Unfiltered Filter of Body Image in Fashion

In the 21st century, it has become the new normal to post our life or current buys on social media. Whether this is a tactic to flaunt how we are living or to show how happy we are, this should not signify that this photo or video is an accurate representation of who we are or what we value. With technology and media constantly evolving, businesses in the fashion industry are always looking for ways to stay relevant. One way they do this is by advertising on social media for millions of people around the world to see. Most people forget to mention the number of alterations made to make these advertisements perfect. The fashion industry is renowned for its inclusion of thin body types and its emphasis on how being skinny correlates with attractiveness. There is an increasing amount of body types that are making their way into the industry but like many things in the world this issue will not be fixed overnight. The fashion industry's high standards of beauty contribute to the societal pressure that distorts women's perception of self-worth and body image. These pressures include the industry's history of body image, the media's effect on consumers, and the way companies benefit from sizing effects.

In the beginning, fashion wasn't always a respected job choice. Many in the late 15th century, ridiculed the study of clothing because to them clothing was just what they wore to stay warm and cover up. They thought that there was no benefit to studying clothes and the materials they were made of. Now, however, fashion is one of the biggest and most successful business in the world. In spite of that, fashion industry in the past wasn't always this fortunate considering that there were areas of weakness. One that is still prominent today is the physical appearance of those around us. Being that the history of body image varies there was a time where being "bigger" implied wealth. In a study about manipulating measurements and defining women's body image, it states "During the Middle Ages, Michael Carolan (2005: 84) reports that the

preferable body, in size and shape was larger and even corpulent, its size representing distinction and wealth through privileged access to food resources" (Hackett 264). With this information, it is evident that your body size was a clear indicator of your social class because the more food you ate the more money you had. In another article it states, "Meanwhile, rich landlords were able to afford an extravagant life where their every need and hunger was waited upon by an attentive staff. This led to a widespread belief that the plump were to be admired for their wealth and fortune" (Lin 102). However, due to an increase in food supply this did not last long, which also brought "social norms fixated on over-consumption and its corresponding health issues" (Hackett 264). From there, these norms stuck and caused people to worry about the beauty standards set out by society.

The issue of public body shaming and the overuse of skinny models has been around for decades, but one harsh beginning to it all was the start of pageant shows. These shows were widely broadcast as well-known television programs and problematic because its purpose was to have a group of women compete based on a list of beauty standards. In a study about muscularity in thin female bodies it mentioned that when you compare both Miss America and Miss USA, most contestants are judged based on "an interview as well as swimsuit and evening gown competitions". However, one aspect where they slightly differ is that Miss America has a talent segment where the models have the opportunity to be judged on something other than their appearance (Bozsik 610). To further this idea, the article also states that "the absence of a talent portion in the Miss USA pageant suggests a greater emphasis on appearance in this competition because participants do not have as many opportunities to gain a higher score in non-appearance focused categories (Bozsik 611). In the end, it still failed to undermine the fact that these women were still working to be crowned the most beautiful woman in the world, which in turn,

shouldn't be battle against. Instead, it should already be known that everyone was made with the same amount of purpose and beauty.

Pageants and beauty contests are still around today but the fashion industry depends on the runway to demonstrate another side of these well-known body types. For years, companies and designers have made it a business to send the newest trends off on a catwalk in well populated countries for full exposure of their new line or collection. Though this may seem like an amazing way to market, this is just one method businesses use body image in inappropriate ways. From fashion runways to Instagram and Twitter, these models are constantly being exposed to the public. What must be reconsidered is that models are regular people who too, stress about life and being insecure. They constantly worry about their measurements and whether or not they are meeting the requirements of their agency. However, it is time to notice that models are simply just models, and that we should no longer view them as role models for what we wish to become or mirror. If you wish to choose a model as an idol it should be because you adore their values or personality, and not just the shape or size of their body.

Fashion has a sense of belongingness and uniqueness to it that makes it so special. To bring it back to its overall purpose though, its main job is to act as an outlet for individuality. Apparel is a way that one can differentiate themselves from those around them as well as to connect with people who share the same interests/ hobby as them. An article about the psychology of clothes mentions that, "clothing can signal many aspects of a person's social identity including socio-economic status, gender, religion, and occupation. Doctors, nurses, soldiers, police and military men, postmen, judges, priests (...) are all identified and called upon by their attire" (Duje 91). Whether it is for our occupation or to just demonstrate our interests, fashion is our voice. The article it discusses "Women who appear sexy" are judged as less

competent, less intelligent, and less moral than those who dress appropriately" (Duje 93). This relates to body image in the fashion industry because it demonstrates that clothing has the authority to make or break your reputation or even the way others view you. The significance of clothing today is that it "serves an important socializing influence and acts as a symbol of social status and identity" (Duje 90).

This section mentions the media's effect on body image. The problem with society in this day and age, is that it only centers around everything that is perfect and up to par with the standards set out by a selected number of people. Whether it is the number of people with high social status or the number of successful lives our society prefers to acknowledge as perfect or flawless. To most, being a perfectionist is equivalent to being successful, however when it comes to body and choice of those living in this society there shouldn't be a say in how "perfect" they are. Thanks to social media this problem continues to get worse and worse. The media is what the fashion industry uses to promote their products. This is mainly because social media is the best way to reach their target market, whether it be domestically or internationally, the media does all the work. Though this may seem like a huge plus, it isn't. More and more people who see these beautiful/ handsome influencers are left becoming harder on themselves and going through drastic measures to mirror them. What they fail to see is the effect it has on their body and health.

The negative consequences of the media are numerous, but one effect that is very common is the lack of self-esteem that's left when one compares themself to these well-known models. Lack of self-esteem is typical for people on social media because "…there is a significant discrepancy between their own body size and the "ideal" body size that is commonly unattainable" (Bozsik 609). When one constantly compares themselves to those around them or

the people they see on social media, they start to feel more self-conscious, which in turn affects the way they dress. For instance, in an article about the psychology of clothing it states "…body image may affect clothing behavior and clothing may affect body image and self-feelings" (Kodzoman 92). If someone is unhappy or unsatisfied with the way, they look they will show it in the way they dress by virtue of not feeling good in anything they wear. Body image especially plays a part in self-esteem because when someone doesn't feel confident or comfortable, their wardrobe is relatively small with a limited amount of clothes to wear. All in all, self-esteem is all about how much value you give yourself. If there is a negative correlation between self-esteem and body image you are left feeling pressured and frustrated, which is very unhealthy for your body and mental health.

In relation to lack of self-esteem comes body dissatisfaction which is also commonly known as dysmorphia. When one lacks self-acceptance, this causes them to degrade themselves, which in turn creates one to believe that they are deformed or not normal. In an article it stated that "… advertising has been described as an internalizing or normalizing means to spread unrealistic beauty ideals. Therefore, a higher incidence of these diseases is presented in advanced and modern societies and people with the best living conditions, mostly caused by the popularization of thin and muscular ideals" (Aparicio-Martinez 2). When an influencer posts a photo including collaborations with clothing and sponsors, some feel that they must compare themselves to them because they are doing it right and that's what our society praises. This in turn makes them feel like they must conform to having these attributes, which also adds to why this is an ongoing issue. People tend to neglect the importance of feeling confident and accepted because there is just one body type that is seen as more attractive and healthier. This is how there becomes a separation between image and reality. Once these two connections detach it's hard to

connect them back, especially for younger girls on social media. Being a teenager or young adult is already stressful and to add lack of self-esteem and body dissatisfaction to the mix just leaves one feeling conflicted and confused. Dysmorphia is heavily associated with eating disorders because stress sometimes causes people to change their eating habits. In fact, "Out of the population with disordered eating attitudes, 16% of them present overeating, 20% purged by vomiting, and 61% food restraining [9]" (Aparicio-Martinez 2). With these young girls already having a tremendous number of stressors it doesn't help that they also have people that judge them with opinions that are extremely biased. They are already going through puberty and accepting the new changes that come with it. So, when it comes down to acceptance, they have a hard time coping with it. What a teenager sees in relation to what an adult sees on social media is a lot different because to a teenager they practically depend on looking up to someone. This is because they are eager to fit in and be a part of something. However, they need to acknowledge that these unrealistic body types are not always genuine.

This section is about how social media is a place for companies to communicate with consumers. With technology evolving at a rapid pace companies and influencers are finding ways to digitally alter their bodies using specific software and applications. The most popularly used apps are Facetune and Photoshop and they are becoming widely accepted by Generation Z and Millennials. This supports the idea that people refuse to accept their bodies. An article about putting disclaimers on magazine articles states, "not only are the models naturally thin, but digital modification techniques are now routinely used to further elongate legs and slice off kilograms and centimeters from waists, hips, and thighs, as well as to eliminate any other blemishes" (Tiggerman 45). These unnatural features are continuously being compared because the public vehemently believes that this is how a real body is supposed to look. In a study about

putting disclaimers on magazine advertisements they hypothesized that if they put visible disclaimers underneath photos that were digitally altered there would be a decrease in the amount of people who are dissatisfied with their bodies. While conducting the experiment, they found that these warning signals made the women more inclined to being dissatisfied with their bodies because they found that "… most women are already well aware that fashion magazine images have been digitally altered (EngelnMaddox,2005; Tiggemann et al., 2000). Alternately, perhaps independently of any judgement of realism, warning labels may actually direct greater attention to the model's body than the advertisement would normally (without any label)" (Tiggermann 52). Even though the results didn't coordinate with the hypothesis it was fascinating that women already knew that these models weren't as pictured. Yet these images still caused them to be even more dissatisfied with their body. When it comes to advertising on social media there shouldn't have to be disclaimers on the photos, instead people should just accept themselves as they come and not belittle themselves over an altered image.

When it comes to the fashion industry people are always looking for new ways to stay on trend. This too relates to body image because once there is a new trend regarding a new attractive body feature people go above and beyond to have this new sense of beauty. Nowadays people tend to lose weight in very unhealthy ways or elect to have expensive surgeries done to fit the specific stereotypes set up by what our society thinks is "healthy". Losing weight isn't something that can be done right away, it takes time. In our society though, there is a common belief that this is possible. In an article it mentions that "many girls today mistreat their bodies, developing an unhealthy relationship with the basic activities that our bodies need to survive: eating, exercising, and waste removal" (Lin 103). Even specific outlets for women to feel healthy and learn about a healthy lifestyle are corrupt. An article about fitspiration posts on Instagram

mentions that, "Whilst fitspiration-style posts are known to often include images of healthy foods (e.g., Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018), investigations into the impact of fitspiration on body satisfaction have mainly used experimental stimuli containing images of female bodies only. Furthermore, a content analysis by Carrotte, Prichard, and Lim, (2017) revealed fitspiration images are not only more likely to adhere to thin and athletic ideals, but also contain sexualized images that objectify female body parts" (Davies 101). This shows that even places that promote a Fitness-inspired life are still driven by body dissatisfaction because it is filled with jealousy and resentment.

As mentioned, people expect overnight success, so to adhere to this mentality people are starting to get plastic surgery. Even though this is expensive and can lead to complications, women would do anything to feel beautiful even if that means risking their lives. For example, in a study about the relationship between eating disorders and female college students it found that "a high frequency of women determined to undergo plastic surgery to improve their image, being focused on breast surgery" (Aparicio-Martinez 10). It also stated that, "Moreover, the results from the data showed that almost 93% of the women desired to change at least three zones of their body using at least two different methods (1.98 ± 0.82). The methods most used were physical activity (92%), diet (48%), surgery (24%) and beauty or alimentary products (23%). Among the zones to be modified by a surgical procedure 68% of the women indicated breast implants" (Aparicio-Martinez 7). Overall, this shows that cosmetic surgeries are commonly used in the hope that one's body will adhere to the societal pressures of being skinny. Feeling uncomfortable in your own body just goes to show that there is a problem with body image in our current society.

The fashion industry for years has been known to target females, which in turn relates to gender inequality. Men's interest in the fashion industry has been overlooked and neglected, which made it very hard for them to have a say on body image. Even though men have the general stereotype to be nonchalant and oblivious to fashion they too are affected. An article states that, "Contrary to commonly held beliefs, men have been shown to be often more self-conscious than females with regards to their personal dress sense and the way in which they are viewed in public" (Kodzoman 94). It is important to recognize that everyone has insecurities and things that they wish to fix. So instead of only addressing one gender we must first comprehend the fact that even though "majority rules" there is still a minority party that is deeply affected. Later in the article it says, "Whether you are male or female, your fashion choices can affect both your self-image, the impression that you convey to others and in turn, the way in which people behave towards you" (Kodzoman 94). Overall, a diverse range of body image is important for our society because it helps teach people that there isn't a "perfect" body type and that all bodies are beautiful. Regardless of gender or health we must promote being comfortable with ourselves.

The media's effect on consumers is one aspect to business but the way in which the business markets itself is an entirely different topic. Creating and maintaining businesses is how our economy functions and to get the word out, companies market in a variety of ways. When it comes to marketing it is significant to enforce and mention diversity so that everyone feels good about the brand. An all-inclusive approach to marketing is ideal because it allows for the customer to experience the brand and feel better about themselves. In a study about body inclusivity, they observed that when comparing Aerie and Victoria Secret there was a difference in self-esteem after viewing brief advertisements. The study signified that "Qualitative research has found similar results, noting that the print version of the Aerie Real campaign elicited

positive reactions regarding body image, mood, and self-concept (Rodgers, Kruger et al., 2019). Viewers of the Dove video also reported increased positive affect, while the women who viewed the HBO, Victoria's Secret, and control videos reported a decline in positive affect" (Selensky 102). A diverse advertisement expresses to the consumer that the company believes that there is a range to beauty and image, which in turn allows customers to feel recognized in their own beauty. Another technique used by businesses to market themselves is done through body positivity promotions. In a study it stated that "Viewers in the current study found the Aerie and Dove campaigns to have a positive, uplifting, and empowering message. We found Aerie and Dove campaigns not only improved self-esteem and put viewers in a better mood, but they also made viewers more accepting of diverse body shapes and sizes" (Selensky 103). Body positivity promotions allow for diversity to enter the industry, which makes people feel empowered and confident by simply wearing clothes they identify with. The assertion of body positivity indicates that all bodies are beautiful just the way they are and that we shouldn't try to change ourselves just to feel noticed or desired.

Advertising and marketing a collection in the fashion industry is not only competitive but at times it can be problematic. When it comes to the cultural and ethnic side of this industry there are more factors to consider. In fact, a study about digital manipulation talked about how "A Caucasian model's skin is rendered more exotic through darkening while a model of color may be lightened to match the readership profile of a major magazine" (Reaves 142). This affects not only the business, but it affects the models and consumers. What is commonly forgotten is that these models constantly sit through extensive hours of hair and makeup to all be digitally altered in the end. This also affects the model and consumer because there won't be a genuine way of broadening race and culture if the photos don't depict the actual beauty of the model's skin.

Reaves also states that "Women of color are often stereotyped as "exotic" (Brislin, 1996), and so computer technology has become yet another tool for racial stereotyping" (Reaves 142). This shows that the race of models is endlessly being considered a factor, which makes it harder for them to create room for diversity. This relates to body image because depending on your race it is believed that it could affect your body makeup. In an article it says, "Studies show that Blacks are less concerned about weight than are Whites (White, Hudson, & Campbell, 1985), exhibit fewer weight-reduction behaviors such as dieting and exercising (Kann & Ross, 1996), and have lower incidences of eating disorders than Whites (Gray, Ford, & Kelly, 1987)" (David 274). Even though race can be very prominent in sizing, all that should matter is that everyone is recognized and appreciated for the beauty and culture they bring to this world.

Diversity in the fashion industry has gotten better over the years. A diverse business helps portray the message that everyone should respect and embrace themselves. This also makes people feel more welcomed when they enter certain stores because it just shows that they too have a place in that store. An article states, "to combat these health concerns, retailers are taking a stand to fight the traditionally thin ideal by incorporating average or plus size models in their media campaigns. For instance, Lane Bryant's #ImNoAngel and PlusIsEqual and Aerie's #AerieReal campaigns have gained increased attention by advocating for body-positivity" (Clayton 406-407). By incorporating plus sized models and those who are considered "outliers" in their advertisements the companies not only get positive feedback but also allow for people to feel like this is the new normal. An article says "U.S. plus-size female consumers account for 28% of the nation's apparel purchasing power (Binkley 2013). This group of women, who wear size 14 or larger clothing, believe that fashion retailers do not understand their clothing needs" (Bickle 45). Bickle explains different areas in which women who are plus sized are dissatisfied

with their in-store retail experience. The article talks about how women are displeased with the clothing sold in plus sizes because it's either limited or not as fashionable and it mentions fitting rooms impacts the customer's overall experience. In the article it states that "Other retailers, such as Yours Clothing, HeyGorgeous, ModCloth IRL, and Simply Be are trying to make the fitting room experience better for plus-size women by incorporating on-demand prerecorded compliments, in-store stylists to assist shoppers while changing, larger fitting rooms with a boudoir feel, and "magic mirrors" that will take four photos of the customer, allowing them to email their friends for a second opinion and alleviate the need to leave the fitting room" (Bickle 47-48). This just goes to show that retailers are working hard and are being more open minded when it comes to broadening the range of body sizes in stores. Last, the article discusses about how mannequins and how plus-sized customers can't relate due to the lack of plus-sized mannequins. As of today, the only store that actually adheres to this is Target because they are the only store that includes plus sized mannequins as well as including their plus-sizes in the same area as the other sizes. Being a part of the minority party can be really demeaning because you are forced to shop in your own section just because you don't adhere to "regular" body types. This makes people who are "plus-sized" feel humiliated since they are purposefully separated from sizes in the store.

Another sizing technique commonly used is vanity sizing, which is when retailing companies label their clothes in smaller sizes to influence people to feel good, making them more likely to buy. In an article it states that "Vanity sizing can assist with perceptions of modification in that a discrepant size label can create the illusion of shifting toward socially acceptable sizes" (Ketron 439). Though vanity sizing is deceitful, it does help companies sell clothing because it makes consumers feel more positive about their body. For example, if a

consumer is a size smaller at American Eagle than at Forever 21, they're more likely to shop at American Eagle because they feel happier to be sized smaller. Vanity sizing can be very difficult to follow but sizing in the fashion industry in general is confusing. An article about clothing measurements, it talks about "… the American convention of using ad hoc sizes, e.g., 8, 10, 12, etc. – and the ad hoc size system means that the designated number has no relationship with actual measurements" (Hackett 267). This demonstrates that retailers use a made-up system to avoid people paying attention to their actual accurate measurements. Though vanity sizing isn't accurate it does affect the consumer in a positive way. For example, "… fitting into a pair of jeans labeled smaller than its true size can increase positive self-related mental imagery for consumers, irrespective of their self-esteem level" (Nilüfer 571). Later it states that "the studies also demonstrate the influence of individual appearance self-esteem on the mediating effect of mental imagery" (Nilüfer 571). This study indicates that vanity sizing helps people feel more worthy and confident when it comes to sizing small because they feel more accepted and a part of something. Being that size is a sensitive subject it is interesting to see companies go out of their way to alter their sizing systems to allure consumers.

The perception of body image will continuously be recognized as a trend but hopefully as time progresses, we will recognize that trends are only temporary, and our bodies are forever. It is time to challenge this issue because we have the power to change the future. Instead of having the mindset that being skinny is healthier and attractive we should reinforce that a person doesn't need to be skinny to be healthy. All bodies were created differently, and we must accept the beauty that each body brings. Equally we all have a certain of ourselves, but it is key to encompass all that makes us who we really are. Being all-inclusive is a turning point because it enables the fashion industry to become more ethical, sustainable, and media savvy. This compels

the industry to refrain from always being perfect and accepting that everybody has flaws. In the history of fashion, its effect on the media, and its significance to business it is evident that body image is an issue that cannot be dismissed as it deeply affects us and future generations. Change cannot be made overnight so as time progresses hopefully the fashion industry can realize the importance of ranging body types and the beauty of individualism.

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