

**The Impact of Body Image in the Lens of Fashion and Creativity in the Editorial and  
Runway World**

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This literature review is focused on the overall impact that editorials and runway fashion shows have on the body standards of women in this generation. Currently, individuals live in a time that focuses on the republication of popular events like Fashion Week or behind the scenes of Vogue shoots, individuals have the ability to constantly compare themselves to the models in each event. While the media tries to portray the fashion world as more body-friendly than it used to be, there are still harsh requirements for models that enforce eating disorders and unhealthy habits that allow for weight loss. The overall conception of fashion is normalized and favored by consumers when models are smaller in size. Trends are still pushed by thinner individuals and mirrored through the everyday woman. Although these strict rules only directly affect a small percentage of people, the indirect effects are long-lasting and reach hundreds of thousands of young women growing in confidence.

### **Rules/laws to help limit the foreshadowing of eating disorders**

A study conducted by researchers Arjona and Checa examines the relationship between social media and the individual's need to achieve an unattainable body image that allows for the manifestation of an eating disorder over time. Protocols are encouraged to be developed within social media and the ability for influencers to post for brands to be monitored to help the audiences feel less targeted. This study aims to ascertain the potential impact of body dissatisfaction and social media usage (both in terms of duration and kind) on the likelihood of eating disorders developing. To do this, a randomized study including 12 schools in Almería (Spain) was conducted using the Sick Control One Fat Food scale. 605 Compulsory Secondary Education pupils, 48.42% female and 51.52% male, ranging in age from 12 to 17 years, made up the sample. After creating cross-tabulation tables to examine the association between age and sex and the likelihood of developing EDs, a two-factor ANOVA was carried out utilizing the

likelihood of experiencing (Arjona & Checa, 2024). Finally, researchers suggest that health promotion campaigns in schools incorporate ED prevention efforts; teachers receive training in ED prevention so they can use content across the curriculum and identify potential risk cases; and there is no gender distinction because there are fewer and fewer differences between the sexes when it comes to risk and manifestation.

To continue the idea of recognizing the potential risks of eating disorders, it is important to highlight that in the fashion industry, it is seen as normal to edit the appearance of an already underweight model, to make her appear thinner than one naturally is. To try and prevent one from comparing themselves to these unnatural and impossible beauty standards, there have been classes present at universities in which professors teach strategies that aid in addressing body standards. However, strategies have shown more promise when implemented by government or industry officials. In Australia, a new law has been implemented that encourages magazines to highlight the natural features of models and allow for photo editing to be diminished. Israel followed Australia's example and implemented a law that banned models from having a BMI of less than 18.5 kg (De Freitas et al., 2024). France agreed with Israel's standards and put it into practice for the first time. There was pushback present, allowing models below this BMI to receive a doctor's note proving their health. While these efforts show a greater awareness from the public of the problem at hand, there are still prevalent issues in the fashion industry and the industry's ability to bend the rules. For example, in a study done by Boyd and Moncrieff-Boyd, there is excess evidence proving that magazines are still broadcasting models with lower BMIs than allowed for and retouching images to achieve a perfect status image. The study found that 90% of the models seen in magazines or advertisements were white and 74% of the models were considered underweight (De Freitas et al., 2024). Only 25% of the models shown were an

appropriate weight. Given the recent efforts to change the industry's ways and point of view, it is disappointing to the average viewer to consistently be reminded that the efforts had no real effect on the industry officials, encouraging body dissatisfaction and constant comparison.

While the pressures of attaining an ideal body image are apparent to consumers, it is also very pressing on models in the fashion industry. Multiple criticisms exist and allow for the dissatisfaction of models in the fashion industry to be explained. Models are expected to weigh around 120 pounds while being 5'11 (Yager, 2010). This is extremely concerning considering a thin figure is hard to maintain for the usual human being. This expectation allows for the constant encouragement of eating disorders or unhealthy practices such as anorexia, bulimia, or even binge and purging episodes. Since models are constantly showcased on magazine covers or commercials, younger girls can constantly compare themselves to this unrealistic standard. While these body expectations are mostly impossible for women, the constant worry of not feeling as if one is not meeting social norms allows for an unhealthy relationship between a woman and her body to be formed. This then encourages unhealthy practices and consistent anxiety and denial of achieving legitimate healthy goals. While individuals in society can recognize the problem of unrealistic broadcasting standards, fashion industry majors cannot accept the issue and refuse to allow for a change in their ways. The younger generation is consumed by media outlets and is always looking for a new role model. If a Victoria's Secret Angel becomes a young girl's inspiration, she will disrupt her growth patterns by eating less as well as damaging her self-confidence.

### **Criticism of plus size models**

For years the fashion industry has received pushback for their inability to break trends and embrace uniqueness. In the 1900s, multiple reforms took place that enabled women to speak

about their opinions on shaping their bodies in unnatural ways, such as using a corset or tightlacing. Currently, there is a reform called the body positivity movement that pushes for inclusivity in both race and size. The overall mission of this movement is to challenge unrealistic standards set by the industry that have affected the overall view of individuals' body image. 1 in 5 adults have felt shame for their body type and disapproval for their weight (Humann, 2020). Over 70% of healthy women have expressed their urge to be thinner (Humann, 2020). Social media has encouraged the growth of the body positivity movement and allows individuals to embrace their natural features like cellulite or love handles. The industry has responded to this movement by becoming more size-inclusive. For example, Nike has created a plus-size collection that inspired other brands to make more size-inclusive options for their customers (Humann, 2020).

While the push for plus-size models is increasingly getting larger and larger, there could be a valid reason why some fashion houses are not supporting this idea. According to Time, when customers were shown a model who was advertising clothes in a size 8 compared to a size 14, the size 8 sold more almost every time (Conley, 2014). Even though consumers push for size equality, they are still drawn to the instability of the thinner models to showcase trends. It is also understood that brands will reshoot low-selling products with thinner models to make the clothes seem more appealing to consumers. The consumer cycle is vicious, as one is used to the constant push of products being modeled on size 0-2. It is up to the consumer to allow plus-size models to showcase the clothes they want and still buy them. We as a community must recognize that every interaction we have bears a duty, especially as corporations continue to pay attention to the input and behavior of plus-size consumers.

Continuing the idea of designer houses not supporting plus-size models, Fashion legend Karl Lagerfeld has some pretty strict standards for women's body types, especially those in the fashion field. The models that would walk in Chanel were a strict size zero and almost had a skeletal look. He referred to the recent emergence of plus-size models as "fat mummies" (Connolly, 2018). He also stated, "With dreams and illusions, and no one wants to see round women " (Connolly, 2018). It is important to highlight this scrutiny because of how loved Karl was in the fashion world. He ideally did no wrong and led Chanel in a very popular and powerful direction. If someone as beloved as Karl can get away with these harsh words and encourage eating disorders in models, how could other brands not partake in the continuous use of thin models? His influence spread through all age levels, especially among young individuals who are looking for idols in the fashion industry. Additionally, Karl Lagerfeld refuted the idea that individuals were practicing disordered eating to achieve their size. He went on to describe how it is normal to see the ribs of a small individual and those trying to push the development of plus size models are absurd and allow for the public to be reminded of overeating problems (Yager, 2010). His words allow individuals to believe they are less than others thanks to their measurements and encourage the continuation of the pattern of editing models and hiring unrealistic bodies for modeling. Another example is the head of People's Revolution, a model agency, who explained that women should not compare themselves to models as they are exceptions to nature. She then went on to explain that fabric hangs better on thinner individuals and that anyone over the size of 4 is not going to be accepted in the industry (Yager, 2010). This allows for an incredibly biased view of young women and their view of the media.

### **The constant comparison of the ideal body**

Throughout editorial pieces, models are showcased to the public with a perfect figure and zero flaws. With this in mind, a study took place where 49 women were examined when looking at fashion editorials that showed differing body types of women (Clayton et al., 2017). Their heart rate was studied and compared to the body type of women shown in each magazine. The researchers studied the extent to which women, whose desire was to be slimmer, made social comparisons between models that matched their ideal—thin size models—and models that were average or plus size, and how these comparisons affected the amount of cognitive resources used to encode the information. They also looked at how women's body satisfaction was affected by the size of media fashion models. It is highlighted that ultra-thin fashion models are used as a reference for social comparison. 40% of the women in our world are overweight and 15% are obese, which allows for the assumption to be made that the bodies shown in fashion magazines are unrealistic and abnormal for the average population (Clayton et al., 2017). According to the findings, women expressed the highest levels of body happiness and the fewest social comparisons when they viewed plus-sized models; however, when they viewed average-sized and thin-sized models, body satisfaction declined and social comparisons increased. Furthermore, the allocation and encoding of external resources declined as social comparisons grew (Clayton et al., 2017). These results suggest that ad creators should keep using more genuinely sized fashion models in their media campaigns to boost body positivity and increase attention to and retention of a message.

With body satisfaction in mind, social comparison theory has allowed for the idea that individuals are eager for self-approval as they are continuously comparing themselves to others (Willis & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2013). Through comparison, one learns how they are supposed to appear in the eyes of the public. Three motives are supposed to guide the practice of social

comparison. These practices include self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement. With the media consistently pushing the idea of a perfect body, there is little room for positive comparisons made within the current publishings of fashion magazines. The more comparisons made with this body standard allow for the overall growth in body dissatisfaction. According to the current analysis of body image in magazines, there is an overwhelming percentage of agreement that editorials have continued to push forth the image of an ideal woman- lean figure, perfect hair, and no flaws present. In a recent study, it was found that 55% of the models were lean, 36% were muscular, and only 6% had a rounder body type (Willis & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2013). Another study took place which surveyed individuals and their view of magazines and their relationship with food. There were a total of twenty- eight health and fitness magazines that were sampled in this study. From these pieces, researchers found that the magazines promoted body-shaping behaviors such as fad diet trends or consuming diet pills (Willis & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2013) There also was an emphasis on the appearance of the models in each issue and their mention of healthy eating or eating less. This encouraged the conclusion that women's constant exposure to issues like these magazines harms their inner confidence and relationship with food or themselves.

### **Pressures of the fashion industry on models**

If the models one sees in the magazines are their standard for beauty, who is the model's standard of beauty? While individuals who look at models can often pick themselves apart for not having a small enough waist or clear enough skin, models are pressured to consistently appear perfect in everyday life. Bridget Malcolm, a Victoria's Secret model who is known for gracing covers of swimsuit issues, opened up about her public body shaming at a casting. Casting directors refused to look her in the eyes as she was a few inches bigger than the industry



standard of 33-inch hips. She had been asked to show her ribs more for catalog shoots and was refused lunch as she was seen as fat in the director's eyes (Elizabeth, 2018). Malcom touches on the gray area of the fashion industry. Ideally, we see models who range from sizes 0-2 and then immediately jump to a size 14. No model represents the average woman's size thanks to the industry's competitive standards and previous practices. According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, there are an estimated 30 million individuals who suffer from eating disorders in America (Elizabeth, 2018). The continuation of pushing unrealistic standards onto women has allowed for the number to grow and dissatisfaction to be pursued.

Additionally, the concept of female fashion and the idea of body image has allowed for self-objectification which is linked to distress and body-focused anxiety. Eating disorders are particularly common in the fashion industry thanks to the constant pressure of losing inches of one's measurements or fitting the standard for models in certain countries. If one is not able to achieve a slimmer figure, the model will be dismissed from their agency as they cannot make efficient money from jobs. In this study, an eating disorder can be described as "a psychological impairment characterized by body appearance concerns, intensive distress, and disturbed eating behaviors" (Fixsen et al., 2022). There have been studies completed that highlight the direct association between model body types and the eating disorders of the public thanks to the heavy media influence they have in their campaigns (Fixsen et al., 2022). The fashion world has created an epidemic where everyone wants to be the thinnest version of themselves, creating an unhealthy relationship with food and one's confidence. The dangers of eating disorders in young girls are vital as they can cause growth impairments and disrupted menstrual cycles. The heavy influence of needing to be thin has encouraged unhealthy practices such as skipping meals,

illegal drug use, and participation in harsh diets and cleanses. Data analysis took place that highlighted models' feelings and their inability to be more meaningful than just a body to their agencies and clients (Fixsen et al., 2022). Model stories were reflected on and transcribed with the overall consensus that unethical work environments in the fashion industry have been normalized which allows for the continued objectification of women in magazines and off.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the fashion industry is an extremely competitive environment that is not accepting of all types of individuals. The constant criticism of measurements and human flaws has led to the normalization of standards that are nearly impossible for the average woman to compete with. Having the pressure to look like the models in magazines is extremely damaging to the average woman as well as the younger generation growing up in a world where diet culture continues to be pushed. The popularity of social media has also played a role in the act of comparison as individuals can share edited photographs or videos with the public at any time or place. This also allows for the republication of editorial pieces to reach even bigger audiences and a wider age group. For audiences to feel less pressured to conform to social standards, fashion houses need to value diversity of body types.

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