Media Ideals Pressure Women: Illustration of Women in Media and the Self-Esteem
An Annotated Bibliography

Working thesis: Although beauty campaigns in media can raise awareness to keep the body healthy, the portrayal of the ideal physical female features can lower self-esteem of women. Moreover, the media should take a larger role in raising awareness of women’s self-and body-esteem.


The article is about how media is projecting anti-aging messages to older women as well as the distress that women have for aging. From deep interviews with 44 women aging from 50-70, researchers were able to understand evident discriminations against aging and toward old women who disguise their aging faces with plastic surgeries, anti-aging cosmetics and hair coloring. Brown and Knight have figured out that the number of anti-aging cosmetics advertisements increased gradually within 50 years in *Vogue* and *The Weekly*. After reading life magazines, aging women scrutinized themselves and were pressured by their undisguisable wrinkles and freckles.

This article was published mainly for academic purposes, especially for aging studies. It is a current resource and was peer reviewed. Moreover, the authors of the article are professional
at this field of study. This article is a secondary source, because it is an analysis of various Australian magazines over 50 years. However, analysis involves strong bias because it is an interpretation, not an experiment that requires analysis of numbers or data. Therefore, Knight and Brown have negative sentiments about how media instigate anti-aging culture, while disregarding natural beauty and denying the process of aging. This source is a great evidence for my working thesis as it proves that the effect of media’s portrayal of women is not restricted to “young women,” but women from all age range.


This book is divided into several chapters regarding the media’s representation of body features and the self-perception of women, men and children. In chapter 3, the author deals with low body confidence of women through an experiment and the analysis of studies from the past. In this chapter, Grogan claims that the ideal female shape is to be thin but at the same time voluptuous. She quotes that such body type is “physically impossible” and believes that expecting women to be thin and curvy at the same time pressures women with “Barbie-doll stereotype,” (p. 204). She supports her reason through a quantitative measurement, “figural rating scales,” which indicate body dissatisfaction through the discrepancy between the ideal body type and women themselves. As a result, she found out that women choose a thinner silhouette for the ideal and heavier figure for their current. Moreover, she found out that women want to be like models in magazines and television because weight loss increases confidence in one’s body.

This book was published for academics, but also mundane reading, as it is easy to find in any site or bookstore people go. However, the author of the book is a professional in the field of
psychology. Moreover, it is a secondary source because the author merely analyzes and summarizes works of others. It is hard to figure out whether this source is peer-reviewed or not because it is the editorial board who decides the publication of the book. This book is strongly biased, because author decided to write only about how media is affecting women’s dissatisfaction for their body. This is a strong basis for my thesis because it clearly shows that women have lower self-esteem of their body because of the media that portrays ideal shape of women’s body.


This source explores the effects of media technology, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, etc., on young adult’s self-perception. Perloff thinks that frequent usage of social media combined with certain individual predispositions will lead to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. In the article, some young women suffer from depression and eating disorders because of how many “likes” that they get for their profile picture. When they do not have as many “likes” as others who are thin and pretty, self-esteem decreases. This article wants to tell the readers that even the new form of media can lower self-esteem because women are exposed to comparison and relative deprivation, shown by the number of “likes.”

This article was published mainly for academic purposes and was peer-reviewed. The author is credible, because he has posted his article on a peer-reviewed scientific journal called *Sex Roles*. This article was published in 2015, giving more support to the credibility of the article. Moreover, it is a primary source because he conducted his own research instead of analyzing other sources. This source is biased, because it focuses its thesis on the negative side
of social media toward the self-esteem of women. Thus, it is difficult to say that this is an objective writing because it has a hidden agenda and the study was designed to find predetermined results. This is a strong support for the working thesis because the article talks about how social media, a new form of communication, has also induced distress in women.


This article deals with both the positive and negative sides of body portrayal in media toward the self-esteem of women. Rollero illustrates a case study that consisted of showing women a magazine with an average-size model and thin model; this study resulted in participants showing positive sentiments toward average-size models. However, the author also introduces a counter-case that consisted of showing a television commercial, and found out that participants felt depressed when they saw average-sized models, or “real women,” and thus restrained eating. Moreover, she conducted an experiment with female undergraduates and figured out the level of sentiments of each woman for pictures that she showed. The result showed that students had lower self-perception of their body when showing the pictures of thin models. Thus, from various experiments, the author finds out negative influences of the media, specifically television, toward the body-esteem of women.

This article is an academic journal and was peer-reviewed. The source is credible because it is from an academic journal and is from a recent study. This article is not as biased as other sources that I read, because the author considers both instances equally. She even conducts an experiment to confirm which claim has a higher correlation, which also helped to eliminate the potential bias throughout the study. Moreover, the article is both a primary and a secondary
source, but it is predominantly primary. Although there are different sources that Rollero analyzed and explained in her article, most of the paper consisted of her experiment and the explanation of the result.


This article is about how popular media forms “sociocultural standards of feminine beauty,” and such standards make women unhealthy. The author states that in order to fit into the criteria, women suffer from severe health issues due to unbalanced diets and excessive exercising. The unrealistic models send messages that women should be beautiful and women internalize such social norms. Furthermore, Serdar backs her thesis with theories that explain how media can seal “thin-ideal” within the mind. According to the author, social comparison theory explains that women are sensitive to what others think about themselves. Thus, by comparing themselves to those women who are thinner, many women have suffered from depression. Especially, she argues that mass media exerts strong influences on women, by showing thin and healthy women and giving the message, “you’re not good enough.” Furthermore, cultural theory helps explain that repetitive appearance of unrealistic image of women in media will engrave unrealistic standards of beauty as reality.

This article is from a very unique source; it is an academic journal, but it is not clear if the author is a professional in this field. This article is from Westminster College, and the article does not indicate whether the author has a ph.D or masters degree thus suggesting it might be coming from undergraduates. However, what is sure for this source is that it is a secondary source. There are many references from different theories in sociology and the author literally
deals with each theory by connecting her thesis throughout the analysis. This article is very biased, because the author has looked for theories that only supported her claim, and there were no experiments done to disprove the counter claims. This article was found on an education site, but this does not suggest that it is a “true” academic journal.


The article mainly focuses on the effect of anti-obesity campaigns in media and the effect on women’s self and body esteem. According to the experiment conducted by Keating, Shentow-Bewsh and Mills, there was a high correlation between participants who are conscious of their body and the rate of suffering from eating disorders. Moreover, the result shows that women tend to eat less or have irregular eating habits and experience drastic reduction in body esteem when they read articles about obesity and anti-obesity messages. Although it was first hypothesized to have greater effects for those who have high BMI, they found out that it was only true for those who were concerned about their body. Thus, the study suggests that women who are highly conscious of their body have more of a tendency to have lower self and body esteem.

This article was published in an academic journal and was published in January 2016. It is fairly credible because it has information from a recent study. Moreover, it was peer-reviewed, presumably by experts in the same field. It is a primary source because it is an experiment conducted by the authors themselves. From conducting scientific experiment with independent and dependent variables, the experimenter tried to eliminate bias; additionally, the article is merely an analysis of the data that they have collected, that further excluded potential bias.

This article discusses both positive and negative aspects of the effect of media on women’s self-efficacy. The author clearly sees that there is a profound impact of thin-ideal body image from the media regarding the attitudes and behaviors of women. It is mentioned that media might be a partial reason for increase in body dissatisfaction for female adolescents. The journal mainly focuses on analyzing different sources and integrating them with the thesis. Moreover, Wang analyzes the survey that he had initiated and found out that “health & sports magazine exposure” and “attitude: importance of attractive body image” had a high correlation. Thus, he concludes that media definitely has influence toward how one feels about one’s body.

This article was published in 2010 through a credible journal and was peer-reviewed. It is both a primary and secondary source, because he had his interpretation for the survey that he took and also an analysis of the work of other scholars. Moreover, it was slightly biased in a sense that the author already mentions his assumption of the impact of media toward women in the abstract. However, he tries to eliminate potential bias through surveys and numerical data. Therefore, Wang could argue his negative opinion toward the impact of media toward women strongly. This article also exerts power as a great support for my thesis as it shows negative impact of media toward self-esteem of women.

This article points out that media does not have any influence on the self-esteem of women, and other psychological problems. Wilcox and Laird believe that women still read magazines and watch beauty shows even though they know they will see slender and beautiful women. They believe that media is not a direct reason for lowering women’s self-esteem but that it might have an effect depending on the context in which women encounter such media. The self-perception theory explains that our actions depend on the situation that we encounter. Thus, women who have lower body and self-esteem are because they were placed in a special situation, such as seeing thin women on the media while they were with their friends. Furthermore, Wilcox and Laird exert their opinion through an experiment; they found out that women who previously did not have any confidence were greatly affected but those who were confident about their body now and then were not.

It was published in 2000, which is quite old compared to other data shown above. However, it is notable to see that it poses different answers to the same question: “Does media affect self-esteem of women?” This was also peer-reviewed and has strong positive stances toward the impact of media on women. Moreover, it is a primary source, because authors have conducted their research and analysis of the experiment. Most importantly, Wilcox and Laird clearly indicate that lowering self-esteem may have correlation with the body portrayal in media but that does not mean it is a causation. The article consists of a counter-claim to my thesis, but has intriguing theories and supports that made me to rethink about my thoughts for the question.


This book deals with different topics and stances throughout the chapter. Among those, there is an article called, “The ‘Assembly-Line Love Goddess’: Women and the Machine
Aesthetic in Fashion Photography, 1918-1940,” which deals with how fashion photography reduces the self-esteem of women. Especially, the author quotes that fashion is “a barrier separating the inner self from the outer world, a relationship articulated through clothes and modes of wearing them.” Thus, Laennec illustrates the increasing emphasis on the body shape of women itself in fashion photographs. She further explains that body of women were part of clothes, just a part of machine that wraps up the fashion. Pictures of women were in fact posted as a cover page of Vogue, and according to the cover, people could figure out the fashion and the body trend of that era. However, she believes that at least in the Western culture, women had to be thin and glamorous.

This book, especially the article that I read, is an academic journal. Although it does not clearly indicate that the book was peer-reviewed, but it is certainly written by experts of the field. Moreover, the article is not from a recent study, but is worth considering about it as it analyzes relationship between fashion magazines and body image of women. It is a secondary source because the author clearly states that the article has its root in a seminar on the Machine Aesthetic taught by Susan Fillin-Yeh at Yale University. Since this article is a mere analysis of a seminar that the author has witnessed, it is quite biased. The article consists of thoughts from the author about how women are portrayed throughout 22 years in the fashion industry. Although it first seems like the article does not relate to the working thesis, it is closely related because she discusses about how fashion photographs fixate the ideal body image of women and shape a standard fashion fit of women. Since I am working on the effect of the portrayal of body image in media and the position of women, this source is a convincing evidence.