Salience Subscale | 3.73 | 3.64 |

## DISCUSSION

In general, these results validate the growing evidence that women are genuinely unhappy with their bodies, regardless of size. Adding to the research that frequent Instagram usage leads to body dissatisfaction, 50.7% of participants who were 'mostly to very dissatisfied' with their weight check Instagram anywhere from 3 to an upwards to ten times a day. The idea that growing visual culture is leading to more women comparing themselves to not only the media's beauty ideal but other celebrities and even friends appears prominent. The same concept translates to the 49.4% of women who were 'mostly to very dissatisfied' with their mid-torso as they checked the same amount. This information adds to previous studies that have stated an increase in social media usage can be linked to greater body dissatisfaction (Tiggeman, 2002). Although the mid-torso is only a small component to the overall body it is definitely an accentuated area on social media. Most 'fitspiration' profiles are covered with images of defined abdomens, ab cracks and oblique lines, emphasizing lean muscle and tonality. Rather than highlighting the certain areas of the body that one likes or is satisfied with, body positivity aims to embrace the body as a whole unit. Within the accompanying literature, many women admit to having constant thoughts about body image to the extent where focusing on other subjects can seem difficult. The notion that today's women are fat-phobic is very prevalent as participants

averaged 3.13 for overweight preoccupation. As social media has become an integral part of life, lives are perpetual photo opportunities. The tendency to look 'picture perfect' at any given moment has escalated since these platforms allow outsiders to view even the most uneventful and mundane moments of people's personal lives. This idea can be linked to the SIBID-S's significantly high average from its 17-year-old counterpart, comparing negative body image emotions in situational contexts from 1.72 to 3.30. Perhaps more of an emphasis is placed on appearance due to the daunting idea that everyone's watching, because realistically, with the influx of social media - they could be. No major correlations were found between participants' levels of body dissatisfaction and those who followed Body Positive advocates. For example, among the 63 women with high scores for overweight preoccupation, 28 followed advocates and 35 did not. The averages for Appearance Evaluation among the 40 participants who follow advocates are 2.94, practically identical to the overall average of 2.99. Therefore, these visual messages of body positive inspiration and motivation may aid temporary thoughts of body negativity, however it does not appear the movement provides a long-standing cure. This study did have limitations as it evolved throughout the course of the summer. This preliminary research begins to investigate the influence of body positivity on Instagram, however more extensive measures may be taken in the future. With larger sample sizes of women who avidly follow body positivity, more of a trend can be analyzed, especially comparing the psychological views of this community to other avid followers of 'fitspiration' and similar groups.

When all of these facts and statistics boil down, one thing remains constant, body image promotion regardless of the message – 'pro-ana', 'thinspiration', 'fitspiration', 'fat acceptance', and 'body positivity' all direct attention to THE BODY. Although body positivity strives to spread a supportive and encouraging message, any emphasis on women's bodies can trigger

negative thoughts towards one's appearance. Media literacy initiatives certainly help the psychological turmoil due to body image pressures women constantly experience, however the effects have proved short-lived. Women outwardly advise and critique against objectified media practices idealizing women's appearance. Techniques of Photoshop and airbrushing are of no mystery to many at this point. Yet, despite the gained awareness behind these superficial practices, many women still strive for the unattainable perfect appearance. Dr. Renee Engeln, psychologist and body image researcher notes in her novel *Beauty Sick* that appearance compliments feed appearance culture. The greatest way to combat the body image epidemic women currently face may not be a lens of positivity but rather a blind eye to the body's appearance and a focus on the body's functionality. If societal norms of functionality and activity were instilled at a young age, the pattern of indirectly teaching young girls that looks are the most important asset may disappear. Instagram serves as a powerful self-presentation medium, so is it possible to present oneself through valued interest, activities and aspirations? If a community were to grow that promoted what women can do, versus what they look like a cure for the diseased minds of modern women may be on the rise.

**CONCLUSION**

This research was limited in terms of sampling size, sampling audience, and the narrow direction of the survey. The sample size of 128 women does not create any conclusions that can be made as a generalization about women's body dissatisfaction, social media usage, and/or their feelings towards the Positive Body Movement. Future research could be performed with groups of women who avidly post body positive content or avidly follow such advocates to gain a better understanding of their personal outlooks on body image. The samples of participants could also be expanded to incorporate more racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Nonetheless, this research

serves as a gateway to future studies on women's body image and social media usage, and adds

to the field of body image research in the modern era.

## Chapter 2

Women's Magazines Audiences:
A Comparative Analysis of Mainstream and Plus-Size Women's Magazines

**ABSTRACT**

*Women's magazines pioneered public feminine reading material in the late eighteenth century however; publications geared towards a solely plus-size audience did not appear until the late 1900s. As the globalization of media has fostered thin-framed beauty ideals many of the current mainstream women's publications endorse the promotion of a thin, lean, and toned body aesthetic. This research analyzes two current women's magazines, a mainstream publication, Shape, and a plus-size publication, DARE, in order to compare the body image messages promoted through cover images, headlines, article subjects, and advertisements. Although mainstream publications like Shape have expanded to adding body confidence sections, the mold of the societal body ideal is mainly showcased whereas DARE embodies body confidence and addresses concerns of plus-size women that are commonly overlooked in mainstream publications. This research adds to the body of women's magazine studies incorporating the current body image pressures many women face.*

**KEYWORDS**: women's magazines, plus-size magazines, *Shape* magazine, *DARE* magazine

**INTRODUCTION**

The thin ideal is documented as the most predominant portrayal of women in the media (Tiggeman, 2002). This body and beauty ideal, often internalized by many young women is pervasive throughout a wide variety of media including magazines (Sypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004). With current media sources, portrayals of the thin ideal are inescapable in Western media, which illustrates a population of women vividly contrasting the realistic norms for actual women's bodies (Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003). Therefore, when Tess Holliday signed on to a major modeling agency in 2015 it made headline news for *People* Magazine (Gordon, 2016). Starting as a size 22, Holliday is now an unapologetic size 26. In Holliday's recent book, *The Not So Subtle Art of Being A Fat Girl* (2017), she remarks that she had gotten tired of 'getting told what curvy/fat/plus size girls are "allowed" to "wear". However, many magazine covers and editions that include plus-size models and photographs are seen as gimmicks.

In March 2017, *Vogue* released a 'diversity' cover showcasing 7 different women. Maya Singer noted in the article accompanying the cover story, "In a climate of immigration bans and building walls, the biggest names in 2017 make the case that there isn't just one type of American girl — nor has there ever been" (*Vogue*, March 2017). However, the women on the cover of the magazine barely exhibit differences in appearance. Plus size model Ashley Graham, is featured as the plus-size model in the shoot with all other models perceived to be ideal straight sizes of 0-6. Additionally, the differences in skin tone, hair, and body shape is slight, if apparent at all. Size diversity appears as non-existent in many women's magazines and the goal to achieve a 'perfect body' still underlines much of the articles and advertisements contents.

As many women's mainstream magazines include a lifestyle portion to their content and advertising, living a "healthy" or "fit" lifestyle is a repetitive topic. Ashley Graham, who is credited by *Vogue* as one of the people who has revolutionized fashion for the modern era stated about herself as a size 14, "It's a size I've maintained for the past eight years, It's not about conforming; it's a size I feel good at" ("Plus Size Model", 2015). Using terms like 'thin' and 'healthy' as synonymous has been promoted to the public as incorrect especially through "Health at Every Size," a trademark of the Association of Size Diversity and Health as a movement to battle weight management with a non-diet perspective (Bacon, 2008).

Yet, the recent plus size models revolutionizing the fashion world are not seen as gimmicks (Gordon, 2016). A plus size publication is sure to read different and frame content in a way unlike the single plus size photo-shoot a mainstream publication uses as their token to the 'others'. With these ideas in mind it becomes difficult to think of how publications that foundationally differ on women's sizes can frame their content much differently.

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### *History of Women's Magazines*

As women were confined to the walls of their homes and motherhood was the primary aspiration, the creation of women's magazines in the late eighteenth century was revolutionary. *Lady's Magazine,* which began in 1770, was the first of its genre, pioneering the idea of feminine reading material. The success of *Lady's Magazine; or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, is apparent in the 67-year run of circulation with monthly publications until 1837 (Walker, 2000). Since *Lady's Magazine* was the first of it's kind in the women's literary sphere, the thematic variety and vague nature of the publication is understandable. The magazine provided readers with an array of material including prose fiction, essays, poems, and letters soliciting advice on personal improvements, household advancements, the sacred calling of motherhood, and marital issues. As the genre of women's magazines has expanded over three centuries since their origin, different publications have become more concise and centralized, catering to specific audiences (Batchelor, 2011). Yet, among the thousands of publications in print from the late eighteenth century till now, women's magazines have never delivered 'perfectly consistent, monolithic messages to their readers' (Walker, 2000). As the same messages about improving one's skin one, pie crust, sex life, home décor, health and standard of living are constantly repeated the purpose of women's literary publications comes into question when (Walker, 2000). Commenting on the redundant nature of women's magazines, Marghanita Laski wrote 'What Every Woman Knows By Now' for *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1950 stating, "any one year's reading must inevitably give enough information about the technique of being a woman to see one through a lifetime" (90) as it was routine for women's publications to consistently instruct

women on how to dress, select silver patterns, function as hostesses, and choose the best household and personal products (Walker, 2000).

*Godey's* was one of the first important American magazines for women reaching a circulation of 150,000 by 1860 (Walker, 2000). The primary readership was between the upper-middle class, showcasing the latest fashion sketches and other appearance related trends (Patterson, 2004). During the mid-nineteenth century more heavily stylized and appearance focused magazines came into the spotlight as *Harper's Bazaar* (1867-present), which assumed an affluent and cosmopolitan reader currently advertises it's mission as the following:

> "We *are* fashion.
> Both a visual muse and unrivaled source of ownable style.
> We turn the unexpected into the coveted.
> As we have since 1867."
>
> (Hearst Magazines, 2017)

*Women's Home Companion* (1873-1957) and *Good Housekeeping* (1885-present) were known as more generic publications for women, incorporating tips and tricks for the household and motherhood but also incorporating sections on intimate life and personal care (Patterson, 2004). *Mademoiselle* (1935-2001) another high line fashion magazine also incorporated short stories and a 'Jobs and Future' section, gearing itself toward 'smart young women' of the generation (Smith, 2010). Regardless of the periodical, women's appearance and aesthetic image has always been a central focus, especially through the advertised products that cater to these desires.

Advertisements for women's appearance products have been included in print magazines for decades. Publications that date before the 1940s when *Women's Home Companion* was peaking with a circulation of four million, consisted of print advertisements for face creams, household cleaners, and several products that 'appealed to women's anxieties about looking attractive and taking care of families' (Walker, 2000). Helen Damon-Moore in *Magazines for the*

*Millions* (1994) points out that the increased availability of products for women increased the standards for women's appearance and domestic performance as 'diets became more varied and cooking more complicated, wardrobes more elaborate'. A 'Good Looks' sections of *Women's Home Companion* from 1948 featured an article "Give Your Face a Lift" discussing remedies to improve one's face and body shape including checking for glandular problems, exercise, and a good corset fitting (Humphreys, 1989). Although such remedies are drastically different from the modern headlines 'Shed 15lbs. Fast' or 'Flat Abs Now!' the concept of women always trying to achieve a 'better' or 'acceptable' appearance has always been present.

### Feminism and Women's Magazines

Betty Friedman, renowned writer, activist, and women's magazine scholar wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 discussing the role of women in and out of the home. In discussing women's magazines Friedman comments on a 1960 issue of *McCall's*, "The image of woman that emerges from this bog, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home…where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit?" Feminism started in the mid-nineteenth century when many women were unhappy with a primarily domestic lifestyle and publications like *Harper's Bazzar* and *Mademoiselle* attempted to cater to this audience by presenting different views of women and work (Walker, 2000). As magazines reinforce this idea that there is something better to be achieved or greater to attain, women are more likely to invest in a journey to reach that end (Stokes & Frederick-Recascino, 2003).

Putting the same concept into a modern view, magazines and other forms of media often showcase a 'better life' in terms of appearance to their audiences. The westernized ideal woman

has been defined as – "thin, young, and often white" (Tiggeman, 2002). In regards to media, women continue to face the 'relentless homogenizing of the female body' since advertisements continually lack diversity in terms of body shape and size, color, and uniqueness (Sarbin, 2005). Friedman makes a case for women's appearance improvements to be promoted for the external approbation of men, however the modern view leans towards the mythical idea that if women are to transform themselves to be acceptable by western societal standards, they will stumble upon unending happiness (Stokes & Frederick-Recascino, 2003).

### Plus Size Women's Magazines

The term 'plus-size' appears to have two definitions, one by fashion industry standards and the other by reality observation (Czerniawski, 2012). With the Western beauty ideal, the range of acceptable sizes has diminished to a size 6 or below making plus-size models an average 'size' and 'weight' by casual observes and 'fat' by the media's definition (Czerniawski, 2012). According to Plunkett Research Group in 2014, the average American woman is a size 14 and woman who wear a 14 or larger account for 67 percent of the American female population, despite the fact that plus size clothing only accounts for 15 percent of overall women's clothing sales (Pipia, 2015). While ideal images of a 'fanaticized self' are encountered on the front covers of magazines and reinforced with every issue, fashion remains a significant and enjoyable mode of self-expression for many women (McCracken, 1993). Needless to say, using fashion as a mode of self-expression becomes difficult when women feel ostracized from the industry due to their natural image. Plus-size magazines spurred in the early 1980s with Carole Shaw's online publication, *BBW* (Big, Beautiful Women) as one of the earliest plus-size fashion outlets. Similar publications like *Mode* known as 'the plus size woman's *Vogue*,' which was then succeeded by

*Grace*, another online approach similar to *BBW* adopted the 'fat style gone mainstream' concept, showcasing full-figured women on the advertisement spreads and covers wearing designer clothes like Versace. Fashion magazines geared towards a solely plus-size audience transformed fat fashion replacing dated terms like 'chunky, plump, and stout' with more exotic labels like 'curvy, rubenesque, and real' (Sarbin, 2005).

Although the concept of plus-size magazines seems inclusive for the ostracized women of reality, the movement for fat fashion publications was short lived (Sarbin, 2005). The average American women is considered plus size by industry standards, yet many women do not identify with this category by industry standards since the label usually begins at a size 10, even size 8 for some companies (Pipia, 2015). If a woman does not fit the shape and appearance plastered across magazine covers it becomes easy to forget one's own image in the mirror and use the magazine's examples as positive projections for a future self (McCracken, 1993). Plus size is not the modern ideal for women portrayed in the media. The demise of many plus size publications is credited to women's unwillingness to publicly label themselves as large, fat, or plus size (Sarbin, 2005). A woman must have a sense of self-worth and acceptance as a large woman to subscribe to or identify with a plus-size publication (Sarbin, 2005). While some women worry about how a dress may fall on their figure, others are preoccupied with thoughts of chairs buckling underneath them or purchasing two plane tickets to travel comfortably. *BBW* aimed to speak to the 'very overweight' and not just an audience defined as overweight by industry standards (Sarbin, 2005). Considering 67 percent of the American female population is a size 14 or larger, the short-lived life of plus size publications may come as a surprise (Pipia, 2015). The greater question appears to be why body diversity cannot be embraced in publications across the board instead of separated into two size categories. A plus size publication open doors to a new

body of entertainment void of dieting, and weight-loss obsession which seems unnatural considering the topics that have been circulating in women's magazines for centuries (Czerniawski, 2012). Reverting back to Laski's commentary on the redundancy of women's magazines, the journey to the 'perfect body' is a topic plastered on the rows of covers at magazine stands. Regardless of size – large or small, thin or curvy, tall or short, women still have the same desire, passions, dreams, issues, and hardships (Walker, 2000). Therefore, the likelihood of drastic differences in the promoted messages between plus size and mainstream magazines comes into question.

**OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this study is to compare the different aspects of women's magazines when catered to a mainstream audience and a solely plus-size audience. This study aims to investigate the differences and similarities in messages a mainstream and plus-size publication send to their audiences in terms of magazine covers, cover headlines, article subjects, and advertisements. This study will add to the growing body of research on the plus-size fashion industry and the unrealistic beauty ideals that have been portrayed in magazine publications.

**METHODOLOGY**

*Materials*

This qualitative study sampled publications from the women's magazines: *DARE* and *Shape*. These publications were chosen due to their contrast of audience and readership in order to examine and compare the different messages promoted to women through magazine content in regards to body image. 6 issues of *DARE* and 10 issues of *Shape* were used for analysis. *DARE*,

the first women's plus-size magazine in Canada was analyzed through digital publications from 2015 (4 issues; Spring, Summer, Fall, Holiday) and 2016 (2 issues; Spring, Fall/Winter). The 10 issues from *Shape*, the second largest young women's magazine, were hard copies from 2016.

### *Procedure*

All magazine pages were reviewed, including the front covers by myself, the sole researcher. A coding sheet was created to track content themes for each individual magazine across magazine covers, articles, and advertisements. Analysis points were adapted from previous studies on weight loss articles and advertisements, cover headlines, and cover images (Ethan, Basch, Hillyer, Berdnik, & Huynh M, 2016; Davalos, B., Davalos, R., & Layton, 2007; Webb, Vinoski, Warren-Findlow, Burrell & Putz, 2017). Tracking the reoccurring themes and content in *DARE* and *Shape* from fairly recent issues (2015-2016) enabled descriptive statistics to compare the messages these two publications spread to their readers.

### *Measures*

The cover headlines of each magazine were categorized by themes including diet and body image, beauty and fashion, mental and physical health, and misc. (Davalos, B., Davalos, R., & Layton, 2007). Themes portrayed to the reader within each article were assessed and recorded as they related to body image by the same categories. Subcategories were created for each headline and article theme, which can be found in Table 1. For article titles, once the article was categorized based on the title listed in the Table of Contents, the article was then located and reviewed. The cover images were interpreted based on the variables of pose (active or inactive), body visibility, perceived body size, body shape, skin exposure, and attire. The stipulations for these variables were adapted from a study by Webb, Vinoski, Warren-Findlow, Burrell and Putz

(2017). Furthermore, advertisements were categorized in terms of beauty, health, food, and

travel. Subcategories were also created for advertisements, which can be found in Table 2. Only

paid source advertisements were included in this portion of the study.

*Analysis*

Using descriptive statistics, each aspect of the magazines – covers, articles, and

advertisements were analyzed and compared using the coding sheet with measures adapted from

previous research. Advertisements were categorized and recorded in order to investigate what

products and services these magazines prioritize in promoting to their readers depending on the

audience. The qualitative analysis of magazine covers, headlines, articles, and advertisements

was used to compare the body image messages promoted by a plus-size women's magazine

versus a popular mainstream publication for women.

**Table 1. Themes and Subcategories for magazine cover headlines and articles**

*Diet & Body Image*
        Sexy/flat abs I
        Tight/firm butt
        Quick workouts III
        Body Positivity
        Curvy women
        Weight-loss meals/slimming recipes
        Weight-loss products
        Body makeover/transformation

*Beauty & Fashion*
        Hair care secrets
        Skin secrets
        Best beauty buys
        Beauty routine tips and tricks I
        Dress to impress
        Style Guides
        Shopping spree
        Wedding fashion

*Physical & Mental Health*
        Fun fitness
        Wholesome foods
        Quick healthy meals I
        Relaxation routines I
        Happiness
        Technology free I
        Motivation I
        Life coaching tips
        Sleeping well

*Misc.*
        Celebrity spotlights
        Athlete spotlights I
        Couple/dating advice
        Sex life
        Vacation getaways
        Socializing

**Table 2. Themes and Subcategories for magazine advertisements**

*Food & Beverage*
        Alcohol
        Water
        Other beverages
        Snack Foods
        Premade meals
        Restaurants

*Beauty & Fashion*
        Hair care products
        Skin care products
        Make-up
        Beauty Apps
        Clothing and shoe brands

*Fitness, Health, Body Image*
        Fitness technology
        Vitamins
        Weight-loss supplements
        Weight-loss programs
        Prescription medicine

*Misc.*
        Cars
        Painkillers, antihistamines
        Household products
        Insurance companies
        Feminine Products
        Conferences

**RESULTS**

*Magazine Covers*

  All magazine covers highlighted a single woman with no group shots. In terms of body visibility, all covers showcased ¾ to full body shots. Any body parts that were cut out were typically the lower half of the legs; although one *DARE* cover (Spring 2016) highlighted a half body photo of Tess Holliday from the mid torso and up. Every magazine across the board included the cover model's face. The perceived body size for the cover models of *DARE* were larger than most mainstream models showcase, and had curvy or pear shaped figures. For *Shape*, all cover models were estimated to fit the fashion industry's straight size category of size 0 to 6. One *Shape* cover (May 2016) featured a curvy cover model who is perceived to be larger than a size 6 and would most likely be considered plus-size by industry standards. Across all issues, Shape accentuated a lean, toned body. As some cover models were more muscular than others, all appeared to have some accentuated muscle whether it was in the arms, legs, or abdomen. *DARE* covers barely present skin exposure of the cover models. Half of the covers featured work appropriate attire or business casual clothing therefore, the only skin exposure was the arms and minimal chest. The swimsuit edition (Summer 2015) featured the most skin exposure, showing the legs, arms, and chest. The Holiday 2015 edition features a special occasion dress; yet the only skin exposure is the arms and minimal chest. No *DARE* covers exposed abdomen skin exposure. Opposite of *DARE*, Shape showcased a lot of skin exposure on their magazine covers, most frequently through the abdomen, arms, and legs. Almost all *Shape* cover models were wearing some form of swimwear. Some covers presented swimwear on the bottom half of the model with a sweater or crop top to complete the outfit. Two covers in particular featured more exotic outfits that appeared more as a presentation factor than a practical attire choice for the

everyday woman. Furthermore, all covers models were featured in a non-active pose. All models were standing for the ¾ to full body shot excluding *Shape* November 2016 where the model is sitting on the ground, and *Shape* March 2016 where the model is squatting so her elbow is resting on her thigh.

*Magazine Headlines*

Comparing the cover headlines from the two publications, *Shape* was very focused on Diet & Body Image while *DARE* had a heavy emphasis on Beauty & Fashion. Every cover of *Shape* included at least one headline about sexy/flat abs including how to achieve them and how to maintain them. Most *Shape* covers included headlines about quick workouts such as 'Up your ab game! 15 minutes to flat' (April 2016) and 'Burn more calories in less time' (May 2016). These headlines were usually geared toward the core and mid-section, although 'firming and toning' the butt was the second most prevalent body part. All cover models on *Shape* were celebrities including Kate Hudson, Jessica Alba, and Lea Michele; therefore a celebrity spotlight was paired as a cover headline for every issue. Contrary to *Shape*, *DARE* magazine cover models were not celebrities except the Spring 2016 edition featuring Tess Holliday. Yet, a majority of *DARE* cover headlines included a celebrity spotlight although not concerning the cover model. Celebrity spotlights for *DARE* included Tess Holliday, Melissa McCarthy, and Ashley Nell Tipton, a project runway winner. *DARE* had no cover headlines pertaining to food as part of the Physical & Mental Health category, however *Shape* headlines regularly featured food in terms of weight-loss or slimming meals, wholesome foods, and quick and healthy meals. *DARE* only had one headline in the Physical & Mental Health section for life coaching advice. In terms of Beauty & Fashion, *Shape* mainly focused on hair and skin care with headlines like 'Vibrant hair!

The secret to major volume' (October 2016) and 'Young, sexy, skin: New science, major results!' (May 2016). The most prevalent headline category for Beauty & Fashion in *DARE* was style guides as each cover alluded to some form of 'Trends to Try' (Fall 2015) and 'Guides to Dressing' (Holiday 2015). It is important to note that *DARE* heavily emphasized bloggers for there fashion headlines, using this platform as a way to circulate trends. Half of the *DARE* covers also included Shopping Spree giveaways. *Shape*, as a magazine geared towards women living a 'fit' lifestyle, had headlines for relaxation, sleeping habits, and happiness although headlines for happiness were mostly put in terms of body image like 'Sleek, Strong, and Happy' (April 2016). Sex life headlines and couple advice were minimal in *Shape* but nonetheless, present. Body Positivity and curvy women were only found on 1-2 covers for both *DARE* and *Shape*, yet *Shape* had a handful of headlines alluding to body transformations or a 'new you'.

### *Magazine Articles*

Every issue of *Shape* is approximately twice as long as each *DARE* issue. The following breaks down the contents in Shape: Cover stories, Workouts, and Motivation & Inspiration. Additionally, some issues include a small Weight Loss section in the contents. Jumpstarting metabolism, energy-packed foods, and fat-blasting workout are common article themes throughout all Shape magazines. In addition to celebrity spotlights pertaining to the model covers, Shape also includes athlete spotlights such as Mountaineer Bonita Norris and Under Armour's Adrienne Lofton. Another main topic in *Shape* articles is eating well and eating right as some issues contain an 'Eat this, NOT that' section including advice for 'Smart Snacking'. Additionally these sections offer information on workout tips for a healthy lifestyle like the 'Two-Day Rule,' the notion that one should not go more than two days in a row without any

physical activity and that one should incorporate 4-5 hours of physical activity in their schedule per week. Again, many of these articles pertain to the Diet & Body Image category as 'trimming, toning, fat-blasting, snacking right, and eating well are common terms and phrases found in many articles throughout all issues of *Shape*. The weight loss sections of the issues that include it contain article titles like 'Seven diet breakthroughs that really work,' 'Don't drink in more calories,' and 'Exercise smarter, not harder.'

*DARE* had a very simple table of contents broken up as the following: on the cover, fashion, and plus. As told by the cover headlines, Beauty & Fashion is the most prevalent topic within *DARE*. Each issue contained article titles such as 'Celebrity Style,' 'Have You Heard?' and 'Get The Look'. The majority of *DARE* articles revolve around fashion trends and style guide whether it be for business wear, summer outfits, swimsuits, wedding fashion, or holiday glam. In regards to celebrity spotlights those featured in *DARE* range from well-known actresses like Rebel Wilson and Melissa McCarthy to plus-size models like Ashley Graham, and Rosie Mercado. As part of the Beauty & Fashion category, *DARE* magazine includes a '#DARETOWEAR' section at the end of every issue featuring women's Instagram posts that showcase their daring and fierce style tastes. Hashtags as an echo of the Body Positivity Movement are seen throughout *DARE* including #AuthenticBeauty #HonorMyCurves and #Uncompromisingwomen. In terms of containing articles about Curvy women, every edition of DARE has a 'Curves of the World' section, featuring curvy and plus-size fashion bloggers typically from the U.S. and Canada. Weight loss articles never appear in *DARE*, however beauty and fashion issues that are specified to an audience with larger body sizes is perceived through the miscellaneous article titles like 'CHUB RUB, Solutions for inner-thigh chaffing'. Workout regiments and dieting plans are not apparent in any issue of *DARE*.

*Magazine Advertisements*

DARE magazine is extremely limited in their paid advertisements and the majority of

their advertising is for plus-size clothing brands. Since it is a Canadian based magazine, an

advertisement for your big sister's closet, the #1 plus-size store in Toronto is featured in every

issue. Other common brand advertisements are Kiyonna (plus sizes 10-32), Toni+ (plus size 14-

22), and Pin-Up Girl Clothing (sizes XS-4X). Besides plus size clothing brands the only other

advertisements are for conferences, events, or movements that deal with curvy fashion and body

positivity. Girl Up, a global movement for empowering young girls is featured in every issue.

Additionally, advertisements for events like Curvy Expo, and #iamallwoman are featured as a

celebration of body empowerment and self-love. No advertisements for fitness, health, or food

products are included and individual make-up and self-care products are shown within the

featured bloggers recommendations.

More than half of every *Shape* issue is paid advertising. The products advertised range

between beauty products, medications, clothing and apparel, cars, food companies, alcohol,

household items and more. Some of the prominent advertisements seen in almost every issue is

Carrie Underwood's active wear line, Calia. Hair care is also a prominent advertisement category

showcasing brands like TRESemme, Nexxus, Garnier, and Herbal Essences. Continually, over

the counter medications such as Advil and vitafusion as well as prescription medications like

Stelara, Enbrel, Rexulti, and Nexplanon have prevalent features. Unlike *DARE*, a moderate

portion of Shape's advertising comes from food and snack companies as most are put in the light

of adding to a healthy diet or lifestyle. Although it is not frequent, alcohol companies including

Coors Light and Michelob Ultra appear in a few of the issues analyzed. Everyday household and

personal items like toothpaste brands, deodorants, battery companies, stain removers, and feminine products are seen. Although clothing and apparel brands are not one of the most prevalent advertisement categories, those that are featured are almost all high-line active wear brands including Chromt, Michael Kors active wear, Vimmia, and Rebok. Lastly, *Shape* magazine endorses weight-loss supplements and programs such as SlimFast and Hydroxycut, which are seen at least once in every issue.

**DISCUSSION**

As part of *Shape*'s editorial mission statement the publication promotes the "Love My *SHAPE* body confidence campaign devoted to nurturing your own unique physique" (Meredith Corporation, 2017). Although *Shape* embraces body confidence and personalized physiques, the contents of *Shape* generally illustrate thin, lean, and toned women adhering to societal beauty standards and body ideals for women. *DARE* Magazine is "the curvy woman's digital go-to-guide for the latest in fashion and beauty news, tips, and trends…to inspire plus size women worldwide to be daring with their style and to flaunt their curves" (*DARE* Magazine, Inc., 2017). As part of *DARE* Magazine's mission statement, the publication encourages women to be unapologetic about their body size and shape as nonconforming to societal standards. Due to the fact that *Shape* includes a lifestyle section unlike *DARE*, much of the magazines contents are geared around weight, food choices, and body image. The word 'fit' consistently appears throughout *Shape* considering that part of *Shape*'s mission is also to 'inspire women to adopt the fit mindset'. However, the 'fit mindset' *Shape* promotes is eventually illustrated in terms of lean muscle, flat stomachs, and firm glutes. Lea Michele's celebrity spotlight in November 2016 focuses on her intense workouts by is titled 'Finding Body Bliss'. Furthermore, all workout

regiment articles and active wear clothing advertisements showcase a model that is perceived to be a fashion industry straight size (size 0-6). There is no allusion to the possibility of a woman who embodies a 'fit' mindset and is also plus size, which questions what the perceived definition of 'fit', is.

Within *DARE,* there is no mention of dieting, weight-loss, working out, or eating habits. As previously stated, *DARE* does not contain any content regarding lifestyle therefore the content is solely based around beauty and fashion. The fashion and beauty articles and advertisements within *DARE* and *Shape* are similar, except the fact that *Shape* uses straight sized models while all *DARE* models are plus-size. There is no promotion for transforming one's body in any way, unlike Shape which incorporates weight-loss sections and headlines like 'Try (Ashley Greene's) body makeover challenge' (April 2016) or 'Sexy New You! Hot body jump start' (Jan/Feb 2016). Regardless of what body size audience these publications are geared towards, their main audience is women in general. The beauty and fashion aspects of these publications are the most similar, however almost all other aspects of the magazine differ in terms of body size. Although *Shape* promotes body confidence, the message to strive for a thin and toned body is an undertone of many advertisements and articles.

**LIMITATIONS**

This research was limited by only analyzing two current women's magazines, one plus-size publication and one mainstream. Due to time constraints, this study was also limited in terms of how many magazine issues were reviewed (16 total). Future research may expand on this study by investigating other plus-size publications as well as a different mainstream women's publication. Furthermore, a progressive study analyzing any changes in women's plus

size and mainstream magazine covers, headlines, articles, and advertisements over the years could be developed.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the recent efforts to promote body positivity and confidence through the media, the desire to 'achieve' a 'goal body' or thin ideal remains as an underlying theme. Additionally, terms such as 'healthy' and 'fit' are used synonymously with 'thin' and 'skinny', leading to the misperception that body size is truly indicative of well being. Plus size publications such as *DARE* have the ability to discuss issues and topics many mainstream publications do not address such as solutions for 'chub rub' or clothing brands that carry sizes about 20. As Sarbin (2005) stated, the hardship that plus size publications face is the fact that subscribers and readers must identify with the label of a large or fat woman. Although the average size woman is currently a size 14, many women still have difficulty identifying themselves with these labels since the 'perfect body' is still viewed in part as the thin ideal (Pipia, 2015). Women's mainstream magazines such as *Shape* promote many lifestyle articles and advertisements that are geared towards women without any regard for body size, however, the articles, advertisement, cover images, and headlines that ignore the population of women with larger body sizes is evident.

## Chapter 3

Negative Body Image Solutions:
A comparative study of Body Positivity, Body Diversity, and Body Functionality
through Documentary Film

**ABSTRACT**

*The concept of body image among young women has continued to reign prevalent in disciplines of the social sciences. In efforts to alleviate the unrealistic pressures women face regarding body image the constructs of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality are investigated through analyzing the recent body image documentary 'Embrace' (2016). This research aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of each construct as defined by 'Embrace' (2016) through descriptive statistics and visual analysis. This qualitative data investigates how each construct can serve as a solution to women's negative body image and can be used to alleviate symptoms associated with negative body image such as self-objectification, anxiety, depression, eating disorder, and disordered eating habits. This study adds to the conversation of proposed solutions for combatting negative body image for future generations of women.*

**KEYWORDS***:* body image, body loathing, documentary film

**INTRODUCTION**

Back in 2013, Taryn Brumfitt posted a before-and-after picture of herself on social media, illustrating the opposite of what traditional transformation pictures usually embody. The unconventional 'before' picture was Taryn during a female bikini competition – toned, muscular, and lean. The 'after' picture was a vulnerable spectacle of Taryn's body – naked, soft, and nonconforming to the societal standards of beauty as promoted by the media. Since the post went viral overnight, Taryn Brimfitt has become a Body Image Activist sensation. As director and co-producer, *Embrace (2016)* is Brumfitt's way of exploring global body image issues such as body loathing and body shaming, investigating the solutions women can use to alleviate body image pressure (Siemienowicz, 2016). The potential solutions include body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality as frameworks for life, hopefully displacing self-objectification, social comparison, and body dissatisfaction. Although the normal female body remains a controversial

spectacle in regards to realistic appearances and idealized messages, each solution aims to ease this pressure that continues to make women perpetually dissatisfied with their bodies.

Although *Embrace* is revered by many as a 'stirring and highly entertaining spectacle that celebrates diversity and preaches self-acceptance,' any shortcomings of the film regarding diverse aspects of women's bodies come question (Siemienowicz, 2016). The Body Positive Movement has grown tremendously over the past few years, however some deem that the movement could be better in terms of inclusivity and diversity (Sastre, 2014). Body Diversity, a lesser-known idea, has been adopted through the fashion industry but has yet to debute in other industry sources. Focusing on the abilities of the body rather than appearances is a more groundbreaking train of thought, as visual modes of media tend to set the gaze on women as objects, opening as a gateway to self-objectification (Alleva, Martin, Van Breukelen, Jansen, & Karos, 2015). Therefore, it is unlikely for these frameworks to serve as an immediate cure for negative body image issues that consume women's lives, yet they present a valuable starting point.

**PURPOSE**

Using the body image documentary *Embrace (2016)* as the sole framework, this research aims to define and compare the ideas of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality and investigate how each work can be utilized as a solution in combatting the contemporary body image issues women constantly face due to the media's long standing portrayal and high expectations of unrealistic beauty.

**THESIS**

Although body positivity and body diversity have been promoted through the media as methods to alleviate negative body image, body functionality is rarely promoted. The negative

views women have towards their own bodies and others have escalated with the rapid expansion of visual media. Considering body functionality is the only framework of the three that displaces the gaze from appearance to ability, highlighting this idea seems beneficial. All three constructs appear as partial solutions to the negative body image epidemic for women as a result of the media's narrow scope of beauty. Perhaps psychological hardships triggered by negative body image require more than social movements on popular media to decline and eventually diffuse.

**METHODOLOGY**

Myself, the sole researcher performed this qualitative research by using visual and contextual analysis. A coding sheet was used while repetitively watching *Embrace* (2016), the documentary of this study, to take note of how all three constructs, body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality appeared in the film. The documentary was viewed at full length a total of six times. Whenever each phrase was used in the film, or another synonymous phrase such as "an array of different bodies" for body diversity or "the body as a vehicle" for body functionality, it was noted. The coding sheet noted the frequency each construct was mentioned, who was discussing the topic, and in what context. Different time stamps throughout the film were noted for each time one of these constructs was discussed in depth. After the documentary was viewed a total of six times, these time stamps for clips were reviewed for further analysis. The literature regarding women's body image and the negative symptoms of body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, body loathing, and disordered eating were analyzed alongside the film to complete a cross-analysis of how these three frameworks for body image may function as solutions for women's negative body image. The visual analysis of *Embrace* (2016) and content analysis of body image literature served as the basis for this research in

investigating how these body image frameworks may serve as proposed solutions to combat the narrow scope of women's beauty ideals as seen through popular media.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality according to the body image documentary *Embrace* and how does each aim to defy the societal beauty ideal?

2. Comparatively, how does each of these ideas alleviate the negative symptoms associated with women's body image (including but not limited to self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, normative discontent, etc.) and which are more successful?

3. Is the body image documentary *Embrace* missing any key points or issues regarding the contemporary struggles women face due to body image?

**LIMITATIONS**

This study is limited in that it only analyzes three possible solutions: body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality through the lens of a single source. Since the study is a qualitative comparative analysis the data is limited in regards to personal interpretation and investigative techniques, which could be expanded upon in future research.

**DEFINITIONS**

***Body image*** is defined as a multifaceted psychological construct that includes the subjective attitudinal and perceptual experiences of one's body, particularly in appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). In Western society, the advancement of visual media has escalated body image pressure specifically among women. Many women have internalized the unattainable beauty and thinness standards portrayed by the media, leading to negative feelings towards the

body to a state where normative discontent, the preoccupied thought and perpetual dissatisfaction in women towards their bodies (Lubkin and Larsen, 2013).

*Normative discontent* standardizes the negative feelings and overtly critical evaluations women and girls have towards their bodies, deeming these psychological hardships as normal (Lubkin and Larsen, 2013). One of the symptoms that add to normative discontent is *self-objectification*, which hinges on the idea that women are constantly gazed upon for their appearances and therefore learn to think of their bodies as an ornament or object, as the greatest value is placed on aesthetics (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Through self-objectification women begin to view their bodies from an outsider's perspective, succumbing to body surveillance and extreme monitoring, often realizing that their physical appearance falls short of societally defined beauty and thinness standards (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Additionally, *body dissatisfaction*, or the ongoing pleasure of one's body and/or body parts is considered a "normative discontent" among women (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985).

In response to the media's narrow beauty standards for women, the Body Positive Movement aims to speak out against an appearance-obsessed society pressuring women to attain unrealistic 'perfection'. Generally, positive body image can be defined as holding love, confidence, respect, appreciation, and acceptance of one's physical appearance and abilities (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010).

*Body positivity* invites women to foster a supportive relationship between the self and the body rather than an idealized notion of feeling fabulous about one's body everyday, promoting body acceptance regardless of any appearance based differences from cellulite, stretch marks, acne, and even physical disabilities (Salam, 2017).

Similar to body positivity, the idea of ***body diversity*** stemmed from mainstream media beginning to embrace diverse body-ideals focusing on personal body acceptance, body trust, and body neutrality rather than developing a positive outlook on one's own body image (Betz & Ramsey, 2017). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, functionality refers to the state or quality of being functional, or the quality to serve a purpose well. Therefore, ***body functionality*** is the idea of the body working to serve a purpose, focusing on actions the body takes rather than how the body appears to look.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In 1983, Karen Carpenter, the American singer and sister in the sibling duo 'The Carpenters' died of anorexia at age 33. The death was one of the first to bring attention to the deathly consequences of eating disorders, serious mental conditions popularly associated with celebrities (Saukko, 2006). The biographical movies that followed Carpenter's death highlight the body image difficulties she faced and the dangerous strategies used to control her weight. Representations of the thin ideal are inescapable in Western media, serving as a sharp contrast to the realistic norms for women's bodies (Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003). Stice (2002) notes, "although most people are aware of societal standards of beauty, not everyone internalizes those standards to the same degree, and it is those who do internalize the societal standards who are at greatest risk of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders".

*Embrace (2016)*, a documentary directed by body image activist Taryn Brumfitt aims to explore global and diverse body image issues among women. Rather than solely focusing on eating disorders, *Embrace* calls attention to proposed solutions to the body image epidemic women face in the twenty-first century including the ideas of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality.

In 2012, Lady Gaga declared a "body revolution" advocating for people to embrace their flaws and challenge the increasing normalization of thin, toned bodies as ideal (Sastre, 2014). In the same year, Tess Holliday an American plus-size model created the hashtag #effyourbeautystandards, empowering women to defy the stigma of idealized beauty outlined by mainstream media (Pipia, 2015). The online 'Body Positive Movement' was dedicated to nurturing bodily acceptance and creating a safe space for social support regarding women's body image anxieties (Sastre, 2014). According to Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, and Augustus-Horvath (2010), positive body image can be defined as holding love, confidence, respect, appreciation, and acceptance of one's physical appearance and abilities. Although the movement aims to promote body acceptance regardless of appearance-based differences, Body Positivity has received criticism for the lack of intersectionality among its supporters (Sastre, 2014).

Similar to the Body Positive Movement, the idea of Body Diversity stemmed from mainstream culture, beginning to embrace diverse body-ideals (Betz & Ramsey, 2017). The Western constructed value of the thin ideal, and often-white ideal, has permeated other cultures with the rise of global media (Greenberg et al., 2013; Sabik, Cole, & Ward, 2010). In a study on South African women by Ashley and Jang (2017) many women were encouraged to follow a different body ideal than women in the United States. Body Diversity focuses more on personal body acceptance, body trust, and body neutrality rather than developing a positive outlook on one's own body image (Betz & Ramsey, 2017).

With society's obsession towards women's appearances, focusing on the functional aspects of one's body rather than appearance has protective affects (Alleva, Martin, Van Breukelen, Jansen, & Karos, 2015). In a study by Betz and Ramsey (2017) where a variety of body-ideal messages were promoted, the internalization of a thin ideal, self-surveillance and self-

objectification remained blatantly apparent. Regardless of the type of attention drawn to the

body, positive or negative, the media focuses the audience's gaze on body appearance rather than

functionality, which triggers self-objectification and social comparison among women

(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In terms of body functionality, most of the motivational language

society uses today assumes the audience as able-bodied. Although every body regardless of

differences possesses functions to some extent the normalized clichés assume all audiences can

harness abilities like running, climbing, or seeing (Begum, 1992). These generalizations ignore

the fact that unlike the societally ideal women represented in the media – young, medium height,

slim, white, and nondisabled – women with physical disabilities often believe their bodies are a

"source of pain, guilt, and embarrassment" (Begum, 1992). Disabilities are not always readily

apparent and they are constantly covered through deceit, modification, and disregard (Taub,

Fanflik & Mclorg, 2003). Despite the fact that only able-bodied people are typically embraced by

the media, their abilities and functions are commonly undermined or ignored by details of

appearance. The disregard for disabled women in the media transfers to situations in reality

where many women with physical disabilities feel excluded from social circles including able-

bodied women (Taub et al., 2003). Physically disabled women commonly attempt to conceal or

deflect their differences in order to fit the mold of social acceptability (Taub et al, 2003). Body

diversity encompasses a range of bodies including variations of sizes, shapes, colors – and

abilities, an overlooked aspect. With women's obsessive strive to fit the 'ideal' mold, the

'differentness' of women with physical disabilities is highlighted, subjecting these women to

harsher body self-perception and social comparison due to the 'otherness' constantly stigmatized

with disabled bodies (Taub et al., 2003). Additionally, able-bodied women tend not to focus on

the functions they are capable of but rather the aesthetics they do not possess (Betz & Ramsey, 2017).

**THEORETICAL FRAMWEORK**

Social Information Processing Theory serves as the framework to this research in order to investigate and analyze the different body image solutions promoted to women through documentary film. Applying social information processing theory allows a broad analysis of women's reactions toward body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality messages in terms of their relevance and success in combatting negative body image. As Engeln discusses in *Beauty Sick: How the Cultural Obsession with Appearance Hurts Girls and Women* (2017), the way women perceive their bodies and appearance is an individualized process. Festinger (1954) introduced social comparison theory in the mid twentieth century suggesting people evaluate themselves based on the criteria of other people. The growth of visual media has heavily influenced the way women define beauty and the mass media has created an ideal image of woman (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Not only do women compare themselves to their friends and counterparts but they also compare themselves to this 'ideal' woman – thin framed, associated with sexy, self-disciplined, and successful characteristics (Rice, 2014). The constant stimulation of visual media portraying the sexualized female body in this unattainable light has caused self-objectification and a drive for thinness in women, both detrimental to women's wellbeing (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Davenport, Rushford, Soon and McDermott, 2015). In response to women's negative body image reaching a point of normative discontent, solutions have been presented to combat the psychologically straining battle against society's ideal woman. The success of these solutions is solely based upon women's understanding, interpretation, and adoption of the frameworks. Therefore, the solutions presented in *Embrace*

*(2016)* are analyzed in terms of social information processing theory to investigate the possibilities such solutions afford to women.

**RESEARCH UNITS**

The body image documentary *Embrace (2016)* was viewed multiple times in order to decipher the differences between body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality. By using descriptive analysis, a coding sheet was used to make note of how often these terms were discussed, among whom and in what context. Through the various women interviewed in this film – actresses, magazine editors, mothers, body image scholars, dieticians, and photographers – the issue of body shame and women's negative body image outlooks is globally compelling. The categories of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality enable each construct to be investigated as a solution to the negative body image epidemic women are currently facing.

**FINDINGS**

**RQ1**: ***What is body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality according to the body image documentary Embrace (2016) and how does each aim to defy the societal beauty ideal?***

As a thematic undertone through the entire film, body positivity is used as an interchangeable term for self-acceptance and self-love. Although the term is not used frequently, having a 'healthy' outlook on one's own body and combatting the societal pressure to appear 'perfect' is a focal point of the film.

Mia Freedman, the editor of Cosmopolitan, discusses the crucial incorporation of body diversity in women's magazines stipulating that without it only one type of woman appears to be in the world – a 17 year old, 6 foot tall, blonde and blue eyed white girl with plastic skin (*Embrace*, 2016). Body diversity is described in the context of groups of women having

differences in height, skin tone, body shape, body size, hair textures, etc., yet it is also discussed in regards to an individual and the diversity a single body will experience throughout life. Jade Beall, a world-renowned photographer specifies body diversity as an art form, 'a practice of seeing yourself in many different lights' and a promise to 'not erase away the details of the moments'.

Early in the documentary Brumfitt reminisces on her 15 week preparation for a body building competition. In attempting to attain the 'perfect body' the result was not one of happiness but rather a stream of thoughts consumed with sacrifice – time, energy, and love that had been lacking in order to attain 'the perfect bikini body'. Brumfitt states, "It's not an ornament, it's a vehicle" in regards to her body as that phrase becomes the basis for body functionality throughout the film. As the film in indirectly structured as a message to Brumfitt's daughter, she continues, "I want my daughter to grow up loving and appreciating her body for all the things it can do, not just how it looks."

**RQ 2:** *Comparatively, how does each of these ideas alleviate the negative symptoms associated with women's body image (including but not limited to self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, normative discontent, etc.) and which are more successful?*

Stefania Ferrario, an Australian plus-size model comments, "When you hate your body it eats away at every aspect of your life" and this struggle is common among almost all women as Amanda de Cadenet, founder and CEO of 'The Conversation' and youngest photographer to shoot *Vogue* adds, "Everyone has a story about her body, it's just a matter of whether they're willing to be honest about it…it's an issue and a subject that affects practically every women and girl I know." Body Functionality is the idea that is promoted the most throughout the film in terms of switching the focus from appearance to abilities. Marika Tiggemann, body image researcher and professor discusses the drawbacks to parents who frequently comment on what

their daughters look like. In a way, gaining so much praise for one's looks at such a young age can become damaging in the future as young girls are taught to believe that their appearances are symbolic of their worth. A distressed mother states, "I feel like I'm putting out a thousand fires a day" in regards to her daughter's self-loathing due to a negative outlook on her own body. The mother ends her interview holding back tears and confessing, "I'm drowning in media." Body diversity seems to alleviate part of them problem by having women of all different types showcased in the media, giving girls and young women more relatable images. Yet, body functionality is a theme throughout the entire documentary that takes the gaze off of women's appearance and emphasizes a woman's character.

**RQ 3:** *Is the body image documentary Embrace missing any key points or issues regarding the contemporary struggles women face due to body image?*

*Embrace* ends with a 'diversity photo-shoot' incorporating 'a woman who is quite heavy, a woman who is physically impaired, a model, a transgendered person, etc…' and on the surface this portion of the film adheres to the notions of body diversity and functionality that have been discussed throughout the documentary. Yet among the vastly diverse appearances in the world, stating this event to be a 'diversity photo-shoot' is unconvincing. Among the immensely broad spectrum of skin tones the world affords, only a miniscule sliver are presented here. The body sizes appear to range from 2 to 14, with one token 'big girl' in the 20s. Furthermore, ethnic differences are slight and unique aspects to individuals are unapparent, except one physically impaired woman.

Additionally, *Embrace* is advertised as a global body image exploration. As Brumfitt "heads out into the world on a nine-week journey" she only explores the countries of Australia, United States, UK – London, Canada, Dominican Republic, and Vienna – Austria. Aside from

the Dominican Republic, all the locations are European and westernized societies. Several times throughout the film, interviewees make allusions to the differing definitions of beauty across cultures, yet these notions are not explored throughout the film. Marika Tiggemann briefly mentions the globalization of media and its affects on the body image ideals of women in Fiji who traditionally embodied a 'larger fatter body presumably as a sign of wealth and health. Amanda de Cadenet references the cultural differences in the Bahamas where she vacations exclaiming, "a girl with no bum and no ass, no one's looking at…culturally around the world the ideal of beauty is different." Unfortunately, the globalization of women's body image ideals is not deeply explored throughout *Embrace*.

**DISCUSSION**

The non-traditional body-loving post that changed Taryn Brumfitt's life is the reason *Embrace* was created. The fact that her story, an extremely relatable one to many women, made headline news in the United States, Canada, Lebanon, and Paris speaks to the global caliber women's negative body image anxieties have reached. Although Brumfitt titles herself as a positive body image activist, this film is a clear representation that body positivity is not the sole answer to alleviate the physical and psychological pains women go through as a cause of westernized appearance ideals and pressures. Sastre (2014) makes note that even women who consider themselves to have a positive body image outlook do not feel 'ra-ra-fabulous' about their bodies at every moment. Possessing a positive perspective toward one's own body is significantly formed in the visual culture that constantly surrounds society. When women cannot relate to the images that are bombarding their newsfeeds, advertisements, billboards, print media, and other outlets, it makes them feel as Stefania Ferrario stated, 'like they're the problem' (*Embrace*, 2016). Despite, what the media outlets promote, women are not the problem;

appearance industries are the problem. The fashion industry deems size 8 and up as plus size, despite the fact that the average woman is currently a size 16 (Christel & Dunn, 2016). Ferrario adds that she has seen models eat cotton balls backstage at fashion shows by dipping them in Gatorade to satisfy hunger pains in order to fit the ideal and societally accepted thin frame.

Additionally, the battle of implementing body diversity into the media holds multiple people accountable. As Mia Freedman discusses her obstacles in trying to print a lingerie spread featuring a size 16 model in *Cosmopolitan* most issues came from people not wanting to be associated with the shoot including the photographer, make-up artist, and designer. Mike Joffries, the CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch, came out with the statement; "Abercrombie is only interested in people with washboard stomachs who look like they're ready to jump on a surfboard" (*Embrace*, 2016). Not only does that restrict Abercrombie & Fitch to a marginalized market considering the average woman is a size 16, it also insinuates the idea that only people with 'washboard stomachs' can partake in activities such as surfing.

For years there have been discussions about the lack of diversity in the fashion and beauty industry, usually in regards to size, ethnicity, and race. The disabled are a population that is significantly undermined and often ignored in the media. *Embrace* touches upon this with the idea of Body Functionality, promoting abilities over appearances as exemplified through the interviewee Turia Pitt, a burn victim from a bushfire during her 100km outback marathon in September 2011. Pitt states, "It's a waste of energy that people spend all of that time worrying about how they look as opposed to what they can contribute." When a variable like physical disabilities is thrown into the diversity mix, audiences begin to realize that there is much more to appearance than 'skinny' and 'fat' and that the human aesthetic is far from the entirety of what a body is. Ricki Lake, actress and talk show host, adheres to this message admitting to the

complexities of women's body image and how she 'has it all' yet still looks in the mirror to find an unsatisfied reflection.

Body diversity and body functionality are a start to women's healing from the appearance pressures of a westernized society in terms of beauty ideals; however, the vitality lies in the difference between promoting positivity, diversity, functionality and embedding it in society's actions.

**CONCLUSION**

At a very young age, girls learn that their appearance is the defining characteristic for future success and happiness (Englen, 2017). The media serves as a principle teacher portraying bodies that do not fit the narrow view of 'beauty' created by visual media as 'other', 'less than', and 'problematic'. As seen through *Embrace (2016)* using methods of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality can alleviate the negative thoughts and consequences that accompany such a harsh and judgmental environment. Body functionality is evidently the most effective of the three as the gaze is completely taken off of appearance and views the body as a vehicle. Despite the good intentions body positivity was founded upon, negative thoughts in regards to one's body can still be triggered due to its focus on appearance and aesthetic regardless of a positive connotation. Body diversity is a beneficial outlook, however, media outlets that often incorporate diversity are seen as 'token' editions and business gimmicks. The diversity of an individual body experienced during a single lifetime is rarely illustrated in the media as Mia Freedman asserts, "You have to be hot all the time…when you're pregnant, after childbirth…aging…all the time" (*Embrace*, 2016). Body functionality appears to be the best solution to combat women's negative body image however it is just a start. It is one thing to promote the body as a vehicle and the functionality women possess as human beings rather than

objectified ornaments, however the success of the concept is founded in women's adoption and execution of such values at a young age before the media consumes their minds with stigmatized beauty ideals of the thin frame. This research can be further expanded upon in the future with different investigative approaches including focus groups and interviews with women who watch the film. As this current study only deals with the personal interpretation of the sole researcher, more input from women and their outlooks on body image as a whole and the possible solutions of body positivity, body diversity, and body functionality may contribute to this growing field. Furthermore, other recent body image documentaries may be analyzed for further analysis, investigating what avenues of women's body image is focused on the most.

## Conclusion

Despite the progressive strides made toward self-love and self-acceptance in regards to women's body image, the promotion of the thin ideal and the journey to achieve a 'perfect body' remains a prominent theme in the media. The hashtag #bodygoals has over 3 million posts on Instagram as Fitspiration pages are still widely active (www.instagram.com). Large women commonly have to face the misconstrued notions that being larger than the ideal is only a cause of laziness or a lack of discipline. Mainstream magazines showcase straight size models more than any other body size and cover headlines alluding to a skinny and happy 'new you' are still apparent as if a change for the thinner is necessary for one's happiness.

Chapter 1 indicated how being positive about one's body may not be the solution to a healthy relationship with one's body as any emphasis on appearance, positive or negative, can trigger thoughts of dissatisfaction. Body shaming does not only take place among a certain group of size but among everyone as body dissatisfaction is normalized, making it difficult to ever attain a happiness with one's physicality. Due to the media's creation of an unattainable ideal, women are made to feel like they are the problem as Stefania Ferrario states in *Embrace* (2016). The emergence of plus size magazines gave women a sphere to be themselves in regards to beauty and fashion as clothing brands that carried sizes larger than a 14 came into view. Unlike mainstream magazines that constantly push for women to change themselves, a publication like *DARE* made no allusions to weight loss and instead focused on beauty and fashion trends as constructs of self-expression. Yet, the idea that a new publication has to be made in order for large women to feel included is shocking. Regardless of body size, women all face similar situations and issues throughout life where one's dress size is irrelevant in terms of discussing the topic or finding a solution. Considering that visual media constantly showcasing and

emphasizes the appearance of women, the struggle for women to think about things other than their bodies and their hatred towards it becomes increasingly difficult as noted in *Beauty Sick* (2017). It has become evident that appearances are promoted far more than abilities in the media, teaching young girls from a young age that their defining characteristic will be found in the way they look. The most progressive step in combatting women's negative body image is the idea of body functionality and viewing the body as a 'vehicle rather than an ornament'. As Turia Pitt states in *Embrace*, "It's a waste of energy that people spend all of that time worrying about how they look as opposed to what they can contribute," echoing Englen's fascination with time and thought women lose to body loathing.

Solutions have been proposed for fighting the media's long held stereotype of the westernized thin ideal; clothing brands are extending sizes, magazines are incorporating size diversity, women are daring to wear clothing that was once seen as 'off limits' due to their size, and media literacy programs have been initiated to promote the unnatural alternations made to the promoted images of beautiful women. Girls as young as 7 will associate 'thin' with 'pretty' or 'wanted' (Englen, 2017). Despite body positivity's best efforts, the inclusion of body diversity, and the versatility of body functionality all are ways to cure the idealized thoughts girls learn early on in life. In order for self-love and acceptance to be embraced by society the long-held stereotypes need to be filtered out, and the idea that appearance is not everything needs to be taught from the start.

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