

BODY IMAGE AND EATING DISORDERS
IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

BY: OLIVIA ELIAS

What is body image?

Body image is the subjective picture or mental image of one's own body. Body image has been a major issue all over the world that has led to eating disorders for many people out there. The fashion industry has emphasized on the fact that SEXY women consists of tall, super skinny models with light skin complexions causing others to eventually hate their own bodies and features. In this research paper you will be reading about the causes and effect of body image and eating disorders and how they will continue to affect our society for many more years. (Body Image, J., 2016)

What are body modifications and supplements?

Body modifications is changes made directly to the body itself, as for body supplements is when items are added to the body. What is the difference between the two?

Body modifications can be tattoos, body piercings, ear piercings, pierling when small beads are permanently inserted beneath the skin such as the genital area, breast implants, waist trainers, exercising, smell such as wearing perfume and male enhancement implants. Other body modification are also hair cutting and removal. As for body supplements it consists of enclosures, attachments to body and hand held objects. Enclosures such as hats and tights, attachments to the body such as jewelry and hand held objects like bags or even our phones.

At this point that young girl is being exposed to new ways she can modify her body and cause her psychological problems that leads her to a new disorder, which can be anorexia or

bulimia. If this young lady was being raised in the early 2000s she will most likely develop anorexia or bulimia because during that time period women who were super skinny were considered the new sexy and size zero became the new two. This brings me to the next topic which is sizing, height and weight on women all over the world and the effects it has had and will continue to have.

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are a range of psychological disorders characterized by abnormal or disturbed eating habits. These disorders can affect a person's emotional and physical health. There are several eating disorders but the main three are anorexia, bulimia and binge eating. The majority of people with eating disorders consist of women ages 12 to 25 years of age. Some women start by having just one disorder and as they get older they begin to adapt to the rest of them. A young girl can start by binge eating at 12 years of age and once she reaches her teenage years she can turn to anorexia. Why? From age 14 and up we begin to be exposed to body modifications and body supplements. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)

What is bulimia Nervosa?

Bulimia Nervosa is identified as compulsive overeating causing those who are victims of it to self induce in vomiting as well as intentional vomiting after any food intake. People with this disease use laxatives and diuretics in an attempt to purge the body of food. Bulimia Nervosa is constructed of three different symptoms (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019):

- 1) Physical which consists of bingeing and purging which causes dramatic weight changes, sore throat, digestive problems, puffy cheeks, swollen neck glands, cavities and tooth enamel. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)
- 2) Emotional, when self criticism begins to happen and poor body image while looking in the mirror or comparing oneself to others. This also triggers poor decisions by turning to drugs, alcohol abuse, splurging and lack of sexual activities. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)
- 3) Behavioral causing oneself to express guilt after eating, avoiding interactions with others, heavy use of diet pills, laxatives to cleanse out the body, hiding food throughout the house, juggling with large amounts of food and self starvation and going to the bathroom right after meals to purge what had just been consumed. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)

What is Anorexia Nervosa?

Anorexia Nervosa is the perception of one's physical appearance leading to self starvation and excessive exercise in order to not gain weight. There are three symptoms of Anorexia which are:

- 1) Physical: A woman who has a physical reaction to anorexia has a rapid change in weight loss, irregular periods, constant dizziness, fainting, low body temperature, feeling of fatigue and exhaustion. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)
- 2) Emotional: In this stage a woman who have emotional symptoms tends to have a fear of gaining weight, hence self starvation and excessive exercise, distorted body image and dramatic mood swings. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)

- 3) Behavioral: In this stage a woman who suffers from Anorexia may abuse on laxative supplements, make excuses not to eat while also having deception meaning hiding food in napkins and clothes. This woman also has a tendency of obsessing with the calorie and fat contents of everything she consumes, avoids being touched and becomes defensive when questioned about weight. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)

What is Binge Eating?

Binge eating is when large amount of foods are consumed in an unhealthy manner. Like Anorexia and Bulimia, Binge eating has physical, emotional and behavioral symptoms.

- 1) Physical: A women with this kind of symptom can experience rapid weight gain due to extreme binging. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)
- 2) Emotional: A women with this kind of symptom can experience guilt of gaining weight, depression by looking at others and comparing oneself to them or asking Why they are in such shape? And very poor body image. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)
- 3) Behavioral: A women with this kind of symptom can experience the urge of avoiding social events for not liking the way she may look, have a tendency of eating late at night while possibly not having an appetite, discriminating ones body shape and image and avoiding sexual contact with others for not being comfortable with body image. (Eating Disorders.n.d. May 5, 2019)

How do eating disorders affect women's body image in the fashion industry?

“Women are their own worst enemies when it comes to how they see themselves.” (Hailes, J. 2016)

We currently live in a world where the women who is super skinny and wear small sizes are still being portrayed as having the perfect body and categorized as sexy. Designers continue to use women who are five feet nine inches and taller and weigh less than 120 pounds to showcase their collections and lines. What is the difference of a collection and a line? A collection is “seasonal production of different styles within a line for that same company.”

(Raji, L.) As for a line it deals exclusively with specific category within the fashion company such as basics, bottoms, tops and outerwear. The models designers hire to showcase their work eventually develop a large fan base that looks up to them. These women become the face of many businesses. Their success isn't a problem for the world but when being categorized and acknowledged as the perfect ideal body that is when the issue begins. This affects women all over the world mentally and physically.

Women become exposed to the perception that their bodies need to look like the one models have which leads to eating disorders and other factors. Some women do not realize they may eventually develop eating disorders due to the excessive amount of body image shaming. Women all over the world have similar and different body shapes and there is one specific body shape that has reached the horizon of recognition which is a thick body figure.

For almost four years there has been a rise in the “thick girl/plus size” body shape. (Elias, O. 2015) Women who tend to be more curvy are being praised in an empowering way in order to help them embrace their curves. Being curvy has turned it into a current body shape trend. Even though the super skinny look is still the ideal body shape that is being portrayed, thicker women have been a major talk and influence. The way the thicker body look has influenced other women by allowing them to embrace their body shape.

The reason why the word thick is being used instead of fat is because the word fat has been used in a way to harm others emotionally. Thicker, gives those who identify as it a meaning of sexiness and power, women feel it is less offensive. (Elias, O. 2019) And just like the skinny body image has affected women with thicker body shapes, the thicker body shape has begun to have an impact on thinner women. Hence impact, not affect. Ever since being thick has gained recognition some women with thinner body shapes are wanting to become thicker and have an hourglass figure. Now, this doesn't have to be a bad thing because these women can feel like they would look as beautiful with a little bit of thickness just as they already do by being thin. It is understandable as to why women want to be thicker now and have that hourglass figure, because men are embracing the thicker shape more than thinner. Our male species looks after a woman with curves and a big butt because they like the image being represented which is sexy and powerful.

In a study done by Nina Bahadur she asked her facebook community how they felt about the word “thick” and what they thought it meant. (Bahadur, N. 2017, December 6)

She shared the responses of 21 women most of them who stated that the thick/plus size look represents an empowering, fierce and independent body image.

As seen, everyone has their own perspective on thick women but one description everyone has in common is sexy, powerful, independent and strong. Something everyone worldwide need to understand is that throughout our journey of life some body shapes tend to manifest into a new shape and others tend to stay the same. Most of the changes that happen to our body most of the time are due to the kind of environment we are on and others are through natural causes, like getting old. This brings me to the next topic which is size, weight and height of women all over the world.

What is the ideal size, weight and height of a women all over the world?

For starters the average size and weight of a women in the United States is 170 pounds, measures five feet three point seven inches with a waist size of 38.2 inches making that woman an almost two XL size in shirts and outerwear. There was a study done by International Journal of Fashion Design who studied body shapes for 21 years and have found out that the average size for a woman in bottoms is 16 to 18. But a woman’s health isn’t determined without their BMI which stands for body mass index. Currently the body mass of a women in the United States is 29.6 which is considered “overweight.” America isn’t just known for being a country of freedom

where dreams do come true, but also known for the fact that their society is filled with overweight people and is drastically increasing to the obesity range. (What is the average weight for women? 2018, February 22)

Plus size models have been a big talk since they made their debuts in fashion shows, designers like Christian Siriano whose Spring 2019 collection that took place in New York Fashion in 2018 consisted of women of all shapes and sizes. Fashion house Chromat also used plus size models to represent their brand. (Glamour, 2018). On the other hand you have other fashion brands who refuse to dress celebrities because they are “too big.” In an article written by People’s Magazine a statement said by singer Bebe Rexha which was “I had my team hit out a lot of designers and a lot of them do not want to dress me because I’m too big.” The singer then revealed she is a size eight which in the United States is considered to be overweight. She then stated eventually others designers reached out to her that way they could dress her for award show the grammys. Trends will always happen in the fashion industry and the plus size/thick body shape seems like it will continue to happen. At this point fashion brands should begin to consider that a size zero or two will not be the only sizes they will have to target in the future. Their consumers will eventually turn into plus sizes whether they like it or not.

In Asia, the body mass of an average woman is of 57.7kg weighing 127 pounds and a percentage of overweight equaling to 24.2%. As for the continent Europe, the average woman weighs 156 pounds with a body mass of 70.8kg and the percentage of overweight is 55.6%. And in Africa the average woman weighs 133 pounds with a body mass of 60.7kg making their overweight percentage 28.9%. Lastly in Latin America the body mass of an average woman is 67.9 kg weighing 149 pounds with a percentage of 57.9% of overweight. Let me elaborate on these numbers. As you can see the continents with the lowest overweight rate are Asia and Africa with 24.2% to 28.9%. Europe and Latin America will proceed to become just like North America who has a 73.9% overweight rate. If Europe and Latin America do not implement a change than their percentage rate for overweight people in their regions will continue to increase. (What is the average weight for women?, 2018)

Why is there such a rapid increase in obesity in the United states?

In 1990 the United States obesity average was at 12% and no state had an obesity average above 15%. By 2004 only six states had an average less than 20% . The following year, 2005, the obesity average had grown to 32% which 17.1% of that consisted of adolescents. Obesity is the cause of hypertension, diabetes, cancer, and depression. (Minefield, C. E., PhD, Doty, N., MPH, & Fletcher, A., PhD., 2008)

The United States does not seem to have a decline in obesity anytime soon. Why is that? All of our foods are mass produced and the prices for fast food will only decline while the prices for organic and healthy foods will remain the same, which is high. The idea of becoming a healthy America sounds great but will it actually happen? A study done by doctors Charles E. Menifield, Nicole Doty, and Audwin Fletcher called Obesity in America demonstrates us the main factors of such devastating disease that makes America weak compared to other countries. Doctor Menifield, Doty and Fletcher analyzed the demographics, education, healthcare and economic factors to have a better understanding as to why there has been such a rapid increase in obesity and figure out the trends. When an individual who suffers from obesity starts to compare him or herself to others who think that size zero is still a trend they end up developing a low self esteem making them struggle with not just one but multiple situations. (Minefield, C. E., PhD, Doty, N., MPH, & Fletcher, A., PhD., 2008)

During Fashion Week 2019 plus size models were the center of attention as they were the ones showcasing the designers collections. As mentioned previously the word “thick “ is now being used instead of “fat” due to its blunt meaning. Plus size women have always gotten backlash for the figures and were not appreciated as models who are a size 00-2 have. While fashion week was happening many news articles, online magazines, social media platforms were talking about the way thee women were representing the brand as well as the pros and cons of the matter. While there were some who had positive things to say, others had the absolute

opposite. On articles being published doctors gave their two cents about how they felt the message these women were portraying was seen by the audience and those who already suffer from obesity.

In an article published by Marjorie Van Elven in Fashion United she interviews Dr. Raya Muttarak who goes on to say “While this type of body positive movement helps reduce stigmatisation of larger-sized bodies, it can potentially undermine the recognition of being overweight and its health consequences. The increase in weight misperception in England is alarming and possibly a result of this normalisation”. Dr. Muttarak’s statement is understandable because everyone can have their own perspectives on the matter but the difference between the message plus size models are trying to send is very different to the ones who are considered to have the “ideal body shape.” Plus size/thick women have always been criticized and made fun off for being curvy and wearing big sizes and now that the society we live in are learning to appreciate the plus size look these women are taking advantage to help those who have been in the shadow for the longest time. They want to demonstrate that whether they are a size 18+ they will still look beautiful and is it up to them if they’d like to change their body shape into a healthier look. Now I understand why some doctors worry about what can possibly happen if everyone began to think these models are trying to say “ look at me, being this big is still gorgeous which means there is no need for you to be skinny.” (The Daily Telegraph, 2017).

What is social media? Is social media a good or bad thing?

Social Media consists of websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media consists of apps like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp, Tumblr, Twitter, Youtube etc. (Jamie, 2018). The most used social media apps are Facebook with 1.59 billion active users, following by Whatsapp with 1 billion active users and QQ with 853 million active users. (Jamie, 2018)

Why is all of this relevant? How does social media affect body image?

Social media affect body image by the way things are portrayed on these sights. Social media can be considered a second life of our lives. How? Social media allows us to put a filter on everything we share on the web and eventually we become accustomed to that filter. The perception of true beauty and reality on social media can sometimes be seen as a fantasy but also as a way to develop new ideas and perception of our futures. To elaborate on that, apps like Instagram tend to portray a so called “perfect life” that causes other users to eventually develop depression and unhealthy mental health. As previously mentioned instagram gives users the ability to promote their businesses and the ability to sell. Online retailing has had a major growth in the past years and brands like Fashion nova and pretty little thing tend to promote their products on Instagram by posting portraits of their models wearing their clothes.

While users have the ability to see how these garments would look on them, they are also mentally affected by it because the photographs that are being posted have gone through various

photoshopping apps before they hit the internet almost making it seem like the models in the pictures have perfect bodies and a perfect life.

In conclusion, these are some of the effects on body image and eating disorders. By the looks of it people all over the world will eventually experience what it is like to be a victim of depression, everyone most likely already has symptoms of eating disorders and there are most likely more to develop in the future. Body image does not seem to ever stabilize since technology is becoming more advance and people already have the idea that the fantasy they were exposed to which is social media can one day be a possibility.

REFERENCES

<https://www.mirror-mirror.org/perfect-body-image.htm>

<https://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/products/berg-fashion-library/article/bibliographical-guides/the-social-psychology-of-dress>

<https://www.livestrong.com/article/357769-weight-height-for-the-average-american-woman/>

<https://www.rehabs.com/explore/womens-body-image-and-bmi/>

<https://makeawebsitehub.com/social-media-sites/>

https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/Resources/Medical__health_articles/Jean_Hailes_Magazine/2016/Body_image.pdf

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-thick-means-to-women_n_7555654

<https://www.mirror-mirror.org/body-image-of-women.htm>

<https://www.quora.com/Why-are-thick-girls-suddenly-the-new-standard-of-beauty-for-women>

https://mercymultiplied.com/eating-disorder/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIhpHQR8-c4gIVBIVCh1JDgpIEAAYBCAAEgKplfD_BwE

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/lifestyle/health-officials-worried-extremely-overweight-models-taking-to-the-runway-glorifies-obesity/news-story/1bbe3edb159d32431606169ac93082f1>

CITATIONS

1. J. (2016). Body Image. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/Resources/Medical__health_articles/Jean_Hailes_Magazine/2016/Body_image.pdf
2. Eating Disorders. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2019, from https://mercymultiplied.com/eating-disorder/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIhpHQR8-c4gIVBIVlCh1JDgpIEAAYBCAAEgKplfD_BwE
3. M. (2018, December 18). Why are "thick" girls suddenly the new standard of beauty for women? Retrieved May 13, 2019, from <http://x-carve-instructions.inventables.com>
4. Bahadur, N. (2017, December 6). How 21 Women Feel About The Word ‘Thick’. Retrieved May 10, 2019, from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-thick-means-to-women_n_7555654
5. 60 Social Networking Sites You Need to Know About. (n.d.). Retrieved May 10, 2019, from <https://makeawebsitehub.com/social-media-sites/>
6. Hailes, J. (n.d.). Body image. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/Resources/Medical__health_articles/Jean_Hailes_Magazine/2016/Body_image.pdf
7. Women's Body Image and BMI. (n.d.). Retrieved May 05, 2019, from Hailes, J. (n.d.). Body image. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/Resources/Medical__health_articles/Jean_Hailes_Magazine/2016/Body_image.pdf

8. Minefield, C. E., PhD, Doty, N., MPH, & Fletcher, A., PhD. (2008). OBESITY IN AMERICA. Retrieved May 10, 2019, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Charles_Menifield/publication/23184337_Obesity_in_America/links/5b71eddd92851ca65057e079/Obesity-in-America.pdf
9. What is the average weight for women? (2018, February 22). Retrieved May 10, 2019, from <https://medkit.info/2018/02/22/what-is-the-average-weight-for-women/>